



Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir: An Analytical Study of His Life and Contributions

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ABSTRACT

Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was born on 15 January, 1899, in the village Adhwaal which is situated on the bank of Greenland Sua Rivers District Compbellpur (Pakistan) Gurmukh Singh Musafir was a famous freedom fighter, writer and political leader of India. He played an active role in the Indian independence movement and contributed significantly to the social and cultural development of Punjab. He was also a preacher of the Gurmukhi script and a scholar of Sikhism. Musafir ji created national consciousness and social awareness among the people through his writing. His work reflects patriotism, humanity and spiritual values. He was also the Chief Minister and later the Governor of Punjab, where he promoted pro-people policies. His life was a symbol of simplicity, service and honesty. The legacy of Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir still inspires us today to strengthen justice, education and solidarity in society. His contribution will be remembered forever in Indian history and Punjabi literature.

Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was a versatile and dynamic personality. He was a politician as well as a writer simultaneously. However, to learn about the life of Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, we have to be acquainted with his family background. Because the background of an individual and his family describes a lot about one's personality. Bhai Mansa Singh, the ancestor of Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir, was a great Saint during the time of the Sikh Misals, and a renowned personality in the region.



Bhai Mansa Singh was born in 1750, in a village Shaan (Pakistan). As a saint, Bhai Mansa Singh was respected and revered by the people of that area and an affluent person, Jahaan Khan, started reverencing Bhai Mansa Singh hence, he was blessed with a son and he appreciated Bhai Mansa Singh's grace. As a result, his esteem increased further. Jahaan Khan came to the village Shaan to meet Bhai Mansa Singh and praised Bhai Mansa Singh. Consequently, Sayad could not assimilate the matter because Jahaan Khan had faith in Sayad as a saint too. Sayad had started *Jihad* against Malik Jahaan Khan and the village was divided into two sections. When Bhai Mansa Singh came to know about it, he left the Shaan village and got settled in Adhwaal. Hereafter, he involved himself in manual labour. During free time, he indulged himself into worshipping God and serving *Langer* to others. With the passage of time, people of the village came to know about his generosity and they started respecting him.ⁱ

In Adhwaal, Bhai Mansa Singh had constructed three main places: the Temple of Bhai Mansa, Dehri of Bhai Mansa and the Tank of Bhai Mansa. Bhai Mansa Singh (1750-1835) was a divine soul. He built not only built Gurdwaras, but constructed mosques aswell. Besides that, ponds were also constructed in the villages. He also believed that men and women carry equal rights, therefore he equally distributed his property among his own children. Bhai Mansa Singh had good relations with Akali Phoola Singh. When Akali Phoola Singh was going to Afghanistan with the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, he met Bhai Mansa Singh, Who served them with *Langer*.ⁱⁱ The area Incharge Kharak Singh came to Adhwaal to meet Bhai Mansa Singh and granted him a village Salmoon as an estate in the village. It was the period of the Sikh Misals.ⁱⁱⁱ Bhai Mansa Singh arranged the *Langer* with the income from this land and kept some part of the land for farming. Besides this, Bhai Mansa Singh had six sons and a daughter, named Sulkhan Singh, Gopal Singh, Nihal Singh, Nand Singh, Shaam Singh, and Pradhan Singh and a daughter named Sulkhani. Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was the descendant of Bhai Mansa Singh's youngest son Pardhan Singh. Bhai Pardhan Singh had only son named Karam Singh and further Karam Singh had two sons Bhai Isher Singh and Chatar Singh. Isher Singh was the grandfather of Giani Gurmukh Singh, and he was called 'Vadda Lala' at his home. Therefore, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was among the sixth generation of Bhai Mansa Singh.^{iv}

Nevertheless, Bhai Mansa Singh was granted a demesne during the Sikh rule. His sons started cultivating the land. But till the birth of Musafir, this land had got divided into several parts. Therefore, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir born in a simple peasant family and had subsistence farming.^v

Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was born on 15 January, 1899, in the village Adhwaal which is situated on the bank of Greenland Sua Rivers District Compbellpur (Pakistan).^{vi} The home where Giani



Gurmukh Singh Musafir was born was called the ‘Haveli of Bhayia’. As the first brother of three sisters, he was taken to roof of his room. This was a superstition at that time. In the village of Adhwaal, most of the people were Muslims. Moreover, Chakri, Dheri, Kolia, Gangawala, Chotra were other popular villages in the region. His village was situated in the center of all these villages. Few houses in the village belonged to Bhai Mansa Singh’s lineage. These families were practicing farming and had a great devotion to Gurbani.

The name of Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir’s mother was Bhrai Devi. She died of plague during the childhood of Musafir in 1915. Musafir’s father Sujan Singh was called ‘Lala’ at home. He was a small farmer. His benevolent nature made him very popular in his village. He felt good to help the villagers. He had thoroughly memorized Shri Guru Granth Sahib.^{vii} This religious thinking of Sujan Singh attracted Musafir. Musafir got the love not only the father but also of a mother and a friend from his father. In Musafir’s own words-

*“Peta ji di pheta jo mere mata vi son,
Oh manu mitra vang sambodan karde san”*

Musafir had seven siblings including three elder sisters and three younger brothers of him. The names of Musafir’s brothers were Jaswant Singh, Kanhaiya Singh, and Gyan Singh. Musafir was called ‘Mukha’ and ‘Garma Bhayia ka’ in his village.^{viii} He belonged to Khatri Caste and further related to Khukhrain caste. His surname was Chadha. When the Humajoo came back to India with the help of the Shah Iran, the resident of that region, Pothohar’s Khokhar Muslims helped the king Humajoo, he gave the Empire to them, They were Khokhar Muslims but often called king because their elders were Hindu in some Era. Their empire was run was by Sahani, Kohli, Chadha, Sabharwal, Suri, Anand Bhasin, and Sethi. They ran the empire of Khokhar King in good ways. They called “Khatri Khokran”, These Khukhrain Khattris were living in the area of Swa, the area situated outside the Pothohar.^{ix}

Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir got married in 1912 to Ranjit Kaur in an early age when he was a student of the 5th standard.^x His wife belonged to the village Nadali District Rawalpindi. She gave birth to seven sons and three daughters named Amrit Kaur, Jaidev Singh, Bhupinder Singh, Rajinder Kaur, Mandev Singh, Joginder Kaur, Parmdev Singh, Jatinder Singh, Tejinderdev Singh, and Sachdev Singh. Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was not only a father but also a good friend to his children. Musafir’s life was influenced by his wife Ranjit Kaur. She maintained the needs of the family very wisely.



Musafir completed his early education in his own village Adhwaal. He passed his 8th class at the middle school Adhwaal. In 1915, a big incident happened in Musafir's life. In those days the disease of plague was spread. So the government sent doctors to prevent the outbreak of the disease. This disease had also got spread in Adhwaal village, and Dr. Bhagwan Das was sent there, at that time. There was a rumor that the doctors despite curing the disease were spreading it.^{xi} The day, when Dr. Bhagwan Das came to the village, a big march past was arranged there. Some youngsters made fun of the doctor Bhagwan Das. Because of this joke, there was a big quarrel between youth and doctor, as a result, the doctor got confused and approached the police station of Chauntra village to report the quarrel. By the fear of this report, Musafir's mother sent him to his sister's city Rawalpindi on 2 March, 1915 early in the morning.^{xii} From that day Gurmukh Singh became a "Musafir". He served as a peon in the office of Pindi Das in Rawalpindi. Pindi Das was the friend of his sister's Husband Jodh Singh Sethi. However, Bhai Jodh Singh and Pindi Das were not happy with this job. They changed the name of the post as 'Daftria' instead of peon for Musafir. Musafir worked for ten days but his sister and brother-in-law migrated to Gujarkhan. Resultantly, Musafir resigned the job.

Musafir was born in a middle class family and there was always a paucity of wealth and inadequate property. Therefore, Musafir wanted to join any job to earn money. So he got admission in J.V. (Junior Veracular). He passed his J.V. Examination from Shahpur (district Sargodha). When he was studying, police approached the school under the case of violence against Dr. Bhagwan Das in 1915. Musafir appealed the police and started singing in a loud voice.

*"Pay panj hai fees shipahiya di
Soo sekh te pachi holdaar lende"*

In this case, Musafir was released on bail. In the second case to abuse police personnel, he was also bailed out. Till that time Musafir did not have any patriotic spirit.^{xiii}

After that Musafir started his career as a teacher in village Chakri. But, soon after, he resigned the job. In 1916, he joined as a teacher at a branch of Lyallpur Khalsa School. After doing a job for some time in Lyallpur, he again joined as a school teacher at Kalar High School. Master Tara Singh was the headmaster of the Kalar School. He was playing the role of a politician at that time. Musafir had a great influence of Master Tara Singh. The meeting of Musafir with Master Tara Singh and Giani Heera Singh Dard was the main reason behind his joining in the Gurdwara Reform Movement. Hence, he made plans with Giani Heera Singh for further studies. After some time, this meeting was converted into a deep friendship, and Giani Heera Singh Dard played a great role in developing the personality of Musafir.



Similarly, Heera Singh Dard appreciated Musafir to complete his study of 'Giani'. Thus, Gurmukh Singh Musafir gained the title of 'Giani' in Kalar School, and kept his nickname 'Musafir'. Then he left Kalar School and went to Narang Khalsa School and started a job there. During his teaching service at Narang School, he got admission in S.V. (Senior Vernacular) at Sargodha.^{xiv}

The massacre of Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April, 1919 left a deep impact on Musafir. He went against the British Government but, nonetheless, Musafir did not join politics. In February 1921, the Nankana Sahib Massacre took place. At that time Musafir was pursuing his S.V. at Sargodha. The News of Nankana Sahib Massacre got spread among the Sikh religion and the *Jathas* of Sikhs started going to Nankana Sahib. Consequently, the News reached Sargodha, a group of Sikhs under the leadership of Baggh Singh got ready for Nankana Sahib. Musafir also joined this group. Therefore, Musafir witnessed the Nankana Sahib Massacre with his own eyes, and he could see his future through these dreadful massacres. But he came back to his school as per the letter sent to him by the principal, and completed his study. He started his teaching job at Bassali.^{xv}

During this time, there was a Sikh agitation in Guru Ka Bagh under the Gurdwara Reform Movement. The government was maltreating them. On hearing the News of such atrocity, Musafir left the job of the teacher and returned to his village, and organised a *Jatha*. This *Jatha* firstly marched towards Amritsar then to Guru Ka Bagh. Such courageous efforts and of Musafir in Amritsar impressed Teja Singh Akarpuri. He did not allow Musafir to go to Guru Ka Bagh but asked him to create more *Jathas*.

At the time, Musafir had become an active member of the Akali Dal and SGPC.^{xvi} He basically devoted himself to the Gurdwara Reform Movement. During this time in 1923, Musafir had been appointed as Secretary of the Sikh Missionary Society. He served on this designation till 1925.^{xvii} He formed many *Jathas* during this time. When the Jaito agitation was going on, then both the parties, the Shiromani Akali Dal and SGPC were declared illegal. Musafir was arrested in November 1923 from Amritsar, because he was an active member of these parties. He was sentenced imprisonment for six months, and fined with Rs. 50. On 19 June, 1924, Musafir got released from the jail.^{xviii} In the Akali Movement, Musafir came into contact with those people who also wanted to take part in freedom struggle. In 1926 Musafir was nominated as the General Secretary of the Akali Dal.

In 1928, when the Simon Commission reached India, it was strongly opposed in the whole country. Musafir also protested against it and delivered speeches.^{xix} During Simon Commission's visit to Punjab, Musafir was actively involved in the boycott rallies in Amritsar and Lahore. In 1930, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was elected as the member of the All India Congress. On 12 March, 1930



Mahatma Gandhi started the Civil Disobedience Movement. At that time, Musafir was the Jathedar of Akal Takht is the supreme institution of Sikhs. However, Musafir cooperated the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. In Sekhupura demonstration, Musafir delivered a speech to boycott the foreign goods. As a result, Musafir was arrested and he was sentenced for a year. On 14 March, 1931 he got released along with other prisoners.^{xx} In 1931, Musafir became a member of the Central Sikh League. He performed many tasks as the *Jathedar* of Akal Takhat. He kept politics far away from the religious culture. In 1934, there was a debate about the salary of the *Jathedar*. As a result, he resigned the job.^{xxi}

Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir started to publish the Amrit magazine with help of professor Ganga Singh. But he later had to leave it upon Ganga Singh, when he found that the income from that magazine was not enough for survival. Musafir remained the editor of this magazine for two months. He preached the Gurbani very well from August 1934 to September 1934. During this time, he spread thoughts and views of Gurbani, Gurbani discussion and many important editorials and the knowledge regarding Gurbani among people. Musafir became the Secretary of the Shromini Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1935, and he attended a lot of meetings during this time. Once Musafir opened an insurance company. Sardar Ujjal Singh and Mangal Singh were the head of this company. Musafir took the agency of Punjab, and all companions had to join this company involuntarily. They received some money in commission, and a suitable site for Sikh Missionary College also came into their notice. A plot was purchased as per the suggestion of Ranjit Kaur. Thereafter, a house was built on this plot in 1936. After this, Musafir got engaged in the election, as a result of which the company he them was running got failed. Because of this, the income got stuck. With the earning from this company, he built his house near the Sikh Missionary College in Amritsar in 1936.^{xxii} On behalf of the Akali Dal, he joined the State Parja Mandal of Faridkot in 1937. He attended some important conventions as well as passed some rules.

In 1937, Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir became the editor of Akali Patrika Newspaper. At that time, the condition of the Newspaper was worst. Musafir brought it on the right path with his diligent efforts. Musafir wrote many editorial notices. His pen had patience. In this way, he spread the News of his Newspaper at National level. But by this time, Musafir had earned a lot of fame in the Congress Party. Consequently, there were some misunderstandings between Master Tara Singh and Musafir. In 1941, the charge of editor of the Akali Patrika Newspaper was taken back from Musafir.^{xxiii}

In 1939, Mahatma Gandhi started the Individual Satyagraha Movement. Musafir did not lag behind in this countrywide movement. Musafir started Satyagraha in his home town at Amritsar. He deliberately refused to provide Indian Military to the British Government. As a result, he was arrested in



March 1941, and sentenced for 2 years.^{xxiv} But after that, he got released. On July 1942, the Congress Working Committee passed a rule that emerged as the Quit India Movement. This movement was initiated from Mumbai in August, and Musafir was also a part of this movement. Due to this, he was arrested by British Government. This was the hardest time in his life, because he faced with a number of mishaps during that time. Likewise, his father passed away on 1 December, 1942 when he was in prison. Similarly, his son Teginder Dev, also known as Bhicha, died on 21 April, 1944. His daughter named as Rejinder Kaur suffered from a disease and died in 20 June, 1945. But these incidents did not affect the patriotism of Musafir. He was released from the prison in June 1945.

When there were riots in the country in 1947, the area of Musafir was also under its grip. All villages along with Adhwaal were engulfed in riots. A hundred Sikhs were killed in Rajgarh village and many more were burnt. A number of other people had adopted the Muslim religion. There were same circumstances in Jhaan village. There had been the murders of the Sikhs in Chakri, Dheria village that was situated just at a short distance from Musafir's village Adhwaal. The Sikh population was only 140 in Adhwaal. Many houses were robbed in Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir's village Adhwaal. However, a number of Sikh people had escaped by reaching Military camps. An army camp was housed there where the people were brought for protection. At that time, Musafir's brother was also involved in these riots and remained in Pakistan to protect himself. Musafir went out in the search of him, and he came to know that he had converted into Muslim religion. He had changed his name as Iamdin, and his wife's name was Fatma. But Musafir got success in rescuing him. Musafir also rescued many other people at that time. Prem Singh Prem, Isher Singh Majhail and some other military officers also joined him in this rescue operation.^{xxv} At the time of the partition in 1947, Bhai Mansa Singh's family had turned into many households mostly in Jagadhri district of Ambala. A Gurdwara was constructed in the memory of Bhai Mansa Singh here. It was founded by Sant Nichal Singh. Giani Gurmukh Singh was also present on this occasion. This Gurdwara is the testimony to '*Manas ki Jaat Sabhe Ek Pehchan*'.^{xxvi}

On 15 August 1947, India got freedom from British Empire. At this time, he was elected as the leader of SGPC, Akali Dal, Punjab Congress etc. During the struggle for Independence, he was sentenced imprisonment many times. After the Independence, he became a member of the Constitutional Assembly (1947-1950). Being a member of this assembly, he spoke in favour several issues regarding Sikhs, and raised questions related to other issues. He was later also elected as the president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee for the first time on June 13, 1948. He assisted refugees in different ways. But then he resigned this office on August 29, 1950.^{xxvii}



The first Lok Sabha elections were held in 1952. Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir got a chance to contest these elections from Amritsar Constituency. He got 86,382 (47.90%) votes and won this seat. In this way, he became a member of the Lok Sabha.^{xxviii}

Later on, he became the president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee with unanimity for the second time on May 30, 1952. During that time, a session of the Indian National Congress was held in Amritsar, under the leadership of Musafir in 1956. In addition to the victory of Congress in the 1957 elections, the party also started publishing its weekly Newspaper 'Punjab Congress Patrika' in Urdu.

Musafir again won the second Lok Sabha elections held in 1957 from the Amritsar Constituency, this time with 1,13,899 (43.90%) votes. This is how he became a member of the Lok Sabha for the second time.^{xxix}

After that, Musafir was appointed as the president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Working Committee again with mutual consent for the third time. This time he held this office from 29 April 1958 to 20 November 1958. To raise the demand for Punajbi Suba, Sant Fateh Singh started fast unto death on December 18, 1960. Musafir made a discussion over this matter with Jawaharlal Nehru, and made many efforts to end this fast.^{xxx}

After the Independence, the Government of India later decided to raise a monument in the memory of the Jallianwala Bagh martyrs. A trust was formed under the presidency of Jawahar Lal Nehru. A managing committee was also formed for this purpose. Musafir became the president of this committee. Eventually, this monument was constructed under the supervision of Musafir in 1961. Giani Gurmukh Singh Musafir was an active member of Jallianwala Bagh Memorial Trust and the president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee till his death.^{xxxi}. In 1961, he was honoured by the Punjab Government as a prolific writer. In 1962, he was nominated as a president of the Sahit Samechya Board.

Later in his career, he contested and won the third Lok Sabha elections from Amritsar Constituency with 1,25,033 (39.8%) votes, in 1962. In the same way, he became the president of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee for the fourth time. But this time, he had to compete Pandit Mohan Lal. Musafir got 56 votes in total while Pandit Mohan Lal got only 37 votes. So Musafir outdid him with 19 votes.

Musafir's wife Ranjit Kaur died on 8 March 1964 at 12:02 pm. She stood by Musafir through thick and thin. As a result, Musafir served his country with full enthusiasm. After the death of his wife, Musafir started to feel alone.



Thereafter, he also got elected as the president of the Punjab Congress Party with unanimity on October 20, 1966. Later on, he got the honour to become the Chief Minister of Punjab on November 01, 1966.^{xxxii} When he came in the power, there were many problems in Punjab. He tried to solve all such problems one after another. The major issue before him was that of Sant Fateh Singh's fast. In this regard, Musafir took many initiatives that this problem got solved.

Thereafter, the Congress Party contested the 1967 Legislative Assembly elections on 103 of 104 seats. The Party won 48 seats in total, whereas Musafir was defeated from the West Amritsar Constituency, by Satpal Dang with 10,000 votes.^{xxxiii} Musafir later firmly worked to end Darshan Singh Pheruman's fast, which the latter had started on August 15, 1969 to merge Chandigarh into Punjab. Later on, Musafir got elected as a member of the Rajya Sabha for the first time on April 03, 1968. He held this office until January 18, 1976. On the same day at around 3'o clock in the morning, he died of heart attack.^{xxxiv} His body was cremated at the Nigam Bodh Ghat at 4 o'clock in the next evening. In addition to the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed; the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi; the Chief Minister of Punjab, Giani Zail Singh; the Vice-President Basappa Danappa Jatti; the Defence Minister and the former Defence Minister also attended his cremation ceremony. On behalf of the Parliament, the Government of Punjab and the Congress Party, the President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed presented flowers to his dead body.^{xxxv} The Soviet countries granted tribute to Musafir, and expressed their grief. A resolution of grief was also passed in the Punjab Assembly on 20th of January.^{xxxvi} The *Antim Ardas* was delivered at the Gurdwara Sheesh Ganj at the Chandni Chowk, Delhi on January 25, 1976.

After his death, the Government of India honoured him for the sacrifices that he had made for his country. Initially, a trust was built in his memory at Chandigarh. Likewise, a library in Patiala was also renamed after his name, as the Musafir Central Public Library. Similarly, he was honoured with the Padam Vibhushana posthumously in 1976, and was awarded with the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book 'Urwar Par' in 1978.^{xxxvii}

The Department of Posts issued a set of postage stamps in 2001 in his honour.^{xxxviii} The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh unveiled his portrait in the Central Hall, Parliament House, on 22 December 2008.^{xxxix}

ⁱ Personal Interview with Joginder Kaur, 12 April, 2018, Chandigarh.

ⁱⁱ Anonymous, Gurdwara Bhai Mansa Singh, (Pamphlet), Buria Gate, Jagadhri, Haryana, India.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Qaumi Ekta*, New Delhi, 10 March, 1968.



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- v *Qaumi Ekta*, New Delhi, 9 December, 1968.
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- vii Personal Interview with Joginder Kaur, 12 April, 2018, Chandigarh.
- viii Prem Singh Prem, *Centenary Celebration*, Punjabi Bhavan, New Delhi, 1999, p.11.
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