

Bhāi Baldeep Singh

Bhāi Baldeep Singh is the 'Renaissance Man' of Punjab, India. He has compassionately dreamt & zealously worked towards a radical reclamation & transformation of the cultural landscape of South Asia. Descending from a long lineage of masters of Gurbānī Saṅgīta, warriors & social reformers, he has rendered the vintage etiquettes of Gurbani Kīrtana with utmost ease & perfection. By personally intervening with the wisdom & profundity of a magical luthier, he has revived extinct musical instruments. Besides setting up a conservatory at Sultanpur Lodi, he has developed a comprehensive educative process & is recognised as one of the finest teachers.

A direct descendant of Gurū Bābā Nanak's disciple Bhāi Sadhārāṇ, Bhāi Baldeep Singh descends from a long lineage of Gur-Sikh masters of the *Gurbānī Kīrtana Maryadā*, and today is its 13th generation exponent. Bhāi Sadhārāṇ was the 2nd head of the *Dharamsāl*, the school of learning, founded by Gurū Bābā Nanak at Kartārpur (now in Pakistan) in 1521 AD. Bhāi Sadhārāṇ was also endowed with a *Manjī* by the 3rd Sikh guru, *Sāhib Srī* Gurū Amar Das. Bhāi Baldeep Singh's repertoire includes masterpieces that were first composed by the Sikh Gurus and the Bhagats themselves. Bhāi Baldeep Singh is also the prime exponent (*khalifā* or *pagrī naśīn*) of this oldest *paramparā* (tradition) of classical percussions, *pakhāwaj/mridang* playing of Punjab known as *Sultanpur Lodhi – Amritsari Bāj* (15th century), a tradition that he has singlehandedly revived.



The Sikh gurus expressed deep spiritual mysteries through musical compositions in *chant*, *vāra* as well as the *padē* or *dhurpada gāyan*, which has particularly been the music of the devotees of India's many spiritual traditions. Bhāi Baldeep Singh has been mentored in the *dhurpada*, *vāra* and *chant* genres of *Gurbānī Saṅgīta* by his granduncles Bhāi Avtar Singh (1925-2006) and Bhāi Gurcharan Singh (1915-2017) as well as Ustād Rahim Fahimuddin Dāgar (1926-2011), a 19th generation scion of the Ḍagurvāṇī and Ustād *Malikzādā* Mohammad Hafiz Khan *Khanḍehrē Talwāṇḍiwālē* (d. 2009), the 133th exponent of the *Khaṇḍarvāṇī*.

The *Sultanpur Lodhi – Amritsari Bāj* is the oldest surviving of all *pakhāwaj-jorī* traditions in South-Asia. He is the for-bearer of one of the most illustrious lineages that was once known as *Nāyīān-dā-gharāṇā* for Bābā Maiyā Singh's father was the *Nāyī* (hygienist) of Mahārāja Ranjit Singh.

Bābā Maiyā Singh

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Bābā Bhoop Singh (other students of Bābā Maiyā Singh are Lala Bhawani Singh/Das, Bhāi Mehtab Singh, Bhāi Karta Singh) and his brothers Bhāi Gurdit Singh and Bhāi Sham Singh

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Ustād Harnam Singh of Jammu

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Ustād Bhāi Arjan Singh Tarangar {and Ustād Pratap Singh s/o Ustād Harnam Singh of Jammu; Bhāi Harnam Singh of Thatha Tibba; Bhāi Pratap Singh – a pioneer who taught the family of the Afghan Ruler in the 19th century and started a business upon his return, Bhāi Pratap Singh Ka Raag Ghar, to Lahore. He also published a magazine and wrote 6 volumes – 4 on tablā and 2 on pakhāwaj. Noted veena player, Sardar Ajit Singh of Dehradun is his grandson; Paṇḍit Uma Dutt Sharma father of Paṇḍit Shiv Kumar Sharma}

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Bhāi Baldeep Singh (and other students of Tarangar: Bhāi Bhagat Singh, Bhāi Mohinder Singh, Bhāi Balbir Singh, Ustād Sardūl Singh of Nanded, Bhāi Gurcharan Singh Ragi, Bhāi Rattan Singh of Tarn Taran)

For his field-specific percussion related research and comparative studies, Bhāi Baldeep Singh has also interacted with the exponents of various traditions, such as *Padma Shree* Paṇḍit Shankar Rao Shindey Appegaonkar, Ustād Gyānī Darshan Singh, Bhāi Narinder Singh, Paṇḍit Laxmi Narayan Pawar, Paṇḍit Gopal Das, Paṇḍit Bal Krishan Sharma, Bhāi Mohinder Singh, Bhāi Balbir Singh, Maharaj Bir Singh Namdhari, Paṇḍit Ram Ashish Pathak, Ustād Altaf Hussain, Bhāi Ranjit Singh, Bhāi Sham Singh, Śri Pawan Kumar Sharma and Paṇḍit Panna Lal Upadhaya of the *Gayā gharāṇā*.

For his vocals related research, he has benefited from his *conversations* with Professor S. K. Saxena, Professor Sumati Mutatkar, and Sardar Balbir Singh Kalsi of the *Agra gharāṇā*.

Bhāi Baldeep Singh has inspired interest in the structure of the classic poetic forms found in *Gurbāṇī*, has revived the rare art of singing the 22 *vārs* (odes) and other folk based genres, and has awakened the artist elements hidden in the old compositions. In 1988, Bhāi Baldeep Singh undertook a herculean project to revive all the instruments from the Gurus' times by personally handcrafting them under the guidance of master luthier Gyānī Harbhajan Singh of Village Dandian, Hoshiarpur. Today, he has the unique distinction of having carved the nomadic *rabāb* (also known as the *Hindustanī* or *dhrupadī rabāb*), *saraṇḍā*, *tāus*, *dilrubā*, *tambūrṇī* (*tanpura*), *joṛī* and *pakhāwaj – mridaṅg*. In January 2002, he made a violin based on the Stradivari violin in Spring City, Utah (USA), under the guidance of his friend Paul Hart, a master lute-maker. He has designed four new bows for the *tāus*, which have been handcrafted by Allan Herou in Paris (2003) and Nicola Galliena in Milan (January and March 2007, January 2008) in addition to making several innovations and inventions in luthiery techniques and designed new tools.

He has also made a detailed 12-hour long audio-visual presentation on the subject, *The Musical Instrument of Gurbāṇī and Bhakti Traditions*, which has been shown at various universities and conservatories in India and around the world receiving rave reviews. Bhāi Baldeep Singh has inspired people around the world to take up the musical instruments of the Gurus' court. Many institutions around the world have now included the playing of some of these instruments as a part of their curriculum.

Bhāi Baldeep Singh has developed a comprehensive educative process, which consists of the original practices of *nāda yoga*, and the modes of teaching-cum-learning traditionally prevalent among the exponents of *Gurbāṇī* and Bhakti traditions. Besides giving many concerts, he has also conducted workshops, lecture-demonstrations and seminars in India, Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and Australia. Several of his articles, poems and papers have been published in renowned academic journals. Since May 2009, he conducted several interviews for the National television (Doordarshan) and All India Radio (AIR), in which eminent artists and musicians were featured.

In 1997, he received the prestigious Bhāi Batan Singh Memorial Award and Delhi State Annual Award (2002-03) for contribution in the field of Music. He has also been conferred the Sikh Gaurav Award for the year 2003 at Amritsar and in 2007, the Kapurthala Heritage Award at Kapurthala. On August 15, 2011, he received the Punjab State award for his seminal contribution to music (*Gurbāṇī Kīrtana* and classical music) and the arts, an award which he returned in November 2015 to protest against the Shiromani Akali Dal led Punjab Government's silence in wake of discrimination against minority communities that led to the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq at Dadri. In 2014, he also received The Sikh Award (UK). On January 6, 2017, Bhāi Baldeep Singh was honoured by the Bihar

Government with the state award —a *Certificate of Merit*, for his extraordinary contributions during the 350th birth anniversary celebrations of *Sāhib Srī* Gurū Gobind Singh.

Bhāi Baldeep Singh has been very active in the contemporary Indian cultural scene by producing and publishing recordings of rare Indian musical instruments and contributing to the inter-religious and inter-cultural exchange organizing musical festivals and lectures. Some of his most successful presentations include *Laya Darshan: Revealing the Riches of Indian Rhythm* in 2005, *Jashan* in 2006, *Anād Kāv Taraṅg* in April 2008, November 2009, November 2010, May 2011 and November 2011, *Expressions On Nature: Dharti Suhāvī* in December 2008 as well as in September 2011, *Venice and Punjab: Water Memoirs* on February 8, 2010 at the Tagore Theatre, Chandigarh, and 19 full moon series titled *Puṇyā Baithak: 31-rāgas in Gurbāṇī* at the Qila Sarāi, Sultanpur Lodhi between May 17, 2011, till June 2, 2015.

Bhāi Baldeep Singh is also a sensitive interpreter of the need for a cultural transformation and rejuvenation. He is the Founder and Managing Trustee of The Anād Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and preservation of traditional culture, with particular focus on the preservation of South Asia's intangible heritage and cultural traditions. One of The Anād Foundation's aims is, in fact, to establish institutions as a means of facilitating the recovery and enhancement of the intangible (*sūkham virsā*) and tangible (*sthūla virsā*) heritage. Bhāi Baldeep Singh is in the process of re-establishing the *Dharamsāla*, founded by Gurū Bābā Nanak in 1521 AD, developing it as the *Anād Khaṇḍ: Conservatory of Arts, Aesthetics, Cultural Traditions and Developmental Studies*, a 120 Crore project at Sultanpur Lodhi, Kapurthala (Punjab). To encourage the young talent to dedicate and express themselves in various artistic forms, including poetry and literature, especially in the vernacular arts, crafts and musical forms, the Foundation confers *Anād Sanmān*, in the fields of poetry, music, dance, sports, science, technology, art, literature, theatre, cinema and handicrafts. In memory of the Punjabi poetess Baljit Kaur Tulsi, the Anād Foundation organizes since 2008 the poetry festival *Anād Kāv Taraṅg* and confers the *Anād Kāv Sanmān*, which is offered to eminent poets and carries a cash prize of Rupees 2.25 lacs, a citation and a *tāmra-patra*.

Over the years, Bhāi Baldeep Singh has served in many boards and committees notably in the Core Committee of the Khalsa Heritage Complex (Anandpur Sāhib), Executive Committee of the Punjab State Sangeet Natak Academy (2001-3 and 2004-6). He served as a member of the Advisory Council of the Punjab Languages Department (2008-10) and helped the Punjab Government form the Sultānpur Lodhi Development Board in 2007 and served on its Board. He is also a patron of the Kapurthala Heritage Foundation, Kapurthala. From 2009-14 he represented the State of Punjab in the General Council of the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama (Sangeet Natak Akademi) in

New Delhi, where he also served in the Executive Board, in the Advisory Committees for Music, Archives and Documentation and in the Advisory Committee for Grants.

Bhāi Baldeep Singh conceived and curated the Gurū Gaurav 350, Bihar Government's flagship event held at SKM Auditorium, Patna, to mark the 350th birth anniversary of the tenth Sikh gurū, *Sāhib Srī* Gurū Gobind Singh. Artists and performers from India and abroad were invited to the 6-day long event which has been considered as the biggest in Bihar's history. Bhāi Baldeep Singh then conceived and ideated Punjab Government's concluding ceremony of the Gurū Gobind Singh Sesquicentennial held on December 24, 2017. Bhāi Baldeep Singh has been made the member of the Punjab Government's committee that was set up in October 2017 to mark the upcoming 550th birth anniversary of *Sāhib Srī* Gurū Nanak Dev, the founder of Gur-Sikh Pañth. Since July 1, 2018, he is also serving as Dean, Faculty of Humanities & Religious Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, in an honorary capacity.

An ardent socio-political activist and a voice for the humbled, he contested the 2014 Parliamentary Elections from Punjab's Khadoor Sāhib for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and came third with 1,45,000 votes. As an independent political analyst and commentator, Bhāi Baldeep Singh regularly features in debates on some of India's top television channels. On April 5, 2015, he was suspended from the primary membership of the party for standing against the party leadership for their conspiracy to unethically and unconstitutionally oust various founding members of the party. On April 13, 2016, Bhai Baldeep Singh, proposed the revival of the Hindostan Ghadar Party, or *The Ghadar*. Among his many vital contributions and interventions is the ideation of Sarbat Khalsa Movement of 2015 and his initiation of the 2nd Gur-Sikh Gurūdwarā Reform Movement to free the Gur-Sikh institutions freed from state control both, overt and covert.

Several of his articles, chapters and papers have been published by some of the top review magazines, edited books and academic journals including the Sikh Formations by Routledge (What Is Kīrtan: Observations, interventions and personal reflections. 2011, 7:3, 245-295), The Book Review (Volume XXXI, Number 8, August 2007. *Sociology of a Bardic Genre* — Review of Michael Nijhawan's *Dhadhi Darbar: Religion, Violence and The Performance of Sikh History*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2006), Seminar and Punjabi University. Bhāi Baldeep Singh actively blogs and posts on the social media.

Besides giving numerous concerts, he has also conducted workshops, seminars, given lectures, lecture-demonstrations, concerts and taught credit courses in some of the top venues, universities and conservatories in **Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and Australia** which include:

- Punjabi University (Patiala)

- Punjab University (Chandigarh)
- Universita La Sapienza (Rome)
- Centre for South Asia Studies in the University of California (Berkeley)
- Guru Nānak Dev University (Amritsar)
- Sangeet Natak Academy (Brahadeshi, 2001)
- National Centre of Performing Arts (Mumbai)
- Dalai Lama Foundation for Universal Responsibility
- Benaras Dhrupad Mela (2004 and 2006)
- Conservatory of Hamburg (July 2006)
- Conservatorio Di Frosinone (June 2007, Italy)
- University of Michigan (October 2008)
- Delhi International Arts Festival (2008)
- India Habitat Centre
- India International Centre
- Guru Manyo Granth (Talkatora Gardens, New Delhi)
- Concert for Peace and Understanding (St. Paul Episcopal Church, Tucson, Arizona)
- Inaugural concert at the Kalidas Sammelan (2005. Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh)
- Concert for Peace at Guru Nānak Bhavan (November 15, 2008 at Ludhiana)
- Consultant, Department of Religions, Hofstra University (New York. Taught a credit course from September 11 – October 2, 2008)
- Parliament of World Religions (Barcelona, Spain, 2004; Salt Lake City, USA, 2015)
- Loyola Marymount University, Los Angles (2016 and 2017)