

Baba Atal Rai

Baba Atal Rai (c. 1619 - 23 July, 1627) was born in 1619 AD at Amritsar to Guru Hargobind sahib, the sixth Sikh Guru and Mata Mahadevi, daughter of Bhai Daya Ram Marwah of Mandeala. From early age he was intelligent, lively and a deeply religious boy. He was called 'Baba' because he carried a wise head over his young shoulders. (Here Baba means, wise old man).

He used to play every evening with his age-mates and tell them many wise things. Whatever he said, even in jest, had some deep humane meaning. All his playmates loved, respected and obeyed him. Guru Hargobind was specially fond of him. He used to take him in his lap, cuddle him and say, "God has given you much power. Don't make a show of it. If you have to use it, use it with caution and wisdom. Don't waste it away on little things". Baba Atal Rai used to say in reply, "O True King, all the power that I possess I have obtained from you. Your storehouse can never be empty. Therefore, I may use it to my heart's content. It will never be used up."

Bibi Kaulan, the daughter of Lahore's Qazi had been a dedicated devotee of Guru Har Gobind Sahib. Kaulsar Sarovar (Pool) was built by Guru Hargobind sahib in her memory. She was extremely fond of Baba Atal Rai who reciprocated her affection. Atal Rai along with his playmates used to play under the shady trees of Kikar, Thali, etc on the bank of Kaulsar. Being bold and active, Atal Rai was the captain of his playmates.

One of Atal's playmates was Mohan, who was about the same age as Atal. One day they played on until the night fell. At the end of the game, it was Atal's turn to play with the bat and Mohan's to throw and pick up the ball. It was mutually agreed that Atal would have his turn the next morning, and they returned home. That night, Mohan got up from his bed to answer a call of nature. It was pitch dark. As fate would have it, he stumbled on a cobra and was bitten by it. He screamed in agony. His cries awoke his parents. They rushed to him and found him fainting. They sent for a hakim (homeopathic doctor), but the cobra's poison had done its work. And thus Atal's boon companion died of snake-bite.

Next morning, all the boys reached the playground, except Mohan. Atal Rai enquired about Mohan. One of his playmates replied in jest that Mohan had not come out of fear for it was his turn to throw the ball. Atal Rai went straight to Mohan's home. He found Mohan's parents and others in deep mourning. When told that Mohan was dead, Baba Atal Rai said, "No, he can't be dead. He is pretending to be dead. He does not wish to give me my turn with the bat. I will make him get up." Saying this, he went to Mohan's room. He touched him with his bat and said, "Mohan, get up and say Satnam Waheguru. Open your eyes. You should not be so late to rise from bed. I must have my turn with the bat."

Upon this, Mohan got up as if from sleep. He had been dead for four and a half hours. Naturally,

his parents were filled with joy. Baba Atal Rai and Mohan went out and began to play.

The prince among martyrs and the ocean of Repose, Guru Arjun Dev has written in his Sukhmani thus:

God restores the dead to life, He feeds the hungry.

The news of Mohan's revival spread like wild fire. Guru Hargobind Sahib also heard about what his son had done. He was not at all pleased. He said, "It has become a habit with Atal to display and dissipate his spiritual power. He has not acted well or wisely. Now, whenever any boy would die, his parents will bring him to our door. Whose dead son shall we bring back to life and whose son shall we allow to remain dead? We must obey God's will. We should not try to undo what He has done."

When Baba Atal Rai returned home, the Guru said to him with a touch of sternness, "I teach men to obey God's will. But you act against His will. Your grandfather, Guru Arjan Dev, courted martyrdom at the altar of his faith. In spite of being tortured, he kept calm, and quiet and kept thinking of God. He kept repeating:

Thy will is ever so sweet to me.

Guru Hargobind Sahib reminded young Atal that two of a trade seldom agreed and kept quiet after that. Baba Atal Rai said, "O True King, may you live for ages. I feel that I should go back to our true home."

So saying, he went away. He took his bath in the sacred sarovar, took four rounds of the sacred Harimandir Sahib and went to the nearby Kaulsar Sarovar (lake) - his favourite haunt. He sat near its bank. Bending his head forward, he supported his chin with his bat. With his eyes fixed on the sacred temple, he recited Japji Sahib, offered prayers. After that, he departed peacefully for his True Home on July 23, 1628 A.D.

Guru Hargobind Sahib soon learned of his son's passing away in these strange circumstances. He advised his family and his Sikhs not to go into mourning, saying:

**"All those who are born must die.
Such is the Almighty's Will.
What pleases Him is good.
We should accept it cheerfully.
Atal's name and fame shall live forever."**

Baba Atal's body was cremated at the spot where he had renounced it. Guru Hargobind Sahib said, "Atal has, by God's Will, given up his body in his ninth year. A nine storied Memorial shall be built here, so that it can be seen from afar."

Later, the tower was built between 1778 and 1784. At the spot now stands a beautiful nine storied Gurdwara known as Baba Atal Sahib. To express their reverence to his bountiful nature, people call out to the open hearted prince of truth:

"O Baba Atal, Pakkian Pakaian ghal."

O Baba, the revered one, send us well-baked bread to satiate our hunger. Since then, faithful Sikhs distribute cakes of bread to all visitors.

There is also the tradition attached to Baba Atal that whenever the city has a long dry spell in the hottest summer, the sangat and devotees have a holy bath in the pool next to this nine storied tower - and invariably there are wide-spread showers in the city of Amritsar.

Gurdwara Baba Atal, the tallest tower in Amritsar city, on one side of the Kaulsar savorar in the Golden Temple complex, enshrines the memory of the Sixth Guru the Master of Miri Piri, Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib and his son, Baba Atal Rai.

**O Lord! Thy Name is the wealth of the poor,
And the refuge of the homeless.
It is the honour of the lowly,
And the sustenance of the hungry souls.**