

Mayo story as told from Paldi Granthi Transcription

By: Sharn

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Granthi: The village Mahilpur is nearby Paldi, where that man is from. He left India in 1906 to come to Canada. He first came to San Francisco and then entered Canada. He was totally uneducated, but he was very intelligent still by the grace of God. His life in Canada started with him working in mills, they were single men, and there were no families then. First they would work, then come home and make rotis. His name from India was Mayan, but here everyone referred to him as Mayo. He even started to write his name that way.

Interviewer: And what was his full name?

G: Maya Singh Manhas. In order to get milk, Mayo used to go to a farm owned by a white woman. It was here that he started to learn English. What happened was, in 1914 when WWI began, the Canadian government issued an order that all young men join the military. These white men, who worked in mills then left for war. The mills no longer had men to work, so the owners assumed they would have to shut down. Perhaps this mill was around the Mesachie area then. When this mill was just about to shut, Mayo's brain began to work and he gathered around 12-14 men and said let us lease this mill together. These men then leased the mill from the white man. These men were hard working to begin with, working 12 to 14 hours a day. The mill became very profitable. He then bought some land here [Paldi]. It was 1300 acres. He then got a partner. This village was right next to Paldi and called Kharodha, this partner's name was Kapoor Singh. He was a very educated man, [Kapoor] and he used to deal with all the reading and writing. And this house was the point of the mill. So here was the mill and right next to it was his house. And it was here that he started building people their houses. That colony that he made, was then named Paldi. And it was here that this gurdwara was, built, also called the Paldi gurdwara.

When the mill became thriving and successful, so much profits and monies were being made, and yet, he [Mayo?] also donated greatly. During those times, I couldn't even get a stay in a motel, because white people hated us so much. Because he [Mayo] used to wear a turban, when he came here, he became clean shaven. He used to tell me, this was that Mayo Singh, whom they wouldn't give a room to stay in [4:13 story confusing]....his son became very ill, when they found out he was my son, they let him in right away. White people never used to cross the line, but for Mayo they would. There was a Joginder Singh Parmar, last year he passed away, hear his story. He told me one day, saying how they went to the hospital and saw an image of Mayo Singh. Joginder was staring at it intently when a woman came asking whether he knew who the man was. Joginder said the woman was shocked and invited them inside. She then told Joginder how much this man donated to the hospital. She was the one who used to hold the monies donated, but she never knew who donated the funds. It was after a very long time that the woman realized who it was donating the money. Once she realized the generosity and humility of the man, she insisted on his picture being hung.

Here's another story of generosity. Two years ago a man came from Surrey to this gurdwara. He told me a story. He was a college professor at Mahilpur and heard of a man who had come to visit the village from Canada. When this professor heard that the man from Canada was going to visit his college, he too was excited to see what would be donated to the college. So they sat, served tea, had a nice chat. And

the man [Mayo] shortly bid his adieu and left quietly. The professor then said, we all just looked at each other shocked, thinking that a man who had come from Canada would donate something atleast and this man gave nothing. There was one man in this group, Bagham Singh, who said, be patient, this man [Mayo] isn't the type to make a big show of his donation just so he can be patted on the back, but for certain he will give something. Eventually, seven or eight days later, they received a donation of one lakh rupees to the college. Imagine that, seventy years ago, he have one lakh rupees, today, that would be crores worth.

This Joginder Singh is the one who also told me that when you would go to India, Mayo would literally have his pillows full of bills and money. If anyone came to him asking for money, or help, ie. if their daughter was getting married, Mayo would simply grab a fist full of these bills and just hand it to that person.

When Pandit Jawarlal Nehru came, he ate lunch at Mayo's house, there's a picture of it downstairs, Mike Sarowa [Mayo's son] was very small then, he is standing there shaking his hand. If the Prime Minister of India is coming, it was definite that he would come to Mayo's house. If Mayo had to go to Vancouver and if he was running late, he would call and the ferry would wait for him.

I: Has the historical society of this area written down Mayo's story anywhere?

G: There's a book here that his daughter in law has written. I can show you.

I: But has the historical society, for the museum, you should ask if this has been written? These stories otherwise will remain as oral histories and will not get recorded in time.

G: I agree, but it's still noteworthy that Mayo's daughter in law, even if she is white, has written a book for her father in law.

I: Does the family still come to this gurdwara?

G: Yes, they do. In fact, this Gurdwara's President is Mayo's grandson. Joan Mayo's husband's name was Rajindi, this Rajindi passed away in 2008. Joan is still well and healthy, able to drive, she is 82 years old though. Whenever there is a function, she still comes and visits this gurdwara. They do prayers for Rajindi's passing every year by doing a Sukhmani Sahib prayer and then do langar. The other thing is, Mayo had his own airport here, he owned his two airplanes, and there are pictures of it downstairs. Rajindi was a pilot, and even if he wanted a cup of coffee, he would fly down to Seattle to get it. That's the sort of work these guys did. [10:47 onwards Granthi recites a line from Gurbani] That was the sort of thinking of this boy [Rajindi] he just assumed that he was so wealthy, that it would never end.

I: So who inherited the family wealth?

G: Mayo had four sons. Eldest was Rajindi. One is alive possibly living in Surrey and Vancouver. The others passed away. I'm sure they have grandchildren. Joan herself has four sons-one is in Duncan, he's the President of this Gurdwara and a vehicle electrician, the other three, one, Darshee, Robin Mayo, and the youngest, Devraj. Just look, there's Mayo who had hundreds working for him, and these boys, the grandsons, who are now working for others.

I: How did the factory close down?

G: In 1955 Mayo passed away. And everything was sold soon after. The mill closed they say while he was alive, but the factory closed after his death. And then Rajindi moved the mill to Nanaimo. Joginder Parmar was telling me that when Kapoor went to India and came back, he went to show him the mill, and complained that he [awkward lines.....13:10]. And then they say at that mill they kept a white German manager, who would spend \$500 and claim \$5000, etc....That's what will happen when one doesn't pay attention to what's going on. Jindo's husband [Mayo's son-in-law] Karel Singh Sarowa, Joe they used to call him, they say he held about 200 Kilas, including this gurdwara and this road which crosses, but which had to be sold. So that left only 98 kilas. Our committee had said that when Joe was the owner, that he was told that the Gurdwara should be placed in the name of the congregation. But he refused and said he wouldn't. He said that the way the gurdwara is, is fine and that the committee should keep managing it. The committee said we are managing it, but if we build a newer gurdwara, it'll be the community that raises the funds and yet the land is in your name-that's a mis-match. So he refused and then he bought land in Duncan, to build this gurdwara in Duncan, he said go ahead make it, but I will still not let this [Paldi] gurdwara shut down. Then some back and forth happened, discussions of how old this gurdwara is, and it also was a community [caste] issue perhaps as they are Rajput who are running that gurdwara. But even that story is interesting. It [Paldi gurdwara? 15:12] was built in 1919. When Joe passed away, then his son in turn became the owner. Mike Sarowa, who still lives in Victoria. Even when I came in 2010, Mike came to me and said that he would once again rebuild Paldi, build houses, grocery stores, gas stations, etc. I then went to another colleague (Kavirji) and said that Mike keeps saying this but he does nothing. I was then told that the problem is that there is no water here. There is a well/water system but it gives very little water. To run a city you need more water. In the past, the men lived in bunkhouses which had no bathrooms, now for bathrooms, you need much more water. There is a reservoir here where the water is collected from the rains. They then said that there is a very strong well nearby here, which was confirmed by three engineers that there is plenty of water. There was some back and forth then with the news from last year being that Paldi was for sale because the man [Mike] becoming bankrupt, so he had to sell it.

I: So he's sold it?

G: Yes, he's sold the land and the gurdwara to a white man

I: It caused quite a stir when this happened as I was getting phone calls while I was in the US saying that the gurdwaras been sold. Even the Akal Takht Jathedar was telling stories about the Paldi gurdwara being sold. We then started receiving calls from Gurdwara in Surrey, ie Sukh Sagar, Vancouver, etc., who called and said that we won't let this gurdwara be sold, we will raise monies. I told them that even our committee can raise monies. And then Sangha(?) went on TV, and spoke to OMNI news and Dilbar Kang and told the community that there was no need to raise funds and that we would figure it out for ourselves. We then had a general meeting, probably including the white man who bought the property. I don't know what was said back and forth and by the end they were handing out sweets (laddoos) in celebration of the gurdwara being given back to the community. And then that Joginder Parmar came and told me that both the gurdwara and the Mayo cemetery, which has the graves of Jindo [Mayo's wife], Mayo, Mike Sarowa, the one who shook hands with Nehru, that these two things will remain as is no matter what happens around and about. Now I've heard that this gora has said that this gurdwara is yours, and I'll give you three kilas more for the parking lot and that whenever I do my management I will always check to see where the gurdwara property goes to. That's what I've heard. And that's the story.

I: What's your name?

G: My name is Mohinder Singh, last name Sidhu. Another interesting thing here is that the Guru Granth Sahib ji we have here is 104 years old. What's written on top of it is 'Lahore Sangat...Bhai Harnam Singh Atte Walle.' This was made in Amritsar and the seva was done in Lahore. I was fascinated by the name Harnam Singh and wanted to find out more. And I found out more of the background. I was reading about Bhagat Puran Singh....in it, it said, if you are ever hungry, go seek Bhai Harnam Singh. [20:30 until the end pretty much.....Bhagat Puran Singh Story.....]

I: So what you say about the Guru Granth Sahib ji *prothi*---who brought that?

G: That's what I'm telling you, I will show you this Granth. Only the baba's know how it was brought.

I: Satwinder talking about stories of the SGGS being brought to Abbotsford in 1906.