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ECHOES OF SACRIFICE: DR. DIWAN SINGH KALEPANI'S JOURNEY FROM PEN TO PRISON, A LIVING LEGACY

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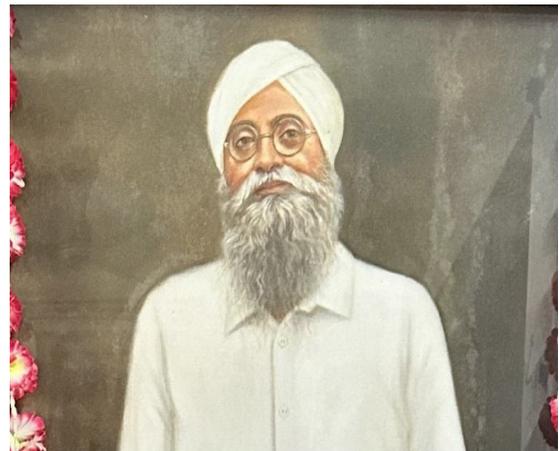
OBJECTIVES:

1. Tracing the childhood life and youth of Dr. Diwan Singh Dhillon.
2. Trace out his early involvement with the nationalists in Non cooperation movement.
3. To study his passion for people and country vide his poetry
4. Dr. Diwan Singh 'Kalepani' work in Andaman Islands and his significant contributions.
5. Findings of the relation of Dr. Diwan Singh with the Japanese.



PREFACE:

Dr. Diwan Singh Kalepani, a shining figure in the annals of India's struggle for independence, serves as a symbol of steadfast resilience and sacrifice. There are very few instances in history where a person became a hero in his life-time and a legendary figure after his death. Diwan Singh was both a hero and legend. As it is known that the beauty of Kashmir inspired Pandit Nehru to craft his finest prose and Rabindranath Tagore to pen his most exquisite poetry, it was the tears of the helpless and condemned prisoners that compelled Dr. Diwan Singh to express himself through both prose and poetry. For many individuals, their life path is determined by their parents; however, there are those who dedicate themselves to a field they neither find interesting nor possess a natural aptitude for. The majority of people typically accept employment solely as a means of earning a livelihood. A minority, however, choose work as a means of shaping their lives. Diwan Singh Ji falls into this latter category, leaving an indelible mark on the pages of history. A rebel from childhood, he earned the respect of his teachers, peers, and rural villagers for his intellect and patriotism. His contributions played a significant role in shaping the historical narrative of his time, placing him among the select few who left a lasting impact.



Early Life and Roots

In the mud house of a quaint village of Little Galotian, nestled in the district of Sialkot (now in Pakistan), a luminary named Diwan Singh Dhillon, later known as Diwan Singh 'Kalepani', entered the world on 22nd May 1897. His tale of valour and sacrifice unfolded against the backdrop of the freedom struggle, tracing its roots to the love of his parents, Sunder Singh and Inder Kaur¹. However, fate dealt him an early blow with the loss of his mother at the tender age of two, followed by his father's untimely demise due to plague. Raised under the benevolent care of his father's younger brother, Sohan Singh and grandmother. As his uncle wanted him to be a high rank government officer so he admitted him in Scotch Mission School at Daska, where he started his journey of getting into the world of literature and science. Who knew that one day little Diwan Singh would etch his name in the annals of history.

A Healer's Non-Cooperation

Born into a freedom-committed family, Diwan Singh graduated from Agra Medical Institution. In 1919, he joined the Indian Army as a doctor and was posted in Rawalpindi. He passionately embraced Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement in 1920. In 1921, his arrest in Dagshai for a vehement anti-British speech marked the beginning of his unwavering spirit. During his posting in Lahore in 1922, he corresponded with many Punjabi and Urdu writers, this was also the time when he was influenced by Gandhian ideals and took up the cause of Swaraj. As destiny guided him, he came to Andaman and Nicobar in 1925 from Rangoon for the deemed punishment for advocating Swaraj and following the disbandment of his regiment. Assuming responsibilities in Cellular Jail on October 20, 1927, he mirrored mainland nationalist movements, undeterred by suspicions and punitive transfers. As a medical officer in the British-controlled Indian Army, he utilized his Port Blair transfer for noble causes, addressing the despondent local population, mainly convicts and descendants, facing discrimination. Driven by a commitment to uplift their conditions, he transformed himself into a mobile doctor, providing free treatment and food from his home turned into a mini-hospital.

The Literary Kaleidoscope and pen name "Kalepani"

Combining the roles of a healer and poet, Dr. Diwan Singh enriched the literary panorama with verses echoing the nation's pain. His poetic odyssey, spanning from Urdu to Punjabi, gave birth to masterpieces like "Wagde Pani"², "Antim Leharan". Adopting the pen name 'Kalepani,' he emerged as a literary guide, bringing light to the darkness of the Andamans, colloquially referred to as 'Kalapani.' Diwan Singh Kalepani gained reverence in literary circles, particularly in Punjab and beyond.

Subsequently, Dr. Diwan Singh committed to promoting literacy by establishing a school. A hostel was given to students from faraway areas, and programs promoting vocational education for young girls were implemented to encourage self-reliance. Initiatives for adult education were widely embraced, complemented by the creation of a library. Through his innovative and welfare projects, he developed a strong connection with the local residents, who saw him as their leader, advocate, and guardian. By 1941, he had earned widespread recognition on the island, integrating seamlessly into the community, and the term 'Kalepani' became an inseparable component of his name.

A Gurudwara of Unity

Dr. Diwan Singh was dedicated to sacrificing his life for the cause of humanity. He ignored his own welfare, wholeheartedly committing himself to the cause of the indigenous people in Andaman and Nicobar, especially within Cellular Jail. Driven by the dire circumstances faced by families on the islands, he decided to build a Gurudwara that would welcome individuals of any faith to come and worship in accordance with their religious convictions. There was one Gurudwara (Police Gurudwara) in the Islands which was allowed only for the police and army personals. In August 1937, Dr. Diwan

¹ Dhillon M, A titan in Andaman diwan singh kalepani, angad publishing house, 1994

² Singh D, Wagde pani, gyani press

Singh initiated the construction of the New Gurudwara³ at Port Blair. His vision was of creating a space that transcends religious boundaries. Later this Gurudwara was renamed as 'Dr. Diwan Singh Gurudwara' in his honour . It still stands as a unique testament, being one of the few Gurudwaras in the country named after an individual rather than the Sikh Gurus. Dr. Diwan Singh's efforts went beyond religious confines, fostering a sense of unity among the diverse populace of these Islands. Celebrating festivals of all the religions in this Gurudwara formed a new norm at that time. Today also , this Gurudwara exists serving the society and folks from all walks of life .

The Island's Guardian

In 1942, as World War II unfurled its wings, the Japanese forces reached the Andamans. Amidst the wartime anticipation of Japanese attacks, the British authorities mandated a comprehensive evacuation of the islands. Despite this directive, a limited number of indigenous inhabitants chose to remain, among them Dr. Diwan Singh, steadfast in his decision to stand by his community. His commitment extended beyond mere presence; he took on the responsibility of providing crucial guidance to his people during their most challenging moments, demonstrating a resolute dedication to their well-being. Dr. Diwan Singh assumed the role of President of the Indian Independence League (IIL) in April 1942, vehemently opposing the Japanese attempts to displace the Gurudwara. The era of Japanese rule over the islands was consistently marked by extreme cruelty and a complete disregard for human values. What initially started as sporadic misconduct by the Japanese escalated into a regular pattern. They invaded the homes of the islanders without warning, engaging in acts of theft and arson seemingly for amusement. Despite formal protests lodged with the authorities, there was a glaring absence of any responsive action. The Japanese, assuming a conqueror's stance, severed any semblance of connection with the islanders, transforming them from comrades against the common British adversary into mere subjects treated as slaves rather than equals. This shift in behavior reflected a profound deviation from any sense of shared humanity

Facing growing resentment among the local population, Dr. Diwan Singh protested against the Japanese and continued to organize national, religious, and social functions in the gurudwara to uplift the islanders' morale. The Japanese introduced a shipload of Korean women, 'comfort girls,'⁴ and demanded Dr. Diwan Singh to vacate the gurudwara for them. Moreover, he was directed to reserve medicines exclusively for the Japanese and 'comfort girls.' Refusing to comply, he stood against the Japanese, especially when they forcibly collected Indian girls and women for the soldiers as 'comfort girls.'

Despite the escalating hostility from the Japanese, Dr. Diwan Singh's unwavering commitment to justice led to his arrest on false allegations of being a British spy on October 23, 1943. He was imprisoned in Cellular Jail, subjected to relentless torture .

Martyrdom and sacrifice

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose arrived in the Andamans on 29th December 1943 . He hoisted the first Indian National Flag at Port Blair the very next day and visited the Cellular Jail. During his entire visit to the Andamans, he was always surrounded⁵ and escorted by the Japanese officials and soldiers. He was unaware of the imprisonment and torture inflicted on Diwan Singh, President of the IIL, and the other members of IIL and INA in the Wing No 6 of the Cellular Jail.

Further, Diwan Singh and other prisoners had to continue to bear the series of torture and during a course of torture in the confines of Wing No. 6 at Cellular Jail, Diwan Singh endured 82 days of brutal torture. Hung upside down, his hair and beard forcibly pulled out, subjected to electric shocks, and pressured to confess as a British spy, he remained steadfast to his principles and the teachings of sikh gurus and the lessons of their life. Forced to sit on a steel chair with a lit fire beneath, enduring

³ Singh NI, unknown martyr diwan singh kalepani,1998

⁴ Dhillon M, A titan in Andaman diwan singh kalepani,angad publishing house,1994

⁵ According to light and sound show at cellular jail

merciless beatings that broke his ribs, he maintained his silence with nothing to confess. The relentless torture included tying his hands and feet, burning various parts of his body, thrusting pins and needles into his nails and toes. Electric shocks targeted his body, the eye balls were gouged, reminiscent of the sacrifices made by Sikh martyrs in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Dr. Diwan Singh Kalepani, a man of culture, rebellion, and idealism, served as a poet, essayist, and unwavering social worker. He endured torture for his principles and embraced martyrdom for his people. His unbroken spirit departed on January 14, 1944, leaving behind a legacy of sacrifice, resilience, and steadfast principles. The Andamans draped in mourning, unpaid homage to a hero whose name echoes in the corridors of freedom folklores . Diwan Singh's indomitable spirit and contributions transcend the pages of history, casting a radiant presence in India's fight for freedom.

The Living Legacy: Shaheed Dr. Diwan Singh Kalepani Museum

Nestled quietly in Siswan, Mohali district, approximately 15 km from Chandigarh, the Shaheed Dr. Diwan Singh Kalepani Museum⁶ was inaugurated in 2013, a testament to the efforts of Mohindar Singh's wife, Gurdarshan Kaur (daughter in law of Dr. Diwan Singh). The museum's red-brick facade silently stands, serving as a witness to the life story of a man who transcended mortal limits. Comprising five sections, the museum meticulously showcases curated photographs and writings bringing to life the narrative of this remarkable individual. Segmented to mirror the various facets of his life, the museum invites visitors to delve into the intricate tapestry of sacrifice, literature, and unwavering commitment. One notable feature is a replica of his prison cell, adorned with his literary works, providing a glimpse into the space where he spent his final days.

Epilogue: a hero lost in time

Dr. Diwan Singh Kalepani, characterized as a man of culture, a rebel, and an idealist, has engraved an enduring legacy on the historical records. His life serves as a symphony of sacrifice resonating across time, serving as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made for the freedom we now cherish. It is imperative to revisit the neglected pages of history and uncover the buried history of this gem of Andaman Island, integrating him into the mainstream discourse. Recognizing the historical oversight, there is a crucial need to restore his due respect, acknowledgment, and rightful recognition, whose name has got lost in the history of time.

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⁶ Diwan Singh Kalepani Museum website -www.diwansinghkalepani.org