

THE POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION OF AKAL TAKHT IN PUNJAB**Ritika Mehra,**

Research Scholar, Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Saboo, Bathinda

Dr Harpinder Kaur,

Assistant professor, Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Saboo, Bathinda

ABSTRACT

Akal Takht is one of the most sacred institutions of Sikhism. It has played a historic role in the socio-political transformation in Sikh people. This great institution was created by 1609 by Guru Hargobind. The history of Akal Takht is inspiring for Sikhs. Akal Takht is one of the most sacred institutions of Sikhism. The institution has evolved its practices and traditions. *Hukammamas* issued from the Takht enjoy religious sanction and are binding on the Sikhs. They constitute religious ordinance, instructions or general information pronounced after deliberations at the congregations. Both the traditions of Sarbat Khalsa and Gurmata played a pivotal role in organizing and strengthening the Sikhs during the eighteenth century when their identity faced the threat of extermination. The administration of the Akal Takht changed many hands, than they replaced by Shiromanani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee maintained the administration of Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht. In fact, the history of the Punjab revolves round the Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib.

KEY WORDS

Institutions, consequences, deviated, vicissitudes, infringement, unflinching, enlightened, pleaded, expel, reckoned, allegiance, gracefully, appropriate, verdict, penance

INTRODUCTION

The first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak Dev started a new institution called Sikhism which grew with time. He preached people to have devotion to One God only not to worship numbers. By bringing the spirit of the teachings of Guru Nanak into practice, the Sikh established a perfect blend of spiritual and worldly activities under the Guru Hargobind. Guru Hargobind not only carried forward the tradition but also gave it a meaningful relevance. Just in front of Sri Harimandir, the sanctum sanctorum of the Sikhs, Guru Hargobind erected an imposing structure. There stood a mountain of earth near its site. Baba Buddha and Bhai Gurdas are believed to have got it leveled and bricks laid. The structure was raised, according to the Gurbilas Chhevin Patshahi, the oldest account of Guru Hargobind's life, on June 15, 1606: *Hargobind laid the cornerstone, and Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas completed the construction, no third person being allowed to take part in it. It was on this foundation that a big raised platform was constructed which served as a seat for the Guru.

Akal Takht in History

Akal Takht, originally known as Akal Bunga (the house of God), is the seat of temporal and spiritual authority of the Sikhs. The Akal Takht literally translated as the, "Throne of the Timeless". A Persian word meaning a residential building the Bunga, later called Akal Bunga that gradually developed into the nucleus of religious and political activities of the Sikhs. It began as a centre where the Sikhs assembled for deliberations in crisis. Its construction started in 1606 A.D. and was completed in 1609 A.D. the creation of Akal Takht, as stated earlier, was a highly noteworthy contribution towards developing a distinctive Sikh identity. The construction of the platform highlighted Guru Hargobind's interest in the temporal affairs of the Sikhs. The Guru held his Darbar here at the Akal Takht, conducted the affairs of the Sikhs and administered justice. Giving the Takht an air of royalty, the Guru received visitors,

accepted offerings and handled the cases pertaining to the Masands. Seated on a raised platform and clothed in kingly robes, the Guru was addressed as SachaPadshah who became the sovereign power among the Sikhs. The Akal Takht, the first of its kind in Sikh history, became the exalted seat of Guru's temporal authority.

In due course of time, Akal Takht became the seat of preaching and prayers. Here, discourses on the problems of the Sikhs and their welfare began to be held. As usual, there was morning service by Guru was held in the Harmandir where Gurbani; religious scriptures, were recited regularly. In the afternoon physical feats were performed in the courtyard before the Akal Takht. The Guru started the practice of choir's moving rightly round the Golden Temple with the blare of trumpets and flare of torches, singing hymns in stirring tunes. The object of this stirring narration to the accompaniment of the martial music was to infuse a spirit of heroism among the people. A new kind of musical instrument called Dhud was popularized. It was most suitable for singing Vars or the stirring ballads. Skilled bards including Abdul and Natha Mal regaled the Sikh gatherings at the Akal Takht with epical. All this put new life into the hearts of the Sikhs. There was the significance in constructing the building of the Akal Takht, a few paces away from the seat of religious authority. The Akal Takht denoted Sikh politics while the Harmandir symbolized Sikh religion. Each place was visible from the other so that when the people were sitting in the Harmandir, they would remember their involvement in religion. Religion and politics were thus, blended into one by Guru Hargobind. They were considered limbs of the same body. The Guru expressed the view that as long as he continued in Harmandir, he should be reckoned as a saint and in the Akal Takht he should be treated and respected as a King. At Akal Takht Guru Hargobind held his court. From here, the Guru granted audience to the visitors and followers who came from distant places. Besides encouraging shooting exercises with arrows and matchlocks, the Guru saw to it that heroic tales of unique bravery, adventure and sacrifice were narrated to the assembly. Here Guru Hargobind issued a *Hukamnama* to the Sikhs asking them to be fully armed and bring him gifts of good horses and arms instead of other valuables.

Formation of the Sikh army

After the revelation of Akal Takht Guru Hargobind announced the formation of an army, he had realized that the Sikh religion needed a system of defend its mission from alien attacks and threats. He sent messages to offer themselves for enrolment in the Sikh army. Then Guru Hargobind wore two swords, one *Miri*, temporal, and another *Piri*, spiritual powers. Akal Takht represented both *Miri* and *Piri*. Two *Nishans Sahib* built outside Akal Takht to remain connected with Harmandir Sahib. The length of both was different from each other. Both *Nishans* were joined by a circular symbol and written in *IK ONKAR* and *Khanda* which shows the mutual relationship of these structures. This was rather a new development of far-reaching consequences and constituted the basis of Sikh polity in the years to come. Such pursuits of the Guru developed a new spirit among the Sikhs and they were enthused to fight for a cause. But some doubts were raised that the Guru had left the policy of peace adopted by his predecessors. This is misconception. The Guru never deviated from the high ideals of spiritualism. He organized the army to defend the faith and the faithful Sikhs from the onslaught of the alien rulers specially Mughals. The force was only to be used when all other peaceful means of solving disputes had failed. Bhai Gurdas, the Sikh Savant has clarified the position. The Guru made arrangements for imparting training to the Sikhs in the art of fighting. Hunting was practiced as a compulsory item to provide useful and necessary training in the war exercises. The Guru himself learnt the use of offensive and defensive weapons, besides riding, hunting, wrestling, and many other sports. He grew up to be an all-round trained, healthy and strong in body and mind as well as saintly and enlightened.

On April 13, 1634, the Mughal army attacked Guru Hargobind Sahib here; the beginning of

conflict between the religious royalty of the Gurus and the imperial authority of the rulers. The Guru had to confront the Mughal forces at different times and then moved to a hilly place Kiratpur near Ropar. Thereafter Guru Har Rai, the seventh Guru, also spent his time there. Guru Harkrishan was bestowed Guruship here, who moved to Delhi where he left for his heavenly abode at a very tender age. During this period, on November 23, 1664, Guru Tegh Bahadur did visit the town but he was not allowed to stay here. From 1635 to 1698, the shrines of Amritsar including Akal Takht remained in the control of the Mina family; the descendants of Pirthi Chand - the elder brother of Guru Arjan Dev. At that time, no court held at Akal Takht and no activity took place.

The Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh established Khalsa 21st March 1699 by giving Amrit to five beloved ones. This was the expansion of the Akal Takht institution. After this, Guru ji given Amrit to Bhai Mani Singh entrusted him the head of Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht. Bhai Mani Singh reached Akal Takht at Amritsar with his five companions: Guljar Singh, Bhupat Singh, Dan Singh, Koer Singh and Kirat Singh. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, for the time the political activities of the Sikh community went into the hands of Banda Singh Bahadur who was devotee of Guru ji. He started taking revenge for the atrocities committed the Sikh people Guru Gobind Singh and his family by Mughal Rulers. The Mughal chief of Patti tried to occupy Amritsar several times. One such attempt was made in April 1709. The Sikhs, under the command of Bhai Mani Singh and Bhai Tara Singh of Dall Wan, repulsed this attack. When Baba Banda Singh Bahadur occupied several areas in the Punjab, Bhai Mani Singh chose to leave Amritsar in order to avoid the Mughal attacks. On December 30, 1711, the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah ranted Alit Singh Palit the charge of Amritsar in order to use him against Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. After the death of Bahadur Shah, Alit Singh Palit returned to Delhi.

Sarbat Khalsa gatherings at Akal Takht 1730-1839

In 1721, Bhai Mani Singh returned to Amritsar all restarted regular worship. He revived the traditional custom of hymns, kirtan and langar and he also the sanctity of pilgrimage place perfectly maintained. Even after receiving threats, Sikhs continued to hold meetings at Akal Takht on occasions like Vaisakhi and Diwali under the guidance of Bhai Mani Singh. His first act was to solve a dispute between the Tat Khalsa and the Bandai Khalsa factions for the right to management of the shrines in Amritsar.

On March 29, 1733, a major gathering of Sikhs called the Sarbat Khalsa - a congregation, representing all Sikhs - was held at the Akal Takht. The tradition of Sarbat Khalsa started under the leadership of Bhai Mani Singh. This led to discussions about the title of Nawab assumed by the Mughals. After accepting the *Jagir*, the Sikh leaders called a meeting of all the jathas at Akal Takht. It was decided to divide the entire Sikh community into two parts, one was the Taruna Dal which included all the youth and the other was the Budha Dal which was an army of senior citizens led by Baba Deep Singh of Pahuwind. On this time, blue coloured flags were also waved at Akal Takht. This was the first major achievement of the Sarbat Khalsa. With the passage of time the Sikh community started gathering twice a year after the rabi crop and the kharif crop at the Akal Takht to attract devotees attention and discuss any issues. Similarly, the Akal Takht continued to be the centre of the activities of the Dal Khalsa. Soon, Mughals intentions changed and they again banned the movement of Sikhs. The result was that once again the Sikh started fighting with the Mughals. In April 1734, Bhai Mani Singh was arrested and was executed in Lahore on June 24, 1734.

In 1740, Massa Ranghar, a Mughal official, desecrated the Darbar Sahib. He was killed for this action by Bhai Sukha Singh and Bhai Mahtab Singh on August 11, 1740. Once again, the Mughals were more aggressive Sikhs were not allowed to go to Harmandir Sahib. Therefore, all the decisions of Sarbat Khalsa were shifted from Akal Takht to the hideouts of Sikh army.

Along period of persecution of the Sikhs ended with the death of Zakaria Khan. On 14 October, 1745 after a gap of eight years, the Sarbat Khalsa assembled in the front of Akal Takht and formed a Gurmata and the Sikh army was placed under the command of the Sikh General Nawab Kapur Singh.

In 1757 the Afghan army of Ahmed Shah Abdali demolished both the Darbar Sahib and the Akal Takht. Baba Deep Singh led several thousand Sikhs against the Afghans. A major battle was fought on November 11, 1757. Baba Deep Singh and several thousand Sikhs were martyred. In 1762, the Darbar Sahib complex was demolished again by the Afghan army. On December 1, 1764, the Afghan army made another attack. Thirty Sikhs, led by Jathedar Gurbaksh Singh, fought against the mammoth Afghan army and were killed. Akal Takht, like the Sikh community as a whole, witnessed many vicissitudes of history. It suffered repeated desecration and destruction until it was finally liberated after the establishment of sovereign authority of the Sikh misl and principalities in the Punjab in 1765. During the eighteenth century, the Akal Takht implemented the strategy of the Sikhs and gave a shape to the action plan of the Sikh struggle for existence through the institution of the Sarbat Khalsa.

Akal Takht and Sikh Rulers

By 1770, the Sikhs had freed most of their homeland. For the next three decades the Sikh Misls administered their respective territories; by 1799 the whole zone was almost complete peace; among the Sikh Misls, Bhangi and Ahluwalias were the most power of the all. But within a short period of time, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was more powerful and captured Amritsar in 1802. At that time Amritsar was ruled by Bhangi Sardars. Even after establishing the rule over Punjab, the Maharaja maintained his contact with Akal Takht. When in 1805, Maratha Sardar Holkar came to Maharaja for help in the fight against the British, the matter was put before the Sarbat Khalsa and in this meeting, they decided to expel Holkar.

During the reign of Akali Phoola Singh, who was the chief of the Misl Shaheedan and was the *jathedar* of the Akal Takht. He was punished Maharaja Ranjit Singh twice. The Sikh traditions hold, he accepted the punishment awarded against him at the Akal Takht—first for his relations with a Muslim woman Moran and secondly for having used the beautiful Chandni, presented by the Nawab of Hyderabad before it was offered at the Akal Takht. The Maharaja showed no rancor or reservation at the punishment proposed by the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, Akali Phoola Singh. The Maharaja stood in the Sangat with his bare back to receive the "fogging". The punishment is believed to have been remitted in view of the submission of the Maharaja to the supremacy of the Takht. In the second event of using the velvet Chandni embroidered with glittering pearls. The Maharaja gave *Jagir* of two villages to the Harmandir.

British Raj

After the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the British captured Punjab. The British tried to carefully organize the Sikhs. They took control of many historical Gurdwaras and holy shrines including Akal Takht. In 1869, they appointed a caretaker named *Sarbarah* who was leader of both Akal Takht and Harmandir Sahib. He had also the authority to issue orders to Sikhs. With time, a feeling of distrust developed among the Sikhs. As a result, organizations like Singh Sabha Movement was born many reformists emerged from it. At that time the activities carried out by the *Sarbarah* of Akal Takht on the premises of Harmandir Sahib were opposed the lower cast servants were not allowed to give or take *parsad* in the premises of the Harmandir Sahib there were certain days fixed for them to enter the complex. The time of Aroor Singh, a *Sarbah*, had deteriorated to extent that he, in connivance with the hereditary *masands*, had the audacity to invite Sir Michael O'Dayer, the immoral executioner of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, to the Harmandir Sahib and presented him with a *saropa* by way of honouring him. There many such examples.

In 1920, a meeting was held in the premises of the Harmandir Sahib to demand the resignation of the *Sarbrah*. The *sarbrah* pleaded guilty and resigned. In October 1920, the Sikh reformer took over the control of Akal Takht and Harmandir. Soon after, the British again appointed a 36-member committee of Sikh elites to look after the Harmandir Sahib complex. Teja Singh Bhucher was elected the first Jathedar of Akal Takht who was accountable to the Panth. To resolve the next issue, a meeting was called at the Harmandir premises in central government. It elected a committee of 175-member body of the management of the Gurdwaras. This body came to be known as the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. From until 1921, the affairs of the Akal Takht became the center of stable politics and activism, where held regularly. The SGPC still functions through the legal system of the Punjab.

Conclusion

The Akal Takht ensures that the Sikhs adhere to the religious code of conduct. Any infringement there from or non-conformity of the Sikhs to the established practices would invite cognizance by the Jathedar who, after following a procedure of explanation and verification, declares the person found guilty of religious misconduct as Tankhayia. An appropriate Tankha (punishment) is levied upon the guilty who is generally asked to recite prayers, clean utensils in the Guru ka langar and dust the shoes of the devotees visiting the Gurdwaras. Obviously, the purpose of the punishment proposed is to redeem the individual from sin and conceit through service and prayers undertaken in a spirit of humility. The Sikhs gracefully accept the punishment and undergo penance. The affairs of the supreme centre of temporal authority are conducted under the leadership of its Jathedar who happens to be an outstanding Sikh personality deeply learned in scriptures and philosophy of Gurmat. Akali Phoola Singh and Bhai Mani Singh were among the illustrious Jathedars of the Takht who guided the Sikh Panth without fear, favour or prejudice. No individual, however big or learned, can defy the summons and verdict of the Jathedar. Akal Takht has flourished into the most valuable authority of the Sikh polity. A symbol of the sovereignty of the belief, it commands unflinching allegiance of the Sikhs.

REFERENCE

- Banrjee, Indu Bushan, "Evolution of the khalsa" Vol. 1 The Foundation of the Sikh Panth, 1963; vol. 2. The Reformation, 1962 The Calcutta University.
- Chatterji, Suniti Kumak, "Third Birth Centenary of Guru Gobind Singh" {1666 – 1708} Chandigarh, Year Published in 1967 January.
- Cunningham, Joseph Davey, "A History of the Sikhs" S. Chand & Co. Delhi, 1966.
- Dhillon, Singh Dalbir & S.S. Bullar, "Battles of Guru Gobind Singh" Punjab University Patiala, year of published 1990.
- Duggal, K.S., "The Sikh Guru Their Lives and teachings", Published in New Delhi 1980.
- Gandhi, Surjit Singh, "History of Sikhs Gurus" {A Comprehensive Study} Govt College Sangrur, First Edition year 1978.
- Grewal, J.S. & Bal S.S. "Guru Gobind Singh" {A Biographical Study}, Deptt of History, Punjab.
- Grewal, J.S., "The Khalsa Sikh and NonSikh" Perspectives Edited by First Published Year 2004.
- Gupta, Hari Ram, "History of the Sikh Gurus", New Delhi, U.C. Kapur & Sons, Published Year 1973.
- Kohli, Surinder Singh, "The Sikh and Sikhism" Published by New Delhi, year 1993.
- Singh, Fauja & Gurbachan Singh Talib, "Guru Tegh Bahadur", Punjab University Patiala year publication 1975.
- Dilgeer, Dr Harjinder Singh, "The Shrines of Anandpur Sahib & Kirathpur Sahib", Published By Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee Amritsar First Edition 1999 February.

Johar, Surinder Singh, "The Sikh Gurus and their Shrines" First Book Published in October 1976.

Mehar, Singh, "Sikhs Shrines in India", Govt OF India Published in New Delhi Year June 1975.

Randhir, G.S, "Sikhs Shrine in India", First Print: 1990 Re Print Edition: 2006 New Delhi Singh, Gurmukh Major, "Historical Sikh Shrines", First Edition Published in Year September 1995.

Sahi, Joginder Singh {Journalist} "Sikh Shrines in India & Abroad", Publication Division First Published in 1978.