

IMPORTANCE OF BUNGAS IN SIKH HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, explained Bungas it was necessary to make these Bungas for the comfort and location of the passengers. The foremost objective of this research is to reveal. During the time of misles and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the area of Bungas was very widespread. The Bungas had a special in the Sikh history. The name Bunga associated with historic Gurudwaras (Sikh Shrines). The meaning of Bunga is a place of dwelling first of all, these Bungas started contributing in the field of education, as before Eighteenth Century, there was not much of development in education field. Those Bungas where also gradually established in Tarn Taran, Anandpur Sahib and Talwandi Sabo by crushing the broken Bungaes. Now a day, the meaning of Bungas is that a residential place which where built at different times by different communities and devotees for the Jathedars of Sikh misles, Sikh Maharajas aristocrats, capatalists Sants, Mahant sand the devotees of different areas, at Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Damdama Sahib and Anandpur Sahib. In 1925 Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee took control of it S.G.P.C. has made a lot of efforts to improve these Bungas, many of these facilities were built in the Bungas, but gradually the Saran named was after them.

The *Bungas* (Mansions) had a special significance in the Sikh history. The name *Bunga* was associated with historic *Gurudwaras* (Sikh shrines). Whenever *Sardars* (Sikhs) and *Maharajas* (Emperors) came to pay obeisance at Amritsar, they used to stay in those *Bungas*. During the period of *Misls* (Sikh confederacies) and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, those *Bungas* were constructed around Harmandir *Sahib*. Even in *Ardaas* (Sikh prayer), the *Bungas* had been referred to as *Jugo Jug Atal* (lasting through ages). The real meaning of *Jugo Jug Atal* is that whether ancient or latest, these *Bungas* will have their existence centuries. The meaning of *Bunga* is a place of dwelling; *Akal Bunga* and *Shaheed Bunga* are built on the same purpose. All such *Bungas* had been built around the *Sarovars* (Holy Pools) like *Bungas* of Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Talwandi Sabo, Anandpur *Sahib* and others. Historians have divergent opinions about *Bungas*. The meaning of *Bunga* (Persian *Bungas*) is a place of dwelling, building, canopy etc.¹

Its meaning is an organisation or institution; places to live-in or halts adjoining Gurudwaras where institutions were established for the maintenance of national traditions or arrangements for the stay of travellers were made, was called *Bungas* in Sikh vocabulary. In *Gurmat Parkash*, the meaning of *Bungas* had been explained as a place where one can take rest² where benevolent feeling was socially gratified by merely keeping it in view. In *Mahan Kosh*, it had been said about *Bungas*, using the context of keeping valuables is a place where money or valuables can be kept³ *Bunga* is a word of Persian language which means a place where people from diverse religions could live together.⁴ Construction of all the *Bungas* in Harmander *Sahib* was done between the year 1763-1773.⁵ The land around the periphery of *Sarovar* (Holy pool) in Harmander *Sahib* was purchased by Guru Ram Das from the land owners from surrounding villages on the order of Guru Amar Das, through which, the ownership of the entire land of the city was in the name of Guru's abode. When Guru Ram Das started digging the *Sarovar*, the entire silt extracted from the *Sarovar* was put outside the *Parikarma* (Periphery). *Guru Sahib* got constructed sheds and houses outside and around the periphery for the stay of devotees and preparation of *Langar* for them. Later on, in place of those sheds, some *kacha* houses were constructed. Thereafter, concrete houses were built in place of *Kacha* houses, where in arrangements for food and rest for the congregation could be made during the annual occasions of *Diwali* and *Baisakhi* and monthly auspicious days of *Amavas* (Moonless night), *Punia* (Full moon night) and *Sangrand*. But when Ahmed Shah Abdali blasted the building of Harmander *Sahib* with gun-powder and filled the holy pool with mud, those houses were also demolished. Then again, during the period of *Misls*, when the reconstruction of Harmander *Sahib* was got done, the heads of *Misls* started constructing new and concrete buildings of *Bungas*. When Sikh states were established, Sikh kings built concrete *Bungas* for the comfort of the considering that a service to Guru's shrine.⁶

For the maintenance of those *Bungas*, *Sardars* (Sikh landlords) and devotees of different areas and towns, did command able service of *Bungas* for the pleasure of the Guru. The names of these minarets were kept after the names of Sikh *Sardars*, Kings and Emperors, *Misls*, localities and towns, and they became famous. In the minaret of *Giania* (Learned ones), training of correct recitation of *Gurbani*, its meanings and interpretation was imparted. In the *Bunga* of *Ragis* (Hymn singers), training of devotional music and recitation of verses was given. In the *Akali Bunga*, training of weapons was also given; in addition to that,

¹ Jaswant Singh Neki, *Ardas Darshan Roop Abhiyas*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1989, P-262.

² Joginder Singh, *Chaunkiyan Jhande Bunge Jugo Jug Atal*, Gurmat Parkash, Delhi, 1967, P-32.

³ Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, *Bhai Gurshabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh* (6th ed.), Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Patiala, 1999.

⁴ Anita Surinder, *Twareekh Lahore Amritsar*, Premier, Amritsar, 2005, P-178.

⁵ *Ibid*, P-179.

⁶ Anita Surinder, *Twareekh Lahore Amritsar*, Premier, Amritsar, 2005, P-179.

arrangements for boarding and free kitchen were available in each *Bunga*. *Bungas* had been considered as a part of the *Gurudwara*. During the period of *Misls*, in addition to Sikh devotees, Sikh Sardars, along with their martial riders, who used to God to Amritsar for paying holy dip, stayed in those *Bungas*. In every *Bunga*, there was a *Bungai*, who did performed daily installation of *Guru Granth Sahib*, cleaned the place and served the visitors.⁷ Whenever a Sikh *Sardar* or Emperor came to pay obeisance at *Darbar Sahib*, he offered sweets to the care-taker of *Darbar Sahib* for looking after the *Bungas* who further distributed that among the *Bungais*.⁸

Money was daily received from *Darbar Sahib* and *Akal Takht* for the repair of large *Bungas*. Orders were issued by the supervisor for the repair and maintenance of *Bungas*. The entire *Parikarma* (Periphery) was encircled with *Bungas*. Those *Bungas* were of different villages, and some of common villages while others were exclusively of *Gursikhs*, some were like residential houses. Especially devotees with exclusive ownership rights used to reside in such *Bungas*. The Sikh Educational Conference of 1916, and the groups that returned back from *Jaito* after release from prison in 1925,⁹ stayed in those *Bungas*.

In 1925,¹⁰ after the formation of Gurudwara Act, when the Committee recorded the *Bungas* as the property of *Harmander Sahib*, the *Bungais*, villagers and residents of the area filed claims in Sikh Gurudwara Tribunal Lahore, citing their ownership rights. When the government started making the legal suits in favour of British *Bungais*, the Committee, in order to save that *Panthic* property from plundering, made agreements with the *Bungai* on the under the mentioned terms. One *Bunga* was embarked for the pilgrims. The property attached to that could not be mortgaged or sold. Its administration was to vest with the progeny of the founders they remain Sikh. They themselves would be the patrons and also appointees of the *Bungai* who would be a baptised Sikh. *Bungai* would install *Guru Granth Sahib* and maintain cleanliness etc. He would not allow any anti-Sikh chore inside the *Bunga*.¹¹ The visitors would be allow to stay but no fare etc was to be taken from them. If any shrine committee complained against any *Bungai*, then management would appoint new *Bungai* by removing the previous one. No one was allowed to make any change towards the *Parikarma* side without the permission of the Gurudwara management committee; to enforce that, litigations were initiated by *Darbar Sahib* against the owners of *Bungas* in accordance with the Gurudwara Act to give the impression that all those *Bungas* belonged to *Darbar Sahib* and it was not the personal property of anyone.¹²

Gurudwara Committee later on, withdrew the court cases after ensuring that the *Bungas* were being utilised by the devotees only. Which had allround benefit. Much of the Gurudwara wealth was saved which might have been spent on litigation.

During the period of Sikh *Misls* and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, *Bungas* were built around *Harmander Sahib*. Since the ancient times, two big gatherings on *Baisakhi* and *Diwali* were held at Amritsar in which entire Sikh community converged.¹³

Heads of various Sikh *Misls* had got those *Bungas* built for their residences. Amritsar had six types of *Bungas* -

- *Bungas* of Gianis.
- *Bungas* of Hymn Singers.
- *Bungas* of Akalis.
- *Bungas* of Communities.
- *Bungas* of Sardars.
- *Bungas* of Religion.

The *Bungas* of *Gianis* (Learned ones) were the *Bungas* to study *Gurbani*, there the knowledge of *Gurmukhi* alphabets was imparted, the recitation of *Gurbani* was taught and corrections were made. The meaning of *Gurbani* was explained and hidden meanings of verses were unfolded. Training to priests was imparted in the *Bunga* of *Gianis* so that they could be made learned persons of high conduct, may act as the representatives of the Guru; they could perform their duties wisely and seriously. Before the start of printing press, the training of chorography was also imparted to publish books of the *Bungas*.

The training of recitation of verses was given in the *Bungas* of hymn singers. The knowledge of religious *Raags*(Tunes), preservation of old traditions, singing of hymns as per the instructions of the Guru, were the characteristics of those *Bungas*.¹⁴ The *Bungas* contributed to preserve, develop and which carried forward the tradition of singing of hymns. Maharaja of Kapurthala was the patron of *Ahaluwalia Bunga*; Raja Fateh Singh himself was the exponent of singing of verses. In addition to *Kirtan*, training of playing *Rabab*, *Sarangi*, *Mridang* (A barrel shaped double headed drum) was also provided in that *Bunga*.

The training in weapon was imparted in *Bunga* of *Akalis*. These were the institutions of keeping the Sikhs in ever-ready mode. *Nihangs* (A Sikh sect) were also called *Akalis*, and *Chhaoni* Singhs were also counted among these *Bungas*.

⁷ Kirpal Singh Giani, *Shri Harimandir Sahib Da Sunehri Itihaas*, Dharam Parchar Committee, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, 2000, P-326.

⁸ *Shri Darbar Sahib 1930-31*, Sikh Reference Library, S.G.P.C., Amritsar, PP-40-45b (Repopr).

⁹ Jagjeet Singh, *Sankhep Itihas Darbar Sahib*, Shri Tarn Taran Sahib Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Tarn Taran, 2000, P-36.

¹⁰ Kirpal Singh Giani, *Harimandir Sahib Da Sunehri Itihaas*, SGPC, Amritsar, 2000, P-327.

¹¹ Kirpal Singh Giani, *Shri Harmandir Sahib Da Sunehri Itihaas*, SGPC, Amritsar, 2000, P-327.

¹² Jagjeet Singh, *Sankhep Itihas Darbar Sahib*, Tarn Taran Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, Tarn Taran, 2000, P-37.

¹³ Jung Singh Giani, *Amritsar Sifti Da Ghar*, Sikh Itihas Research Board, SGPC, Amritsar, 1977, P-126.

¹⁴ Jaswant Singh Neki, *Ardas Darshan Roop Abhiyas*, Singh Brothers, Amritsar, 1989, P-263.

Sampardayi Bungas were established by *Udasi*, *Nirmale* and other communities which were running camps were operating there. *Bungas* of *Sardars* were built by the Chiefs of *Misls* and other prominent Sikhs.¹⁵ Devotees from those areas came and stayed there.

Akal Bunga, *Jhanda Bunga*, *Kothri Sahib* and *Bunga Dukh Bhanjan* and others are included in the *Bunga of Religion*.

The buildings of *Bungas*, *Akhara Bungas* and congregations are those indigenous institutions of education system, which were not only revived, but established at the time of religious reforms movement. The institution of *Bungas* is quite old and was started during the time of *Misls*. In the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his father and the founder of 'The Tribune' newspaper and grandfather of Sardar Dial Singh Majithia, had built his own *Bungas*. These *Bungas* were built for the comfort of travellers. According to Melcom, in 1912, there was *Bunga Shaheedan* and *Bunga of Nirmalas*; both these *Bungas* were *Vidyadhar* (Education centres).¹⁶ These *Bungas* were the centres of universal awareness and institutions of study and learning; students from far off places came to get education in these *Bungas*. Every *Bunga* had its own tradition. The scholars and teachers of these *Bungas* maintained the *Bungas* with hierarchical administration. Their life was dedicated to the cause of education. Students were provided with accommodation and free food in these *Bungas*. Their expenses were borne by big scholars but some of them were served by the society. These *Bungas* continued serving the cause of education for a century. Apart from maintaining *Harmander Sahib* as a pious pilgrimage centre, these men made the place as the republic of education. Some of the *Bungas* were purely schools wherein study of grammar, Vedanta and criticism was imparted. Study of Vedanta was given in *Malwai Bunga*. The education level, there was of high order. *Bunga of Kapurthala* was expert in translations. The Faridkot Emperor of Bhai Mani Singh arranged a congregation of scholars of *Guru Granth Sahib* and got written a new translation which was considered authentic. The verses of *Assa Di Var*, *Sohila* (Sodhare) were specially taught in that *Bunga*.¹⁷

Primary education was imparted in these *Bungas*. There was a *Gurmukhi* school adjoining *Ahluwala Bunga*. Training of music instruments like those in *Harmander Sahib*, was given in these *Bungas*. There were *Bungas* of arts too. In those days, German invention of printing had not reached our country. At that time, *Gutkas* (small booklet of scriptures) of *Guru Granth Sahib* were hand-written in the *Bungas*. The *Bunga* of pattern writers is called as *Bunga of Singhapuris*. Sant Singh, priest of *Harmander Sahib* was the patron of this *Bunga*. He himself was a good writer. Handwritten samples of *Adi Granth* (Ancient version of *Guru Granth Sahib*) are still lying with Khalsa College, Amritsar, by seeing which, one can feel the artistic beauty of those days. In Sikh Reference library, Amritsar and in the library of Dr. Ganda Singh of Patiala, such *Granth*s are available in which the procedure of making permanent ink had been given. Apart from that, there was an old priest, Bhai Bishan Singh in Khalsa College Amritsar, who also had such specimen of anthologies. In *Bunga Udaasian*, training of medical treatment was given and patients were also being treated. *Bunga of Jallianwala* maintained expertise in treating skin disorders. *Sanskrit* was also taught in *Bungas*.

Dr. Leitner, who was appointed first Principal of Oriental College, Lahore did research on indigenous education pattern and provided detail thereof in one of his books. All these *Bungas* were doing literary as well as social service. Dr. Leitner had maintained that classes of *Gurmukhi* were taken up in these *Bungas*.¹⁸ Bhai Atma Singh was a teacher in *Akal Bunga*. Krishan Singh was the in-charge of *Bunga Nurmahilian*, Bhai Maya Singh of *Bunga Ahluwalian*, Bhai Atma Singh of *Anandpurwalian* and Bhai Atma Singh was in-charge of *Hukam Singh Bunga*.

The literary, cultural and educational contribution of these *Bungas* is very significant. Sant Nihal Singh *Nirmale* of *Sohla Wala Bunga*, who was a famous poet, compiled many books, Bhai Sant Singh of *Bunga Gianian* was a noted scholar; Maharaja Ranjit was a big admirer of his qualification. Bhai Gurmukh Singh (First) of *Akal Bunga* compiled the *Gurbilas* of Ninth Sikh Guru. Bhai Santokh Singh of *Gharial Wala Bunga* wrote *Guru Kaviah Manak Munjusa*. Bhai Budh Singh was the poet-laureate of the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.¹⁹ Rattan Singh Bhangu of *Bunga Shyam Singh* wrote '*Pracheen Panth Parkash*' The writer of *Gur Partap Suraj*, Mahakavi Bhai Santokh Singh, was the product of *Bunga Gianian*. *Nirmale* saints were the scholars of Vedanta, Sanskrit texts and poetry. *Udasi Mahants* established centres of *Vedanta*, grammar, *Pingle* and others. Like *Kapurthala*, these *Bungas* were the watchmen of Sikh customs; that is why the immortality of these *Bungas* is prayed.

There were junior and senior students ranging from 8-10 to 70-80 getting primary education in the *Bungas of Damadama Sahib*. At that time, the chiefs of *Bungas* opened schools in large villages of *Malwa* which imparted education in the form of *Deras*, *Gurudwaras* and *Dharamsalas*. Children and grown-ups started studying *Gurmukhi*. These *Bungas* made the children mature in Sikh sanctity in their young age. Sikhism flourished after opening of branches of *Bungas* in villages. The holymen of *Bungas* continued the *Taksaal* (Masonry) of *Guru Kashi* despite untold and unbearable miseries.

Towards the ending decades of Nineteenth century, the recitation of *Guru Granth Sahib* was daily held in 12 *Bungas of Guru Kashi*.²⁰ Teaching about *Gurumat*, of language, history, religion, literature, philosophical literature, poetry and books of Ayurveda were available in these *Bungas*. Now the tradition of recitation of *Gurbani* is prevalent only in *Bunga Mastuana*. The buildings of remaining *Bungas* have been demolished by SGPC.

In *Bunga Mastuana of Damdama Sahib*, the flow of *Guru's* name and singing of hymns continue for eight quarters. Even today, after obtaining education from this *Bunga*, students have become ace scholars of *Gurmat* and propagators. Hundreds of students can be seen studying *Gurbani* in ancient style and learning *Ragas* in this *Bunga*, while learning correct rendition of verses, recitation of *Gurbani* and verses from other *Granth*s. Only *Bunga Mastuana* is providing education and carrying forward

¹⁵ Jaswant Singh Neki, *Ardas Roop Te Abhiyaas*, 2008, PP-263-64.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, P-34-38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, P-38.

¹⁸ Jaswant Singh Neki, *Ardaas Darshan Roop Abhiyaas*, P-263.

¹⁹ Giani Balwant Singh Kotha, *Sri Damdama Sahib Guru Ki Kashi Talwandi Sabo*, PP-109-110.

²⁰ Balwant Singh Kotha, PP-141-142.

the masonry of Gurumat to flourish the verses of Guru Kashi. Students are provided with *Langar* (Free food), residence, books, Harmonium, *Tabla* (A pair of small drums to provide beat to a song), stringed musical instruments, dresses, soaps, oil; everything was provided free of cost. Likewise, *Bunga Mastuana* had been an attractive and distinct heaven. The flow of recitation of *Gurbani* and *Langar* continues for eight quarters.

The devotees on pilgrimage to Guru Kashi stay in *Bunga Mastuana*. On the occasion of congregation on Visakhi and other religious celebrations, the place of residence of these Saints, Mahants, scholars from the country and abroad, was in *Bunga Mastuana*.

The following had been the chiefs of this *Bunga*.

- 1) Saint Kehar Singh
- 2) Saint Kehar Singh Modi
- 3) Saint Sarwan Singh Khazanchi
- 4) Shri Saint Arjan Singh
- 5) Shri Saint Mit Singh
- 6) Shri Saint Jaswant Singh

These great men, despite being the chiefs of the *Bungas*, took proper care of the *Bungas*, day in and day out. Till then, the administration of the shrine was looked after by five chosen ones of the Guru selected by *Sant Sewak Jatha*. This *Panch Prdhani Siddant* was that pious tradition which was established by the Gurus. That principle of *Panch Pradhan* practically is only seen in *Bunga Mastuana* Guru Kashi. At present, *Bunga Mastuana* has become legal Trust of Talwandi Sabo, District Bhatinda. This Trust was approved after registration on April 3, 2002 whose name is *Shri 111 Sant Attar Singh Sewak Jatha Dharmik Maha Vidayalya Guru Kashi Langar Mastuana Charitable*.

This Trust, as per the sanctity enforced by Shri Sant, is doing service in the field of education, administration of *Amrit* (Baptisation), service of *Langar*; everything is being done in accordance with religious sanctity and in public interest. There is another uniqueness of the *Bunga* that there is no paid employee here.²¹ All administrators are remarkable, students are doing service. On 27th March, 2002 this trust issued a letter to the Income Tax Department regarding the foregoing subject. *Bunga Mastuana* respects, serves and welcomes the visitors. Even today, thousands of devotees partake of *Langar* there. Hundreds of great men reside in *Bunga Mastuana*. Shri Sant had established such an institution which is a source of scientific Knowledge repository of religious study and a source of *Brahm Vidya* (Cosmic study).²² *Bunga Mastuana* is such a place where nobody is scorned, everybody is welcomed. Each one gets food, listening of hymns and a place to rest. *Langar* (Free kitchen) operates day and night. It is the good fortune of *Bunga Mastuana* which is continuously going on.

Such types of centres should also exist these days. *Bungas* are the historical heritage of *Khalsa* community. These are the property of the *Khalsa*. That is why *Khalsa Panth* always calls for the glory of these historical shrines.

²¹ *Ibid.*, PP-141-142.

²² Joginder Singh, *Ardas te Sada Itihas*, P-173.