

ROLE OF AKAL TAKHT IN SIKH HISTORY

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ABSTRACT: *The throne of the timeless one 'the Akal Takht' was built by Guru Hargobind. It is located directly opposite the Harimander Sahib, Amritsar. The purpose of building 'the Akal Takht' was supervision of religious and political activities of Sikh Panth. Guru Hargobind put on two swords – Miri and Piri: one indicated his spiritual authority and the other, his temporal authority. Akal Takht was continuously attacked by Ahmed Shah Abdali and Masa Rangar. At present, Akal Takht is the Chief Centre of religious and political activities of Sikhism.*

Index Terms- Akal Takht, Dal Khalsa, Sarbat Khalsa, Gurmatta, Hukamnama, Khalsa Panth.

¹Akal Takht was founded by Sixth Guru Hargobind Ji in 1606 AD. He supervised the religious and political activities from Akal Takht. It aroused due to Guru Arjun Dev's martyrdom and his last message to Guru Hargobind Ji. Even Sikhs did not want another of their another Guru to die. Guru Hargobind Ji started wearing turban with tuft, keeping arms and wearing hood was result of all these developments. Akal Takht was result of this ambience.¹

Akal Takht means God's throne. It also means Akal: timeless and unending. Both the meanings are identical as God is timeless and only His reign can last forever. No one from the mortals can keep their rule until eternity their rule is for limited period. God is the only Lord who remains ruler for eternity. Ten Sikh Gurus are called true rulers as they preached the message of the Lord. The Preachings of the God are true and the Gurus are true because they represent Him. Guru Hargobind Ji, under the guidance of his predecessors, built Akal Takht. He did not take the position of a ruler but remain a keeper of it.²

Guru Arjun Dev Ji took the Sikh religion to a high level. *Adi Granth Sahib* was completed in 1604 A D. and Harimander Sahib became a different identity for the Sikhs at the time of Guru Arjun Dev Ji. The Sikhs had their own scripture and it united people who were against the policies of Mughal Empire. Compilation of *Adi Granth*, organization and discipline in Sikh religion was not tolerable for Jahangir. He thought it to be against his own motives so he turned against Guru Arjun Dev Ji. Guru Ji went to trail in the Mughal court because he helped Dara Shikoh. He had been tortured for it. He had to sit upon hot plates and the Mughal executioner poured hot sand over his head.³

Jahangir was not in favor of the popularity of Sikh religion. That caused martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev Ji in 1606 AD. Guru Ji was aware of Jahangir's plan so before leaving to Lahore he called Guru Hargobind Ji and other Sikhs and told them to appoint Hargobind as his² successor. He asked Hargobind to change his outlook regarding the policies of Sikh religion. Guru Arjun Dev Ji advised him to carry arms and organize an army, as in the changing times it was wise to do so.⁴

On the thirteenth day of Guru Arjun Dev's martyrdom, *Adi Granth Sahib* was concluded and Guru Hargobind Ji was given the authority as the sixth Guru. The responsibility of uniting the Sikh Panth came on the shoulders of Guru Hargobind Ji. Then he led to the foundation of Harimander Sahib at Amritsar and established it as the fundamental center of Sikhism. He changed the policy of his predecessors. Guru Ji put on two swords of *Miri* and *Piri*. *Miri* indicated worldly authority and *Piri* indicated spiritual authority. It meant that Guru Ji would look after political matters alongside spiritual. So he changed the destructive power into constructive. He took the arms against the cruel people and it considered religious in manner.⁵

Historians have different views about the establishment of Akal Takht. Gyani Lal Singh believed that the construction of Akal Takht began in 1608 AD. and went on until 1613 AD. According to Gyani Gyan Singh the construction of Akal Takht began in 1609 AD. Ganda

1. Sukhdayal Singh, 2002, Khalse de Panj Takht, Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 1.
2. Harjinder Singh Dilgir 2002. Akal Takht Sahib Da Falsafa Te Tawarikh, Sikh University Press Belgium, pp. 11-19.
3. Jodh Singh, 2007, Guru Arjun Dev Ji Di Shaheedi Ate Rachana, Publication Bureau Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 153.
4. Mukhtyar Singh Goraya 2012. Dus Patshahian, President All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, Amritsar, pp. 106-107.
5. Surjit Singh Panchi, 1987. Rabab de Rakhe (Shri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji), Utaan Publication, Mansa, p. 59.
6. Sukdyal Singh, 2000, Guru Hargobind Ji Sahib (Jeewan, Yudh Ate Yatraawan), Sudarsh Printers, New Delhi, pp. 17-18.
7. Jasvir Singh Sarna, 1986. Guru Hargobind Ji, Sant and Singh Publishers near Super Bazaar, Baramula, p. 20.

Singh and Teja Singh also supported this view. Some historians mentioned it 1606 AD, some other 1608 AD, 1609 AD and 1612 AD, but these could not be considered as authentic dates as they have not mentioned any source.⁶

Akal Takht was built opposite to the Harimander Sahib. Guru Hargobind Ji laid down the foundation stone. Baba Budha Ji and Bhai Gurdas Ji constructed the whole building of *Akal Takht* themselves.⁷ *Akal Takht* was necessitated in the presence of Harimander Sahib. Guru Hargobind Ji was the owner of two swords *Miri* and *Piri*. Harimander Sahib, the indicator of spiritual authority or *Piri*, was already in existence. So *Akal Takht*, the indicator of temporal³ authority or *Miri*, was constructed.⁸ Guru Hargobind Ji hoisted two saffron-colored flags at *Akal Takht*. These were symbols of *Miri* and *Piri*. It means that Sikhs are independent of any rule.

Guru Hargobind Ji used to dress up as an emperor. He wore a tuft and sat on throne in *Akal Takht*. He went to his court daily after his morning prayers. In evening there was a court meeting for public also. He delivered the first *Hukamnama* right after sitting on the throne. The order read as that who considered himself a true Sikh should present a horse and weapons to Guru Hargobind Ji, when they would visit him. He sent the order in 1606 AD and they circulated the copies to many devotees. Soon after that order, the Sikhs sent many horses and weapons to Amritsar. The evening court became a routine and number of people visiting the court was increased. Guru Hargobind Ji asked for horses and weapons, as he knew that a big threat would be awaiting Sikh religion in the near future, if they would not be organized as an army. Those weapons and horses were circulated in the trainees. The Sikhs were trained for guerrilla warfare.⁹

He asked his followers to change with time, even to those in abroad he asked to send horses and weapons. He told them to revolt against the rulers, not to pay any fine and die with dignity instead of living a life of slavery. He want to abolish cruelty, they must spark that in them. He encouraged them with saying that they were fighting for religion and that would be the cause of their success because those fighting for money could not hold for long. Sikhs should be afraid of no one but the God. He strongly advised them to live with the dignity. They should always be ready to fight for justice. They would be fearless if they were fighting for the right cause. They should live in unity. People were trained in front of the Harimander Sahib. Oration of Guru Hargobind Ji was impressive. He could lure the people only with the power of his speech. Many people joined the Sikh army. They were ready to die for the cause of the community. People were gathered in the open field near *Akal Takht*. They took part in *kirtan*. Afterwards a *Nagara* was being beaten and the poets sang the songs of bravery.¹⁰

Guru Ji⁴ wanted to aware the people to their present conditions so that they became ready for revolt. He considered *Akal Takht* to be an indicator of religion and justice.

Jahangir sent for Guru Hargobind Ji to come to his court. Guru Ji took advice of his Sikhs on the matter that whether he should go to Jahangir's court or not. Most of the Sikhs were not in the favor of his departure. However, Baba Budha Ji and Saalo Ji gave him permission to go for the meeting. He made Bhai Gurdas the first *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht* and Baba Budha Ji the in charge of Harimander Sahib while he went to Delhi.¹¹

Jahangir knew well about the increasing power of Sikhs. He was afraid of the growing popularity of Sikh religion. The Sikhs became more determined after the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev Ji. When Guru Ji reached in his court, he arrested him and sentenced him 12 years of imprisonment in Gwalior fort. Guru Ji was released after two years on the request of many Muslims.¹² Guru Ji went to Amritsar. After some time, Jahangir also visited Amritsar and offered some money to Guru Hargobind Ji for the construction of *Akal Takht*. But Guru Ji refused to accept his offering saying that *Akal Takht* was the Throne of justice and it was better to built it with the money of the Sikhs only. Jahangir did not tolerate his insult and it changed the relations between Guru Hargobind Ji and Jahangir.¹³

Guru Hargobind Ji fought many battles in the last years of his life. Those battles sure did pave a wide way to the establishment of *Akal Takht* and the declaration of independence of Sikhs. Guru Hargobind Ji visited rarely to *Akal Takht* during those battles. Therefore, the organization of the *Akal Takht* had never remained the same since Guru Hargobind Ji. After Guru Ji it came in the hands of the children of Prithi Chand, hypocrite enemies of Sikh religion. In 1651, when Guru Har Rai Ji returned Sodhi Hari Ji (grandson of Prithi Chand) was looking after *Akal Takht* and he was not like his grandfather. Therefore *Akal Takht* remained under many setups.¹⁴

⁵After his death, *Niranjania* Sikh the flatterer of Mughals was given the charge of *Akal Takht*. Sikhs were not happy with that, as he was supporter of Mughals. A group of Sikhs went to Anandpur Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh Ji and requested him to send a Sikh delegation to improve the order of *Akal Takht*. He sent Bhai Mani Singh Ji to Amritsar in 1699 AD, after the foundation of Khalsa to take control of *Akal Takht*. Bhai Mani Singh took Control of *Akal Takht*. Sikhs began to visit Harimander Sahib. Bhai Mani Singh also served the Sikh *Panth* in the Battles as the head *Granthi* and *Jathedar*. When he was with Guru Gobind Singh, he helped him in writing *Guru Granth Sahib* that was later copied in three copies by Baba Deep Singh These were sent to Amritsar, Nander Sahib and Patna Sahib.¹⁵

Guru Gobind Singh Ji visited and stayed in Nander Sahib, saddened the Sikhs. At that time Guru Gobind Singh sent Bhai Mani Singh to Punjab. Once in Punjab, he took the charge of *Akal Takht*. He would hold *diwan* of Sikhs in the evening at *Akal Takht*. Bhai Mani Singh

8. Jung Singh, 1977. Gyani, Amritsar Sift da Ghar, Sikh Research Board (S.G.P.C.), Amritsar, p. 36.

9. Jasvir Singh Sarna, op.cit. p. 23.

10. Ibid, p. 25.

11. Jodh Singh, 2007. Shri Hargobind Sahib Ji, Dharam AdihyanVibhag, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 33.

12. Ibid, p. 38.

13. Ibid, p. 240.

14. Gurmohan Singh, 1985. Sodhi Har Rai Ji : Jiwan Ate Rachna, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 8.

15. Gyani Gyan Singh, 1880. Panth Parkash, Khalsa Tract Society, Amritsar, Murtazai Press, p. 234.

16. Kour Singh, 1968. Guru Bilas Patshahi Dasvin, S. Shamsher Singh Ashok, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 294.

was the main Sikh Leader in Punjab after Guru Gobind Singh. He was a political leader as the *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht* and he also helped Banda Singh Bahadur in many of his fights. His family until their last breath supported Banda Singh Bahadur. He also handed over the supervision of *Akal Takht*. On the other hand, Zakariya Khan wanted to blot out the Sikhs; therefore, he arrested Bhai Mani Singh and other main Sikh leaders. In his old age, Bhai Mani Singh was brutally murdered. They chopped off his body inch by inch.¹⁶

After the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, the tradition of Sarbat Khalsa was founded. Nawab Kapoor Singh became the Chief Sikh leader and Jathedar. He divided the Sikh forces into two batches: *Budha Dal* and *Taruna Dal* in 1733-1734. Zakariya Khan captured the Sikhs living with Bhai Mani Singh and killed them. He banned entry of Sikhs at Amritsar. Sikhs were slaughtered for many years. Sikhs went away from Amritsar during that time. When Nadir Shah invaded India in 1739 AD, he crumbled the power of Zakariya Khan. He came under the rule of Nadir Shah. The Sikhs organized themselves during that period and looted Nadir Shah when he was returning.¹⁷

Sikhs became active once again. Then Zakariya Khan tried to abolish the Sikhs from Amritsar. Therefore, the Sikhs went into the hills. He died in 1745 AD. After his death, the Sikhs returned to plains, began to discipline and organize themselves. That was the period of Dal Khalsa. It was the Army of Sikh Panth. It was organized with the blessings of *Akal Takht*. They fought With Mir Mannu to Abdali. They faced many problems but it was their success in 1765AD that the Punjab was under the Sikh rule. They always worked on the directions of *Akal Takht*. All the decisions related to whole Sikh community were taken in the meetings of *Sarbat Khalsa* at *Akal Takht*. *Akal Takht* played a very important role in the polity of that period. It was the place where the Sikhs gathered twice in a year on the occasion of *Diwali* and *Basikhi* for their further planning.¹⁸

The Sikhs held a meeting of *Sarbat Khalsa* in 1746 AD, Nawab Kapoor Singh divided the whole Sikhs in 25 *Jathas* and every Jatha had its own leader. It strengthened the political power of the Sikhs. Many young Sikhs joined the Army, which increased the number of the Khalsa soldiers.¹⁹

In the meeting of *Sarbat Khalsa* in 1748AD, Nawab Kapoor Singh organized a Sikh national army called *Dal Khalsa*. The Sikhs were divided into 11 *Jathas* or *Dals*. All those *Dals* were independent in their fields but they came together in the communal danger. They had to protect Sikh community jointly. The army of those *Dals* was called *Dal Khalsa*. It was a central fighting body of the Sikhs. Nawab Kapoor Singh elected Jassa Singh Ahluwalia as the supreme commander of *Dal Khalsa*.²⁰ *Dal Khalsa* was always a part of *Akal Takht*. All the decisions of *Dal Khalsa* were taken in the meetings of *Sarbat Khalsa* at *Akal Takht*. It was so powerful that it even faced the enemies like Mir Mannu and Abdali.

When Abdali invaded India in 1764 AD, he captured Lahore instantly, after it he moved towards Amritsar. *Dal Khalsa* was not present in Amritsar at that time. Gurbaksh Singh was the *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht* and he did not accept to leave *Akal Takht* at any cost. He decided to face Abdali's forces with his 29 Sikhs present at that time in *Akal Takht*. When Abdali⁷ reached near circumambulation, they attacked on the army of Abdali with guns. The forces of Abdali encountered them. They all died facing them in that battle.²¹

Abdali attacked only to teach a lesson to Sikhs. However, after a while, he returned to his home. *Dal Khalsa* called a meeting of *Sarbat Khalsa* and planned to capture Lahore. They wanted to have a battle with Abdali, so they became more active in their actions. They did not allow Abdali to be comfortable even for a minute in that battle. They were victorious and then called a meeting of *Sarbat Khalsa*. They decided to establish a new calendar and a new *Khalsa* rule. They also took care of Amritsar and *Akal Takht*. They renovated the *Akal Takht* and cleaned the holy tank. *Dal Khalsa* had almost every important area under their control and they thought Abdali would never attack them again.²²

In 1765, Abdali's representative was sitting in Delhi. Sikh besieged him and made him under their control. Abdali did not invade Punjab but he could not do any harm to *Dal Khalsa*. As Akali Singh was the chief attendant of *Akal Takht* at that time. He never left *Akal Takht* least it was the most necessary. The Sikhs were always ready to sacrifice their life and they would keep the interest of their humanity ahead of their personal motives.²³

They established the *Khalsa* rule in 1765 AD. *Sarbat Khalsa* and *Gurmatta* united the Sikhs since 1716 AD, in which once they divided themselves in different *Jathas* and always worked for their community and for Amritsar and *Akal Takht*. Afterwards they divided themselves into *Misals* and fought against their enemies. All that resulted in the establishment of *Khalsa* rule in Punjab in 1765 AD. After Abdali, his son Timur Shah prepared twice to invade Punjab in 1792 AD and 1798 AD. During that period, the Sikh leaders met at *Akal Takht* and they chose Ranjit Singh as the leader of *Dal Khalsa* to face Taimur Shah.²⁴

17. J.D. Cunnigham, 1999. A History of Sikhs, Johan Murray, London, p. 83.

18. Khushwant Singh, 1999. History of the Sikhs, Vol – 1, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 116.

19. Henry T. Prinsep, 1970. Origin of the Sikh power in Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Language Department, Patiala, p. 3.

20. Khushwant Singh, op. cit. pp. 127-128.

21. Noor Muhamed, 1939. Jangananama, ed. by Ganda Singh, Singh Brithers, Amritsar, p. 35.

22. Khushwaqt Rai, (1811). Tarikh-i-Sikhan, MS, GS, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 61.

23. J.D. Cunnigham, 1849. A History of Sikhs, Johan Murray, London, p. 100.

24. Fakir Sayed Wahee-ud-din, 1981, The Real Ranjit Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 51-130.

⁸In 1800 AD, Akali Phula Singh became the *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht*.²⁵ At that time Amritsar was under the rule of Bhangi Sardars. When Maharaja Ranjit Singh besieged Amritsar, Akali Phula Singh came in between for reconciliation. He had no personal interest but he acted only as a *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht*. As he was well aware that the battle would cause damage to Sikh lives, he reconciled both the sides. Bhangi Sardars were given *Jagir* and Amritsar came under the rule of Ranjit Singh. The meeting between Ranjit Singh and Akali Phula Singh showed that Ranjit Singh hold religion and *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht* superior to his own position of a king. Even though a King, he still was a person from the Sikh *Panth*. In 1811 AD, Maharaja Ranjit Singh thought to win Multan a meeting of *Sarbat Khalsa* was called at *Akal Takht* under the leadership of Sahib Singh Bedi. Akali Phula Singh was sent as the leader of the army. Every mission planned at Amritsar was executed under the leadership of Phula Singh.²⁶

Another incident, which proved the Superiority of *Jathedar* over the King, was that when Ranjit Singh voluntarily took the punishment given by Akali Phula Singh as a *Jathedar* of *Akal Takht*. When Ranjit Singh disobeyed the Sikh religion and he was tied to the tree of tamale on the order of *Jathedar* Phula Singh.²⁷

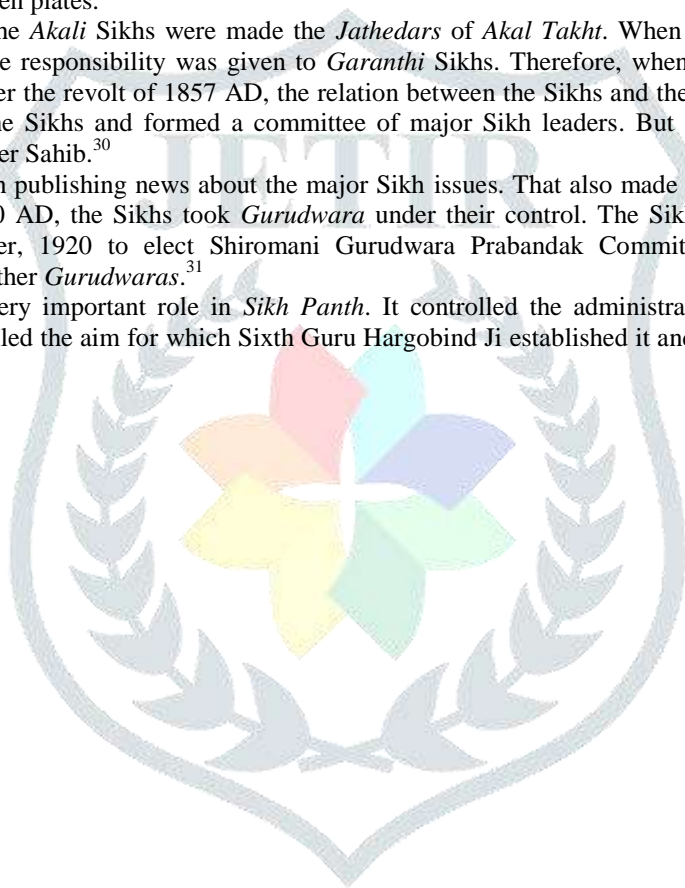
Akali Phula Singh was also the part of military excursions. When Ranjit Singh attacked Peshawar, Akali Phula Singh and his batch was with him. In that fight, at one point of time, the Sikh soldier seemed almost helpless against *Pathans* but the *Akali* Sikhs encouraged them and showed rare piece of courage. *Pathans* got confused and Sikhs took advantage of that confusion to make their side strong. They had no plan to fight in that battle and many *Akali* Sikhs including Phula Singh died in it.²⁸ Bhai Sant Singh also served *Akal Takht* after the death of Akali Phula Singh. He worked till his death in 1823. It is said that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had built four stories of *Akal Takht* in his time. His son Gurmukh Singh succeeded him. Hari Singh Nalwa built the golden dome and gave *Jathedar* Gurmukh Singh 25 thousand

⁹rupees to cover the dom with golden plates.²⁹

During the time of Ranjit Singh the *Akali* Sikhs were made the *Jathedars* of *Akal Takht*. When British Government captured Punjab, most of the *Akalis* were killed and the responsibility was given to *Garanthi* Sikhs. Therefore, when Sikhs were not worried about it, the attendants became administrators. After the revolt of 1857 AD, the relation between the Sikhs and the British had changed. They gave back the responsibility of *Akal Takht* to the Sikhs and formed a committee of major Sikh leaders. But they were not serious to improve the condition of *Akal Takht* and *Harimander Sahib*.³⁰

In 1920 AD, the newspapers began publishing news about the major Sikh issues. That also made people aware of bad administration of *Gurudwara Mahants*. In August 1920 AD, the Sikhs took *Gurudwara* under their control. The Sikh leaders gathered at *Akal Takht* and passed a *Gurmatta* on 15 November, 1920 to elect *Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandak Committee* for looking after the order and administration of *Akal Takht* and all other *Gurudwaras*.³¹

To conclude, *Akal Takht* has a very important role in *Sikh Panth*. It controlled the administration of the Sikh community from its establishment. We can say that it fulfilled the aim for which Sixth Guru Hargobind Ji established it and it is still working in Sikh society and politics of Punjab respectfully.



25. Baba Prem Singh Hoti, 1971. *Jiwan Birtant Akli Phula Singh*, Basha Vibhag, Patiala, p. 42.

26. Baba Prem Singh Hoti, 1946. *Akali Phula Singh*, *Khalsa Darbar*, ed. by Gyani Lal Singh, Bhasha Vibhag, Patiala, p. 308.

27. *Ibid*, pp. 398-423.

28. Sukhdyal Singh, 2002. *Khalsa De Panj Takht*, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 61.

29. Gyani Gyan Singh, 1917. *Twarikh Shri Amritsar*, Singh Sabha Committee, Amritsar, p. 16.

30. *Ibid*, p. 68-69.

31. Pyara Singh Padam, 1979. *Sankhep Sikh Itihas (1469-1979)*, Gurunanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 244.