

Akali Phula Singh: His Importance in Sikhism

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Abstract..

Akali Phula Singh was one of the brave organizers of the *Khalsa Panth* who sacrificed his life during the initial establishment of the *Khalsa* rule. He inspired the freedom minded Akali *Singhs* (the *Nihangs*) in such a way that they were always prepared to lay their lives for the defence of their religion and for the spread of the Sikh rule. Akali Phula Singh was born on 14th January, 1761AD in the village Seehan of the Sunam tehsil of the Sangrur district. His father's name was Bhai Ishar Singh and his mother's name was Har Kaur. After the death of his parents, Akali Phula Singh spent his childhood in the supervision of Baba Narain Singh. Although he was born in a Rangreta family, yet he was appointed the priest of *Akal Takhat* by the Sardars of Sikh *Misals* and the Sikh people. He always struggled for keeping the piousness of the Sikh religion intact and for the spread of the Sikh rule. For this, he contributed immensely in the Kasur, Multan, Peshawar, Kashmir, other campaigns. For this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh called him the custodian of the Sikh religion. He laid his life in the battlefield of Naushehra in 1823AD while spreading the Sikh empire and thus kept the unconquerable brave Mughal Pathans away from the Sikh rule.

Index Terms

Akali Phula Khalsa was one of those brave pioneers of the *panth* who sacrificed his life during the initial development era of *Khalsa* rule. He inspired independence minded akali (*Nihang*) Singhs to be always on their toes to sacrifice their lives for the protection of Sikh religion and expansion of Sikh rule.

Akali Phula Singh was born on 14th January, 1761 to Bhai Isher Singh (Father) and Har Kaur (Mother) at Seehan village, Tehsil Sunam, District Sangrur. Bhai Isher Singh was a saint-soldier of Nisanawali misal. Nisanawali was a misal of Badhad varna.

Ahmed Shah Abdali attacked Punjab for the 6th time to crush the power of mighty Sikhs in Punjab. He wanted to gain political rights in Punjab by defeating the existing Sikh power. Even Sikhs had got the news of the attack by Abdali. Abdali reached Lahore in no time. In 1762 A.D., Sikh and Afghan forces fought a mighty battle in the fields of Kuperheede. The saint-soldier, Bhai Isher Singh of Nishanawali misal fought bravely against the Afghans, leading to deep wounds on his body. Thousands of Sikhs got martyred in that war. Afghan forces killed almost half of the Sikh forces in a Single day of war. Bhai Isher Singh was brought back home injured. At that time, Phula Singh was a dozen months old. The wounds of Bhai Isher Singh were getting worse day by day. Just then, one more son, Sant Singh was born to him.

Bhai Isher Singh could feel himself in the arms of death. After pondering for a long time, he called upon for his friend, Baba Narain Singh Akali, who was a brave saint-soldier of Shaheeda misal and a pioneer of Akali Nihang Sikhs. Bhai Isher Singh put the hand of his beloved son, Phula Singh, in the hands of Baba Narain Singh and urged him to consider him as his own son there on and hence, prepare him for the future of *Khalsa* rule in Punjab. Saying that, Bhai Isher Singh breathed his last.

After the death of his father, Bhai Phula Singh started leading his life by taking care of his mother Har Kaur and Baba Narain Singh.

His childhood days were spent listening to the brave stories of Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Gobind Singh. By that, his mother wanted to create an eagerness in his mind to serve for Sikhism like other brave Soldiers.

Due to those efforts of the mother, Phula Singh had a brave heart and love for his religion since his childhood. Bhai Isher Singh had given the responsibility of his son to Bhai Narain Singh before his death. So, in order to give this child a good piece of education, Baba Narain Singh brought that child to Anandpur Sahib. In no time, he became expert in writing and reading *Gurmukhi*. At that time, the official language was Farsi. Hence Baba Narain Singh also made arrangements to teach him Farsi along with the Punjabi. Phula Singh came in contact with Maharaja Ranjit Singh during the English rule. He also got knowledge about the English language as he had to talk to English officers.

By the age of 10, he had memorized *Japji sahib* and many more religious books. The whole credit to this goes to Bhai Narain Singh and Har kaur. He was so sharp minded and brave since childhood that he used to do each and everything that he used to think of and in order to complete that he would forget his food also. He loved the *Gurbani* since his early childhood and whenever he got time from playing he used to read *Gurbani*. It was due to his love for *Gurbani* that he was Brave lover of Sikhism and a self respected person.

When Phula Singh became perfect in religious education, then according to the religious rules Baba Narain Singh started giving him the training of weapons. In no time, child Phula Singh learnt the use of weapons with expertise. Nobody could match him in the field of archery due to his regular hard work. He was getting expert day by day. Baba Narain Singh used to bring all his students to a fake battle field ground and used to divide them into two groups. Singhs of the misal used to get very happy on seeing the mental strength and enthusiasm of Phula Singh because they used to see all the positives of brave Jarnail Singh in him.

Under the leadership of Narain Singh, Phula Singh became unknowledgeable lover of *Gurbani*, expert of weapons and a person of high character like his mother had imagined. Narain Singh used to thank God that Phula Singh was staying with him. Singhs of *Shahida misal* used to say that God had himself sent that great child to serve the religion. Phula Singh was the one who would expand the Sikh Empire in the country.

While Phula Singh was spending his teenage days with Baba Narain Singh, his mother was getting old. She had got too weak and once while going up stairs she fell down. As she fell down, she was injured severely. As soon as Phula Singh got that news, he came back to his Village from Anandpur Sahib to rescue his mother but his mother's condition was getting worse day by day. She called him and told him that he had been taught to adopt the life of a Sikh soldier. She wanted him to become a fearless and an altruist person of the religion. Whenever religion needs him, he should be ready even to sacrifice his life. It was his father's last will that he would become a fearless and the religious warrior.

Saying that, his mother took her last breath. Phula Singh did the last rituals of his mother and hence decided to become a part of a Shahidi Jatha.

Phula Singh along with Narain Singh had come to Anandpur Sahib. He got admitted into *Shahidi dal*. According to the rules, he gave all his property to his younger brother Sant Singh. He started spending his life praying to God and in no time he won the hearts of the people of Shahida Jatha. They used to say that people like Phula Singh would take the Sikhism to new heights. Akali Narain Singh used to consider him as Kohinoor. He often said that the brave soldiers like Akali Phula Singh would take the Sikh Panth to new heights.

When he got entered into the Nishanavaali misal, Punjab had two enemies, Pathans and English. Mughal's political and army had been overpowered. Pathans had been ruling Punjab since ages and English were in the hope that they would get a chance to rule Punjab. Hence they wanted to end the Sikh rule in Punjab.

By that time Phula Singh had completed his religious and warrior education. Baba Nihal Singh had got too old. He gave all his responsibilities to Phula Singh. Phula Singh was also given the responsibility of the construction of Damdama sahib and Anandpur Sahib. At that time there were many problems. The hill Kings used to attack and Phula Singh was sent to teach a lesson to the hill Kings. Shahidi dal had full trust on Phula Singh that if someone could be a good successor, then it had to be Phula Singh.

Very soon the Shahidi Jatha was raised to heights under the leadership of Phula Singh.

He took over the responsibility of protecting and serving the religion. Whenever hill kings used to attack them, they used to get defeated very badly. Hence, Phula Singh struggled a lot to maintain peace in the area. His efforts were rewarded soon and there was peace in Anandpur Sahib. He also removed the negativities in the *Gurudwaras* and hence the love of people for him increased exponentially and also the respect from the people of Jatha increased rapidly. This was because the protection and caring of the *Gurudwaras* was under Guru Gobind Singh since the beginning. The Sikh who used to be the leader of a Shahidi Jatha was the one who used to be the pioneer of *Akal Takht* Sahib.

Around 1800 A.D, Phula Singh came to Amritsar because he had got the news that there were many negativities and wrong practices in the *Gurudwaras* of Amritsar. What he saw in the *Gurudwara* of Amritsar was no less than the harsh monopoly of the few. To remove those practices from the *Gurudwaras*

of Amritsar, Phula Singh took over the control of the *Gurudwaras* of Amritsar. The culprits were punished accordingly. Commons people were very happy seeing his fearlessness and his caring nature

The time when Phula Singh was made the religious and the political Pioneer of *Akal Takht* Sahib, Maharaja took over the leadership of Shukarchakkia misal around that time. In Punjab, base of many misals had been laid on. Due to lack of political and religious power, diversion in the unity of Sikh misals had arisen. Pioneers of different misals were fighting for their own misals instead of Sikhism. Ranjit Singh had got a lot of popularity in Punjab till then. In order to expand his empire, he attacked Amritsar in 1802. While the armies of the misals were fighting, Phula Singh was sitting in the *Akal Takht*. He could not bear the fight among the Sikhs and he himself came to the battle ground and made them seize the battle. He told everyone that it was against the dignity of the religion. Seeing the Sikhs fighting with each other, he asked them to compromise by talking to each other rather than fighting. Both the Sikh Kings agreed to him and made Maharaja Ranjit Singh to rule the Amritsar. This was the first meeting of Akali philosophy in Punjab.

Shahidi Jatha would always be at our service to fight with the outside forces. This boosted the confidence of Maharaja and he envisioned a strong force which would become invincible.

The power of Maharaja's force got a great impetus with the assistance of Phula Singh. Taking great pleasure from it, Maharaja donated an enormous amount of wealth in Amritsar for the purpose of *Sewa bhoj* and *Gurudwaras*. Phula Singh also decided that he would never back out from any of the conquests that Maharaja would lead. He would always be ready to face every danger for the protection of his religion. It was first time that in 1807, Maharaja sought the help of Phula Singh in battling with Qutubddin who had become his rival. Phula Singh made his Shahidi Jatha ready for the battle. A hard battle was fought in Lahore which resulted in the victory of Shahidi Jatha. Qutubddin was arrested. The respect for Phula Singh in the heart of Maharaja increased many folds after that incident.

Phula Singh came back to Amritsar after the victory. He respected *Gurbani*. Muharram was to be celebrated in Amritsar. The pomp and show of the Muharram festival was led by a group of Muslims. As they were soaked in the religious bliss, they ignored the warning issued by Phula Singh that they had to move silently where the holy scripture of *Gurbani* was being read. That led to a fight in which a number of Muslims lost their lives.

Phula Singh could not bear even a slight intolerance towards Sikh religion.

Maharaja had gifted a used article in *Guru Darbar* which was considered as an offence and hence he had to go through punishment. Heavy fine was also levied. Phula Singh ordered for severe punishment for Maharaja which he accepted.

But due to the politeness instilled in Maharaja, Phulka Singh ignored all his wrong doing. He thought of *Khalsa* as *Sher-e-Punjab Khalsa*. He was intolerant to anything against Sikh rule. He did not like the interference by the Dogras, Misaras and English in the territories owned by the Sikhs. Maharaja was not

ready to carry out any campaign against those people. So Phula Singh became unhappy and went to Anandpur Sahib. Phula Singh was one of the bravest Generals in Sikh rule. Although unhappy sometimes with the deeds of Maharaja, he still showed exhilarating enthusiasm when it was the task of extending the territory of Sikh empire. He had no complaints ever and had always followed the policy of do or die.

Phula Singh was furious when he heard about the incident of Nawab Muzaffar Khan. He was forced to deport out of Khangarh by Mir Hafiz Ahmed Khan. Phula Singh decided to take revenge from the cruel Pathans. It resulted in yet another battle and yet another victory for the lights of Shahidi Jatha. The forts of Ahmedgarh and Khangarh were captured. Ahmed Khan was finally arrested after a quarrel.

Sher-e-Punjab wanted to conquer the mainstream Islamic centers of Multan, Peshawar, Kashmir and Pissore. That would have led to a great territorial extension of Punjab. In order to fulfil his ambition, he led a number of conquests but wasn't able to succeed in any.

In 1818, *Sher-e-Punjab* sent 25000 Sikh soldiers under the leadership of Maharaja Kharak Singh and *Diwan* Mohkam Chand to conquer Multan. A religious battle was fought with Muzaffar Khan. The battle was fought for a number of days. Sikhs were finally able to conquer Multan city but were still far from conquering the Multan Fort. Sikhs started losing the passion and will power to stay for long in the battlefield. In order to boost the Sikhs, *Sher-e-Punjab* resorted to Phula Singh. Phula Singh was once again ready to fight for the Sikhs. He ordered the Shahidi Jatha to conquer Multan. Sikhs won in Multan. Appreciating the efforts of Akali Phula Singh, *Sher-e-Punjab* honoured him with the title of "The Protector of Sikhs".

After the victory of Multan, Akali Phula Singh suggested *Sher-e-Punjab* to conquer Peshawar because there was much unrest in Afghanistan. Kamgan, Son of Emperor Muhammad Shah had treacherously killed the knight Fateh Khan which resulted in unrest.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Akali Phula Singh wanted to take advantage of that unrest. In 1818, the combined forces of Akali's and the Sikhs attacked Peshawar. Akali Phula Singh defeated the Peshawar forces and their leader like Umar Din mercilessly resulting in the victory of Shahidi Jatha. After Peshawar, *Sher-e-Punjab* decided to bring Kashmir under his territorial extent. He used to behave very cruelly with Hindus of Kashmir. So Phula Singh and Maharaja wanted to win Kashmir now than.

The conquest of Kashmir was really a tough task. It was in 1819, that Shahidi Jatha took up the task of bringing Kashmir under their territory. Shahidi Jatha was slowly moving towards Srinagar conquering every territory that came in between. But the Kashmir Governor wanted to oppose them. So he tried building check posts on Hills so that the Shahidi Jatha could be stopped. But the effort went in vain. The Akali Jatha was able to conquer the territory of Srinagar and Governor was seriously injured.

With the help of Akali Phula Singh, Kashmir, Multan and Peshawar were then a part of Sikh rule. The last battle fought by Phula Singh was in the year 1823 when Muhammad Azim, with the help of his

brother Yakub Khan and some of his friend, conquered Peshawar. That led to the spread of Muslim rule to far off areas like Kabul, Baner, Bajathi, Jahad, etc.

In order to curb that, Maharaja sent a heavy force under the leadership of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Phula Singh, Desa Singh Majithia, Sher Singh and Hari Singh. Pathans were also prepared for the heavy battle and trained huge army. Akali Phula Singh was heavily injured in a battle at Naushehra. At that time, Phula Singh was fighting in the spirits of religion. Just then, a Pathan fired bullets onto him that hit him severely. Though the Sikhs were finally victorious, yet Akali Phula Singh finally kicked the bucket i.e gave up his breathe.

In this way, Akali Phula Singh sacrificed his life for Sikh religion and for the expansion of Sikh rule. Though he was born in a simple family, yet his positives made his name held high in the Sikh religion history. It is due to such great warrior pioneers that even so called immortal Pathan, Mughals were expelled from the mighty soil of Punjab.

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