

# GURMAT STUDY

Using Technology, To Spread the message of Sikhism

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## **2<sup>nd</sup> July - "Sirjana Divas – Sri Akal Takht Sahib"**

AKAL TAKHT is the primary seat of Sikh religious authority and central altar for Sikh political assembly. Through hukamnamas edicts or writs, it may issue decretals providing guidance or clarification on any point of Sikh doctrine or practice referred to it, may lay under penance personages charged with violation of religious discipline or with activity prejudicial to Sikh interests or solidarity and may place on record its appreciation of outstanding services rendered or sacrifices made by individuals espousing the cause of Sikhism or of the Sikhs. The edifice stands in the Darbar sahib precincts in Amritsar facing Harimandar, now famous as the Golden Temple.

The word Akal, a negative of kal(time), is the equivalent of timeless, beyond time, everlasting, and takht, in Persian, that of royal throne or chair of state. Akal Takht would thus mean "timeless or everlasting throne" or throne of the Timeless One, i.e. God." In the Sikh system, God is postulated as Formless (Nirankar), yet to proclaim His sovereignty over His creation, He is sometimes referred to as sultan, patshah, sachha Patshah, or the True King; His seat is referred to as sachcha Takht. the True Throne, sitting on which he dispenses sachcha niao, true justice (cc 84, 1087). it also became common for Sikhs, at least by the time of Guru Arjan Devji (1563-1606), to refer to the Guru as sachcha patshah and to his gaddi or spiritual seat as Takht and the congregation he led as darbar or court. Panegyricizing the Gurus, The bards, Nalya and Mathura, in their verses included in the Guru Granth Sahibji, use the word takht in this very sense. Formally, to proclaim Sikh faith's common concern for the spiritual and the worldly, synthesis of miri and piri, Guru Hargobindji (1595-1644), son and successor of Guru Arjanji adopted royal style. For the ceremonies of succession, he had a platform constructed opposite the Harimandar, naming it Akal Takht.

According to Gurbilas Chhevan Patshah, a detailed versified and, going by the year of composition recorded in the text/colophon, the oldest account of Guru Hargobindji's life, the structure was raised on 5, 1663 sk/15 June 1606. The Guru laid the cornerstone and Bhai Buddha and Bhai Gurdas completed the construction, no third person being allowed to lend a helping hand. Guru Hargobindji used the takht for the accession ceremonies which, according to the source quoted, took place on 26 Har suds 10, 1663 sk/24 June 1606. From here, he conducted the secular affairs of the community. From here he is said to have issued the first hukamnama (q.v.) to far flung sangats or Sikh centers announcing the

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creation of Akal Takht and asking them to include in their offerings thenceforth gifts of weapons and horses. Bhai Gurdasji was named of officiant in charge of the Akal Takht. A building subsequently raised over the Takht was called Akal Bunga (house) so that the Takht is now officially known as Takht Sri Akal Bunga although its popular name Akal Takht is more in common use.

The Sikhs recognize four other holy places as takhts, namely Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur; Takht Sri Harimandar Sahib, Patna; Takht Sachkhand Hazur Sahib, Abchnagar, Nanded; and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talvandi Sabo. All four are connected with the life of Guru Gobind Singhji (1666 - 1708). All five Takhts are equally venerated, but the Akal Takht at Amritsar enjoys a special status. Historically, this is the oldest of the takhts and along with Harimandar, across the yard, constitutes the capital of Sikhism. Meetings of the Sarbatt Khalsa or general assembly represent native of the entire Panth are traditionally summoned at Akal Takht and it is only there that cases connected with serious religious offenses committed by prominent Sikhs are heard and decided. Hukamnamas or decrees issued by the Akal Takht are universally applicable to all Sikhs and all institutions.

After Guru Hargobindji's migration to Kiratpur early in 1635, the shrines at Amritsar, including the Akal Takht fell in the hands of the descendants of Prithi Chand, elder brother of Guru Arjanji, his grandson, Hariji (d. 1696), remaining in charge for over fifty-five years. Soon after the creation of the Khalsa in March 1699, Guru Gobind Singhji sent Bhai Mani Singh to Amritsar to assume control of the Harimandar and the Akal Takht. Later, After Guru Gobind Singhji's death, his wife Mata Sundari ji, sent Bhai Mani Singh again to Amritsar on behalf of the Khalsa panth During the troublous period following the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur. The sacred samovars or holy tank, at Amritsar, the Harimandar and the Akal Takht continued a source of inspiration and Spirit and veneration for the Sikhs when circumstances permitted, and usually on Baisakhi and Divali, their scattered bands defying all hazards converged upon Akal Takht to hold sarbatt khalsa assemblies and discuss matters of policy and strategy, For instance, through a gurmata, sarbatt Khalsa at the Akal Takht resolved on 14 October 1745 to reorganize their scattered fighting force into 25 jathas or bands of about 100 warriors each. By another gurmata on Baisakhi, 29 March 1748 the sarbatt khalsa meeting, again, at Akal Takht, formed the Dal Khalsa or the army of the Khalsa consisting of 11 mists or divisions. On Divali, 7 November 1760, the sarbatt khalsa resolved to attack and occupy Lahore (till then Sikhs had not occupied

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any territory, their only possession being the small fortress of Ram Rauni or Ramgarh they had built at Amritsar in 1746). Akal Takht was again the venue of the sarbatt khalsa on Baisakhi day, 10 April 1763, when through gurmata it was decided to go out to the help of a Brahman who had brought the complaint that his wife had been forcibly abducted by the Afghan chief of Kasur.

Even after the Punjab had been parceled into Several Sikh independencies or kingdoms. Amritsar remained the common capital where all sardars or chiefs had built their bungalows and stationed their vamps or agents. But as the need for a common strategy and action decreased and rivalries among the mist chiefs raised their head, sarbatt khalsa and correspondingly the Akal Takht lost their political pre-eminence. Maharaja Ranjit Singh felt little need for sarbatt khalsa assemblies after 1805 when it was summoned to consider the question whether or not the fugitive Maratha prince Jasvant Rao Holkar be assisted against the British. The religious authority of the Akal Takht, however, remained intact and the State never challenged it in any manner.

There are in fact instances of the State showing subservience as in the case of Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself responding to the summons from the Akal Takht and accepting for a moral misdemeanor penalty imposed by its custodian, Akal Phula Singh, who had fought as a loyal soldier in several of the Maharaja's military campaigns. In spite of its supremacy in the matter of enforcing religious discipline, Akal Takht discharges no divine dispensation. It remits no sins, nor does it invoke God's wrath upon anyone.

On several occasions during the eighteenth century, Akal Takht shared with the Harimandar desecration and destruction at the hands of Mughal satraps and Afghan invaders. Ahmad Shah Durrani, who had razed the Harimandar in 1762, again attacked Amritsar in December 1764. On this occasion a small band of 30 Sikhs under their leader, Nihang Gurbakhsh Singh stationed there to serve and protect the Akal Takht, came out to dare the invading horde and fell fighting to the last man. Ahmad Shah had the Akal Bunga completely demolished. Sikhs, however, continued to hold the sarbatt khalsa in front of the ruins and decided at one such gathering on Baisakhi, 10 April 1765, to rebuild the Akal Bunga as well as the Harimandar. Funds for this purpose had already been set apart from the pillage of Sirhind in January 1764. The work was entrusted to Bhai Des Raj, who was also furnished with Guru ki Mohar or the Guru's seal to enable him to raise more funds. The construction of the ground floor of

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the Akal Bunga was completed by 1774. The rest of the five - storeyed domed edifice was completed during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The gilded dome atop the building was built by Hari Singh Nalva at his own expense.

The facade of the first four storeys including the basement (originally ground floor but rendered partly below ground level because of the raising of the level of the circumambulatory terrace in front) had a semi-circular orientation. The ground door was a large hall With an attached pillared marble portico. The facades of the next two floors had projected eaves supported on decorative brackets. The facade of the third floor, a large hall with galleries on the sides, had cupped arched openings, nine in number. The exterior of the fourth floor, covering the central hall of the lower floor, was decorated with projected ornamental eaves and a domed kiosk at each corner. The Guru Granth Sahibji was seated on the first floor, where the jathedar of the Akal Takht also took his seat. The second floor was used for important meetings and also for amrit prachar, administration of the initiation of the Khalsa. The hall on the third floor was used especially for the meetings of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee until a separate office block, called Teja Singh Samundari Hall, was constructed for the purpose during the 1930's.

The beautiful and sacred edifice was destroyed in the army action, called Operation Blue Star, in early June 1984. The Government of India got the building reconstructed in order to assuage the injured feelings of the Sikhs, but this was not acceptable to them. The reconstructed building was demolished in early 1986 to be replaced by one raised through kar-seva, voluntary free service of the Panth and by money accruing from voluntary donations.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singhji with whom ceased the line of living Gurus, hukamnamas were issued in the name of the Khalsa Panth from the different takhts, especially Akal Takht at Amritsar. Any Sikh transgressing the religious code could be summoned, asked to explain his conduct and punished. Disobedience amounted to social ostracism of an individual or the group concerned. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 19th century ruler of the Punjab, was summoned by Akali Phula Singh, the then jathedar of Akal Takht, for violating established norms of Sikh behavior. Among instances from recent history a striking one is that of Teja Singh of Bhasaur who was censured for the liberties, he was taking with the Sikh canon. A hukamnama issued from the Akal Takht on 26 Savan 1985 sk/9 August 1928 read: "The Panch Khalsa Diwan (Panch Khand. ), Bhasaur,

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has published books called Gurmukhi courses in which the bani of Sri Guru Granth Sahibji has been garbled and its order changed, changes have been made in gurmantra, the ardas and the ceremonies for administering amrit. These are anti-Sikh proceedings. Hence Babu Teja Singh and Bibi Niranjan Kaur [his wife] are hereby excommunicated from the Panth. Other members of the panth Khalsa Diwan are debarred from having ardas offered on their behalf at Sri Akal Takht Sahib or at any other Gurdwara. No Sikh should purchase Gurmukhi courses published by the Panch Khalsa Diwan, nor keep them in his possession. The Panch khalsa Diwan or whoever else has copies of these should send them to Sri Akal Takht Sahib."

An example of an individual penalized for disobeying the Akal Takht edict was that of Bhai Santa Singh, the Nihang, who for the charge brought against him was excommunicated from the Panth (Hukamnama, 8 Savan 515 Nanak Shahl/22 July 1984). Hukamnamas have also been issued to settle points of religious and political disputation; also for commending the services to the Panth of individuals and for adding passages to Sikh ardas, the daily prayer of supplication, as a particular historical situation might demand. On 26 Jeth 1984 sk/8June 1927, the Akal Takht eulogized in a hukamnama Bhai Sahib Sardar Kharak Singh for his qualities of determination and steadfastness and for his sacrifices in the cause of the Panth; likewise, on 30 Bhadon 1988 sk/15 September 1931, Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh was honoured for his outstanding services to the Panth. On 20 Asuj 1970 sk/4 October 1913, Takht Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib promulgated a hukamnama fixing the length of kirpan or sword a Sikh will carry slung from across his shoulder at a minimum of one foot. On 12 Magh 483 Nanak Shahi/25 January 1952, Akal Takht enjoined upon the entire Khalsa and all Gurdwara ministers" to add these lines to the ardas: " O Timeless Lord, the Benevolent One, ever the succourer of Thy Panth, we pray grant the Khalsa ji the privilege of unhindered access to and control and maintenance of Sri Nankana Sahib and other holy shrines and sites from which the Panth has been parted " [after the partition of the Punjab in 1947]."

Such writs promulgated under the seal of a Takht carry sanction for the entire Sikh people.

***SEWA: Sangat is requested to print this, distribute & display it in their local Gurdwara Sahibs to spread awareness...***

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