

**THE SIKHS – INSTITUTIONS AND IDENTITY
A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF AKAL TAKHT AND SHIROMANI
GURDWARA PARBANDHAK COMMITTEE
IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES**

A THESIS

Submitted to the
FACULTY OF ARTS
PANJAB UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2018

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April 15, 2019

It is certified that the external examiner/s have not pointed out/suggested any mistakes/corrections to be carried out in the thesis of Mr. Kanwar Deep Singh, a candidate for the award of Ph.D. degree.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank “Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji” for granting me the passion and ability to pursue my goals in field of research and academics. It would have been impossible without the faith I have in “Guru Sahib”, the Almighty - *Waheguru Ji*, which remains the supreme source of guidance and motivation. Undertaking this research work has been a truly life-changing experience for me and it would not have been possible to complete it without the blessings, support and guidance that I received from some special people who I am indebted to.

At the outset, I express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor Professor Emanuel Nahar (Department of Political Science - USOL, Panjab University, Chandigarh) under whose supervision the study has been completed. His analytical and valuable comments and critical insights on the theme during various stages of thesis writing made my perceptives clear, and helped in improving the quality of research work. His constant inspiration from initial to final stage of this work enriched my thought process and aptitude as a researcher. His expert guidance and moral support made me to work with sincerity and dedication in completion of this thesis for the degree of Ph. D. I could not have imagined having a better guide and mentor for my Ph.D study. I am immensely grateful to him from the bottom of my heart.

I gratefully thank all the members of the Faculty of Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh, for their inspirational support, expert opinions and valuable suggestions for the improvement of this Ph.D research work. It was fantastic learning experience to carry out my research under the intellectual guidance of the team of eminent professors and scholars. I am also thankful to non-teaching and library staff of Department of Political Science, Panjab University, for their continuous support and cooperation. I express my thanks to staff of various libraries that I consulted in the course of this research work.

Without the everlasting encouragement and support of my family it would have been impossible for me to complete this research endeavour. Indeed, it is great pleasure and privilege to acknowledge my academic indebtedness and reverence towards my parents. Without my parents unwavering faith and confidence in my abilities, understanding and motivation, and complete financial support, this research work would have never been possible. My respected parents have made endless sacrifices for my research and academic desires for which I am indebted to them all my life. My father’s intellectual support in form

of opinions, suggestions and insights into Sikh religious and political affairs enriched my vision, knowledge and perspective for the undertaken research work. I owe it all to the Guide of My Life - My father.

Words cannot express how grateful I am to my wife, *Sukhdeep Kaur*, for standing beside me throughout this research journey. Her love, care and constant support, for all the late nights and early mornings, and for keeping me sane, made the completion of this work possible. She courageously stood by me through all my travails, my absences, phases of sadness and impatience. Thanks to her for taking over the responsibilities and duties towards my parents and family that provided me with ample time to pursue my academic and research goals. I owe her my life for the sacrifices she has made to enable me to pursue my research objective. Along with her, I want to acknowledge my 3 year old son, Fateh Deep Singh, who has never known his dad as anything but a student, it seems.

I am also grateful to my sisters and other family members who supported me in this research journey and encouraged me to strive towards my goal. A special thanks to all my critics for fuelling my motivation and multiplying my intensity towards my research and academic targets. Needless to say that whereas the knowledge and guidance of all my well wishers should have greatly enriched and improved the quality of research, the shortcomings which might have crept in are due to my intellectual limitations.

Kanwar Deep Singh

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Religion continues to be the significant part of people's personal and social lives, their ethical values, their social relationships and political behavior. Religious ideology, beliefs, symbols and practices form an integral part of social structure, and religion therefore is the most crucial source of community identity, internal solidarity, and cohesion.¹ At the same time, religion is often the source of inter and intra group rivalries, disputes and conflicts, and may form the basis of political division and struggles. Religion may often serve contradictory functions in the society; integrative and disintegrative, a conservative force that supports the status quo as well as an agent of social change.²

As the youngest world religion, Sikhism had to address the various doctrinal, philosophical, and cultural dilemmas and divergent approaches in a more compact time frame and within a context of persistent political turmoil. The evolution of the Sikh faith in response to changing historical context has been the focus of sustained scholarly attention for over a century. Unlike some other religious traditions, origin of Sikhism is not in a distant prehistory that can never be fully recovered. The historical past of Sikhs is not too old and their global visibility makes them an active subject of research in a period of rich historical sources. As a consequence, scholars of Sikh studies are able to explore the issues of scriptural authority, social history, gender, diaspora, and national and religious identity from perspectives that scholars of other religions often lack.³

The study of the Sikh past is deeply conflicted, riven by polemics over the boundaries of the community; debates over the transformations enacted by colonialism and migration

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- 1 David Radford (2015), *Religious Identity and Social Change: Explaining Christian Conversion in a Muslim World*, Routledge, pp.154-157. Also see, David N. Lorenzo (1995), "Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion in India", in David N. Lorenzo (ed.), *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, State University of New York Press, Albany (New York), pp. 2-4.
 - 2 Paul G. Hibert (1982), "India: The Politicization of a Sacred Society", in Carlo Caldarola, (ed.), *Religions and Societies, Asia and the Middle East*, Mouton Publishers, Berlin, pp. 311-318. Christophe Jafferlot (2010), *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India*, published by Primus Books, New Delhi, pp. 3-14. Also see, Pnina Webner (2010), "Religious Identity", in Margaret Wetherell & Chandra Talpade Mohanty (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, Sage publications, London, pp. 234-236.
 - 3 Khushwant Singh (2006), *The Illustrated History of the Sikhs*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 4-17. N. Gerald Barrier (1999), "Issues of Sikh Identity", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity - Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp.23-26. J.S Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs – Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 334- 353. Also see, Mark Juergensmeyer & Norman Gerald Barrier (1979), "Introduction: The Sikhs and the Scholars", in M. Mark Juergensmeyer & N. G. Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition : Working Papers from the Berkeley Conference on Sikh Studies*, Graduate Theological Union, Berkley, pp. 1-6

beyond India, and heated exchanges over the status of the discipline of history itself as a way of understanding Sikh communities and their experiences. The Sikh identity question has long remained a fascinating area of historical enquiry. The tragic events in Punjab and their international fallout have also made the history and religion of the Sikhs the subjects of intense debate. The evolution of Sikh academic studies also has reflected such crises during the last three decades. It has emerged as a lively and contested academic field. A critical examination of Sikh studies highlight several fundamental intellectual and political issues, allowing us to explore the encounter between faith and scholarship, the relationship between imperialism and academic disciplines, and the fundamental epistemological questions that trouble historians and scholars in social sciences.⁴

The study of Sikh past and developments in the 21st century suggest that issues of Sikh identity and authority have not been fully resolved.⁵ Competing ideas are fought out in political arenas, print and electronic media, and in local events affecting the social networks and institutions. There is a dire need and scope for serious research and discussion about the strategies and priorities to be fixed for the future form and role of the Sikhs, and their governing institutions.⁶

In the twenty-first century socio-political and religious scenario, Sikhs are not primarily concerned with religious doctrines or details relating to rituals and ceremonies. The

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- 4 Important historical developments, vital events and movements that played determining role in the Sikh history have been studied and documented in the following works: J.D. Cunningham (1853), *A History of the Sikhs, from the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*, John Murray Publishers, London. J.S. Grewal (1990), *The Sikhs of the Punjab Volumes 2-3*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK). Gurmit Singh (1991), *History of Sikh Struggles*, Atlantic Publications, New Delhi. Gopal Singh (ed.) (1994), *Punjab Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi. Parmjit S. Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity and Nationhood - The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur. Gurdev Grewal (2006), *The Searching Eye: An Insider Look at the Punjab Crisis*, Rupa Publications, New Delhi. Sangat Singh (2002), *The Sikhs in History*, Uncommon Books, New Delhi. Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case Study of Punjab*, Macmillan, London. Ghani Jafar (1988), *The Sikh Volcano*, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi. W.H. McLeod (1996), *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford India, New Delhi. Pashaura Singh & N.G. Barrier (eds.) (2004), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Nazer Singh (2012), *Modern Sikh Studies and Historiography (1846-1947)*, K.K. Publications, New Delhi.
- 5 Sikh history entered political ups and downs after 1708 when attempts were made to diffuse the Sikh identity. As a result Sikh ideology, tenets, history and code of conduct have been widely contested in academic and religious arenas. See J.S. Grewal (2011), *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, pp.85-136. Robin Rinehart (2004), "Strategies for Interpreting the Dasam Granth", in Pashaura Singh & N.G. Barrier (eds.), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.135-148. See also Daljeet Singh (1989), "Issues of Sikh Studies" in Jasbir Singh & Harbans Singh (eds.), *Advanced Studies in Sikhism*, published by Sikh Community of North America, Irvine-USA, pp.16-33. For comprehensive account of rationality of Sikh doctrines and practices, see Trilochan Singh (1994), *Ernest Trumpp and W.H. McLeod – As Sikh Scholars of Sikh History Religion and Culture*, published by International Centre for Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp.226-263.
- 6 J.S. Grewal (1990), *The Sikhs of Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), pp.157-174. Also see Farhana Ibrahim (2012), "Representing the Minority", in Rowena Robinson (ed.), *Minority Studies*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 118-120.

centrality of Guru Granth Sahib as the Holy Scripture of Sikhs⁷ and other basic doctrinal issues in Sikhism have largely been resolved over the last hundred years⁸. Today authority, power, politics and identity tend to underpin much public debate and action. Now, most of the public discussions on Sikh studies, whether in conferences, journals or newspapers, highlight another set of issues and debate. The role of Sikh religious institutions, their internal relationships and the issues related with management of Gurdwaras- all are political in broad sense that they involve struggles over resources and legitimacy. The struggles for authority and legitimacy in Sikh religious affairs, and contentious issues of Sikh identity related with the role of apex Sikh politico-religious institutions - have been the talk of the town in Sikh political and religious circles.⁹

The relationship between the Sikhs and those in governing authority over them at various times is a central aspect of Sikh history. Those who govern and those who are governed accept one another for two sets of reasons: self interest and shared identity. Interest and identity in turn provide the sources from which the belief in the legitimacy of a government springs. The two sources interact but the more fundamental is the ability of a government to ensure for the governed, their material interests and aspirations, which in turn engenders the belief that the governors and governing institutions are in fact inappropriate or working well.¹⁰

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- 7 Guru Granth Sahib is the supreme and central religious text of Sikhism, considered by Sikhs to be the final, sovereign eternal Guru. The holy text spans 1430 pages (*1430 Ang*) and contains the actual words spoken by the founders of the Sikh religion (the Ten Gurus of Sikhism) and the words of various other Saints from other religions including Hinduism and Islam. On October 20, 1708 Guru Gobind Singh gave his final sermon that conferred permanent Gurudom on the earlier version of the 'Granth'. Personal Guruship was ended by the Tenth Guru after finalizing the Sikh mission and sanctifying and passing succession to the 'Guru Granth Sahib' as the future, supreme and sacred living Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh selected town of Nanded (presently in Maharashtra) for this event. Since that day, the Granth has come to be known as - Sri Guru Granth Sahib. For excellent information on authority and sanctity of Guru Granth Sahib for the Sikh Community, see Ganda Singh (1986), "Guru Gobind Singh designates Guru Granth Sahib to be the Guru", in Gurdev Singh (ed.) *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications, Chandigarh, pp.183-209. See also Harbans Singh, (1986), "The Guru Granth Sahib: Guru Eternal for the Sikhs", in Gurdev Singh (ed.) *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications, Chandigarh, pp.211-227. W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi (1999), *Sikhism-Beliefs and Practices*, published by Adarsh Enterprises, New Delhi, pp.44-61.
 - 8 Trilochan Singh (1994), *Ernest Trumpp And W.H McLeod- As Scholars of Sikh History Religion And Culture*, Published by International Centre of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 226-242. See also W.H. Mc. Leod (1999), *Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp.2-16.
 - 9 I.J. Singh (1994), *Sikhs and Sikhism - A View with A Bias*, Manohar Publications, pp.76-88. Jugdeep S. Chima (2010), *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India- Political Leadership and Ethnonationalist Movements*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp.23-34. See also J.S. Grewal (2011), *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies-An Assessment*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp.101-115.
 - 10 Sangat Singh (1995), *The Sikhs in History*, Uncommon Books, New Delhi. Martin E. Martly & R. Scott Appleby (eds.) (1997) *Religion, Ethnicity and Self-Identity*, Salzburg Seminar, University Press of New England, Hanover. See also J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, PP.79-85.

The Institution: An Explanation

An institution is an organization with regulative principles that organizes most of the activities of an individual in society. Through these organizations, society channelizes the human energy towards positive and constructive goals and restricts the wayward human activities by standardizing the norms and ethos to be maintained.¹¹ In words of H.E Barnes, “*Social institutions are the social structure and machinery through which human society organizes, directs, and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs.*”¹² Institutions are established patterns of behaviour that satisfy religious, political and economic needs of the society. Once a certain way of doing or acting is repeated over a period of time, it achieves acceptance and recognition among the members of group or particular section of society, and gradually settles into an established pattern, which is termed as ‘institution’. In the context, C.A Ellwood rightly says that “*Institutions are ways of living together, which have been sanctioned, systematized, and established by the authority of communities.*”¹³ These ways of living and norms of conduct are not only sanctioned and recognized by the members of society, but in fact are the outcome of deliberations and planning. An institution is thus an organized system of social relationship which embodies definite set of common beliefs, values and procedures, and fulfils certain basic needs of the society.¹⁴

The emergence of mutually common shared values, beliefs and traditions reflect shared ideas and goals. An institution is a set up of norms and network of social relationships that embodies shared ideology, belief system and objectives. The fundamental condition behind the authority and legitimacy of a particular institution is belief in its doctrine and loyalty to its norms and modes operandi that may have evolved after years of experience and struggle. Institutions have basic traits of establishing, maintaining and asserting the norms, standards and symbols. All institutions are based on particular ideology that forms their matrix.¹⁵

An institution gives a definite, continuous and organized pattern of behaviour to the individual in society and these patterns involve normative ordering and regulations. The

11 . Joyce Oramel Hertzler (1929) *Social Institutions*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, pp. 3-5. Also see, P. Gisbert (1973), *Fundamentals of Sociology*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, pp. 43-45.

12 H.E. Barnes (1946), *Social Institutions*, Prentice Hall, New York, p.29

13 C.A Ellwood (1925), *The Psychology of Human Society*, Appleton Century, New York, p.91.

14 Paul B. Horton & Chester L.Hunt (1963), *Sociology*, McGraw Hill, New York, p. 206. P. Gisbert (1973), *Fundamentals of Sociology*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, pp. 44-45. Also see, Jack Knight (1992), *Institutions and Social Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), pp.21-24

15 P. Gisbert (1973), *Fundamentals of Sociology*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, pp. 43-45. Also see, G.R. Madan (1990), *India's Developing Villages*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 368-370.

social institutions simply present the set of social behaviour and roles which are systematized, instituted or established by particular groups or communities.¹⁶ In the context, Kingsley Davis rightly defines an institution as a set of “*interwoven folkways, mores and laws built around one or more functions.*”¹⁷ The emergence and development of various institutions in history of mankind has always been in terms of the needs of society. The growth and continuity of an institution predominantly depends upon the doctrine or concept on which it is based. It is the doctrine of an institution that motivates the members of society to conform by the norms, ethics and authority of the particular institution. Institutions have always been the backbone of social, political and religious system.¹⁸

Religion has been regarded as vital factor in creation, propagation, and preservation of civilization and culture. It is the most accepted and recognized force that shapes human life by providing it a sense of guidance and direction. Religious institution is a form of association in which people enter into relation with one another on the basis of values, beliefs, traditions, norms and procedures. When a new religion is in process of evolution, the life of a particular group is integrated through rites, symbols and religious practices. New concepts and new belief system give expression to group’s solidarity. The beliefs, values and ideas cannot become functional unless they are institutionalised. Institution is necessary entity to mobilize resources from different groups and individuals, and to maintain the legitimacy of religious beliefs, values, symbols and norms. The institution provides a systematic form to the religious faith.¹⁹

Religious institutions represent the religious belief system, structure and machinery. It is the institutional framework of the particular religion that provides unity of purpose and gives cohesion and strength to followers of the religion. The institutions form an integral part of a religion and are concomitant with the very existence of ordered religious life. Religious institutions guide and regulate various aspects of religious groups and establish code of conduct for an individual member of the particular religion. Institutions thus provide an effective functional mechanism for the propagation and spread of the religious faith.²⁰

16 Jack Knight (1992), *Institutions and Social Conflict*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), pp. 1-3.

17 Kingsley Davis (1957), *The Human Society*, Macmillan Company, New York, p. 71.

18 Paul B. Horton & Chester L. Hunt (1963), *Sociology*, McGraw Hill, New York, pp. 206-207. P. Gisbert (1973), *Fundamentals of Sociology*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, pp. 43-45

19 Joachim Wach (1949), *Sociology of Religion*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 17-27. Also see, Joan Brothers (1971), *Religious Institutions*, Longman Group Limited, London, pp. 41-46.

20 Shanjendu Nath (2015), “Religion and Its Role in Society”, *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Volume 20, Issue 11, Nov. 2015, pp. 82-85, available at <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol20-issue11/Version-4/L0201148285.pdf>, accessed on

Religions like Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism are based on prophetic visions of their founders. These religions have to evolve an organizational mechanism to uphold the religious beliefs, values and identity as established by revered founders of the religion. Based on this thoughts, there emerge and evolve institutions to promote and practise the particular religious value and belief system. Religious institutions are visible and systematic manifestations of traditions, beliefs, practices and norms in particular social and historical contexts. Religious institutions represent such attitudes, beliefs and practices that shape, reshape or reaffirm identities. Religious institutions take shape in relation to both religious impulses and contextual configurations. As religion flourishes through religious institutions, therefore, they acquire paramount significance.²¹

Identity: A Conceptualization

The question of identity is an important subject for academic discussion as it covers a wide range of important issues pertaining to the complex process of identity-formation. The complexity of this process is compounded by the inter-connections between the organized, conscious and formal processes of institutional development and the informal unorganized and unconscious ways in which people come to know themselves.²² Identity, first of all, is a quality of the individual; its development as the part of the general process of personal maturity and it is viewed as such from the psychological as also from the sociological perspectives. In the psychological sense, it is an emotional group feeling which gets developed over a period of time. In the sociological sense, identity refers to the process by which we place ourselves in the network of social relationship.²³

Identity is the fragrance of any culture. Nowadays faith, gender, race, class, caste and some other aspects of self are emerging with the complex mixed identity. Thus, identity is a sense of uniqueness, a feeling of continuity over time and a sense of ego completeness. The characteristics of identity demand identification with the ideals of some group that affirms the

23/06/2016. Also see, Pradeep K. Chhibber, & Sandeep Shastri (2014), *Religious Practice and Democracy in India*, Cambridge University Press, New York, pp.17-21.

21 P. Gisbert (1973), *Fundamentals of Sociology*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, pp. 44-45. N. Jayapalan (2001), *Indian Society and Social Institutions*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, pp.247-249, 306-309. Gurnam Kaur (2013), *Studies in Sikhism Its Institutions and Its Scripture in Global Context*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 56-62.

22 Margaret Wetherell (2010), "The Field of Identity Studies", in Margaret Wetherell & Chandra Talpade Mohanty (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, Sage publications, London, pp. 3 -10. Bert Klandermans & Marga de Weerd (2000) , "Group Identification and Political Protest", in Sheldon Stryker Timothy J. Owens & Robert W. White (eds.) , *Self, Identity, and Social Movements*, published by University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, pp. 68-74.

23 Degner Bernstorff (1979) "Region and Nation: Telengana Movement's Dual Identity", in David D. Taylor & Malcolm Yapp (eds.) *Political Identity in South Asia*, published by Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, London, pp. 142- 143.

sense of self that is the final achievement of a healthy sense of identity. The individual develops his identity through the social links both within the family or other primordial units and outside.²⁴

Oxford Learner's Dictionary records that: "*identity is the characteristics that determine who or what a person or thing is, feelings or beliefs that distinguish people from others, and a state or feeling of being very similar to and able to understand somebody/something.*"²⁵ Cambridge Dictionary defines the term 'identity' as "*who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others.*"²⁶ The Webster's Dictionary mentions four important features of 'identity' as - (i) *The state of being identical or absolutely the same; self-sameness, (ii) The distinctive character belongs to an individual, personality and individuality, (iii) The state of being what is asserted or described and (iv) An equation that is satisfied for all values of the symbols.*²⁷

The general human psychic question - "who I am?" is becoming very crucial and complex nowadays. The strategy which is more frequently employed is to provide a comparison with other prevailing ideas, traditions and practices. There is a certain utility in the concept of the 'other' in the process of creating, forming and maintaining identities. The 'other' represents all that is perceived as not oneself. Primarily, the 'other' is the unspoken definition of the self.²⁸ It is pertinent to note that one does not conceive of the 'other' as totally different from oneself in every way, but what is shared may not appear to be so important as what is not shared.²⁹ Thus, it is this difference that is very significant and relevant in understanding the concept of identity. Although seeing in the 'other' precisely what one is not might be construed as a necessary project for limiting the view of the self. The strategies employed in the process of self-definition are not mutually independent and exclusive. They go hand-in-hand in the construction of identities.³⁰

24 Stuart Hall (1996), "Introduction :Who Needs Identity ?", in Stuart Hall & Paul Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 2-5

25 Term 'Identity' as defined in *Learner's Oxford Dictionary*, available at http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/identity, accessed on 11/01/2016.

26 Meaning of 'Identity' as given by Cambridge Dictionary, available at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/identity>, accessed on 11/01/2016.

27 Meaning of term 'Identity' as per Merriam Webster Dictionary, available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity>. Very similar features of 'identity' are mentioned in Collins Dictionary, available at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/identity>, accessed on 12/01/2016.

28 Peter du Preez (1980), *The Politics of Identity*, Basil Blackwell publisher, Oxford (England), pp. 4-7.

29 Richard Jenkins (2014), *Social Identity* (fourth edition) , Routledge, London, pp. 17 -21. See also Kristen Monroe (2003), "How Identity and Perspective Constrain Moral Choice", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 24, Issue 4, pp. 405-425, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/01925121030244001?journalCode=ipsa>, accessed on 19/07/2015.

30 Erik H. Erikson (1980), *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Norton publication, New York, pp. 110-115.

Jonathan Rutherford³¹ employs variance, difference, diversity and margins – the key terms to understand the various dimensions of identity. According to Rutherford, understanding of difference is crucial in the present scenario, in fact the ‘other’ has become a hegemonic point. As, ‘other’ plays a vital and important part in cultural phenomenon, identity depends upon one’s relation with the disparity and alterity.³² The identity of self and other is reciprocally determined. Jonathan Rutherford also maintains that the emergence of cultural politics of difference is a response to the new political subjects and cultural identities. The acknowledgement of the ‘otherness’ of ourselves is gained through the transformation of relations of subordination and discrimination. Rutherford initiates debate in the realm of identity politics by saying that formation of identity is incommensurable component, thus, it cannot be judged by same or similar standards.³³

Stuart Hall³⁴ argues that ‘identity’ is not as transparent or unproblematic as we often think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think instead of identity, as a production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within not from outside representation. According to Stuart Hall, the cultural identities have two aspects which are related with the past and the future. Hall further emphasizes that as history manifests itself in the present state of culture, the importance of history in cultural identity cannot be ignored because history has its facts, symbols and meanings and we are related with it. Every culture is dynamic and its past’s influence shows in present situation, thus it will also reshape the future image of identity. Cultural identities are the points of identification, in fact the unstable

31 Jonathan Andrew Rutherford is an academician who is a Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Middlesex, England. Information available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonathan_Rutherford., accessed on 14/01/2017.

32 Jonathan Rutherford (1990) , “A Place Called Home: Identity and the Cultural Politics of Difference”, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* , published by Lawrence & Wishart, London, pp.8-11.

33 ibid.

34 Stuart McPhail Hall, was a Jamaican-born cultural theorist, political activist and sociologist who lived and worked in the United Kingdom from 1951. Stuart Hall, along with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, was one of the founding figures of the school of thought that is now known as British Cultural Studies or The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies. He extensively discussed notions of cultural identity, race and ethnicity, particularly in the creation of the politics of Black Diaspora identities. Stuart Hall (1996), “Introduction :Who Needs Identity ?”, in Stuart Hall & Paul Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 2-4. Also See, “Stuart Hall obituary”, *The Daily Telegraph*, February 10, 2014, London (online edition), available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/10629087/Stuart-Hall-obituary.html>, accessed on 06/01/2016.

points of identification, which are constructed and formed within the discourse of history and culture.³⁵

Stuart Hall explains that cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’; identities have histories and they undergo constant transformation. Apart from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, culture identities are subject to continuous play of history, culture and power. Identities are often created, shaped and re-shaped in turbulent times of colonialism, subordination, national conflicts, and also in the specificity of the group histories and structural positions.³⁶ In this context, Stuart Hall concisely puts in, “***Identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.***”³⁷ Hall documents that ‘identity’ is the most powerful object in the life because it combines the relations of the past and gives the vision of the future. Identity, then is never a static location, in fact, it contains traces of its past and what it is to become.³⁸ Following Stuart Hall, one should think of identity as a production that is constituted in representation. This production is ever evolving and it continues as a process in every human’s life. Identities are not something that already exist but rather they evolve from a place that has history. Identity that is produced in is not eternal, but it goes under the influence of place, time, history, religion and culture.³⁹

Richard Jenkins too makes a similar point when he says: “***identity can only be understood as a process of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. One’s identity is always multi-dimensional, singular and plural. Identity is never a final settled matter.***”⁴⁰ This notion of social identities enables us to study the community and identity movements as open-ended phenomenon where politics plays a determining role. It also enables us to approach the culture with critical and historical perspective where identities apart from expression of cultural aspirations could also represent specific social interests. In support of Jenkins’s

35 Stuart Hall (1990), “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” in Williams, Patrick & Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, available at http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/Literary_Criticism/postcolonism/Hall.html, accessed on 22/08/2016 .

36 Linda Martin Alcoff (2003), “ Identities : Modern and Postmodern”, in Linda Martin Alcoff & Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Identities – Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, USA, pp. 3-5.

37 Stuart Hall (1990), “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”, in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity :Community, Culture, Difference* , published by Lawrence and Wishart, London, p.225

38 *ibid.*

39 Stuart Hall (1996) , “The Question of Cultural Identity”, in Stuart Hall et.al (eds.), *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Blackwell Publishers, New Jersey, pp. 614-617 . See also, Liang Zhang (2017), “How to understand Stuart Hall’s ‘identity properly?’”, *Inter Asia Cultural Studies* , Vol. 18 Issue 2, pp. 188-196, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14649373.2017.1309498?scroll=top&need.access=true>, accessed on 19/08/2017.

40 Richard Jenkins (2014), *Social Identity* (fourth edition) , Routledge, London, p. 18.

argument, **Charles Correa** also argues that identity is a complex process which is produced through history and period of time. The understanding of 'self' and surrounding environment is vital for understanding the process of identity.⁴¹ The process of socio-economic changes could make the question of identity for a particular community- a very crucial and significant one.⁴²

According to Taylor and Yapp, ***“Political Identity in its broadest sense is coeval with political organization; in another sense it is part of any conscious political action.”***⁴³ It derives from the political unit to which an individual's primary allegiance is given. The political judgment of a given identity movement and community consciousness should thus be based on an empirical understanding and analysis of its politics and not merely on its form. Identity movements belong neither to the left nor to the right wing of politics, but could be either depending upon the context. For, example, an identity movement by an oppressed minority, is likely to raise questions that might ask for a further expansion of the democratic space in society.⁴⁴

However, it is individual's political identity that has to be seen as part of his total cultural identity. It is important to note that the political identity is not a simple derivative from an amalgam of linguistic and religious practices and historical experiences, alongside more narrowly cultured symbols. The development of political identities must be treated as separate phenomenon. The individual, particularly in times of technological or demographic upheaval, can choose how far to adopt new cultural practices, or can try to adopt another pattern of culture altogether different from the one in which he was brought up. Still for political identity, the parameters within which a man's political identity takes place must be treated adaptable and manageable. The notion of political manipulation of the process of identity formation is firmly embedded in the arguments of recent writers on political identities.⁴⁵

41 Charles Correa (2012) , “Quest for Identity”, available a <https://www.scribd.com/doc/111987832/Charles-Correa-Quest-for-Identity>, accessed on 22/08/2017

42 Surinder S. Jodhka (2001), “Introduction”, in S.S. Jodhka (ed), *Communities and Identities, Cotemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp.26-27

43 As quoted in David Taylor & Malcolm Yapp (1979), *Political Identity in South Asia*, published by Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, London, p. ix.

44 Malcolm Yapp (1979), “Language, Religion and Political Identity : A General Framework”, in David D. Taylor & Malcolm Yapp (eds.) *Political Identity in South Asia*, published by Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, London, pp . 2-8. Also see, Rosaura Sanchez (2006), “On a Critical Realist Theory of Identity”, in Linda Martin Alcoff, Hames-Garcia, Sayta P. Mohanty & Paula M.L. Moya (eds.), *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, published by Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 34-36.

45 David Taylor (1979), “Political Identity in South Asia”, in David D. Taylor & Malcolm Yapp (eds.) *Political Identity in South Asia*, published by Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, London, pp. 255-263. Moya Lloyd (2005), *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power and Politics*, Sage

Democracy creates the most favourable and supportive identities. The democratic provisions and electoral process encourages groups to identify themselves politically so that they may exert a greater influence both within their constituencies and within parliaments. Dagmar Bernstorff enlists three factors which translate identity into political action, namely: (a) the experience of inequality, (b) an advent to serve as a spark, and (c) a leadership which channels a latent feeling into action and gives it organizational structure. Political identity also has to be perceived both by a large number of inhabitants of the region and by the opponents of the manifestation of such an ‘identity’.⁴⁶

The role of the Government in reshaping of political identity must also be taken into account. According to Rajni Kothari, State and political processes play a crucial role in reshaping and reforming political identities. New ethnic identities are not created but old identities are reshaped in political terms. Once so stated, these are able to accommodate one another through a normal process of bargaining, indeed by implication they are formed as bargaining counters.⁴⁷ This notion of social identities enables us to look movements as open-ended phenomena having context-specific politics. It also helps to approach culture with a critical and historical perspective.⁴⁸ Apart from an expression of cultural aspirations, identities could also be representing certain social interests. The question of identity could have itself been made crucial or vital for a given collectively by the process of socio-economic and political changes or developments.⁴⁹

Another significant factor that seems to have brought the questions of community and identities into the research agenda of the social sciences is that of globalization. The social and cultural possibilities opened up by the new technologies of communication initiated a re-conceptualization of the very notions of spatiality and territory. The process of globalization

publications, London pp.154-165. Also see, Peter du Preez (1980), *The Politics of Identity*, Basil Blackwell publisher, Oxford (England), pp. 7-10.

46 Degner Bernstorff (1979) "Region and Nation: Telengana Movement's Dual Identity " in David D. Taylor & Malcolm Yapp (eds.) *Political Identity in South Asia*, published by Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, London, pp. 139-143. Also see, Roger Scruton (1979), *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, Curzon Press, London, pp. 12-13.

47 Rajni Kothari (1972), *Politics in India*, published by Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp. 244-246. Dipankar Gupta (1996), *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective* Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 121- 143. Also see, Suman Gupta (2007), *Social Constructionist Identity Politics and Literary Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 48-54.

48 Anthony D. Smith also analyses the role of state in shaping and reshaping the identities. See Anthony D. Smith (1983), *Theories of Nationalism*, Homes & Meier Publishers, New York, pp. 312-315. Rajni Kothari (1972), *Politics in India*, published by Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp. 254-549

49 Ali Riaz (2011), "Religion as a tool of Political Ideology", in Ishtiaq Ahmed (2011), *The Politics of Religion in South and Southeast Asia*, Routledge, New York, pp. 17-22.

has altered the spatial conditions of possibility for all kinds of communities.⁵⁰ At a more concrete level, globalization made it possible for emigrants in the western world to rediscover their roots, and re-articulate their identities as Diaspora communities. The effects of such processes are not confined to the diasporas alone. The influence of their articulations of nation and community is being to be felt in the lands of their origin also. The role that emigrant Sikhs played in identity movement in Punjab during the eighties or the manner in which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has come to influence the notions of ‘*Hindutva*’ in India are some notable examples of this process.⁵¹

Language and religion are each important and determining factor in identity formation and maintain process. Language skills develop within the primordial groups and define the wider range of those with whom easy and spontaneous contact is possible. The process of identity formation is thus natural. Though language and religion are the most important basis of the political identities, they are not the only ones. Nor the culture groups identified by language and religion always exhibit a related political identity.⁵² Some other factors which have influenced the outcome of political identities can be mentioned as the rate of urbanization, the progress of industrialization, the pressure of the Government, and even the international factors. A major factor is the advent of democracy. Thus, there are some multilayer resonances on identity and the question of identity has been discussed on various levels. Although, the term ‘identity’ has been defined differently by various scholars, yet most of them share almost the same that identity is a process that continues in all stages of an individual’s life. The scholars have been trying to revive the different disciplines of academics such as religion, philosophy, history, sociology, politics, economics, etc. to understand collectively the concept and problems of identity.⁵³

50 Bhai Harbans Lal (2001), “Globalization and Sikh Relevance in Twenty-First Century”, in P.S. Kapur and Dharam Singh (eds.), *Perspectives on Sikhism*, Published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 188-192. Giorgio Shani (2008), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, Routledge, London, pp. 73- 78.

51 Christophe Jaffrelot (2010), *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India*, published by Primus Books, New Delhi, pp. 207-214. Mohinder Paul Singh (2007), *The Sikhs in Canada: from Kama Gata Maru to Parliament Hill*, published by Lahore Book Shop, Ludhiana, pp. 77-83. Also see Darshan Singh Tatla (1999), *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*. UCL Press, London, pp. 208-211.

52 Paul R. Brass (1974), *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, London, pp. 3-8. Ishtiaq Ahmed (2011), “The Politics of Religion in South and South East Asia”, in Ishtiaq Ahmed (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in South and Southeast Asia*, published by Routledge, New York, pp. 1-5. Also see, Ali Riaz (2011), “Religion as a tool of Political Ideology”, in Ishtiaq Ahmed (2011), *The Politics of Religion in South and Southeast Asia*, Routledge, New York, pp. 19-23.

53 Andrew Heywood (2014), *Global Politics – Second Edition*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, pp. 186-188. Catarina Kinnvall (2007), *Globalization and Religious Nationalism in India: The Search for Ontological Security*, Routledge, New York, pp. 113 -117.

The Evolution of Sikh Identity

The crystallization of a religious community is an ever-evolving process, a process which continues as a creative response to the changing historical situation. A comparison with the other prevailing traditions, faiths and beliefs sharpens the process of self-definition. In fact, every encounter with a new society or a new culture brings with it new self-discovery. There is always a need to meet the challenge of changing times and answering the new questions each age presents. Thus, the process of self-definition of religion is an ongoing phenomenon of a dynamic nature.⁵⁴ It involves a conscious process of defining the essential features or internal markers of identity. Basically, this strategy deals with the issues of fundamental beliefs and practices which make the bedrock of a religious identity. It is pertinent to mention that at no time could people of a particular faith identify themselves without some reference to the substance of their beliefs. The way people define themselves shapes how they develop their identity. Outward religious practices and inward beliefs are therefore always the important factors that define human beings. All these identity markers in turn fashion responses to how others understand and accept one's identity.⁵⁵

Sikhism is the youngest of world's major religions. It is a revelatory faith which originated in the sixteenth century as a distinct revolutionary system of thought with great revolutionary potential, aimed at spiritual, social and political regeneration of man. With their emphasis on the lofty ideals of fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the Sikh Gurus sought to abolish the invidious distinctions not only between man and man, but also between man and woman. The fifteenth-century Punjab witnessed the emergence of Sikhism, a socio-religious movement, which over a period of two hundred and fifty years developed into a well-organized religious and militant force.⁵⁶

54 Prina Webner (2010), "Religious Identity", in Margaret Wetherell & Chandra Talpade Mohanty (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, Sage publications, London, pp. 232-236. Pashaura Singh (2004), *Sikh Identity in the Light Of History*, in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.77-83.

55 Fred W. Clothey (2006), *Religion in India: A Historical Introduction*, Routledge, New York, pp. 193-198. Patrick James (2011), *Religion, Identity and Global Governance: Setting the Agenda*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, pp. 4-9. Also see, J. P. S Uberio (1992), "Five Symbols of Sikh Identity", in T.N. Madan (ed.), *Religion in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 328. 332.

56 Max Arthur Macauliffe's classic work "The Sikh Religion : Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors", is comprehensive study of Sikh religion and its philosophy - a set published in 6 volumes by the Oxford University Press in 1909. It consists of the lives of the Sikh Gurus, their followers as well as extensive translations from Sri Guru Granth Sahib spaced throughout the author's narrative. Author -Max Arthur Macauliffe was one of the first to bring a detailed account of Sikhism to the Western world in English. His style of giving an account of Sikh Religion is such that the followers of the Sikh faith can be proud of. This all time classic work is based on Macauliffe's extensive access to manuscripts of the Sikh sacred writings as well as support from Sikh scholars and leaders of the time. For detailed study of life, philosophy and teachings of Guru Nanak Dev, See, Max Arthur Macauliffe (1909), *The Sikh Religion:*

The word 'Sikh' is derived from Sanskrit word 'shishya', meaning a disciple or learner. Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539) belonged to the great family of religious reform movements that had their appearance in the 15th and 16th centuries with an aim of cleansing the dirt which had accumulated on the basic gems of Hinduism in the course of its history. Hinduism had declined from its ancient heights because of many empty and degenerating rituals and customs, the idol worship, superstitions, polytheism, casteism and monopoly of Brahmins over spiritual matters had crept into Hinduism.⁵⁷

Any discussion of Sikh identity must begin with the understanding of the question of how the early Gurus became the spearhead of a process of demarcation which clearly defined the distinctiveness of the Sikh tradition and faith. Notably, Sikhism is rooted in a particular religious experience and culture and informed by a unique inner revelation of its founder, Guru Nanak Dev, who declared his independence from the other thought forms of his day. Guru Nanak Sahib tried to kindle the fire of autonomy and courage in those who claimed to be his disciples.⁵⁸ Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh Guru, was a creative genius who through his life and supreme philosophy broke the irrational shackles as established by rigid caste and religious order of his times. Guru Sahib's social and religious commitment stems from his invincible belief in the oneness of God and equality of humankind. Guru Nanak Dev and his nine successors vehemently condemned and rejected the ideology of '*varnashrama dharma*' (law of social classes and stages of life) which they held to be based on caste exclusiveness and institutionalized inequality.⁵⁹

Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith, was a revolutionary religious and social reformer according to whom the political and cultural domination over people by the ruling classes was mainly responsible for the degeneration of the society. Their emancipation, the Guru thought, could only be brought about by a new consciousness which would instil into

Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors, Vol 1 of 6, (digital version) Cambridge University Press, New York.

- 57 Surjit Singh Gandhi provides insights into the historical evolution of Sikhism, reasons of the origin of Sikh faith, its fundamental objectives, and biographies of the ten Sikh Gurus. See, Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708 C.E.*, (latest edition), Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 10-25. Also see, Anil Chandra Banerjee (1971), *Guru Nanak and His Times*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 54-59
- 58 Indeed, the first Sikh families who gathered around Guru Nanak in the early decades of the sixteenth century at Kartarpur formed the nucleus of a rudimentary organization of the Nanak Panth, the Path of Nanak, referring to the community constituted by the Sikh who followed Guru Nanak's panth of liberation. See, W.H. McLeod (1975), *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp. 38-52. Also see, Harbans Singh (1969), *Guru Nanak and Origin of the Sikh Faith*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 17-25.
- 59 Trilochan Singh (1969), *Guru Nanak: Founder of Sikhism: a Biography*, published by Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Delhi, pp. 11 - 15. Also see, Sheena Kandhari (2012), "Sikhism and Interfaith", *Sikh Courier*, Vol. 61. No. 113, pp. 12-17

them the unity and fatherhood of God and the equality and fraternity of man. Guru Nanak Sahib rationally condemned the distinction between man and man, and between the sexes, as created by the old caste social order and other out-moded social conventions, and proclaimed that all humans were born equal.⁶⁰ The Guru felt that the real cause of the misery and sufferings of the people was their disunity engendered by diversity of faith and beliefs.⁶¹

The twin institutions of the ‘Sangat’⁶² and the ‘Pangat’⁶³ were founded by Guru Nanak to do away-with the existing distinctions of castes, colour, race and creed.⁶⁴ This created a sense of community consciousness among the followers. To break the vicious hold of caste, Guru Nanak started-free community kitchens which are known as the ‘Guru-ka-langar’.⁶⁵ The corporate obligation of the maintenance of the ‘langar’ helped in inculcating a spirit of brotherhood and service. By giving practical shape to the notion of equality, the institution of ‘langar’ has played a significant role in the process of establishing Sikhism as

60 Besides enunciating the truths of spiritual and ethnical life, Guru Nanak came out resolutely against caste-system, idol worship and other Brahmanical rituals. Guru Nanak's teachings fired the imagination of the peasants downtrodden of Punjab and large number of Hindus and Muslims gathered around him. See Pritam Singh Gill (1969), *The Doctrine of Guru Nanak*, New Books., Jullundur, pp. 162-168. Also see, Sarjeet Singh (2011), “Uniqueness of Guru Nanak's Philosophy: Revelation or Philosophy?”, *Understanding Sikhism-The Research Journal*, Vol. 13(1-2), pp. 12- 14.

61 Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708 C.E.*, (latest edition), Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 10-22

62 ‘Sangat’ or congregation was the mixing together of devotees of all castes, creed and social denominations in worship - recitation of hymns and singing of ‘shabad’ and listening to discourses. The ‘Sangats’ were established all over the places visited by Guru Nanak, right from the beginning and eventually emerged as missionary centers of Sikhism.

63 Term ‘Pangat’ is derived from Sanskrit word pankti (literally a row, line, series, or a group, assembly, company). In Sikh terminology, ‘Pangat’ stands for commensality or sitting together on the ground in a row to partake of food from a common kitchen regardless of caste, creed, sex, age or social status. Pangat is thus a synonym for Guru ka Langar - an institution of fundamental importance in Sikhism. It is customary for eating in the Guru ka Langar to sit side by side in a ‘pangat’ or row when food is served to them by sevadars or volunteers. The institution of Guru ka Langar itself thereby came to be referred to as Pangat. Third Sikh Guru, Guru Amar Das ji attached particular importance to pangat. The Guru expected every visitor to partake of food in it before seeing him. This gave rise to the popular saying: "pahile pangat pachhe sangat" — “eating together must take precedence over meeting together.” Sikh Langar is probably the most largely attended community kitchen in the world. It is a strong belief that the visitor to the Gurdwara must first sit in Pangat to partake Langar and then enjoy Sangat. See, G.S. Deol (1999) , “The Concept of Sangat and Pangat”, in Parm Bakhshish Singh et.al. (eds.), *Golden Temple*, Published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 199-205. Dalbir Singh Dhillon (1988) , *Sikhism Origin and Development*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, pp. 154-158. Also see, “The Sikh Institutions: Langar and Pangat”, available at <https://www.allaboutsikh.com/sikh-institutions/the-sikh-institutions-langar-and-pangat>, accessed on 19/06/2016.

64 The Sikhs met in the mixed congregations, the ‘Sangat’, and heard the recital of the Guru's teachings and participated on corporate signing of devotional hymns (shabads).

65 In these langars His followers, irrespective of their castes, had food sitting in one and the same row, called as “Pangat”. These community kitchens were run with the voluntary offerings from the followers. See, J.S. Grewal (1971), *Guru Nanak - Some of his Key-Concepts*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 12-15.

distinct and unique religion.⁶⁶ Explaining the relevance of unique institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat*, Sikh scholar Sangat Singh writes:

“Guru Nanak instituted the concept of ‘Sangat’ and ‘Pangat’. ‘Sangat’ or congregation was the mixing together of devotees of all castes, creed and social denominations in worship - recitation of hymns and singing of ‘shabad’ and listening to discourses. The ‘Sangats’ were established all over the places visited by Guru Nanak, right from the beginning and eventually emerged as missionary centers of Sikhism. That infused a social spirit, and formed an attempt at communal living apart from group ‘moksha’ (deliverance from birth and death), instead of emphasis on individualism and individual ‘moksha’ in Hinduism. It also provided the people a platform to exchange views on common problems, and generate a feeling of communal and national consciousness at a time, when sense of nationalism was absent among the populace.”⁶⁷

The founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev,⁶⁸ travelled widely and preached against ritualism, superstitions, caste system, religious intolerance, and religious oppression by the Mughal rulers. His message was one of love, equality, fraternity; and tolerance. Guru Nanak’s message and his teachings questioned the then prevailing structural arrangements and were a threat to those who had power and benefitted from a system of inequality. In essence, his message was one of emancipation, equality, liberation, and change.⁶⁹ The two institutions: *Sangat* and *Pangat*, became Guru Nanak's laboratories for both the demonstration and practice of his teachings. They also resulted in gradual but definite departure of the Sikhs from the orthodox Hindu fold and in a sense of psychological togetherness as a new religious community.⁷⁰ As the number of the faithful increased, many new institutional features were added to the common life by the Ten Sikh Gurus. With the

66 In Sikhism the institution of ‘langar’ owes its origin to the founder, Guru Nanak himself. Sikhs sit in ‘pangat’ (a row) without distinction of caste or status to share common meal prepared in the ‘langar’. Partaking of food in ‘Guru ka Langar’ was made a condition for disciples and visitors before they could see the Guru (Guru Amar Das). Guru Amar Das’s injunction was: *pehle pangat pachee sangat*- first comes eating together, then meeting together. Langar thus gave practical expression to the notion of equality

67 Sangat Singh (2002), *The Sikhs in History*, Uncommon Books, New Delhi, p.21.

68 Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith was born on 15 April 1469 in the village of Talwandi near Lahore (now in Pakistan).

69 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1987), *Sikhism Today- The Crisis Within and Without*, Published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp.64-66.

70 J.S. Grewal in his work titled - “The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity”, provides a comprehensive account of crucial aspects of Sikh faith and tradition from times of Guru Nanak to the contemporary times. Organized thematically, this work provides a detailed discussion on key issues in Sikh religion and history. J.S. Grewal dwells on ideology, evolution of socio-political institutions in Sikhism, and Sikh literature. The author throws light on socio-political issues concerning Sikh faith — norms of equality, caste, and gender. Apart from this, debated issues like the contest over sacred space, cultural reorientation under British rule, and the Akali struggle are also discussed. The issues and controversies related to Sikhism in recent decades are examined and critically investigated by the author. See, J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

development of its life-embracing ideals and institutions, Sikhism became an independent, conspicuous and sovereign dispensation with a religious discipline of its own.⁷¹

The founding Gurus of the Sikh religion had themselves perceived a different religious identity for their followers. As the Sikh faith came to flourish in the 15th and the 16th centuries, those days saw a new ferment sweep the land and compel people to re-examine their values and refurbish their faith. Out of this ferment, rose a new set of religious reformers who consciously preached this synthesis and unsparingly condemned the ills which had seized hold of the Hindu religion and society. In the first, Guru Nanak the founder of the Sikh faith, held the sway. The succession of each Guru was by appointment which was the prerogative of the Guru immediately preceding the successor. Guru Angad, who succeeded Guru Nanak, continued his work and was instrumental in making knowledge more accessible to the common people through his writings and teachings. The standardization of *Gurmukhi* script by Guru Angad Dev, in which the Guru's writings were compiled, also threatened and undermined the authority of the priests who wrote in Sanskrit, the language of the privileged classes.⁷² Guru Amar Das, the third Sikh Guru, continued the process of democratization by institutionalizing the practice of *langar* or free kitchen, where everyone is equal and together regardless of their religion, caste, and class. The fourth Guru, Guru Ram Das, continued the teachings and practices of his predecessors and also founded the city of Amritsar (originally known as Ramdaspur).⁷³

Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, is remembered for two very important contributions to the Sikh faith – (i) building the Harmandir Sahib at Amritsar (the pool of nectar)⁷⁴ and (ii) the compilation of the Adi Granth (Sikh Sacred Book).⁷⁵ Shortly after the

71 For detailed history of Sikh nation during first half of 19th century to mid of 19th century, see John Davey Cunningham (1849), *A History of the Sikhs : From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*, J Murray Publication (later editions by S. Chand and Co., Delhi, 1955 and 1985) , London , pp.83-96

72 Daljeet Singh (1994), *Essentials of Sikhism*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 201-206. Eleanor M. Nesbitt (2016), *Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (U.K), pp 33-34.

73 Gurinder Singh Mann (2005), *Sikhism Religions of the World*, published by Prentice Hall, New Jersey, pp. 30-32. Surinder Singh Johar (1998), *Holy Sikh Shrines*, M.D. Publications, New Delhi, pp.21-23.

74 The foundation of ‘ Harmandir Sahib’ now known as ‘Golden Temple’ was laid on December 28, 1588. On Guru Arjan Dev ji’s request, the foundation stone of the sacred place was laid by a Sufi saint Hazrat Mian Mir of Lahore. Harmandir Sahib unlike Hindu and Muslim places of worship was built at a lower level than the surrounding area, having doors on all four sides signifying universalism, which spoke itself, that it was open for people of all denominations. See, Surinder Singh (1986), “The Life and Times of Mian Mir”, *Punjab Past and Present*, Vol. XXII, No.2, October 1986, pp. 245-268. Also see, Madanjit Kaur (1983), *The Golden Temple: Past and Present*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University Press, pp. 5-14.

75 The sacred scripture of the Sikhs - Guru Granth Sahib- is unique among the scriptures of different religions. The Guru Granth Sahib — the divine Word— is revered and worshipped as the eternal “living Guru” by the Sikhs. The Sikh Scripture contains 5894 holy hymns in 31 *ragas* (classical musical

visit of Akbar in 1599, Guru Arjan Dev began the project of compilation of ‘Granth’. To ensure ideological purity and integrity of the Sikh movement, it was essential to differentiate the genuine compositions of the Gurus from the spurious ones. Accordingly, Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, undertook the stupendous task of collecting, compiling and editing the writings of the earlier Sikh Gurus. The Guru was assisted by revered Sikh scholar Bhai Gurdas who collected the available compositions, and scrutinized them carefully, assigned them to their authors, and assembled them into a volume which was given the name of ‘Adi Granth’.⁷⁶ The first scribe of the Holy Scripture and was installed in Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, in 1604 with Baba Buddha ji as its first official reader or Granthi.⁷⁷ The religious centre of Amritsar and the Holy Scripture (Adi Granth) became the pivots of the Sikhs. Benedict Anderson rightly says:

“Sikh community began its existence through a religious schism, its holy book and temple priests in Northern India. The link with a territorial centre “a homeland” formed an essential part of the ‘Sect to ethnies’ trajectory and Sikh religion crystallised around its cultural centre of Amritsar. But more important than that was centrality of the book and the sacred ‘tongue’ in which the scriptures were remembered and exalted.”⁷⁸

The supreme martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev had a profound impact on his successors and led to a crucial shift in the orientation and methods of the Sikh community of using force if necessary to defend their faith and religion.⁷⁹ The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, developed

measures). Apart from six Sikh Gurus, the holy Granth contains writings of 30 divinely inspired persons – Hindu Saints, Muslim Sufis, Bards etc. from the length and breadth of India. See, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1983), *Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine (Sikhism in the Perspective of Modern Thought)*, Bahri Publications, New Delhi, pp.81-82. Also see, Madanjit Kaur (1989), “The Guruship and Succession of Guru Granth Sahib”, in Jasbir Singh Mann & Harbans Singh Sarao (eds.), *Advanced Studies in Sikhism (Papers Contributed at Conference of Sikh Studies, Los Angeles, December 1989)*, published by Sikh Community of North America, California, USA, pp. 121-127.

- 76 Adi Granth compiled by Guru Arjan included the hymns composed by Sant Kabir, the Sufi Farid, and other Bhagats which had been collected by his predecessors including Guru Nanak. It took five years for Guru Arjan Dev to complete this project. Adi Granth enunciated unadulterated, monotheism and humanism. It can be termed as a reflection beyond doubt, matter of faith and existence of Sikhism. See, Gurinder Singh Mann (2001), *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, published by Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 4-5, 59-68. Pashaura Singh (2006), *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory, and Biography in the Sikh Tradition*, published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.134-138. Also see, Gobind Singh Mansukhani (1993), *Introduction to Sikhism*, published by Hemkunt Press, New Delhi, pp. 9-10
- 77 Pritam Singh (1992), *Bhai Gurdas*, published by Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, pp. 10-15. Gursharan Singh (1999), *The Granth be Thy Guru: Guru Maneyo Granth*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, pp. 57-58. Also see, James Massey (1991), *The Doctrine of Ultimate Reality in Sikh Religion: A Study of Guru Nanak’s hymns in the Ādi Grantha*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 5-11.
- 78 Benedict Anderson (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, published by Verso, London, p. 87
- 79 Unlike the Mughal emperor Akbar, who was tolerant of other religions, his successor Jahangir felt threatened by the ideological, moral, religious and spiritual commitment of Guru Arjan Dev and his followers. Thus, Mughal emperor Jahangir tried to convert him to Islam. When Guru Arjun refused he

the military organization of the Sikhs to fight against religious persecution, atrocities and exploitation; and started using two swords - *Miri and Piri*.⁸⁰ Guru Hargobind also institutionalized Sikh religion with the establishment of Akal Takht Sahib, the ‘throne of almighty’ and highest seat of religious authority. The seventh and eighth Gurus (Guru Har Rai and Guru Harkrishan Sahib respectively) also continued to firmly follow the teachings and religious path of their predecessors.⁸¹ The ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, faced intense challenges both from within and outside the community. During his times, the non-Muslims faced religious persecutions by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. When some Hindus sought the Guru’s help against forced conversions, he told them to tell the Mughal officials that they would convert to Islam if he (the Guru) agreed to such conversion. Guru Tegh Bahadur resisted the forced conversions of Kashmiri Pandits and non-Muslims to Islam, and was publicly beheaded in New Delhi on November 11, 1675.⁸² The ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, undertook the supreme sacrifice for the protection of the most fundamental of human rights - the right of an individual to freely practice his or her religion without interference or hindrance. Guru Arjan Dev’s supreme and unique sacrifice was extremely important event in the Sikh history that had profound impact on the future direction of Sikhism and shaping of the Sikh identity.⁸³

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, was only nine at the time of Guru Tegh Bahadur’s martyrdom. Guru Gobind Singh was crystal clear about his mission - to uphold the right in every place, to destroy sin and evil, and was prepared to use force if necessary to defend the right and faith. Guru Gobind Singh gave final form to the Sikh faith, instituted baptism and created the order of baptized Sikhs, the Khalsa. It gave Sikhs very precise form

was tortured and executed by the emperor. See, Gurdeep Kaur (1990), *Political Ideas of the Sikh Gurus*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 37- 42. Singh, Harbhajan (2007), *A Saga of Supreme Sacrifice: Martyrdom of Shri Guru Arjan Dev*, published by J Chandramohan Printers, Chennai, pp. 142-158.

80 Concepts of *Miri and Piri* are dealt in detail in second chapter.

81 Surinder Singh Kohli (1989), “Constant Unity of Sikh Thought”, in Jasbir Singh Mann & Harbans Singh Sarao (eds), *Advanced Studies in Sikhism (Papers Contributed at Conference of Sikh Studies, Los Angeles, December 1989)*, published by Sikh Community of North America, California, USA, pp. 99-107.

82 Prithi Pal Singh (2006), *History of Sikh Gurus*, published by Lotus Press, New Delhi, pp. 124-128, 95-99. Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708 C.E.*, (latest edition), Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 478-482, 617-632. Also see, Surinder Singh Johar (1975) *Guru Tegh Bahadur: A Bibliography*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, pp. 193-204.

83 Pritam Singh Gill (1975), *Guru Tegh Bahadur, The Unique Martyr*, New Academic Publishing Company, Jullundhur, pp. 2-8. Trilochan Singh (1967), *Guru Tegh Bahadur, Prophet and Martyr: A Biography*, published by Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Delhi, pp. 322-333.

of distinct and separate identity which has its roots both in doctrinal and practical terms.⁸⁴ The influence of these reformers went far beyond the limits of the particular sects that grew around them. Hinduism came under the deep impact of new ideas and new ethical principles. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were not only becoming integrated within themselves but they were also giving birth to a new class structure within the confines of the Indian society as a whole.⁸⁵ Later, the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, added hymns of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, to the Adi Granth and affirmed the text as his successor. The second and the final rendition is known today as - Guru Granth Sahib.⁸⁶ The full text was dictated by Guru Gobind Singh at Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo), and the Guru bestowed Guruship in Guru Granth Sahib in 1708. It is this edition that is installed in the Gurdwaras now, the sacred religious scripture of the Sikhs, regarded by Sikhs as the final, sovereign, and the eternal living Guru.⁸⁷

Sikhism, a religion that emerged in the 16th century as a new revolutionary force, aimed at spiritual rejuvenation, moral upliftment and socio-political emancipation of the people. It introduced a qualitatively new mode of thought in the realm of religious philosophies of the world. On one hand, the Sikh faith sought to release people from the grip of ritualistic, caste ridden, priest-dominated and retrogressive social order; and on the other, it challenged the tyranny and oppression of the ruling class. For true and correct evaluation of the ideological and practical implications of Sikhism, it is essential to understand the true

84 For a very informative essay on Guru Gobind Singh's contribution in establishing distinct and separate Sikh identity, see, Nikky – Gurinder Kaur (2011), *Sikhism- An Introduction*, published by I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, New York, pp. 50-59

85 Khuswant Singh in his very compact and informative work "*The Sikhs*" presents a concise history of the world's newest religion- the Sikhism. Beginning with the life and times of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith, the contents move on to describe the vital contributions made by the following nine Sikh Gurus in shaping and developing the Sikh religion. There is special emphasis on the importance of the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, and its centrality to the religion. The author also discusses epoch making developments such as the setting up of Singh Sabha and related social reform, the decisive Gurdwara Reform Movement for the control over management of historical Sikh shrines, and the impact of the Ghadar rebellion. See, Khuswant Singh (2004), *The Sikhs*, Harper Collins Publishers, India, pp. 22-44.

86 During his stay at Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo), Guru Gobind Singh prepared the full version of the Sikh scriptures called Sri Guru Granth Sahib in 1705. The Guru added the religious compositions of Guru Tegh Bahadur to Adi Granth to create a definitive compilation. Bhai Mani Singh acted as scribe when Guru Gobind Singh ji dictated Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Bhai Mani Sahib collected the 'Gurbani' of Guru Gobind Singh Ji and compiled it in the Guru Granth Sahib.

87 The Guru Granth Sahib is written in Gurmukhi (the script in which the Punjabi language is written) and has 1,430 Angs (pages). It contains 5,894 *shabads* (hymns) arranged into 31 ragas (musical groupings). See, Ganda Singh (1986), "Guru Gobind Singh Designates Guru Granth Sahib to be the Guru", in Noel Q. King, Daljeet Singh & Hari Ram Gupta (eds.), *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications, Chandigarh, pp. 183-197.

import of Sikh postulates as enshrined in its sacred scripture, Guru Granth Sahib.⁸⁸ The practice of physical Gurudom continued till Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, who put an end to it and made the ‘Word of the Gurus’ (*Gurbani*) embodied in the holy scripture – Guru Granth Sahib as the spiritual Guru of all the Sikhs for all times to come. For his disciples, the ‘Word’ (‘Shabad’) became the Guru.⁸⁹

Sikhism which arose as a unique religious phenomenon left an indelible mark on the history of the Indian sub-continent. With each succeeding Guru, Sikhism became increasingly crystallized and institutionalized into a distinct faith. Within a span of time, Guru Nanak's followers came to be known as his ‘Sikhs’. The Guru coined few basic concepts and laid down certain institutions which had since been undergoing a process of evolution. By the beginning of 18th century these concepts and institutions had assumed more or less a definite shape. **Sikh identity is the creation of new ideology, new institutions, and four hundred years old tradition of martyrdom and unparalleled sacrifices for the cause of justice, equality and righteousness.** Sikhism evolved ritualistic conventions of its own. Sikhism gradually detached itself from Hinduism, developed the institutions of its own and came to acquire a more or less definite meaning.⁹⁰

Formation of Khalsa – The Crystallization of Sikh Identity

Since its inception, Sikhism and Sikh community have experienced few very vital changes. The history of the Sikhs is replete with persecution, oppression, martyrdom, sacrifices, and the genocidal policies of Mughals and the Afghans.⁹¹ These experiences led to transformation of Sikhs from being a peaceful community to one prepared to defend their faith with ‘sword’, if necessary. The Sikh identity of self- sacrifice, bravado, and valour is

88 For multi-dimensional understanding of Sikh faith and sacred Sikh scriptures, see, W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi (1999), *Sikhism Beliefs and Practices*, Adarsh Books, New Delhi, pp. 44-55.

89 The ‘Guru’, according to Sikh belief, is the spiritual teacher who shows the way. After Guru Nanak Dev, nine subsequent Gurus held that office. In Sikhism, the term ‘Guru’ is used only for the Ten spiritual prophets-Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh and for none other. Now this office of Guru is fulfilled by the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sacred Book, which was so apotheosized by Guru Gobind Singh. See, Kharak Singh (2004) “The Religion of The Shabad Guru”, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 6(4), pp.11-12.

90 Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition), *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh*, Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930), pp. 3-9. J.S Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs – Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 339- 353. N.G. Barrier (1999), “Sikh Identity in Historical and Contemporary Perspective”, Singh, Pashaura & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.) (1999), *Sikh Identity – Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi., pp.38-53

91 Pritam Singh Gill (1978), *The History of Sikh Nation - Foundation Assassination Resurrection*, New Academic Publishers, Jullundur, pp. 146-149, 178-182, 193-198.

rooted in their historical experiences, the supreme teachings and exemplary conduct of the Sikh Gurus.⁹²

The creation of Khalsa was a historic event unrelated to any local situation. It was in fulfillment of Guru Nanak's mission to propagate righteousness, equality and to destroy the evil. This two-fold purpose became achievable with the creation of the Khalsa Panth.⁹³ The concept and institution of 'Khalsa' describes an ideal man's intent in the support of goodness, morality and the protection of basic human rights. As such, the Khalsa order provides for an external identity markers which signify inner vision and sense of equality. The external identity symbols include *five K's* (five articles of Khalsa order)⁹⁴ and the practice of virtuous and gallant deeds.⁹⁵ When these unique symbols and articles of faith are worn, they give a very distinct identity to the Sikhs with special appearance of a 'Sant-Siphai' (saint-soldier).⁹⁶

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- 92 Sir Gokul Chand Narang in his classic work- "Transformation of Sikhism", very systematically presents a concise but complete view of the various processes which led to the transformation of Sikhism from the religious sect into a political organization. The author argues that Sikhism founded by Guru Nanak Dev was a sect of peaceful disciples but the atrocities by Mughals turned them into a band of militant warriors. The book provides insights into a short history of the Sikhs and how this transformation of the Sikhs had begun long before the time of Guru Gobind Singh. This book throw light on brief history of all ten Gurus and their relations with the Mughals. The author also gives the brief history of the Sikh Misl and the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. See, Sir Gokul Chand Narang (1945), *Transformation of Sikhism*, published by New Book Society, Lahore, pp.220-23.
- 93 Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru created the *Khalsa Panth* on April 13, 1699. He selected the day of *Baisakhi*, when at Anandpur Sahib, at a large gathering of his followers, he called for five Sikhs totally devoted to the 'Guru'. He baptized them and called them the '*Panj Pyaras*' - the 'Five beloved Ones'. They were to form the nucleus of new brotherhood, the *Khalsa*. Guru Gobind Singh furnished the order of the Khalsa with the institution of 'Panj Piaras'. The five men had literally stood up at the Guru's bidding to offer their heads to the Guru's, sword. That exciting test earned them the rank and status reserved for them for all times to come. The names of these five Sikhs were, Bhai Daya Singh, Bhai Dharam Singh, Bhai Himmat Singh, Bhai Muhkam Singh, and Bhai Sahib Singh, who were designated as 'Panj Pyaras' by Guru Gobind Singh at the historic divan at Anandpur Sahib on 30th March 1699.
- 94 Members of the Khalsa brotherhood were ordained to wear five K's (1) Kachha (Knicker) ensuring briskness of movement at times of action and serving as an easy underwear at times of rest, (2) Kara (iron ring) on the right arm as an insignia of sternness and constraint, (3) Kirpan (sword) as an instrument of offence and defence and as an emblem of power, dignity and readiness against oppression, (4) Kesh (long hair) which have been associated with holiness all over the world and (5) Kangha (comb) which was a sheer necessity for keeping the hair clean and tidy. These external symbols are perpetual reminders for an inner discipline of the qualities of saintliness, cleanliness, continence, righteousness and courage respectively. The term 'Five K's' refer to the five symbols which must be worn by the Sikh who is a baptized member of the Khalsa. All begin with the letter 'k' and hence the collective term 'Panj Kakkar', or 'Five K's'. The inner unity of the faith was sought to be strengthened with external uniformity.
- 95 Inner inspiration was achieved by a constant recall of and reflection on *Gurbani* coupled with mediation or *Nam-Simran* on God's name. See, Ganda Singh (1996), "Khalsa", in Harbans Singh (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Volume II, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 473-474.
- 96 Guru Gobind Singh created a brand of Sikhs, the 'saint soldiers' who were to be the guardians of the faith established by Guru Nanak Dev. 'Singhs' were to be saints and soldiers in one and were to combine the piety of a saint and the strength and sternness of a soldier. For detailed explanation of 'Khalsa' and external symbols of Khalsa order, see, Trilochan Singh (2001), *The Turban and Sword of the Sikhs*, published by B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, Amritsar, pp. 217-229, 234-249. Also see, Arthur W. Helweg (1997), "Revitalization in a Sikh Community", in Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (ed.), *Sikhism and The 21st Century*, Published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 72- 76

With the formation of Khalsa order, the Sikh movement started by Guru Nanak Dev reached its highest fulfilment. The Sikh community of saints and martyrs evolved into a band of bold ‘saint-soldiers’ (‘sant- sipahi’) fully retaining its original attributes of compassion and selflessness. There was no question of transformation of the Sikh community; it was simply the outcome of the continuous process of growth and development of the Sikh religion.⁹⁷ The life and thought of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, cannot be studied either theologically or logically in isolation from the general Sikh world-view; instead it has to be understood within and in relation to the totality of the Sikh philosophy and ethos. It is in this context that the unique institution of ‘Khalsa’ established by Guru Gobind Singh is to be seen and studied.⁹⁸ There is complete uniformity in the fundamental doctrines and principles of Sikhism. The Sikh doctrine is essentially rational and real; its philosophy, ethical order and value system are deeply rooted in the social and historical context. A deeper study of the emergence and progress of Sikhism highlights the fact that Sikh religion has a consistent ideology.⁹⁹

It is thus obvious that the new phase of the creation of the Khalsa was epitome of the teachings and practices of the founder of Sikh faith, Guru Nanak and his successor Gurus. The establishment of Khalsa Panth, in no way, was in contradiction to their socio-religious thesis. This democratic initiation was supported by religious sanctions, and it was recognized as an actuality in the institution of the ‘Panj Pyare’ (the ‘five beloved ones’).¹⁰⁰ The baptism symbolized a re-birth as they were to abandon all their links with their castes, deities and was to follow one immortal God. The male converts were to adopt the surname of ‘Singh’¹⁰¹ and

97 For detailed study of ‘Khalsa’ order, see, Sirdar Kapur Singh (1997), *Raj Krega Khalsa*, published by Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC, Amritsar, pp. 5-18. Also see, J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs – Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 196-200.

98 Himadri Banerjee (2002), *The Khalsa and the Punjab; Studies in the Sikh History to the Nineteenth Century*, published by Tulica Books, New Delhi, pp. 187- 192

99 The basic concept and ideas to which Guru Gobind Singh tries to give concert expression in the *Khalsa* form were a continuation of the fundamental and core concerns of Sikhism. With the link of the individual soul with the infinite soul, the integration of religion and religious activity with the principles of an egalitarian society, subordinating politics to ethics, and the creation of selfless *Khalsa* upholding the vision of a regenerated humanity was heralded. See, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (2003), “Khalsa and Integral Sikh Identity”, *Sikh Review*, 51 (5), pp. 25-30.

100 The Guru adopted for himself and his followers the distinctive appellation of ‘Singh’ meaning literally a lion and metaphorically a champion or warrior.¹⁰⁰ See, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1999), *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 65-73

101 The name ‘Singh’ is derived from Sanskrit word - ‘simha’, meaning "lion." It was originally used by Rajput Hindus, and is still a common surname for many North Indian Hindus. When Guru Gobind Singh created ‘Khalsa Panth’ (March 30, 1699 at Anandpur Sahib), a Khalsa Sikh (baptized Sikh) was given the titles of ‘Singh’ (male) and ‘Kaur’ (female). In Sikhism, these titles eliminate the discrimination based on cast and reinforce the basic principle of Sikh ideology that all human beings are equal under God. This tradition in Sikhism started because through the last surname one could distinguish what caste one belongs to and caste based hierarchy comes into picture from the surname itself. Thus, Guru Gobind

the female converts the surname of 'Kaur'.¹⁰² Guru Gobind Singh provided the Khalsa Sikhs with symbols which transformed their physical appearance and gave them a new name which signified their distinct identity.¹⁰³

Sikh identity was visibly sharpened by the institution of the Khalsa. Indeed, the 'Khalsa Sikhs' were distinct from Hindus and other religious communities of India. However, all Sikhs did not embrace the Khalsa discipline, and Sikh Panth was larger than the Khalsa.¹⁰⁴ However, the institution of the 'Khalsa' with the set of five symbols has made very important contributions to the history. It provides the ideology and social cohesion for many militant uprisings in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. It has played a dynamical and purposive role in bringing about social, moral and cultural awakening in the Punjab society. The unique institution of 'Khalsa' has created not only a religious and political society, but also customs and traditions so distinctive that those who profess it rank in common esteem as a separate race with unique identity characteristics. The significance of maintaining distinct identity characteristics by Sikhs may be explained by the following comment (made in another context) by De Vos and Romannucci Ross:

"In identity maintenance one has to access the nature of the possible threat which close with an alien group implies. In a modern pluralistic society, where contact is intense and unavoidable, certain minor symbolic emblematic measures remain vitally necessary to maintain psychological distance from those outside one's group."¹⁰⁵

Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru by giving the last names as 'Singh' to men and 'Kaur' to women eliminated the last name from all the Sikhs so that no one could distinguish the caste. See, Khushwant Singh (2004), *A History of the Sikhs: Volume 1: 1469-1839*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 80-82. Also see, See, Khuswant Singh (1985), *The Sikhs Today*, published by Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp.91-92.

102 Name 'Kaur' has been derived from Sanskrit word - 'Kunwar' meaning prince which changed into 'Kaur' by metathesis. The literal meaning of the word 'Kaur' is Princess. Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of Sikhs, introduced last names as 'Kaur' and 'Singh', when he administered *Amrit* (baptism) to both male and female Sikhs. These titles act as a symbol of equality among men and women. This further confirmed the equality of man and woman as was the tradition set by the founder of Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev. The last name 'Kaur' given by Guru Gobind Singh also ensured that women does not need a man's title to raise her own status. It was intended to give women a sense of self-respect and warrior ethos. Normally, when a woman gets married, she takes the last name of the family she gets married into. Since the Guru eliminated the last name, it empowered the women to keep her last name 'Kaur', thus creating the sense of self respect. See, Khuswant Singh (1985), *The Sikhs Today*, published by Orient Longman, New Delhi, pp.91-92.

103 Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries – Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, pp. 62-66, 88-91

104 A considerable number of urban 'Khatris' continued to live as *Nanak-Panthis*, who were scattered in large cities throughout India. Moreover, the continuing presence of non-Khalsa Sikhs is attested by the literature of the eighteenth century. For instance, the Chaupa Singh *Rahit-nama*, compiled in the middle of the eighteenth century; provides us with references to 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' who continued to live as *Nanak-Panthis* Sikhs. They maintained an identity which was less precise than that of an initiated member of the Khalsa

105 See, George A. De Vos and Romanucci –Ross (1985), *Ethnic Identity, Cultural Continuities and Change*, published by University of California Press, Berkley, Los Angeles, p. 369

The various steps in Khalsa initiation ritual: the state of an individual before getting initiated, the separation of the neo-phyte from the rest during baptism, the preparation of sanctified water, the readings from Sikh Sacred Scriptures and instructions for future behaviour—all these endowed an individual with a new and distinct identity, one that he/she shared only with others who had been similarly initiated and who were committed to follow the specific ‘Rehat’, the Khalsa code of conduct. Along with the general code of conduct, meant for all Sikhs, there are some special instructions for the Khalsa Sikhs. The Khalsa has been bestowed with some special physical and doctrinal features which are over and above the general Sikhs. In this context, a prominent Sikh scholar Surinder Singh Kohli acknowledges the value and spirit of a ‘Khalsa Sikh’ in the following words:

“Amrit or ambrosia is the Name of the Lord. It was meant for the Beloved Ones, who surrendered completely to the Guru, in mind, speech and action. The Amrit could instill such a spirit that the sparrows could fight with falcons and one Khalsa could fight with a lakh and a quarter (sawa lakh). This Amrit was a miracle that has changed the shape of events in the history of India. Because of this Amrit, the Sikh community has brought forth a galaxy of martyrs which-no other nation could produce or excel.”¹⁰⁶

The doors of the Khalsa brotherhood were thrown open to all irrespective of the distinctions of caste and class. The Guru exploded the myth that the low caste people were not capable of spiritual uplift. Khalsa form was the visible image of the basic ideas and concepts, inherent in the spiritual thesis of Guru Nanak Dev. With the historic establishment of Khalsa order, the Sikhs were able to establish more secure and separate religious boundaries. The very conception of the Khalsa embodied the ideal norm, towards which the entire Sikh historical process had been directed.¹⁰⁷ The creation of the ‘Khalsa’ by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, on-the-Baisakhi day of 1699 A.D. was the epitome of the mission of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism.¹⁰⁸

106 Surinder Singh Kohli (1994), *Real Sikhism*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, p.44

107 Sangat Singh in his book “The Sikhs in History” uses a detailed account of historical events to develop better understanding about the origin of Sikhism, and how it's adherents, the Sikhs, have participated in the process of its evolution. The author interestingly covers questions ranging from the history of Guru Nanak Dev, the creation of Khalsa order, to the detailed commentary on events leading to partition of India, and more recent events such as:- Operation Bluestar in 1984. In "The Sikhs in History", the author also highlights the gradual introduction of non-Sikh Brahminical doctrine in Sikh practices and how this has influenced the present day Sikhs into adopting a more non-Sikh Hindu communal philosophy. The author has made very successful attempt to take the reader through every stage in history where Sikhs have been involved, providing references for his facts with every new development. See Sangat Singh (2002), *The Sikhs in History*, Uncommon Books, New Delhi, pp. 80- 87.

108 Shiv Kumar Gupta (1999), “Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak’s Mission”, in Shiv Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak’s Mission (Khalsa Tercentenary Commemorative Volume)*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 41-43. Also see, G.S. Sandhu (1999), “Institution of the Khalsa: A Philosophical Perspective”, in Shiv Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Creation of*

With the development of its life-embracing ideals and institutions, Sikhism and Sikh identity became an independent, distinct, conspicuous, and sovereign dispensation with a religious discipline of its own. The Sikhs came to be recognized as an integrated community with an independent world-view and a religious scripture of their own. Guru Gobind Singh gave the Sikhs a distinct physical identity by establishing the Khalsa Panth in 1699, and the sacred religious scripture of Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib became the embodiment of the Gurus and supreme source of religious and spiritual guidance. The recognition of Khalsa Panth and Guru Granth Sahib as living Guru is signified in the following hymns which are sung at the conclusion of every 'ardas' which is a short direct prayer to God :

ਆਗਿਆ ਭਈ ਅਕਾਲ ਕੀ ਤਭੀ ਚਲਾਯੋ ਪੰਥ।
 ਸਭ ਸਿੱਖਨਿ ਕੋ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਾਨਿਓ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ।
 ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਜੀ ਮਾਨੀਓ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਗੁਰਾਂ ਕੀ ਦੇਹ।
 ਜੋ ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੋ ਮਿਲੋ ਚਹੈ ਖੋਜ ਸਦ ਮੈਂ ਲੇਹ।
 ਰਾਜ ਕਰੇਗਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਆਕੀ ਰਹੇ ਨ ਕੋਇ।
 ਖੁਾਰ ਹੋਇ ਸਭ ਮਿਲੈਗੇ ਬਚੈ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਜੋ ਹੋਇ।

(*Tawarikh Guru Khalsa by Giani Gian Singh, Part-1, p. 1142*)¹⁰⁹

This is translated as:

*Command came from the Timeless God.
 And there was established the (Khalsa) Panth.
 All Sikhs are commended to recognize the Granth as the Guru.
 Recognize the Granth as the Guru;
 It is the visible body of the Masters.
 Those who wish to meet the Lord may see Him therein (in the Granth).
 The Khalsa shall rule, no hostile refractories shall exist.*

Frustrated, they shall all submit, and those who come in for shelter shall be saved.

After the tenth Sikh Guru (Guru Gobind Singh left for the heavenly abode in 1708), the spirit and teachings of Guru Gobind Singh were carried on by his disciple Banda Singh Bahadur and his men who fought against the Mughals under the most inhospitable circumstances.¹¹⁰ With the conquest of Sirhind in 1710, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, the great

the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak's Mission (Khalsa Tercentenary Commemorative Volume), published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp.113-115.

109 As per relevant historic records, "Guru Maneyo Granth" refers to the historic statement of the 10th Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, affirming the sacred text, Guru Granth Sahib - as sovereign eternal Guru of the Sikhs, thus terminating the line of human Gurus. This composition (Dohra) is said to be Guru Gobind Singh Ji's "Holy Saying" recorded in Bhai Prahlaad Singh's Rehitnama. Giani Gian Singh found it and copied it into his literature's - "Twarikh Guru Khalsa" and "Panth Parkash".

110 Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and his men stuck to their faith and principles till the end of their lives. The Sikh devotion to their religion and their spirit is evident from the fact that out of 740 Sikh prisoners of war, who were executed in Delhi, along with Banda Bahadur, not one deserted the faith, even while given the choice to do so.

Sikh warrior, established the first Sikh State. It is a historical fact that he shook the foundation of the seven centuries old mighty Mughal empire and paved the way for the establishment of the Sikh Misls and later the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799. The distinct identity and the formation of Khalsa Panth is rooted in particular structural conditions of the origin of the Sikh religion and the prolonged historical struggles of the Sikhs against oppressive state policies of the Mughal rulers.¹¹¹

Who is a 'Sikh' and how is the 'Sikh Panth' to be defined? At one level the answer is easily given. A 'Sikh' is one who believes in the teachings of ten Gurus and in supremacy of Guru Granth Sahib and no other. The primary criterion is strictly religious and it is accordingly on the basis of a distinctive religious belief and practice that the Panth's identity is to be established. However, throughout the Sikh history we observe the basis of religious unity contending with various diverse social elements.¹¹² The history of the growth and consolidation of Sikh power in Punjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh provided the Sikh leaders in modern times with a vast pool of symbols to draw upon to feed the modern sense of Sikh identity.¹¹³

Sikh Identity During British Rule

With weakening of the Mughal State and the progressive military strength of the Sikhs, they consolidated their State power under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.¹¹⁴ As per historical records, it seems that it was only during this time period that Sikhs enjoyed a certain level of social, economic and political stability and prosperity. After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, dissension and political conflicts among his successors created the opportunity for the British to annex Punjab, and extend and consolidate their colonial rule throughout India.¹¹⁵ Internal conflicts and factionalism among the Sikhs gave rise to groups

111 Gurmit Singh (1991), *History of Sikh Struggles*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 122-128.

112 See, "R. Ballard (1999), "Panth, Kismet, Dharam te Qaum: Continuity and Change in Four Dimensions of Punjabi Religion", in Pritam Singh & Shinder S. Thandi (eds.), *Punjabi identity in a Global Context*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 17- 27.

113 During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule, the Sikh religion and the Sikh community flourished and prospered. Many more Gurdwaras were built, restored, and renovated under Ranjit Singh's patronage.

114 After tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh left for the heavenly abode, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur established the first Sikh kingdom within two years. With the conquest of Sirhind in 1764, had begun the final phase of the emergence of the Dal Khalsa into confederacy. After the death of Baba Banda Bahadur, the Sikhs went through some very difficult phase for the almost next four decades. Later, the Sikhs established 12 *Misls* in Punjab and ultimately established a mighty Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh by the end of the 18th century.

115 Khuswant Singh in his work "How the Sikhs Lost their Kingdom" narrates the story of the disintegration of the Sikh kingdom after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The author highlights the role of court intrigues and treachery, encouraged by the British who eagerly awaited the opportunity to annex the Sikh kingdom of Punjab and extend their empire beyond the Indus. See, Khuswant Singh (1996), *How the Sikhs lost their Kingdom*, UBS Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 11- 27.

with competing religious beliefs and practices. Some Sikhs were even reverting to Hindu traditions, and they also basically lost control of their Gurdwaras.¹¹⁶

The loss of political power had immediate economic and social implications, bringing in its trail the problem of readjustment. The long-term policies of the new rulers created a new social and political environment.¹¹⁷ Like other Punjabis, the Khalsa were affected by these policies, and had to face new challenges. They tried to meet them in the light of their understanding of past and their vision of the future. In the process, they created new institutions. The institutionalization of religious politics had very deep impact on Sikh politics in pre and post independent Punjab.¹¹⁸

The Sikh struggle to revitalize the basic principles and values of Sikhism, and regain the control of Sikh institutions were important factors in the formation of Sikh identity.¹¹⁹ By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the distinction between Keshdhari Sikhs and Hindus had grown very thin. Though, a Keshdhari Sikh might observe the distinctive symbols of his community, which were intended to stress an independent identity and brotherhood of the Khalsa, these had largely become distinctions of mere form. The complicated rituals and practices against which Sikhism was initiated as reform movement were widely observed. The Sikhs worshipped Guru Granth Sahib with ceremonies akin to the ritualistic worship of Hindu Gods or Goddesses, observed pollution inhibitions towards converts from the outcastes of the Hindu hierarchy and consulted astrologers and mystics. Thus, the stronghold of the Brahmanical practices over the Sikhs increased. In order to reinforce and re-emphasize the separate and distinct Sikh identity in form and spirit, several reform movements were launched towards the end of the nineteenth century. With the active proselytizing practices of the Christian missionaries along with the fear of reappearance of Brahmanistic rituals, Singh

116 Har Jagmandar Singh (2008), *A Story of the Sikhs (Pursuit of Sovereignty)*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp.107-127. J.S. Grewal (1990), *The Sikhs of Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), pp. 128-142.

117 The British colonial policy of 'divide and rule' also contributed to the process of formation of political and religious identity of the Sikhs. The British electoral policies, such as the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 and the Communal Awards of 1932, encouraged communal conflict among various religious groups. Despite opposition, the Government of India Act was passed by the British Parliament in 1935 to implement the 'communal awards'. Gurbir Singh (1994), "Sikhs, Akalis and the Panth", in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab – Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, pp. 22-28.

118 Gokul Chand Narang (1972), *Glorious History of Sikhism; From the Times and Teachings of Guru Nanak to the Death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. (6th ed.), published by New Book Society of India, New Delhi, pp. 234- 248. W.H. McLeod (1989), *Who Is a Sikh ? : The Problem of Sikh Identity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, pp.72-78.

119 Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India – A Case Study of Punjab*, published by MacMillan Press, London, pp.82- 86

Sabha Movement was launched in the late nineteenth century.¹²⁰ The fast deteriorating environment challenging the Sikh identity was taken note of by the then Sikh elite, who mobilised the Sikh people through Singh Sabha Movement.¹²¹ Prior to the British Rule, the Sikh *Panth* (Sikh community) united in its devotion to the Gurus and Sikhs, occupied diverse cultural locations and articulated a multiplicity of identities. It has been pointed out by scholars of Sikh studies that the steady penetration of British rule in Sikh politico-religious affairs coupled with numerous socio-economic changes contributed much to the crystallization of a new Sikh identity.¹²²

For three hundred years of colourful Sikh history, an all-encompassing definition of a Sikh had not been generated. However, the hundred years succeeding 1849 under British rule saw the intentional creation of Sikh identity formed. The combined force of conversions to Christianity and the persistence of the British to define what a ‘Sikh’ was, caused the Singh Sabha movement to emerge and evolve. Singh Sabha Movement succeeded in creating a definite framework within which the Sikhs lived.¹²³ The Singh Sabha Movement supplied the definition of a ‘Sikh’ reforming and sharpening the Sikh identity forever.¹²⁴

Going back to the commencement of the debate in the late nineteenth century, we notice that the problem was discussed from different religious/communal platforms. Reacting to the ‘Sanatani Hindu’ or the ‘Arya Samaji’ call that Sikhs were Hindus, the Singh Sabha leaders, particularly those affiliated to the Lahore wing, strongly asserted for separate and

120 The Singh Sabha Movement was launched with the founding of Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873. The objectives declared were: (a) to restore Sikhism to its restint purity, (b) to edit and publish historical books, (c) to propagate current knowledge using Gurmukhi as medium and to start magazines and newspapers in Punjabi, (d) to reform and bring back into Sikh fold, apostates, and (e) to interest tile highly placed Englishmen in and ensure their association with the educational programme

121 Paul R. Brass (1974), *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Cambridge University Press, London, pp. 303- 313. Paramjt Singh Judge (2005), *Religion Identity and Nationhood –The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 22-26.

122 Indu Banga (2002), “Sikh Raaj Adheen Punjab : Khteri Ilakai Raaz di Sthapati”, in J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga (eds.) *Khalsa Itihaas ate Vichaardhara*, (in Punjabi), published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 85-92.

123 After the formation of Amritsar Singh Sabha in 1873, another Singh Sabha was founded in 1879 at Lahore. Whereas the leadership of the Amritsar Singh Sabha was in the hands of the aristocratic class, the leaders of the Lahore Singh Sabha were a group of educated men of middle class. The two Singh Sabhas-because of difference in the nature of their leader-ship clashed on many issues, especially on the institution of Gurudom (fresh) and the right of untouchable Sikhs to worship in the in the Gurudwaras. However, in their efforts to develop a communal consciousness in the Sikhs, the two Sabhas joined hands. By 1889, some 121 Singh Sabhas were operative.

124 J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 269-270. Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 25-30. Joginder Singh (1997), *The Sikh Resurgence*, published by National Book Organization, New Delhi, pp. 16-21.

distinct identity of the Sikhs.¹²⁵ The writings of prominent Singh Sabha reformers like Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha , Bhai Gurmukh Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh, Bhai Vir Singh and Mohan Singh Vaid awakened the Sikh society and provided highly valuable arguments in favour of the distinct and separate Sikh identity.¹²⁶ The new leadership, it is argued, often sought to project the dominant *Khalsa* symbolic and rituals, ideals and institutions to be the sole representative of the Sikh religious identity. This late nineteenth-century Singh Sabha identity projection, however, continued to be enriched by the equally radical Tat Khalsa¹²⁷ leadership of the early decades of the present century.¹²⁸

Enactment of two significant pieces of legislations, namely, the Anand Marriage Act (1909) and the Sikh Gurdwaras Act (1925), as well as the growing domination of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and the influential role of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the political life of the Sikh community put the legal stamp on Khalsa Sikh identity in the first quarter of 20th century.¹²⁹ However, a significant section of Sikh world reacted very sharply to this line of argument. The debates of the recent years have no doubt provided a new perspective to Sikh studies.¹³⁰

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- 125 Indu Banga (1999), “Arya Samaj and Punjabi Identity”, in Pritam Singh & Shinder S. Thandi (eds.), *Pre-Colonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics and Culture*, published by Oxford University Press. Also see N. Gerald Barrier (2004) , “Authority, Politics, and Contemporary Sikhism”, in Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier & W. H. McLeod (eds.) *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 197-199.
- 126 Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University, New Delhi, pp. 23-37. Joginder Singh (1999), *The Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 57-58. Also see, J.S. Grewal (1990), *The Sikhs of Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) , pp.143-146.
- 127 As the Singh Sabha movement expanded, the next main centre of its activity was founded six years after the first Singh Sabha founded in Amritsar in 1873. This was the centre in Lahore (founded in 1879). This Singh Sabha basically consisted of much more radical and progressive thinkers, whom eventually formed the Tat Khalsa (True Khalsa) view, which was destined to become the main orthodox view of Sikhism today. There arose two trends: the Sanatanist view of the Amritsar Singh Sabha and the Tat Khalsa view of the Lahore Singh Sabha. The Tat Khalsa Singh Sabha gradually gained dominance, creating new, distinctively Sikh rituals for birth, naming, marriage and death, and formed a particular view of Sikh history and religion that reflected the uniqueness of the Sikh faith. This led to the systematic exclusion of all non-Singhs due to the fixing of 'Sikh' as only a signifier of Khalsa a Singh. Their main argument was to prove that Sikhs were not Hindus or Muslims and that they had their own revealed religion.
- 128 Mohinder Singh (2000), *Sikh: Forms And Symbols*, published by Manohar Books, New Delhi, pp. 96-99. W.H. McLeod (1997), *Sikhism*, Penguin Books Publications, London, . 83-84, 112-115.
- 129 Harish K. Puri (1983), “The Akali Agitation-An Analysis of Socio-Economic Bases of Protest”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 18, Issue No.4, pp. 113-16. Also see , K.R. Bombwall (1986) “Sikh Identity, Akali Dal and Fedral Polity”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 (20) , May 17, 1986, pp: 888-90.
- 130 A significant section of the Sikh world argued that Sikh identity was not of recent origin; it was not engraved on the Sikh mind in the late nineteenth century under colonial rule, but could be traced back to the days of the inception of Sikhism by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith. They argued that their views should not be treated as an alternative version but be given their rightful place as an authoritative and sober defence of Sikhism. See, J.S. Grewal (2011), *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies – As Assessment*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 101 - 108. Also see, Nazer Singh (2012), *Modern Sikh Studies and Historiography (1884-1947)*, K.K. Publications, New Delhi, pp. 56-68, 88-93.

It was the British fascination of census , that to some extent, fuelled the Singh Sabha's desire of establishing a homogeneous identity for the Sikhs. The British worked out in 1855 that the Sikhs who constituted 10 million during the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, accounted for only 200,000 in a population of 3 million in the Lahore Division of Punjab. As per census published in 1868, they numbered 1.14 million for the whole of Punjab including the Cis-Sutlej princely states. During the 1891 census of Punjab, nearly 1,344,862 Sikhs declared themselves to be Hindu.¹³¹ The census of 1911 justified the Sikh assertion and aspirations. Recording a rapid rise of 37 percent, the Sikh population rose from 2.1 million in 1901 to 2.881 million in 1911.¹³²

The battle against assimilative 'Hindu forces' led by Arya Samaj activists has been immortalized in the words of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, an eminent Sikh scholar, who proclaimed through a vernacular tract- "Ham Hindu Nahin" ("We are not Hindus"). It was these three words that added to what was essentially the basis of the Singh Sabha Movement, aimed at refining, sharpening and crystallizing the homogenous Sikh identity.¹³³ The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed a remarkable resurgence among the Sikhs in the Punjab. Their numbers shot up from less than two million in 1881 to more than four million in 1931. The bulk of the Sikh population was identified as 'Singhs', who generally claimed to have a distinct and independent religious identity. Consequently, Sikh identity for most Sikh leaders became the basis of Sikh politics. This resurgence is seen as a revival, a re-formation or a rupture in relation to the earlier Sikh tradition. Distinct and separate identity was, in part, based on a separate religious orientation derived from respect for the teachings of Sikh Gurus and from the set of social institutions and ritual practices that had grown up around the community.¹³⁴

The question of Sikh identity is highly centred in the evolution of Sikh psyche during the community's decline, which led to searching of ways for its resurgence. It was influential

131 Figures as given in Punjab Census Report 1868, Punjab Census Report 1891. See, Ethne K. Marengo (1974), *The Transformation of the Sikh Society*, Hi Pi Press, Portland, pp.108-109.

132 Figures as per Punjab Census Report 1911. See, Joginder Singh (2002), "Mardum Shumari ate Sikh" in J.S. Grewal & Indu Banga (eds) *Khalsa Itihaas ate Vichaardhara*, (in Punjabi) published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p.157

133 Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition) , *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh* , Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930), pp. 3-12. J.S. Grewal (1999), "Nabha's Ham Hindu Nahin : A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, PP. 231-246.

134 Pashaura Singh (2004), "Sikh Identity in the Light of History: A Dynamic Perspective", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 78-95. Paramjit S. Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity and Nationhood - The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 84-89.

politico-religious role of Singh Sabha Movement, Chief Khalsa Diwan and Tat Khalsa that brought the Sikhs in confrontation with the Arya Samaj and eventually to conflictual assertion of their distinct identity. It was the principle focus and emphasis of these Sikh organizations on the propagation of Sikh religion and cultivation of Sikh tradition that gave rise to the new consciousness and awareness of Sikh identity.¹³⁵

The symbol of Sikhs as being a ruling race and a great courageous fighting force went deep in the Sikh minds.¹³⁶ The institutions of Dal Khalsa, Sarbat Khalsa and Gurmata became symbols of great emotional appeal that inspired the Sikh community to behave as one coherent body. Periods of particular difficulty have been experienced during the waning of the original religious impulse, the oppression of the early eighteenth century, the anarchy of the mid and later eighteenth century, the confused years which followed the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, and the twentieth-century Diaspora. All of these have raised acute problems of identity and cohesion produced distinctive solutions with varying degree of success.¹³⁷

Sikh Community in Minority Fold

Throughout most of their history, the Sikhs have lived as a minority community within the governing ambit of a non-Sikh superordinate political authority. During their first 250 or so years, Sikhs were part of the Mughal State and its subdivisions. From 1849 to 1947, they were governed by the British. Since 1947, Sikhs have been citizens of the Republic of India and the successive territorial incarnations of the Punjab have been constituent components of the sovereign Indian state. The achievement of a Punjabi Suba in 1966 did provide the Sikhs with a State within the Republic of India, wherein they formed the majority of the population.¹³⁸

135 Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries – Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, pp. 88-97. Shinder Purewal (2000), *Sikh Ethno-Nationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 10-24. Parmjit S. Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity and Nationhood - The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 88-95.

136 Richard G. Fox (1985), *Lions of the Punjab : Culture in the Making*, published by University of California Press, Berkeley and California , pp. 79-93

137 Gopal Singh (1994), *Politics of Sikh Homeland, 1940-1990*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi pp. 41-44. Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 22-25. Also see, Harbans Singh Bhatia & Shri Ram Bakshi (1999), *Political Ideology of The Sikhs*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 40-52.

138 Even during the brief period extending from the later eighteenth century to the conclusion of the First Anglo-Sikh War when the Sikhs of the Punjab lived in a sovereign state whose rulers were Sikhs, they remained a numerical minority: a fact Maharaja Ranjit Singh fully understood when he ruled in a fashion designed to retain the support of many non-Sikhs among the population of the wider Punjab he came to control. See, Dalip Singh (1981), *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, Macmillan Publications, New Delhi, pp.

As the Sikhs were trying to establish their separate and distinct identity, the new institutions and leadership emerged among them to reform and revitalize their community. The Sikhs pondered over their roots, for it was only in the defining and identifying their roots and identity that they could have hand in determining their future. With the fresh awareness of identity on the basis of religion, the Sikhs gradually became conscious of their religious, social and political delimitations. The political identity and special preference to the Sikh community was accrued in the Government of India act of 1919. The Sikhs were identified as minorities based on population & geographical factor. This Sikh movement had the special flavour of communalism as it was associated with Gurudwara Reform Movement or Akali Movement. The Cabinet Mission Plan in May 1946 recognized Sikhs as major minority in India.¹³⁹ In independent India, under the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992, the Sikhs have been notified as one of the minority communities of India.¹⁴⁰

Gradually, the Sikh religion came to be recognized as distinct and separate from Hinduism and religious identities were taken to be exclusive. The representatives of the Sikh community reacted with anger when the Constitution of India (in 1950) declared the Sikh religion as a sect of Hinduism and failed to establish a separate personal law for the Sikhs. After the denial of constitutional safeguards, the Akali leadership waged political struggle for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State which due to the intransigence of Punjabi-speaking Hindus became a struggle for Sikh majority area.¹⁴¹ The leadership could not put up a united struggle as one group led by Sant Fateh Singh diluted the demand by couching it in cultural terms. Understandably, this group gained wider acceptability with the help of Congress leadership of the time. In 1966, the Punjabi Suba became a reality but with a cultural orientation.¹⁴²

23-31. Also see, Ajmer Singh (2007), *Vihvin Sadi Di Sikh Rajniti* (in Punjabi), Printwell Publishers, Amritsar, pp. 11--114

139 Sukhmani Bal Riar (2006), *The Politics of the Sikhs, 1940-47*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 103-106.

Baldev Raj Nayar (1966), *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 91-94.

140 See, Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. Also see, Zoya Hassan (2007), "Defining India's minorities", *The Hindu*, July 14, 2007, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/Defining-Indias-quos-minorities/article14794192.ece>, accessed on 23/06/2015. Information also available at official website of National Commission for Minorities, i.e. <http://ncm.nic.in/>.

141 Goplal Krishan Lamba (1999), *Dynamics of Punjabi Suba Movement*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 61-74. Gurmit Singh (1989), *History of Sikh Struggles*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 115-118. Also see, Gian Singh Sandhu (1985), "The Roots of the Problem", in Amrik Singh (ed.), *Punjab in Indian Politics - Issues and Trends*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, pp.65-66.

142 Baldev Raj Nayar in his work titled - 'Minority Politics in Punjab' discusses Sikh politics since independence and focuses on Punjabi Suba Movement. The author dwells on the fact that great part of Punjab politics is shaped by minority and its campaign. At macro level, the study deals with the problem of what is referred to as "nation building" in the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa. In its

Though Sikhs are present in most of the states of India and in number of countries across the globe, yet their maximum concentration is in the Indian Punjab. As per the figures of 2011 census, India has Sikh population of 2.08 crores which is only 1.72% of the total population of the country.¹⁴³ Out of the total Sikhs in India, nearly 76 per cent of the Sikhs reside in Punjab.¹⁴⁴ Followed by nearly 57.69 per cent of the state's population, Sikhism is the dominant religion in Punjab, and also the only state in India where the Sikhs are in majority.¹⁴⁵ The Sikhs are the third largest religious community in India next to Muslims and Christians. The proportion of the Sikhs in the total population of India increased from 1.89 per cent in 1971 to 1.97 per cent in 1981. Thereafter it has been declining. It was 1.94 per cent in 1991, 1.87 per cent in 2001 and 1.72 percent as per the figures of 2011 Census of India.¹⁴⁶

Minority status and ensuing vulnerability intensified for the Sikhs the significance of the political arena and the relationships between them and the governing authorities.

attempt to the question of nation-building process in India, the author focuses on two major aspects. At micro level, the author seeks to understand the basis and dynamics of the demand for the formation of a new state out of the territory of Punjab prior to 1966. Baldev Raj Nayyar focuses on the nature and role of Sikh minority community in general and its leadership in particular. The study explains and highlights that how the demand for the independent Sikh state (the minority community) has dominated the direction and course of political activities in Punjab. See Baldev Raj Nayyar (1966), *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, pp.57-79. For various perspectives on minority based politics, also see, Moin Shakir (1980) *Politics of minorities: Some Perspectives*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, pp. 35-38.

143 "Sikh Religion Census 2011", available at <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/4-sikhism.html>, 23q, accessed on 21/07/2017. Also see, "India has 79.8% Hindus, 14.2% Muslims, says 2011 census data on religion", *First Post*, August 26, 2015, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/india/india-has-79-8-percent-hindus-14-2-percent-muslims-2011-census-data-on-religion-2407708.html>, accessed on 21/07/2017. "India's religions by numbers", *The Hindu*, August 26, 2015, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/religious-communities-census-2011-what-the-numbers-say/article7582284.ece>, accessed on 22/07/2017.

144 Of the total population of the states: Haryana, Delhi, and Chandigarh - 4.91%, 3.40 %, 13.11% are the Sikhs. Apart from this Uttarakhand constitute o 2.34 per cent , Jammu and Kashmir constitute of 1.87 percent and Rajasthan consists of 1.27 percent of Sikhs out of their total population. Figures as per 2011 census of India. See, "Punjab Data", available at <http://www.punjabdata.com/Sikh-Population-In-India.aspx>, accessed on 25/07/2017. "India's religions by numbers", *The Hindu*, August 26, 2015, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/religious-communities-census-2011-what-the-numbers-say/article7582284.ece>, accessed on 22/07/2017. Also see, "Sikh Religion Census 2011", available at <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/4-sikhism.html>, accessed on 23 07/2017

145 Figures as per 2011 Government of India Census. See, "Sikh Religion Census 2011", <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/4-sikhism.html>, available at 23. 07/2017. "India's religions by numbers", *The Hindu*, August 26, 2015, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/religious-communities-census-2011-what-the-numbers-say/article7582284.ece>, accessed on 22/07/2017.

146 Ranjit Singh Ghuman (2012), "The Sikh Community in Indian Punjab: Some Socio-Economic Challenges", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 87-88. Kuljit Bains (2015), "Why Sikhs ought to be happy, not worried", *The Tribune*, Sept. 1, 2015, available <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/sunday-special/perspective/why-sikhs-ought-to-be-happy-not-worried/126229.html>, accessed on 22/07/2017. Also see, "Census 2011: %age of Sikhs drops in Punjab; migration to blame", *The Times of India*, August 27, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Census-2011-age-of-Sikhs-drops-in-Punjab-migration-to-blame/articleshow/48689317.cms>, accessed on 21/04/2016.

Conversely, the Sikhs like other minority communities in South Asia and elsewhere were often of special interest to those in governing authority.¹⁴⁷ Geography alone was enough to ensure a special place for the Sikhs in the thinking of India's ruling class. Thus, the continuities and changes to the Sikh identity have also involved complex interactions with other communities and crucially with the governing authorities.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, in the late twentieth century, events in India and within the Sikh community, and the widely-propagated ideology of nationalism led some Sikhs to consider themselves as a nation and to demand an independent state of Khalistan.¹⁴⁹ Their sense of persecution as a religious minority, self-sacrifice, and militancy has roots in the historical—structural conditions of the origin and evolution of the Sikh religion. Few specific struggles and events such as the Gurdwara Reform Movement, the partition of Punjab in 1947, Operation Blue Star, and militant violence of 1980's and 1990's¹⁵⁰ have only contributed to and reinforced their sense of persecution as a religious and political minority. These events to a large extent are also responsible for Sikh demands for autonomy and the resort to militant means to secure these demands.¹⁵¹

Existence as a minority community has been a fundamental continuity in the history of the Sikhs and a central factor in the formation and continual reformulation of the Sikh

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- 147 Inis. L. Claude (1955), *National Minorities: An International Problem*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp.16-21
- 148 Ian J. Kerr (1999), "Sikhs and State: Troublesome Relationship and a Fundamental Continuity with Particular Reference to the Period 1849-1919", in Pashaura Singh & N.G. Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 147-74. Joginder Singh (1997), *The Sikh Resurgence*, published by National Book Organization, New Delhi, pp. 47-59.
- 149 To study historical origin of the Sikh demand of 'Khalistan', see, Sukhmani Riar (1996), "Khalistan: The Origin of the Demand and its Pursuit Prior to Independence 1940-45", in Pritam Singh and Shinder S. Thandi (eds.), *Globalisation and the Region: Explorations in Punjabi Identity*, published by Association for Punjab Studies, Coventry (UK), pp. 233-244. Ghani Jafar (1988), *The Sikh Volcano*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp.155-168. Also see, Gurmit Singh (1991), *History of Sikh Struggles*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 174-187
- 150 Sikh Militant Movement in Punjab was based on identity crisis of Sikhs and on the idea of a theocratic state. The violent militant movement entered a dangerous phase after operation Blue Star and 1984 anti Sikh riots. See, Joyce Pettigrew (1985), *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerrilla Violence*, published by Zed Books Ltd, London, pp. 30 -46 . Ambrose Pinto S.J. (2002), "Minorities: An Insecure Existence in India", in Akhtar Majeed (ed.), *Nation and Minorities –India's Plural Society and its Constituents*, published by Centre for Federal Studies, Hamdard University, New Delhi, pp. 102-106
- 151 Birbal Nath in his book titled as "The Undisclosed Punjab – India Besieged by Terror", provides detailed explanation of policies, strategies and events that led to the era of militancy and violence in Punjab. The author who is retired Director General of Police, highlights the role the main agents of Sikh fundamentalism and explains how religion became the significant ideological source of movement for state autonomy and militancy. This work describes the personalities, who fashioned the era, and the policies which spelt disaster. Birbal Nath presents the admixture of religion and politics as crucial factor that put the land of Punjab on fire. See, Birbal Nath (2008), *The Undisclosed Punjab – India Besieged by Terror*, Manas Publications, New Delhi, pp. 94-99, 117-136, 197-202. Also see, Paramjit Singh Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity and Nationhood –The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 94-98.

identity. Democratic regimes with a focus on the rights of the individual citizen often have provided a more uncertain context for the protection and/or advancement of community-based rights and identities. The Sikhs have experienced various diverse possibilities and their situational responses usually have been multiple in character since members of the *Panth*¹⁵² rarely acted in locked concert, due to which Sikh identity have remained under the continuous process of shaping and reshaping.¹⁵³ The course of Sikh politics has not been an isolated phenomenon but its responses and reactions were constantly influenced by the Government policy, the growing national movement, and by the very plural nature of the Indian society. The Sikh community has constantly been involved in the process of renewal and re-definition. In fact, the question – “Who is a Sikh?”- occupies much of the attention in the discussions among the various Sikh religious and political networks, although the debate frequently becomes acrimonious. Each generation of Sikhs has responded to this question in the light of new historical situation and to address the larger issues of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.¹⁵⁴

Sikhs: The Demographic Aspect

The Sikhs in India constitute nearly 2 percent of the population (though the rigidly orthodox among them do not consider other sects believing in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus *Nirankaris, Namdharis, Radasoamis* - as Genuine Sikhs) but their role in Punjab particularly after independence has attracted considerable attention and focus. Despite their small size, the Sikhs constitute the majority population in the Indian province of Punjab (nearly 58%). The Sikhs, however, are spread all over India and world, and are among the most prosperous

152 *Panth* or *Guru Panth* means -“Guru’s path” or way. It refers to the global Sikh community. Today it is a term used commonly to describe the worldwide Sikh community. Historical evolution of ‘Sikh Panth’ explained and documented in - W.H. McLeod (2004), *Sikhs and Sikhism: Comprising Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, Early Sikh Tradition, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, Who is a Sikh?*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.2-22. See also J.S. Grewal (2011), *Recent Debates in Sikh Studies-An Assessment*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, pp.118-127.

153 Natasha Behl (2012), “Sikh Minority Identity Formation”, in Rowena Robinson (ed.) *Minority Studies*, Oxford University, Press, New Delhi, pp. 251-260. Paramjit Singh Judge (2004), “Politics of Sikh Identity and Its Fundamentalist Assertion”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, Issue No. 35, 28 Aug, 2004, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2004/35/special-articles/politics-sikh-identity-and-its-fundamentalist-assertion.html>, accessed on 21/06/2106.

154 W.H. McLeod in his book titled - “Who is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity”, surveys the history of the Sikh community, showing how various set of circumstances influenced the criteria by which people have been identified. McLeod argues that according to one belief, Sikhism is the complete acceptance of the teachings of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Thus as per this tradition, a true Sikh must be of the Khalsa order, yet there are many who belong to families with a *Khalsa* heritage but no longer observe the tradition in its full form and spirit. On the other side, McLeod referring to ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’, argues that there are many others who regard themselves as ‘Sikhs’ but do not follow the Khalsa code of conduct. The author while examining such discrepancies and disagreements offers a new discussion and analysis of who and what defines a ‘Sikh’. See, W.H. McLeod (1989), *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity*, published by Clarendon Press, Oxford.

communities in the country.¹⁵⁵ While the Sikhs in their recent history have tended to treat Punjab as their homeland, they are settled all across northern India particularly in the urban centres of the vast Gangetic plains.¹⁵⁶ The Majha region of Punjab is considered as the ‘cradle of Sikhism’. Dotted with cities founded by the Sikh Gurus, by major Sikh shrines and innumerable pilgrimage centres associated with both the Gurus and their disciples, the middle areas of the region are a constant reminder of the Sikh presence. It is not surprising that many of the important socio-political movements associated with Sikhs originated from the Majha region of Punjab.¹⁵⁷

Unlike the Muslims and Hindus, Sikh identification with Punjab is much stronger for various historical and demographic reasons. Apart from their being demographically concentrated in the region in large numbers, Punjab is also the land of the Sikh faith’s origin. With the exception of a few small groups (and unlike most other religious communities), almost the entire population of the Sikhs has its origin in this region, the contemporary Indian State of Punjab and Punjab province in Pakistan. It was here that the Sikh movement started and was able to gain a strong momentum and following. In fact, a large majority of the Sikhs who live outside Punjab are migrants either from western Punjab at the time of partition or later from Indian Punjab.¹⁵⁸

In the post-partition scenario, the Sikhs faced diverse set of circumstances and challenges. They demanded a new state of Punjab which would essentially be a Sikh majority region.¹⁵⁹ The influence of communalized Hindu elite over the Hindu Punjabi population of

155 Surinder S. Jodhka (2010), “Sikhs Today: Development, Disparity and Difference”, in Gurpreet Mahajan & Surinder S. Jodhka (eds.), *Religion, Community and Development – Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*, Routledge, pp. 175-182. Also see, Bhupinder Singh (2010), *Punjab Politics – Retrospect and Prospect*, Read-worthy Publications, New Delhi, 27-30.

156 According to the 1868 census (the second official enumeration under British administration), Sikhs were a minority everywhere in the province, numbered over nine million (5 per cent), and Hindus around six million (22 per cent). The total population of the province was over seventeen million. The bulk of the Sikh population was concentrated in what is often described as the real Punjab or central Punjab. For comprehensive historical evolution, demographic and geographical aspects related to Sikh Community, see, J.S. Grewal (1990), *The New Cambridge History of India : The Sikhs of the Punjab*, published by, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), pp. 1-9, 205-218. Also see J.S. Grewal (1988), “Legacies of The Sikh Past for the Twentieth Century”, in T. O’Connell et al. (eds.), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, published by Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, pp. 18-31.

157 Gopal Singh (1994), *Politics of Sikh Homeland, 1940-1990*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, pp. 65-67. Subrata Banerjee (2008), *Punjab in the 20th Century: The Crucial Years*, Shubhi Publications, New Delhi, pp. 227-229.

158 J.S. Grewal (1990), *The Sikhs of Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) , pp. 181-183, 205-209. Gurinder Singh Mann (2005), *Sikhism Religions of the World*, published by Prentice Hall, New Jersey, pp. 56-65.

159 Ajit Singh Sarhadi (1999), *Punjabi Sube di Gatha* (in Punjabi), Lokgeet Parkashan, Sirhind, pp.33- 47. Also see, Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (2008), *Kurbanian Te Ghadarian Da Daur* (in Punjabi), published by Sikh University Press, Wareme, Belgium, pp. 1121-1127

Punjab and their decision to enumerate themselves as a Hindi-speaking population only helped the Sikh political elites in strengthening their case for a separate Punjabi Suba within the linguistic framework that the Indian State had accepted for the reorganization of the provinces. After some resistance from the Central Government, Indian Punjab was reorganized once again in 1966, a state where the Sikhs emerged as a majority religious population.¹⁶⁰

The Sikhs are unique group of people, both on doctrinal and physical basis of their identity. The religion, beliefs, traditions and collective identity of Sikhs are relatively new in the larger scheme of world history. With their total population very small (estimates ranging between 18 to 30 million people worldwide), still the Sikhs have managed to make a prominent mark at global level. The Sikhs have done relatively well in improving their socio-economic conditions after India achieved independence in 1947.¹⁶¹ The changing composition of Sikhs both in terms of number and socio-economic and cultural changes has crucial implications on identity of the Sikhs. From the time of foundation of Sikh faith by Guru Nanak Dev until the establishment of Khalsa order by Guru Gobind Singh, and even today, Sikh identity has been in process of crystallization and in act of separating itself from Hindu culture.¹⁶²

The Sikh identity conveys the essence of Sikhism in everyday living which encompasses the whole life system of a Sikh. Sikhism is a scientific way of life and the Sikhs comprised a distinct community of spiritual and social democracy. Although a small minority in its homeland, the Sikhs have played a significant role in the socio-cultural, economic and political developments and the struggle for Independence Movement in the history of India. Even their contribution in the foreign lands where they migrated for adventures and in quest

160 A.S. Narang (1986) , *Punjab Politics in National Perspective*, Gitanjali Publications, New Delhi, pp. 31-34. For detailed analytical discussion on Punjabi Suba Movement, see, Gopal Krishan Lamba (1999), *Dynamics of Punjabi Suba Movement*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 39- 58. For history and politics of the demand for a separate state Sikh minority community, see, Gopal Singh (1994), *Politics of Sikh Homeland, 1940-1990*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi pp. 80-86.

161 The Sikhs have done well in improving their social and economic conditions after India achieved independence in 1947. There are two factors that have contributed significantly towards their economic prosperity. One, the green revolution – a phenomenon of high agricultural productivity - occurred in Punjab in the second half of the 1960s. Since a majority of the Sikh lived in rural areas among whom most of them are peasants, they benefitted from the agrarian change. The other important factor is large scale migration to Gulf countries, Europe, North America, Australia, etc. See, Gopal Singh (1991), “Green Revolution, Punjab Economy and Punjab Crisis”, in B.S. Hansra and A.N. Shukla (eds.), *Social, Economic and Political implications of the Green Revolution*, Classic Publishing Company, New Delhi, pp. 201- 205. Also see Shinder Purewal (2000), *Sikh Ethno-nationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 61-64.

162 Pashaura Singh (2004), “Sikh Identity in the Light of History”, in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford, New Delhi, pp. 77-92. Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh Identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 17-28.

of bread earning is dazzlingly spectacular. The Sikhs stand apart from others not only in their outward physical appearance but also in their ideals, institution, traditions, outlook and their ideas regarding the nature of God, universe, society and the goal of human life. Sikhs have made a distinctive mark in all fields of life, disproportionately to their small numerical strength. They have been conspicuous for their social dynamism, chivalry, valour and a spirit of enterprise.¹⁶³

Sikhs in Diaspora

The Sikh Diaspora has maintained a solid connection both with their homeland of Punjab and with their religion since the first migrants left the Indian subcontinent in the 19th century till the present day through economic and emotional support. The economic consequences of the agrarian transformation in Punjab, and the violence of the 1980s and early 1990s,¹⁶⁴ led to a new wave of migrants and political refugees seeking domicile in United Kingdom, Canada, United States of America, Europe, New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, migration of the Sikh labour class to the Gulf countries also increased especially from the less well-off or well-connected sectors of the community.¹⁶⁶ The unique history and migration of the Sikh Diaspora out of the Indian subcontinent provided a fertile ground for developing close connections with Punjab. This connection was strengthened and boosted by the diaspora's strong desire to preserve their distinct identity in foreign lands and their familial roots in Punjab.¹⁶⁷

Diaspora's involvement in Punjab's political affairs was minimal, if not non-existent before the 1980s; its subsequent political mobilization resulted from the assault on the Golden Temple under Operation Blue Star¹⁶⁸ in June 1984, and the backlash of violence

163 Sikhs have earned name and fame in various fields. The Sikhs as individually and also collectively have made their impact in the fields of Commerce, Industry, Sports, Defense, Business, Literature, Journalism and Fine Arts. See, Surinder Singh Jodhka (2010), "Sikhs Today: Development, Disparity and Difference", in Gurpreet Mahajan & Surinder S. Jodhka (eds.), *Religion, Community and Development – Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*, Routledge, New Delhi. Giorgio Shani (2008), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, Routledge, London, pp.80- 88. Also see, Ranjit Singh Ghuman (2012), "The Sikh Community in Indian Punjab: Some Socio-Economic Challenges", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 87-88.

164 Jugdeep S. Chima (2010), *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India – Political Leadership and Ethno-nationalist Movements*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp. 127-134,182-188.

165 The desire to go to foreign lands for better economic opportunities continues to be strong among the Sikhs. They can be seen in almost every part of the globe and in every sphere of economic life. They have been a globally mobile community.

166 Verne A. Dusenbery (2008), *Sikhs At Large – Religion, Culture, and Politics in Global Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 34-35, 314-315

167 Darshan Singh Tatla, (1999), *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*. UCL Press, London. Giorgio Shani (2008), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, Routledge, London, pp. 73- 78, 94-96.

168 Operation Blue Star was seen by diaspora Sikhs as an invasion of the Golden Temple and an attack upon the entire Sikh community, sending a major shockwave throughout the Diaspora. The tragic event of

against the Sikh community after the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in October 1984.¹⁶⁹ The Diaspora's role in the Sikh separatist movement was significant in several ways but most importantly because it quickly internationalized an internal Indian conflict – creating multiple battlefronts for the Indian Government in different countries of the world.¹⁷⁰ Sikhs abroad were not much interested in Punjab's political events as in the preservation of their identity and religion.¹⁷¹

The turmoil in Punjab's political and religious life in the late 1980's took hold among Sikhs in North America and United Kingdom, and a wave of activism swept away old elites, destabilized Gurdwara politics, and raised urgent calls of "Sikhism in danger".¹⁷² From the earliest days of Sikh migration, the diaspora community have used Gurdwaras to nurture their faith but also to provide social contacts and survival mechanisms in foreign societies. The fact that Gurdwaras were the primary social institutions of the diaspora by the 1980's; it made them the perfect political platform from which to seek their involvement in the separatist movement.¹⁷³ Much due to the actions of the Sikhs in North America, Sikhism is changing from a religion of the Punjab to an international religion. Second, Sikhism is becoming legitimized in the West as a valid belief system. One result is due to the efforts of Sikhs in the United States to provide financial backing for notable universities like the University of Michigan, the University of Toronto and the University of British Columbia to

Operation Blue Star at Golden Temple narrated in R.K. Mihsra (1984), "Operation Blue Star", in V.D. Chopra et al, *Agony of Punjab*, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 28-36.

169 Khushwant Singh in his classic work "My Bleeding Punjab", narrates the sequence of events that led to the anti Sikh riots of 1984, and also talks about the measures taken after it. The book contains excerpts from authors personal diary, perceptions, observations and personal beliefs of the writer about the issue. This work indeed is the tragic story of the troubled and terror-torn Sikh community in decade of 1980's. This work truly reflects personal views of the author on Punjab politics and the mess made by narrow-minded Akali leaders on one side, and the deliberately mischievous political designs of the Central Government on the other. This exceptional work is rare unbiased account of the proceedings of that time. See, Khuswant Singh (1992), *My Bleeding Punjab*, UBS Publishers, New Delhi.

170 The attachment was almost entirely emotional and nostalgic; in fact, the number of Diaspora Sikhs taking active interest in Punjab affairs prior to Operation Blue Star was extremely low. They pursued the media, made headlines and appealed to international organizations, and thus brought the Punjab conflict to international attention in an attempt to pressure the Indian Government and establish their own independent state.

171 Parkash Singh Jammu (2001), *Globalisation and Punjab: Impact on Economy, Polity, and Culture*, published by Punjab Academy of Social Sciences, Language, and Culture, Jalandhar, pp. 32- 54

172 In a definitive and insightful study, Darshan Singh Tatla has provided a clear record of the stages of Sikh political mobilization in the Diaspora. Demonstrating that specific individuals and organizations already were planting the seeds for a Sikh hornet and, he then traces the instantaneous repercussions of Operation Blue Star. Many Sikhs quit cutting their hair, joined for the first time in mass protests, and provided resources for militant organizations both in the Punjab and abroad. See, Darshan Singh Tatla, (1999), *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*. UCL Press, London.

173 The fact that Gurdwaras were the primary social institutions of the Diaspora by the 1980s, it made them the perfect political platform from which to seek their involvement in the separatist movement. See, G.S. Basran & B. Singh Bolaria (2003), *The Sikhs in Canada - Migration, Race, Class and Gender*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 107-112, 214-217.

establish Sikh Studies programs. This subjugated Sikh documents, history and beliefs to Western academic scrutiny.¹⁷⁴

Thus Sikhism is becoming regenerated from a sect of South Asia's Punjab to an internationally legitimized belief system that is part of the curriculum of some major universities around the globe, especially in North America.¹⁷⁵ The global dispersion to Sikhs from Punjab and perhaps more significantly the unprecedented mass conversions of non-Punjabi westerners to Sikhism introduced Sikhs and Sikh philosophy to new audiences, and ultimately made Sikh religion global both in its spread and in appeal. The Diaspora Sikhs have responded to diverse issues and challenges from their own particular situation in different cultural and political contexts. In fact, they rediscover their identity in cross-cultural encounters as well as through their interaction with other religious and ethnic communities. It is no wonder that they are starting to provoke fresh responses to the notions of identity and authority in the postmodern world.¹⁷⁶

Sikhs have struggled with questions of identity for over five centuries.¹⁷⁷ Internal and external pressures have helped frame their questions and answers. Often the context or more

174 See, J.S. Grewal (1998), *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 23-33, 82-94, 119-129. See also Arvind- Pal Singh Mandair (2001), "Thinking Differently about Religion and History; Issues for Sikh Studies", in Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh & Arvind-pal Singh Mandair (eds.), *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, published by Curzon Press, Surrey, UK, pp. 47-55.

175 Sikhism got established in North America by its becoming part of the University curriculum and also numerous members of the wider white society converted to it. Sikhism transformed from a local religion of the Punjab, and maybe India, to an internationally recognized belief system.

176 Shinder S. Thandi (2012), "Migration and Comparative Experiences of Sikhs in Europe : Reflections on Issues of Cultural Transmission and Identity", in Knut A. Jacobson & Kristina Myrvold (eds.), *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, published by Bloomsbury, London, pp. 28-31. Verne A. Dusenbery (1989), "Introduction: A Century of Sikhs beyond Punjab," in N.G Barrier & Verne Dusenbery (eds.), *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and the Experience beyond Punjab*, Chanakya Publications, Delhi, pp. 4-26.

177 Sikh identity has been the subject of serious historical research and some significant literature has been written on it. Few such works are mentioned here: Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition) , *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh* , Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930). Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1983), *The Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine: Sikhism in the Perspective of Modern Thought*, Bahri Publications, New Delhi. Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Dipankar Gupta (1996), *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New Delh. J.S. Grewal (1997), *Historical Perspectives on Sikh Identity*, Punjabi University, Patiala. W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh (1999), *Sikhism – Beliefs and Practices*, Adarsh Books, New Delhi. J.S. Ahluwalia (1999), *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, Publication Bureau- Panjabi University, Patiala. Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case Study of Punjab*, Macmillan, London. Pashaura Singh & N.Gerald Barrier (eds.) (2001), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi. W.H. McLeod (2002) *Who Is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity*, Oxford University Press, New York. (2003), McLeod (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa – A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs Ideology, Institutions and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. James Massey (2010), *A Contemporary Look at the Sikh Religion: Essays on Scripture, Identity, Creation, Spirituality, Charity and Interfaith Dialogue*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi.

likely the crisis surrounding Sikhs has sparked a sense of urgency and a drive towards differentiating doctrine, ritual and way of life. The challenges of British colonial rule, missionary conversions, the militancy surrounding the 1920s Gurdwara Reform Act, the political repercussions of partition in 1947, and finally struggles against the Central Government after Operation Bluestar and the militant Sikh response- all have forced Sikhs in Punjab and diaspora to rethink assumptions and relationships within the community and outside.¹⁷⁸ The political battles have been fought for at least a century, which reflect continuing insecurity over the perennial minority status of Sikhs, and their attempts to deal with an increasingly complex world both at home in Punjab and abroad. The role of key institutions and their leaders, their efforts to evolve as legitimate spokesman for Sikhs, and control and management of Sikh shrines are the complex issues and disputes concerning the authority among Sikhs¹⁷⁹.

Review of Literature

The Sikhs have been a well researched community. Initially, it was the colonial administrators who were the first to translate sacred Sikh scriptures into English language. Later, the theologians and historians of the contemporary academia too have produced a great deal of literature on Sikh community. Scholarly attention from western academics especially the works of W. H. McLeod (although his works have been received very critically in some Sikh quarters),¹⁸⁰ contributions of Norman Gerald Barrier, Mark Juergensmeyer, W. Owen Cole and others made Sikh religion and identity as a legitimate topic of intellectual discussion and research. With growing consolidation of the Sikh community in Diaspora and the

178 Sikh Struggles and militant movements have been well analyzed and documented by Jagjit Singh (1986) "Militarization of Sikh Movement", in Gurdev Singh (ed.), *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications, Patiala, pp. 325-338. Gurmit Singh (1991), *History of Sikh Struggles*, Atlantic Publications, New Delhi. Gopal Singh ed.) (1994), *Punjab Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi. Parmjit S. Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity and Nationhood: The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp.75-79. Gurdev Grewal (2006), *The Searching Eye: An Insider Look at the Punjab Crisis*, Rupa Publications, New Delhi, pp.104-161.

179 The interaction of local Sikh and host cultures, and the rich variety of responses of Sikhs to new challenges outside India are reflected in numerous monographs and articles. Some issues are summarized in Arthur W. Helweg (1993), "The Sikh Diaspora and Sikh Studies", in John Stratton Hawley and Gurinder Singh Mann (eds.), *Studying The Sikhs: Issues for North America*, State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 69-82. Verne A. Dusenbery (2008), *Sikh At Large Religion, Culture and Politics in Global Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. James Marsey (2010), *A Contemporary Look at Sikh Religion: Essays on Scripture, Identity, Creation, Spirituality, Charity and Interfaith Dialogue*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi. N. Gerald Barrier (2011), "Sikhism in a Global Context : The Legacy of History and Contemporary Challenges", in Pashaura Singh (eds.) *Sikhism in Global Context*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Knut A. Jacobson & Kristina Myrvold (2011) (eds.), *Sikhs in Europe-Migration, Identities and Representations*, Ashgate, Surrey, England.

180 For detailed critical evaluation of W.H. McLeod's exposition of Sikh religion, history and scriptures, see, Trilochan Singh (1994), *Ernest Trumpp and W.H. McLeod As Scholars of Sikh History, Religion and Culture*, published by International Centre of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 152-168, 289-301.

sharpening of Sikh identity during the decade of 1980's, the need and support for research on the Sikh community has grown significantly.

This literature review is an attempt to map the major analytical positions that dominate the historical work produced within the sub-discipline of Sikh academic studies in the hope that both the common grounds and points of conflict within the field can be brought into stark relief. A lot of work has been done on the issue of Sikh identity and Sikh institutions from historical perspective. On the basis of central concepts (identity and institutions) and area of the study, i.e. Sikh identity and role of Sikh institutions, the relevant existing literature has been categorized in three broad sections: (i) **First category** include works that re-focus on individual-society issues in terms of identity-authority relationship. They provide comprehensive assessment of relationship between identity and activities of politico-religious institutions. This section also includes those works which broadly assess the relationship between institutional structures and religious identity. (ii) **Second category** includes significant works that provide historical account of formation and evolution of Sikh identity. The studies in this section also throw light on various issues and challenges that Sikhs have confronted at different periods of time. (iii) **Third category** includes studies that examine the role of Sikh politico-religious institutions in the deeply conflicted and contested past of Sikhs.

I

Studies by **Holzner** and **Robertson**¹⁸¹, **Guy Swanson**¹⁸² and **Rainer C. Baun**¹⁸³ focus on the interplay between authority and identity issues. **Holzner** and **Robertson** establish the theoretical framework between authority-identity relationship. Their work is magnificent attempt to penetrate into the grounds of this relation in conceptual terms. In this framework, term 'identity' has been conceptualized as presentation of actors both in internal and external relationship; similarly term 'authority' has been conceptualized as the mode of presentation of society and collective constituent units. The study documents authority issues as interconnected with differentiation of identities into both personal and collective aspects. Locating the authority between levels of social structure and culture, identity has been centred upon knowledge, assessment of positions, performances and attributes of social

181 Roland Robertson and Burkart Holzner (1980), "Identity and Authority: A Problem of Processes of Identification and Authorization", in Robertson & Holzner (eds.) *Identity and Authority – Explorations in the Theory of Society*, Basil Blackwell, England.

182 Guy Swanson (1980), "A Basis for Authority and Identity in the Post-Industrial Society", in Robertson & Holzner (eds.) *Identity and Authority – Explorations in the Theory of Society*, Basil Blackwell, England.

183 Rainer C. Baun (1980), "Authority and Identity: The Case for Evolutionary Invariance", in Robertson & Holzner (eds.) *Identity and Authority – Explorations in the Theory of Society*, Basil Blackwell, England.

objects. The study by Holzner and Roberson effectively argues that terms ‘identity’ and ‘authority’ are mutually implicative. The identification of the units is meaningless until studied in relation with conception of authority. The main objective of the study lies in presenting the analysis of identity-authority relationship through which individual-society issues and conflicts can be more fruitfully re-focused.

Guy Swanson’s work dwells upon the crisis in authority and identity. He argues that authority and identity grow up together and persuasive difficulties in one imply persuasive difficulties in the other. Swanson effectively argues that authority exists only in the context of identity. Similarly, identity cannot be established and maintained without the authority. The new styles of organization root authority in power of objectives to formulate collective action. This new basis of authority rests on a new and more general principle of societal integration; it constitutes a new stage of societal evolution. Swanson documents that appearance of any such stage entails major reformulation of religious understanding. In the post-industrial society, organizations and society as a whole, are providing a new basis for authority and are thereby recasting and forming a personal identity. Thus, this work describes new basis for authority and identity, especially for the sense of empowerment. Similarly, the article by **Rainer C. Baun** also effectively argues that the firm connection between identity and authority is inevitable, indissoluble and obvious.

The studies by **Bernstroof**¹⁸⁴, **Robinson**¹⁸⁵ and **Kothari**¹⁸⁶ provide comprehensive assessment of the relations between identity and the activities of political agents. These works are based on politics as central concern for maintaining and imposing identity system. **Bernstroof’s** study presents politics as the consolidation and elaboration of an identity system in which the allocation of opportunities is regulated. The author argues that without a common identity individuals cannot form a collective action- identity of a group which makes political action possible. He further extends his views that identities exist in system of relations- and an individual cannot be either the subject or the object of action without an identity which orients him towards others in action. Degner Bernstroof enlists three factors which translate identity into political action, namely- (a) experience of inequality (b) an event to serve as a spark , and (c) a leadership which channels a latent feeling into action and gives it organizational structure. The author through his study, effectively argues that political

184 Degner Bernstroof (1979), “Regional Nation; The Telangana Movement and Identity”, in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds.), *Political Identity in South Asia* , Curzon Press, London.

185 Francis Robinson (1979), “Islam and Muslim Separatism”, in Taylor and Yapp (eds.) *Political Identity in South Asia*, Curzon Press, London.

186 Rajni Kothari (1972), *Politics in India*, published by Orient Longman, New Delhi.

identity also has to be perceived both by a large number of inhabitants of the region and by the opponents of the manifestation of such an identity. Similarly, **Robinson** discusses the vitality of the role played by elite group in manipulating cultural symbols to create political identities.

Rajni Kothari's work titled "Politics in India" remains significant in highlighting the role of Government in reshaping of political identity. The study points out that new ethnic identity is not created; it's the old identity which is requested in political terms. Kothari further argues that once so stated these are able to accommodate one another through a normal process of bargaining, indeed by implication they are formed as bargaining counters.

Studies by **Stuart Hall**¹⁸⁷ and **Linda Martin Alcoff**¹⁸⁸ emphasize on the understanding of identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have strongly influenced the character of many populations and cultures. **Stuart Hall** argues that identities need to be understood as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies. Hall explains the emergence of identities as the result of play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion than they are the sign of identically naturally constituted unity. Stuart Hall documents that identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of how we have been represented and how we might represent ourselves. Similarly, **Linda Martin** discusses that identities need to be analyzed not only in their cultural location but also in relation to historical epoch. This work provides the causes of emerging importance of social identities and their most likely enduring political effects. The main aim of the author is to examine that how the identities arise and how they are transformed.

Michael Mc Bride¹⁸⁹, **Craig Van Gelder**¹⁹⁰ and **Edward Shils**¹⁹¹ primarily highlight that religious authority exists to coordinate social action. The authors discuss and examine the

187 Stuart Hall (1996), "Who needs Identity?", in Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Sage Publications, London.

188 Linda Martin Alcoff (2003), "Identities: Modern and Postmodern", in Linda Martin & Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Identities-Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd., USA.

189 Michael McBride (2013), "A Rational Choice Theory of Religious Authority", available at <http://www.webmeets.com/files/papers/IEA/2014/901/TheoryReligiousAuthority-2013-07-01.pdf>, accessed on 3/09/2014.

190 Craig Van Gelder (2007), "Defining the Issues Related to Power and Authority in Religious Leadership", *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 6, No.2, Fall 2007, available at: <http://arl.jrl.org/Volumes/VanGelder07.Pdf>, accessed on 29/08/2014.

191 Edward Shils (1971) "Tradition", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Apr., 1971, published by University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp.122-128, available at <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/178104?uid=2&uid=4&sid=21104328102001>, accessed on 14/09/014.

authoritativeness of religious leaders and teachings as having consequences for society as a whole by providing a source for shared values and social control. **Michael Mc Bride** effectively argues that social coordination is a fundamental aspect of religious life and applies his new rational theory to demonstrate its value. He demonstrates that how rituals create religious authority; the relationship between religious authority, organizational hierarchy, and how the theory creates complementarities between the two, sometimes contentious sides of the secularization debate.

Craig Van Gelder explains that in the authority- individual relations, the superordinate element is expected to control by orders and commands, warnings and prohibitions- the behavior of the subordinate element. Such expectations attach to relatively permanent social positions rather than to the character of individuals. The author highlights that authority exists when social actors agree about the identity of the device that has the right to direct action. Shils demonstrate that authority figures prominently in seminal analyses of religion either explicitly or implicitly. In either case, authority directs and coordinates action. He defines religious authority as the right to direct action within religious groups. **Edward Shils** associate religious authority with the conveying of other kinds of religious meaning. Religious symbols, objects, and ritual acts serve to communicate important ideas and reinforce and reshape the religious identity.

P.L. Berger and Luckman¹⁹², **P.J DiMaggio and Powell**¹⁹³ argue that identity is the core concept as well as a key focal point for empirical analysis in institutional theory. **Berger and Luckmann** present the process of institutionalization as strongly responsible for production of identities, both individual and organizational. These scholars document the production of individual and organizational identities as an outcome of institutional pressures in mature and merging fields, especially those characterized by multiple and conflicting logics. **P.J DiMaggio and Powell** conceptualizes identity not only as an outcome of institutional pressures but as the mechanism of institutional work by which institutions are established, maintained and transformed.

192 P.L. Berger & T. Luckmann (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Anchor Books, New York.

193 P.J. DiMaggio & Powell, W.W. (1983), "The iron cage revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Field.", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 147–160.

Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin and Linda Walton¹⁹⁴, and **M.A. Glynn**¹⁹⁵ argue that identity is constructed according to the interests of power. **Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin and Linda Walton** point out that where religions do not have a strong institutional structure, religious identity becomes an ambiguous phenomenon. Whether it is the Romans prosecuting Christians and then becoming defenders of an empire said to be rooted in Christianity, or Turks spreading Islam in the Balkans after having adopted it in the Middle East, this ongoing relationship is evident. These empires consolidated and justified their power through identity manipulation, and each redefined its subjects as it expanded through time and space. Thus, these studies highlight that the interaction between power and identity is nonlinear. **M.A. Glynn** convincingly asserts that recent interest in identity within institutional theory is not surprising for albeit the different analytic aims of each, identity and institutional theories both take into account the role of constructing organizations and organizational practices. Glynn explains that identity and institutions both take interest in issues of legitimacy, although on different levels of analysis.

Francis Robinson¹⁹⁶ and **Markha Valenta**¹⁹⁷ explain that the diminishing influence of Islamic clergies in centre of power particularly after the decline of Mughal Empire in India prompted them to launch an Islamic revival movement with the sole objective to re-establish the political authority of Muslims in Indian sub-continent. **Francis Robinson** highlights that the past two centuries have been a period of great creativity amongst South Asian Muslims. He argues that context of all the movements that emerged in South Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth century was in part that of a continuing process of Islamic institutionalization, their revival and reform, and in part that of the imposition of the colonial state. **Markha Valenta** argues that gradually these institutions underlined the need to adopt methods appropriate to the changed political environment. Power of institutional authority organizes and propels itself through notions of identity and is therefore, to an extent, defined by the cohesion of a people's collective identification.

194 Candice Goucher, Charles LeGuin, and Linda Walton (1998), "Religion and State: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam", *In the Balance: Themes in World History*, McGraw Hill, Boston, available at http://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/support/reading_7_1.pdf, accessed on 23/03/2015.

195 M.A. Glynn (2008), "Beyond Constraint: How Institutions Enable Identity", in: R. Greenwood et al. (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, Sage Publications, London, pp. 414–430.

196 Francis Robinson (1998), "Varieties of South Asian Islam", *Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations*, University of Warwick Coventry, Research Paper No.8, available at https://web.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CRER_RC/publications/pdfs/Research%20Papers%20in%20Ethnic%20Relations/RP%20No.8.pdf, accessed on 28/03/2015.

197 Markha Valenta (2012) "The Muslim as Victim, The Muslim as Agent: On Islam as a Category of Analysis", in Abdul Shaban (ed.), *Lives of Muslims in India: Politics, Exclusion and Violence*, Routledge, New Delhi, pp.35-65.

Arshad Alam¹⁹⁸ and **Ashis Nandy**¹⁹⁹ throw light on processes and strategies within religious institutions in North India through which ideological reproduction takes place. **Arshad Aslam** focuses on some key texts and debating forums that are important sites of ideological transmission and play a key role in constituting a particular religious identity. **Ashis Nandy** effectively argues that the modern state always prefers to deal with religious ideologies rather than with faiths. It is religion-as-ideology that prompted a significant proportion of the Punjabi-speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue, thus underlining the differences between Sikhism and Hinduism and sowing the seeds for the creation of a new minority.

II

The famous work titled “Ham Hindu Nahin”²⁰⁰ by **Kahan Singh Nabha** is a clear-cut declaration of Sikh identity registered by a Sikh scholar towards the close of the nineteenth century. The statement constitutes the basic dictum of the book which appeared under this challenging title in 1898. The book recalled the days of long-drawn polemic between Hindus and Sikhs. This unique study appeared in the form of a dialogue between a Hindu and a Sikh: the Hindu was asking questions which are answered by the Sikh. The bulk of the work consists largely of texts drawn mainly from the Sikh scriptures and presented as evidence that Khalsa faith and conduct differ from Hindu tradition to such an extent that Sikhism must be regarded as a separate religious system, distinct and autonomous in its own right. Pressing its claims vehemently and vigorously to a distinctly separate Sikh identity, the work concludes with a versified note by the author, describing characteristics of the ‘Khalsa Sikh’.

J.S. Grewal in his article, “Nabha’s Ham Hindu Nahin- A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity”,²⁰¹ examines how western religious paradigms and changes among Punjab religious groups, most notably Arya Samaj, set the stage for the creation of key work in Punjab’s intellectual and polemic history. The author while addressing the question as to why Kahan Singh’s clear statement of Sikh separateness was necessary, emphasizes the role of monolithic construct of Hinduism emerging from Arya-Samaj activities, and suggests how

198 Arshad Alam (2008), “The Enemy Within: Madrassas and Muslim Identity in North India”, in *Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 42 / Special Double Issue 2-3 / March 2008, pp. 605-610.

199 Ashis Nandy (1998), “The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance” in in Veena Das (ed.) *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.74- 79.

200 Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition) , *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh* , published by Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930).

201 J.S. Grewal (1999), “Nabha’s Ham Hindu Nahin : A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity”, in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi.

and why Kahan Singh Nabha attempted to show that Sikh identity required Sikhs to be a political community. The study also throws light on Chief Khalsa Diwan and Akalis in institutionalizing the Nabha's understanding of Sikh options and strategies.

In context to issue of Sikh identity, **McLeod** makes a major statement in his work titled- "Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity."²⁰² To explain the evolution of Sikh identity, McLeod takes into account the doctrines, institutions, rituals, the social character of the 'Sikh Panth', and the consciousness of a distinctive identity among the Sikhs. The substance of McLeod's argument finds that he appreciates the change brought about by the institution of the 'Khalsa' by which the identity of the 'Singh' became much more pronounced than that of the 'Sikh'. McLeod also points out that though the 'Khalsa identity' was the predominant Sikh identity in the early nineteenth century, the non-Khalsa Sikhs remained present throughout. **Pashaura Singh's**²⁰³ work is an extension to McLeod's analysis on the aspects of Sikh identity. His work deals with the question of Sikh identity by dividing Sikh history in evolutionary phases. Pashaura Singh defines the various concepts and institutions to explain the early Sikh Panth's identity. For him, *Gurmukh*, *Dharamsala*, continuity of *Gurgaddi*, *Kirtan*, *Langar* and *Gurmukhi* script are main flashes of Sikh identity. He argues that sense of distinct identity was marked by distinctive belief system, modes of worship and socio-religious institutions. In Pashaura Singh's view, the early Sikh identity was based upon peculiar doctrines, organizations and institutions, and social attitudes including the gumption of spiritual and temporal concerns.

Surinder Singh Kohli²⁰⁴ strongly criticizes the works of W.H. McLeod for taking up undesirable controversies. Providing relevant facts and explanation, the author alleges that definitions offered by W.H. McLeod regarding the identity of Sikhs and Sikh doctrines are misleading, unauthentic and sacrilegious, and must be condemned by all the Sikhs.²⁰⁵ According to Surinder Singh Kohli, W.H. McLeod by dividing the Sikh community into various categories, has created unwanted controversy concerning the religious identity of a Sikh. Surinder Singh Kohli argues that there are sects in all the major religions, for example, a Muslim can be a Shia, Sunni, Rafazi or Imam Shaft; a Christian can be a Catholic, Protestant or Puritan. Similarly, there can be different shades of Sikhs like - Udasis,

202 W.H. McLeod (1989), *Who is a Sikh? The Problem of Sikh Identity*, Oxford University Press, New York.

203 Pashaura Singh (2004), "Sikh Identity in the Light of History: A Dynamic Perspective", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

204 Surinder Singh Kohli (1994), *Real Sikhism*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi.

205 The views and perspectives of W.H. McLeod regarding the religious identity of a 'Sikh' are contained in his books titled as: (i) "Who is a Sikh?" and (ii) "The Sikhs: History, Religion and Society".

Nirmalas, Nirankaris, Namdharis etc. The author documents that apart from these dissimilarities, the Sikhs only have two major divisions i.e. - Keshadhari Sikhs and Sahajdhari Sikhs.

Daljeet Singh²⁰⁶ and **Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia's**²⁰⁷ approach to understand Sikh identity is based upon Sikh ideology and philosophy. **Daljeet Singh** enumerates some features of Sikh identity by distancing his views from McLeod. Basically, there is a difference between the methodological approach of Daljeet Singh and McLeod. McLeod prefer to do the study of events, facts and text as per historical method. On the other hand, for Daljeet Singh history is the part of faith. In his observation, Sikh identity is distinct primarily due to a radically distinct concept of God. His research is confined to dealing with the peripheral aspects of the phenomenon of Sikh identity which as a result causes his work to oversimplify this complex issue. For Daljeet Singh, distinct Sikh identity was not only fully formed in the time of the Gurus but it was also their creation, resulting from the ideas of Guru Nanak and the ideals, institutions, and actions based on them. **Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia** traces the philosophical issues and problems of Sikh identity. He locates that Sikhism is a synthesis of the sacred traditions. He discusses the fundamental concepts of Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh praxis e.g.- Sikh metaphysics, 'five Khands', Sikh polity, Sri Akal Takht, etc. He makes it clear that the creation of Khalsa was the major juncture of separate Sikh identity. J.S. Ahluwalia explains that the essence of the Sikh identity lies in the dual character of Sikhism which is not only other-worldly path of soul salvation but also a this-worldly ideology with socio-political concerns.

Verne A. Dusenbery,²⁰⁸ **Shinder Thandi**²⁰⁹ and **Darshan Singh Tatla**²¹⁰ switch our attention towards the Sikh Diaspora which is such an important context for the understanding of contemporary issues concerning Sikh identity, and set of choices and conditions faced by the Sikh elite in the Diaspora. **Verne A. Dusenbery's** study explores the challenges that Sikhs have faced over their five hundred- plus year history. He argues that Sikhs continue to grapple with an array of challenges over identity, authority, rights,

206 Daljeet Singh (1994), *Essentials of Sikhism*, Singh Brothers Publications, Amritsar.

207 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, (1983), *The Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine*, Bahri Publications, New Delhi.

208 Verne A. Dusenbery, (2008), *Sikh At Large- Religion, Culture and Politics in Global Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

209 Shinder Thandi (2012), "Migration and Comprehensive Experiences of Sikhs in Europe : Reflections on Issues of Cultural Transmission and Identity 30 Years On", in Knut A. Jacobsen, Kristina Myrvold (eds.), *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, published by Bloomsbury, London, pp. 11-36.

210 Darshan Singh Tatla (2001), "Imagining Punjab: Narratives of Nationhood and Homeland among the Sikh Diaspora", in Christopher Shackle, Gurharpal Singh et.al. (eds.), *Sikh Religion, Culture and Ethnicity*, Curzon Press, Surrey, Britain.

representation as they come to terms with modernity in Indian challenges, especially in rendering Sikh practices fully intelligible to non-Sikhs audience. Together through a series of essays, the author examines the ways the Sikhs living outside India have experienced and dealt with modern-state ideologies, policies, and practices of religions and ethnic management in various countries of residence. Dusenbery's work effectively develops emerging cultural understandings and political strategies of a transnational religious group—the Sikhs. **Shinder Thandi** while giving an overview of the Sikh migration history to Europe also provides the analysis of recent discourses on integration and assimilation of Sikhs in the European society. In his article, Shinder Thandi illustrates the complexities surrounding on experiences in home and diaspora by comparing few critical events (issues like Turban ban in France, aftermath of 9/11 attacks in United States). **Darshan Singh Tatla** argues that Sikh Diaspora significantly contributed to the vigorous debate on the idea of Sikhs as nation and the need for Sikh homeland. By exploring the literature on Sikh homeland and Sikh self-perception as an ethnic community, the paper highlights competing visions and asks searching questions about Sikh imaging. Tatla situates this imagining construction in terms of complex set of choices faced by the Sikh elite in the diaspora.

Studies by **Opinderjit Kaur Takhar**²¹¹ and **Natasha Behl**²¹² bring out the indicators for Sikh identity suggested by an analysis of historical development of Sikhism. **Opinderjit Kaur**, through the selection of the groups that are regarded in the present as “Sikhs”, highlights particular ethos explored by founders and leaders of these groups. Further by making scrutiny of each group, the author comes up with significant implications of scrutiny of various groups towards examination of corporate Sikh identity. Similar study has been done by **Natasha Behl**, although their approaches are somewhat different. The study by Natasha Behl aims to create better understanding of Sikh identity by examining the narrative construction of identity through an examination of opinions and practices of Sikhs.

The studies by **Paramjit Singh Judge**²¹³, **Gurharpal Singh**²¹⁴, **Joyce J.M. Pettigrew**²¹⁵, **Ajmer Singh**²¹⁶, **Jugdep S. Chima**²¹⁷ and **Kirpal Dhillon**²¹⁸ provide a wider

211 Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2005), *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups among Sikhs*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, England.

212 Natasha Behl, “Uniformities and Differences of a Sikh Nationalist Identity: Opinions and Practices of Ordinary Sikhs”, available at http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/journal/v16_2/articles/3-Natasha%20Behl%20Final%2016.%202.pdf, accessed on 21/09/2014.

213 Paramjit S. Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity and Nationhood- The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

214 Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India- A Case Study of Punjab*, Macmillan Publications, London.

political context for historical background to the violent Sikh ethno-nationalist movement in Punjab. The authors discuss the historical and sociological bases for Sikh ethnic identity and the institutionalization of Sikh identity into contemporary political organizations, and Punjab's political party system. **Paramjit Singh Judge** constructs the argument that in multi-religious society like India, an attempt to valorise the community may give rise to temporary mobilization but the eclectic space that differentiates the society from community never disappears. The author investigates the construction of Sikh identity, starting from the Singh Sabha movement to its fundamentalist assertion. The articulation of Sikh identity by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindrawala and the emergence of communal politics in Punjab forms the core of this study. The author makes an impressive in depth, micro historical analysis of the rise, sustenance and fall of the violent Sikh ethno nationalist movement.

Similar study by **Gurharpal Singh** eschews the fashionable contemporary post structural emphasis on raptures and departures for a review of continuities and discontinuities. Gurharpal Singh discusses the limits to the political articulation of Sikh identity in the post 1947 India, and demonstrates Sikh identity as remarkably cohesive in modern times. **Pettigrew**, after examining the period between 1947 and 1966, presents it as consolidation in which ruralite and urbanite within the Sikh community were drawn closer together giving some material realization to the purely religious concepts of 'Khalsa' and 'Panth'. **Ajmer's Singh's** work - "Vihvin Sadi Di Sikh Rajneeti" (in Punjabi) is critical documentation of Sikh militant movement that emerged after the 1984 anti Sikh riots. The study effectively examines the role of influential Sikh personalities during period ranging from 1920's to 1984. Ajmer Singh while using micro- historical approach traces the crucial politico-religious Sikh activities and evaluates their impact on Sikh identity and society.

Jagdip Sing Chima's study provides an authoritative political history of the Sikh separatist insurgency in Punjab by focussing on patterns of political leadership. Chima's study explains the trends which led to the emergence of violent crisis in the state. The author also highlights the dynamics through which the ethno-nationalist movement, the Khalistan, sustained itself and gradually declined in the mid 90's mainly due to changing pattern of political leadership. Drawing on his experiences in Punjab as Director General of Police

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- 215 Joyce J.M. Pettigrew (1994), "Growth of Community Consciousness among Sikhs, 1947-1966", in Dharam Singh (ed.), *Sikhism and Secularism*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi.
- 216 Ajmer Singh (2012), *Vihvin Sadi Di Sikh Rajneeti* (in punjabi), Singh Brothers Publications, Amritsar.
- 217 Jagdip S. Chima (2010), *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India: Political Leadership and Ethnonationalist Movements*, published by Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- 218 Kirpal Dhillon (2006), *Identity and Survival: Sikh Militancy in India 1978-1993*, published by Penguin Books, UK.

during the violence of 1984, **Kirpal Dhillon**'s study argues that the phase of Sikh militancy in Punjab was not just a law and order problem but a question of Sikh nationalist identity, and of a minority religion under threat.

Shinder Purewal²¹⁹, **Giorgio Shani**²²⁰ and **Paramjit Singh Judge**²²¹ examine the construction of Sikh national identity and role of 'identity issue' in the genesis and evolution of Sikh politics in the post-colonial period, both at home and in the Diaspora. **Shinder Purewal** provides the historical account of the Sikh separatist movement for Khalistan and explains that how the movement turned violent. Purewal explains how the political and economic interests of the Sikh capitalist farmers have shaped post-independence Sikh politics. On the basis of his analysis and explanation of the post-independence Sikh Politics, Shinder Purewal highlights that internal power blocs within Sikh community have shaped an exclusionary Sikh identity. **Giorgio Shani** explores and evaluates the reasons for the failure of the movement for an independent Sikh state – the Khalistan. The study by Giorgio Shani effectively argues that failure of the movement to bring about an independent Sikh state (Khalistan) points to the transformation of national identity under conditions of globalization. The author highlights that globalization have severed the link between nation and state, and through the proliferation and development of information and communication technology, has facilitated the articulation of a transnational diasporic Sikh identity. **Paramjit Singh Judge** in his article titled, "Politics of Sikh Identity and Its Fundamentalist Assertion", argues that Sikh leadership and Sikh politics have evolved around fundamental assertion of distinct and separate identity of the Sikhs. Judge explains that while Singh Sabha movement sought to create 'Khalsa' identity by distinguishing it from Hindu culture, the Sikh political leadership in the early years of the 20th century was ambivalent in defining a 'Sikh'. In his article, Paramjit Singh Judge explains that later it was Bhindranwala phenomenon that by construction of a singular religious identity, attempted to transform a heterogeneous nature of Sikh community into a congregation. As this movement failed, the issue of Sikh identity continues to play crucial part in the policies and strategies of the Akali Dal. In this study, the author documents that the historical genesis of the politics of the Sikh identity worked on the contradictory principles of inclusion and exclusion.

219 Shinder Purewal (2000), *Sikh Ethno-nationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New York.

220 GiorgioShani (2008), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, Routledge Publication, London

221 Paramjit Singh Judge (2004), "Politics of Sikh Identity and Its Fundamentalist Assertion", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, Issue No. 35, 28 Aug, 2004, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2004/35/special-articles/politics-sikh-identity-and-its-fundamentalist-assertion.html>, accessed on 21/06/2106.

Pashaura Singh²²², **Dipankar Gupta**²²³ and **Surinder Singh Jodhka**²²⁴ argue that Sikhism as the youngest world religion had to address the various doctrinal, philosophical, and cultural dilemmas and divergent approaches in a more compact time frame and within a context of persistent political turmoil. In his article, “Revisiting the Evolution of the Sikh Community”, **Pashaura Singh** carefully looks at the major hypotheses offered in the McLeod’s work - “The Evolution of the Sikh Community” (1975), and provides alternate readings of those issues. Pashaura Singh further makes the case for putting McLeod’s scholarship in its own historical context and adopting new approaches of understanding the Sikh past. In his work, **Dipankar Gupta**, while examining the struggle for Sikh identity, highlights that Sikhs too felt that if they were being polarized as a community, then the answer to the problem probably lay in Sikh culture and religion. Secondly, he argues that it was also clear that they had very unclear idea of what it was to be a Sikh other than to wear turban, or speak Punjabi, or that they were born in visibly Sikh families. Dipankar Gupta’s study effectively explains that Sikh lifestyle being contrapuntally to the Hindu way of life is a modern feature, and did not dominate Sikh identity formation prior to late nineteenth century.

Surinder Singh Jodhka in his article- “*Sikhs Today: Development, Disparity and Difference*”, deals with important aspects of Sikh social and economic life in India, focusing specifically on the internal differences and dynamics of Sikh population in different parts of the country. He points out that the minority politics of Sikhs in the post-independent India have been identity-centric. While throwing light on Punjabi Suba and Khalistan movements, Surinder Singh Jodhka documents them as movements motivated by concerns for maintaining and promoting separate Sikh identity. Jodhka presents Sikh ideology and identity as an active subject of research as their historical past is not too old and also because of their level of global visibility, especially in USA, UK and Canada. The author specifically documents that the dominant narrative of the scholarship in Sikh studies has been historical and theological which has focused mostly on questions of interpretations of the Sikh scriptural doctrine and the Sikh past.

222 Pashaura Singh “Revisiting the Evolution of the Sikh Community”, *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Vol. 17, No.1 & 2, Spring Fall-2010, available at http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/journal/v17_1-2/JPS_17_nos_1-2_2010.pdf, accessed on 25/09/2014.

223 Dipankar Gupta (1996), *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

224 Surinder Singh Jodhka (2010), “Sikhs Today: Development, Disparity and Difference”, in Gurpreet Mahajan & Surinder S. Jodhka (eds.), *Religion, Community and Development – Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*, Routledge, New Delhi.

Norman Gerald Barrier's article titled- "Sikhism in a Global Context-The Legacy of History and Contemporary Challenges"²²⁵ is a masterful analysis of the historical legacy to understand contemporary challenges to Sikhism in global context. Sikhs have spread and prospered throughout the world but in the process several key elements have influenced their religious beliefs, practices and sense of community. N.G. Barrier argues that on one hand Sikhism have continuities of tradition, documents, history and vibrant connection with the past that give the Sikhs a strong sense of belonging, but on the other hand, Sikhs have not been able to consolidate and mature in a compact timeframe and within the context of persistent political turmoil. N.G. Barrier highlights that the relative minority status of Sikhs in India and non-Indian cultural settings have forced to shape cultural and social debates, created factions and political alliances. Sikhs have been self consciously balancing the persistent pressure to emphasize distinct elements of culture and religion with accommodation and integration in national and international arenas. The author emphasizes that authority in the sense that 'who speaks for Sikhs' remains an unsolved and problematic issue, often leading to the repetition of arguments concerning history, traditions and strategies to strengthen Sikhs worldwide.

III

J.S. Ahluwalia's study titled- "Sikhism and the 21st Century"²²⁶ examines how Sikhs have responded to complex challenges and ideas in recent history, perennial culture and minority status. The author effectively analyses the impact of British colonial experience in forcing the Sikhs to evaluate their traditions, beliefs, hopes and aspirations in a very different way. The study throws light on the role of Singh Sabha movement and Chief Khalsa Diwan in mobilizing the Sikh community, shaping identity debate, and in creating new institutions designed to move Sikhs and Sikh faith into future. Ahluwalia also provides the discourse of concerted efforts aimed at developing a broad-based communication network that would tie Sikhs together and mobilize resources in a more productive fashion. While providing the historical perspective, the main aim of the author is to explain how the leaders of the movement used new approaches and command of a formidable communication network to further institutionalize the Sikh identity.

225 N. Gerald Barrier (2011), "Sikhism in a Global Context- The Legacy of History and Contemporary Challenges", in Pashaura Singh (ed.), *Sikhism in Global Context* , Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

226 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1997), "*Sikhism and the 21st Century*", in J.S. Ahluwalia (ed.), *Sikhism And The 21st Century* , published by GNDU, Amritsar.

J.S. Grewal's work titled- "The Sikhs: Ideology, Institutions, and Identity"²²⁷ presents a comprehensive and authoritative account of key aspects of Sikh tradition from Guru Nanak Dev to the present times. Organized thematically, this study by J.S. Grewal provides a detailed discussion of few issues which have been central in Sikh history and religion. The explanation of ideological underpinnings and evolution of socio-political institutions of Sikhs forms the integral part of this study. The author dwells over central areas like political identity of the Khalsa Panth, martyrdom in Sikh literature, evolution of the Sikh State, Darbar Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib.

Harjot Oberoi in his work titled- "The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition"²²⁸ provides comprehensive views regarding construction and dissemination of religious identities in Indian society in general and among Sikhs in particular. He raises the complex issue of religious boundaries of Sikh identity. Harjot Oberoi argues that early-period Sikh tradition did not show much concern for establishing distinct religious boundaries. A dramatic change occurs with the rise of Khalsa in the eighteenth century, and section of Sikh population consciously started to push for distinct and separate religious culture and identity. Most concrete expression of this transformation was the creation of distinct code of conduct for Khalsa Sikhs. Oberoi's work also examines the circumstances that led to the development of Singh Sabhas, Chief Khalsa Diwan and Tat Khalsa resulting in the establishment of SGPC. These organizations have each contributed to the issue of "who a Sikh is", and many of the leaders of these organizations were indeed responsible for providing the definition of a 'Khalsa Sikh'.

Ian. J. Kerr's article- "Troublesome relationship among Sikhs and State with particular reference to the period 1849-1919"²²⁹ is an influential work based on relationships of governing authorities with the minorities with special reference to Sikh community. The author highlights the continuing significance for the minority Sikh community of their relationships with those governing authorities within whose ambit they came. I.J. Kerr emphasizes on the point that Sikhs have always been shaped by policies and actions of governing authorities. After a very interesting analyses of such policies and resultant effects in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the author documents relationship between

227 J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs – Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi,

228 Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

229 Ian J. Kerr (1999), "Sikhs and State: Troublesome Relationship and a Fundamental Continuity with particular reference to the period 1849-191", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity : Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

Sikhs and those in governing authority over them at various times - as central aspect of Sikh history.

Studies by **Rajiv A. Kapur**²³⁰, **Baldev Raj Nayar**²³¹, **Rajinder Kaur**²³² and **Gurmit Singh**²³³ argue that Sikh identity consciousness is the result of a social movement among the Sikhs in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first decades of the 20th century which reformulated Sikh identity and established new norms for Sikh orthodoxy. **Rajiv A. Kapur** examines that how the movements like Singh Sabha reformulated Sikh identity and drew communal boundaries between Sikh and Hindus. The study effectively analyses the strategies and tactics employed by nineteenth century Sikh organizations. The study is comprehensive assessment of Sikh fundamentalism, and its deep social and historical roots linked to development of distinct Sikh identity. The study by **Baldev Raj Nayar** is a comprehensive analysis of Sikh politics in the following years of independence. He focuses on the basis and dynamics of Sikh demand for separate state and implications of that on Punjab politics. Nayar's study is a lucid analysis of the emergence of Sikh political consciousness and problems of Sikh leaders. He has effectively analyzed the strategies adopted by the Sikh leaders to marshal the resources for improving the position of Punjabi Sikhs. **Rajinder Kaur** discusses crucial aspects of the Sikh identity right from its genesis up to the period of 1990, with focus on politicization of Sikh identity through formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). **Gurmit Singh** traces the genesis of the Punjab problem in a historical perspective and brings out its essential character as yet another vestige of the colonial era. He examines the influence of religious communalists, separatist and other reactionary forces on socio-economic roots of Punjab problem.

Studies by **Surjit Singh Narang**²³⁴, **Kashmir Singh**²³⁵, **I.J. Singh**²³⁶ and **Yogesh Snehi**²³⁷ focus on the crucial problems involved in bringing about a new Sikh praxis, through long overdue second Sikh reformation for addressing the challenges and imperatives that are impinging Sikh religion and identity. These studies attempt to examine the functioning of

230 Rajiv A. Kapur (1986), *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*, Allen & Unwin, London.

231 Baldev Raj Nayar (1966), *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

232 Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi.

233 Gurmit Singh (1991), *History of Sikh Struggles*, Atlantic Publications, New Delhi.

234 Surjit Singh Narang (1998), *Sikh Politics: The Study of Elite Perspective*, published by Punjab Development Society, Jalandhar.

235 Kashmir Singh (2001), "SGPC in the Twenty first Century" in Harchand Singh Bedi (ed.), *The Sikhs in the New Century*, published by Khalsa College, Amritsar.

236 I.J. Singh. (1994), *Sikhs and Sikhism- A View with a Bias*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi.

237 Yogesh Snehi (2014), "Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, Issue No. 34, August 23, 2014.

Sikh religious and political institutions that arose in the 20th century socio-political environment. **S.S. Narang's** work is a comprehensive assessment of Chief Khalsa Diwan's political activities. He effectively analyses how the position of Diwan was challenged, and how it responded and adjusted to various challenges. Narang's study is a serious attempt to fill the vital gap in a complete and comprehensive understanding of Sikh politics in twentieth century. **Kashmir Singh** discusses the control over SGPC and its influences on the Sikh politics. His study highlights the politicization of SGPC and its affiliation with Akali-Dal. Kashmir Singh's work remains significant in providing the basic institutional, structural defects in governance of SGPC, and problems in its working.

I.J. Singh deals with those crucial issues that have enriched and occasionally confounded a general understanding of Sikhs in contemporary world. On the basis of his personal experiences of holding various offices in Gurdwara committees and some Sikh organizations, I.J. Singh documents mechanism of Gurdwara administration as often driven by pride, prejudice and passion, not by reason and principles. The discussions on contemporary practices and controversies symbolizes a significant departure in the literature on the Sikh experiences especially that of the diaspora Sikhs. The author also suggests his ways to maintain democratic structure of the Gurdwaras as also the spirit of service, minus ambitious infighting. **Yogesh Snehi**, in his article titled -“Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics” presents Gurdwaras as a significant legitimising social space for the diverse community of Sikhs in India. He documents Akali Dal's absolute hegemony over the management of Sikh Shrines through SGPC. Yogesh Snehi while referring to the enactment of Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Act 2014 and strong hold of Akalis over Sikh Shrines, highlights the entrenchment of the legal battles over shrines in the region.

Gyani Sant **Maskin Singh**, a Sikh scholar and theologian known for his expertise of 'Gurmat' and 'Gurbani', in his significant work titled - “Desh Videsh De Gurdwarian Da Prabhandhki Dhancha”²³⁸ (in Punjabi) sheds light on the ills plaguing the functioning of Gurdwaras. Based on author's personal experiences, observations and perspectives, this work is an analysis of adverse and unfortunate situation of Gurdwara management bodies and their preaching of Sikhism. Drawing upon his vast experience in preaching Sikh moral and religious thought in Gurdwaras across the globe, Gyani Maskeen Singh rues the absence of a unified preaching line that he believes is mainly responsible for the decay in 'Gurmat' (teachings of the Gurus) principles among the Sikhs. Tackling the issues objectively, the

238 Gyani Sant Maskin Singh, *Desh Videsh De Gurdwarian Da Prabhandhki Dhancha* (in Punjabi), published by Gurmat Samagam, Alwar, Rajasthan.

author lays down a certain vision for the reformation of Sikhism and Sikh institutions, while placing the responsibility on both the religious administrators and the followers of the Sikh faith.

Gaps in existing Literature and Rationale of the Study

Review of the literature shows that scholars have put in most of their energy working on the understanding of Sikh past. The literature review reveals that there is plethora of literature written on historical aspects of Sikh identity, Gurudwara Reform Movement, Gurudwara management, Gurdwara legislation, historical evolution of Sikh institutions, electoral politics of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). Also there is plenty of scholarly work available on life history and philosophy of Sikh Gurus, and their impact on society. Dominant narrative of the scholarship in Sikh studies has been the historical and theological, focused mostly on questions of interpretations of the Sikh scriptural doctrine and the Sikh past.

Although few insightful works focusing on Sikh institutions of 20th century are available, the premier Sikh politico-religious institutions have received inadequate attention for scholarly study from critical perspectives of inquiry. Amongst the works available on Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, most of the studies are descriptive in nature dealing with their earlier history, evolution and ideological doctrines. Hardly any attempt has been made to study and analyze the role of apex Sikh politico-religious institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) in the light of 21st century political dynamics. There is dearth of literature that studies the role of concerned Sikh institutions in context to contemporary issues, conflicts and challenges that have emerged as serious concerns for the Sikh community. There is hardly any scholarly work that studies the contemporary role of concerned Sikh institutions under the light of Sikh values and principles. The study is an attempt to fill this vital gap. The study has attempted to explore and explain the contemporary role of premier Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), in context to issues which are directly related with identity of Sikhs and have erupted into intense conflicts or controversies within the Sikh political and religious circles.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs the **Robertson and Holzner's** phenomenon on "Identity-Authority Relationship".²³⁹ They attempt to conceptualize the relation between authority and

239 For theoretical analysis on relationship between identity and authority see Roland Robertson and Burkart Holzner (1980), "Identity and Authority: A Problem of Processes of Identification and Authorization", in

identity at the highest possible level of abstraction and generality. Their analysis explain that relation between ‘authority’ and ‘identity’ has been one of the most widespread crisis in the civilizations, and there has been far little theoretical explication and clarification on the nature of this relationship, partly because identity has been the subject of psychoanalysis, while authority was left to political sociology. This framework argues that sociological problem becomes more realistic when woven into more specific theme, i.e. identity-authority relationship. According to this analysis provided by Robertson and Holzner, identity constitutes the form of presentation of actors, both in internal and external relationship. Similarly authority is the mode of presentation of society or the particular constituent units.

This theoretical framework developed by Robertson and Holzner terms ‘identity’ and ‘authority’ as mutually implicative. No conception of authority makes sense unless we describe the ways in which the constituent units are identified and identify themselves. By the same token, identity implies the devices of authority in the process of identification of self which also involves the problem of authorization. The framework helps us to understand that how the authority is bound up with the aspects of collective identity. More specifically, problems of authority exercising bodies are frequently attendant upon the differentiation of identities into personal, special or local aspects on one hand, and collective aspects on the other hand. This phenomenon explains that identity- authority relationship is the form in terms of which the individual- society relationship can be fruitfully re-focussed.²⁴⁰ On the basis of this analysis, the study focused on identity and the process of identification in relation to authority.

This identity-authority relationship analysis developed by Robertson and Holzner provides the theoretical framework to this study. This authority-identity relationship phenomenon was highly beneficial to study and examine the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in context to the issues which have emerged as serious concerns and challenges for the Sikh community in existing times. The framework was used to study the contemporary pattern of interactions and nature of relationship between the authorities of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, and use of their authority in context to contested issues of Sikh identity. This helped to re-focus on the identity shaping or reshaping, maintaining and affirming process in context to the authority and role of Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak

Robertson & Holzner (eds.) *Identity and Authority—Explorations in the Theory of Society*, Basil Blackwell, England.
240 *ibid.*

Committee (SGPC). The theoretical framework enabled the study to be explained and evaluated under the identity- authority centric relationship.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the doctrinal basis and historical evolution of the pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).
- To explore and understand the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in context to issues and conflicts which have emerged as serious concerns for the Sikh community in contemporary times.
- To unravel the complex political dynamics involved in the contemporary roles of Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).
- To explain and highlight the emerging concerns and challenges before Sikh institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) and Sikh identity in contemporary times.
- To understand and document the impact of emerging politico-religious dynamics on the status, authority and credibility of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

Research Questions

- What are the doctrinal, historical and legal basis of establishment and authority of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC? How Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC institutionalized the Sikh identity?
- How Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC have dealt with the issue of 'caste' in contemporary Sikh society?
- What has been the role and purpose of SGPC in shaping or reshaping the identity of Sehajdhari Sikhs?
- What has been the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in regard to Dera-cult among Sikhs and Dera Sacha Sauda conflict?
- What has been the response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC to RSS's agenda and strategy towards the Sikh religion?
- What has been the role of SGPC in context to Nanakshahi Calendar controversy?
- What has been the role and response of SGPC in context to formation of new Gurdwara management committee by Sikhs of Haryana?

- On basis of the study of concerned issues and the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, what are the emerging concerns, challenges and threats before Sikh community?
- What is the impact of emerging politico-religious dynamics on the status, authority and credibility of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC?

Research Methodology

The study is based on observatory, historical and descriptive methods. The study has predominantly relied upon observation method to understand and project the insider's perspectives on complex concerns, which were of utmost importance for achieving the objectives of the study.²⁴¹ Observation method (both participant and non-participant) turned out to be very useful for identifying and understanding the behaviour, perceptions and activities of the concerned authorities, representatives and various members of the institutions under study.²⁴² Observation method allowed and enabled the study to approach the concerned institutions, their representatives and members in their own environment. In attempt to fulfil the objectives of the study, it was essential to know the diverse roles, functions and perspectives, and understand the interplay among them.²⁴³

Historical and descriptive methods also formed an integral part of the study.²⁴⁴ Historical method enabled the study to systematically recapture the complex nuances, issues, events and even ideas of the past that have influenced and shaped the present role of the institutions (Akal Takht and SGPC), organizations and individuals which were under the

241 Generally speaking, the researcher engaged in observation method tries to learn what life is like for an 'insider' while remaining, inevitably, an 'outsider'. In order to get better access to the social reality and 'the real world', the observation techniques were considered as most useful

242 Observation method, involving both participant and non-participant techniques was considered an appropriate method for this study for the following reasons: (i) to explore and understand the different views and perspectives of concerned individuals and organizations on the role of Akal Takht and SGPC, (ii) to understand and analyze the recent controversies and conflicts centering the role of Akal Takht and SGPC, (iii) to observe and understand the independent roles of Akal Takht and SGPC, (iv) to examine the perceptions and insights of concerned individuals from Sikh religious, political and educational circles on emerging relationship between Akal Takht and SGPC, (iv) to examine consequential influences and impacts on the status of Akal Takht Sahib, and concerned issues of Sikh identity and public life. The idea behind choosing such a method for the conduct of this study was to project the insider's perspectives on the complex concerns that confront the Sikh religious-politico daily life.

243 The reasons for choosing observation (both participant and non-participant) as the method for this study are: Participant observation always takes place in community settings, in locations believed to have some relevance to the research questions. Observation method is also useful for gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which study participants live; the relationships among and between people, contexts, ideas, norms, and events; and people's behaviors and activities – what they do, how frequently, and with whom. In addition, the method enables researchers to develop a familiarity with the cultural milieu that will prove invaluable throughout this research

244 Historical method lays the foundation for all social inquiry and for informed debates on the politics and culture of our time. The historical method refers to the study of events, processes, and institutions of past civilizations, for the purpose of finding the origins or antecedents of contemporary social life and thus understanding its nature and working.

scope of the study. Historical method acquainted the study with the evolution and legacy of the concerned Sikh politico-religious institutions, and enabled to understand their conceptual establishment and framework. The study involved a critical inquiry of previous events with the aim of reconstructing a relevant representation of the past. The study of historical documents and other sources that contain facts concerning the research were considered to achieve better understanding of present practices, problems, conflicts and contradictions.

The descriptive method has been used to describe, explain and interpret conditions of the contemporary role of Sikh institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC), the concerned organizations and members. Description emerges following creative exploration, and serves to organize the findings in order to fit them with explanations. This study necessitated the description of conditions, practices, opinions, structure, differences or relationships that exist, and changes that have taken place over time in context to the issues and institutions under study.

Primary and Secondary sources

Primary Sources of the study include unstructured in-depth and open ended interviews, discussions with key members and representatives of the concerned institutions. Primary sources also consist of press releases, media briefings and speeches of the leaders, officials, spokespersons, etc. of the Sikh politico-religious institutions. A number of places of worship were visited and great deal of information was obtained from Sikh leaders and representatives. The opinions of key members have been incorporated, where deemed appropriate. The concerned Sikh gatherings at various Sikh religious places were closely monitored. Meetings and gatherings at five Sikh *Takhts*²⁴⁵ and joint sittings of authorities representing the 'Takhts', were also be keenly observed to understand the nature of working and internal dynamics within Sikh politico-religious circles.²⁴⁶ A visit to Takht Hazoor Sahib (Nanded, Maharashtra) was very useful in understanding the perspectives of Sikhs operating a Gurdwara management committee/board beyond the territorial boundaries of Punjab.

245 Five 'Takhts' (Panj Takht) are five important Gurudwaras and these have a very special significance for the Sikh community. They are considered the seats of Sikh religious authority. The important decisions concerning the religious and social life of the Sikh community have been taken from here. See Nikky Gurinder Kaur (2011), *Sikhism: An Introduction*, published by I.B. Tauris Publications, London, pp 80-83. Sikh Rehat Maryada (1950), published by SGPC, Amritsar pp.14-16. Jane Bingham (2008), *Sikhism*, Smart Apple Media, Minnesota, USA. Also see, Surinder Singh Johar (1977), *Handbook on Sikhism*, Vivek Publishing Company, Delhi. pp. 105-111.

246 As five Takhts are recognized as seats of authority in Sikhism, the perspectives and insights of representatives and members of other four Takhts were very useful to achieve the objectives of study.

Meetings, conferences and other gatherings (on concerned issues) of influential Sikh organizations like Damdami Taksal, Dal Khalsa, Chief Khalsa Diwan²⁴⁷, Sehajdhari Sikh Party, Panthik Talmel Committee²⁴⁸, etc. were also monitored for their direct or indirect influences in matters of religious importance of Sikh community. The information provided by members, leaders and spokespersons of these Sikh organizations was highly beneficial to get useful insights into the undertaken issues, conflicts and controversies. Resolutions passed by Sikh institutions, especially Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, were closely monitored and studied under the light of emerging political and religious dynamics.

Current and former members of SGPC, its executive committee members, and SGPC's Dharam Parchar Committee members were very significant sources of information that enabled the study to develop deep insights into the role of SGPC vis-a-vis issues related to identity of Sikhs in contemporary times. Speeches delivered, decisions taken and resolutions passed by the office bearers or authorities of Sikh institutions (especially SGPC) at various meetings and religious gatherings formed an integral part of the study. In-depth discussions and conversations held with SGPC members and officials, leaders and representatives of other influential Sikh organizations were of utmost importance to unravel and understand the realistic role of SGPC in regard to concerned issues.

Relevant legislations related to Gurudwara Management, definition of Sikhs, reservation provisions, authority and powers of SGPC, amendments pertaining to aspects of Sikh identity and voting rights in SGPC, etc were considered for this study. Primary sources also include Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 and Delhi Gurdwaras Act 1971. Specific relevant judgements and legal cases relating to the identity of Sikhs, Sikh Gurudwaras Act of 1925 and voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs were also consulted.

247 Chief Khalsa Diwan' is a central organization of various *Singh Sabhas* spread all over Punjab with the mission to promote the aspirations and redress grievances of the Sikh public, settle their religious differences and channelize Sikh public opinion. Its headquarters are located at Amritsar. Role of Chief Khalsa Diwan in identity articulation and Gurudwara reform movement discussed in Surjit Singh Narang (1981), "Chief Khalsa Diwan- An Analytical Study of its Perceptions", in Paul Wallace & Surinder Chopra (eds.), *Political Dynamics of Punjab*, published by GNDU, Amritsar, pp. 67-75. Louis E. Fenech (2000), *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.234-240. H.S. Singha (2005), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Hemkunt Publications, New Delhi, pp.42-46. See also Jugdeep S. Chima (2010), *The Sikh Separatist Insurgency in India- Political Leadership and Ethnonationalist Movements*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, pp.22-24.

248 Giani Kewal Singh (*Chief of Panthic Talmel Committee*) had served as the head 'Granthi' (priest) of the Akal Takht Sahib for two years and 'Jathedar' of Takht Damdama Sahib for eight years. See "Sikh bodies to meet today to demand panthic panel", *Times of India*, January 15, 2015, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sikh-bodies-to-meet-today-to-demand-panthic-panel/article-show/45892750.cms>, accessed on 16/01/2015.

Sikh intellectuals, scholars of Sikh studies, Sikh preachers, religious and political representatives of Sikh community, etc. contributed with historical, philosophical, political and legal dimensions that were very useful to reach the objectives of the study. All these primary sources together explored and revealed the crucial politico-religious dynamics behind concerned issues and conflicts that the study has attempted to explain and analyse.

Secondary Sources were equally significant for the study. This section included books, journal articles, magazine articles, resolutions and extracts from the editorials, reviews and comments published by daily newspapers and periodicals. The study had made use of publications and authentic sources released by Sikh leadership and Sikh religious institutions. Literature published by important Sikh religious institutions, especially by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), was significant source of information on the concerned issues and objectives of the study.

The study of secondary sources required visit to various libraries that included: Bhai Gurdas Library - Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha Library and Dr. Gnada Singh Punjabi Reference Library - Punjabi University, Patiala, Central Library, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University- Fatehgarh Sahib. Secondary sources were also consulted from Sikh Study Centres and Departments like: Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Professor Harbans Singh Department of Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Punjabi University, Patiala, Sikh History Research Department, Khalsa College, Amritsar, and Literature Houses at various Gurdwaras

In order to understand the multiple perspectives within, the study took recourse to Qualitative approach which included in-depth interviews, discussions and content analysis. In-depth discussions and interviews with spokespersons, leaders, conveners, representatives, members and activists of various influential Sikh organizations, Sikh intellectuals and experts on Sikh studies were held. The purpose of such interactions was to know and understand their opinions and perspectives on issues related to the inquiry and objectives of the study. This proved to be very valuable exercise for understanding and developing deep insights into the concerned matters of the study.

. As the study aimed to inquire the contemporary issues, conflicts and controversies centring the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, the time period for such analysis and evaluation focussed on the events from the year 2000. This period was selected on the basis

of following factors: (i) Crucial issues related to the identity of Sikhs like: Sehajdhari identity issue, Sikh Rehat Maryada, the Turban and Kirpan issue, etc. came into limelight both within and outside India. (ii) This period witnessed the emergence of serious controversies regarding the role, appointment and sacking of *Takht* Jathedars. (iii) Developments on issues like: Sehajdhari voting rights, Dera cult among Sikh, RSS's anti-minority agenda, Nanakshahi Calendar, etc. - all became subjects of heated debate in Sikh religious and political circles. (iv) The role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC reflected some extraordinary changes that involved complex political dynamics.

Chapter Scheme

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introductory chapter looks at the background of the problem and focus of the study. As 'identity' is the pillar around which the study revolves, this chapter conceptualises the term 'identity' and explains the process of identity formation. The chapter briefly explains the formation and evolution of the Sikh religion and identity both in historical and philosophical contexts. The chapter also sets out- how the lack of existing literature on the role of premier Sikh politico-religious institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) in context to contentious issues and conflicts of contemporary times made it necessary to conduct this study. The chapter thus provides an overview of the study. This includes: review of literature, objectives of the study, research questions, research methodology and theoretical framework which informs this study.

Chapter 2: Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC: The Institutionalization of Sikh Identity

The second chapter deals with institutionalization of the Sikh religion and identity through two pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The chapter is divided into two separate sections. First section explains the establishment of Akal Takht Sahib in religious, philosophical and historical contexts. It also provides an understanding and brief analysis of the significant role of Akal Takht Sahib in Sikh history and Sikh identity formation process. The second section of the chapter throws light on the formation and evolution of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) as a dynamic institution of the Sikhs. Explanation of the role of SGPC towards the politicization of Sikh identity forms an integral part of this chapter.

Chapter 3: Divisions within the Sikh Community

(Sehajdharis and Caste Factor)

Role of Akal Takht and SGPC

The chapter deals with two intense issues which have created sharp divisions and segregation in the contemporary Sikh society - (i) Issue of Sehajdhari Sikh identity and their voting rights (ii) Caste factor within Sikh Community. The emphasis of the chapter is to unravel and understand the role of concerned Sikh institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) in context to above mentioned issues. The chapter is divided in two parts to discuss and explain each issue separately. In first part of the chapter, the study discusses the issue of Sehajdhari Sikhs, their evolution and identity. Here, the focus is on the role of SGPC in regard to voting rights (in SGPC elections) and identity concerns of the Sehajdhari Sikhs. In second part of this chapter, the study explores and explains the role and response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in context to specific caste based issues which are cause of serious concern in the contemporary Sikh society.

Chapter 4: Threats to Sikh Identity

(Dera-Cult and RSS Agenda)

Role and Response of Akal Takht and SGPC

As this chapter deals with two different issues, it is also divided in two separate sections. First section of the chapter dwells upon the issue of Dera-cult among Sikhs. In this part, the focus is on the role and response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in context to massive following of Deras among Sikhs. The conflict between mainstream Sikhs and Dera Sacha Sauda sect has also been examined with deep focus on the role of two pioneer Sikh religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC. The second part of the chapter unravels and explains the challenges and threats posed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs. The emphasis here remains on the role and response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in regard to RSS's agenda and strategy towards Sikh religion and identity.

Chapter 5: Conflicts within the Sikh Institutions

(Nanakshahi Calendar and Haryana Gurdwara Committee)

Role of Akal Takht and SGPC

The chapter makes in- depth study of two most heated conflicts which have been centred by vigorous debate and discourse within the Sikh community - (i) Conflict over Nanakshahi Calendar (ii) Conflict over the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara

Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). The chapter provides multi-dimensional explanation and understanding to the conflicts dealing with each issue in separate parts. Both the concerned conflicts are directly related with Sikh affairs and identity of Sikhs, and predominantly revolve around the roles of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC. The chapter while highlighting the involved political dynamics primarily concentrates on the study of the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in regard to the concerned issues.

Chapter 6: Sikh Institutions and Identity: The Emerging Politico-Religious Dynamics

On the basis of the study of concerned issues and role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, this chapter highlights the emerging politico-religious dynamics within the Sikh community. Based on the analysis of the previous chapters, the study here explains and documents the emerging concerns, threats and challenges before the Sikh community and apex Sikh religious institutions. Impact of the contemporary nature and state of Sikh politics on the role, authority and status of concerned Sikh institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) forms the integral part of this chapter. The chapter forms the crux of the study.

Conclusion: Findings of the Study

The findings of the study have been summed up in this chapter.

Chapter 2

Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC – The Institutionalization of Sikh Identity

The institutional patterns of authority and power are quite varied and complex in various religious traditions. Social scientists have long understood the authoritativeness of religious leaders and teachings as having consequences for society as a whole by providing a source for shared values and social control¹. It is no surprise that authority figures prominently in seminal analyses of religion either explicitly or implicitly. Authority in religion can be defined as the right to direct action within religious groups. In either case, authority directs and coordinates action. Religious authority is also associated with the conveying of various kinds of religious meanings. Religious institutions, symbols and ritual acts serve to communicate important ideas and reinforce and reshape identity². Authority exists when social actors agree about the identity of the device that has the right to direct action.³

Religious institutions and their functioning form an integral part of the social structure, and thus constitute an important aspect of people's personal lives, their social relationships, political behavior and religious orientations. Religion and religious institutions do not exist in vacuum and cannot be indifferent to the existing social, political and economic environment.⁴ Religious institutions especially those representing the minority religious communities have to contend with the existing socio-economic and political forces that may create contradictions and conflicts between the ideal

1 Gifford, Paul (2005) "Religious Authority: Scripture, Tradition, and Charisma", Chapter 21 in John Hinnells, (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, Routledge, New York, available at http://archive.org/stream/The_Routledge_Companion_To_The_Study_of_Religion_Hinnells_JohnR/0415333105_djvu.txt, accessed on June 23, 2014.

2 Edward Shils (1971) "Tradition", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 13 No. 2, April, 1971, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp.122-128, available at <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/178104?uid=2&uid=4&sid=21104328102001>, accessed on May 23, 2014.

3 Craig Van Gelder (2007), "Defining the Issues Related to Power and Authority in Religious Leadership", *Journal of Religious Leadership*, Vol. 6 No. 2, Fall 2007, available at : <http://arjrl.org/Volumes/VanGelder07.Pdf>, accessed on May 24, 2014.

4 Harsh Pati Singhanian (2011), "Religious institutions useful in sharing righteous value system", *The Economic Times*, February 6, 2011, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/special-report/religious-institutions-useful-in-sharing-righteous-value-system/articleshow/7434293.cms>, accessed on May 24, 2014.

religious principles and everyday life experiences of individual and institutional practices.⁵

This chapter studies the establishment and evolution of two pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the custodians of Sikh interests and distinct Sikh identity. As both these institutions vary in their historical backgrounds, concepts, nature of authority, role and relevance; they are being studied in two independent sections of this chapter. The chapter is thus divided into two separate parts: Part I of the chapter deals with the study of Akal Takht Sahib and Part II undertakes the study of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

I

Akal Takht Sahib: An Introduction

Akal Takht Sahib is recognized as primary seat of Sikh religious authority and central altar for Sikh politico-religious assembly. The word 'Akal' is the equivalent of 'timeless', 'beyond time' and 'everlasting'.⁶ The word 'Takht', (Persian word) signifies 'royal throne' or 'chair of state'.⁷ The dictionary meaning of term 'Takht' is - the sovereign seat of the State from where the State laws and decisions are promulgated and enforced. In the context to history of India, the use of term 'Takht' signifies imperial throne with total and pervasive focus on worldly or temporal power.⁸

In the context of Sikh philosophy, the connotation of the term 'Takht' is much wider for the basic reason that a unique concept of co-ordination of secular sovereignty and spiritual domain is recognized as the fundamental doctrine of Sikhism. It was the revelation of the unique concept of 'Miri-Piri' and the practise of 'Double Sovereignty'

5 M.A. Glynn (2008), "Beyond Constraint: How institutions Enable Identity", in: R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, R. Suddaby & K. Sahlin-Andersson (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, Sage Publications, London pp. 414–421. Also see, Harsh Pati Singhania (2011), "Religious institutions useful in sharing righteous value system", *The Economic Times*, February 6, 2011, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/special-report/religious-institutions-useful-in-sharing-righteous-value-system/articleshow/7434293.cms>, accessed on May 24, 2014.

6 H.S Singha (2000) , *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism (over 1000 Entries)*, Published by Hemkunt Press, New Delhi, p.12. See also, Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (2000), *Who Are The Sikhs ?*, published by Sikh Educational Trust, Demark, p. 92

7 H.S. Dilgeer (1995) , *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, p. 7. Sardar Harjeet Singh (2009), *Faith & Philosophy of Sikhism -Volume 4 of Indian religions series*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 276

8 Madanjit Kaur (2007), *Guru Gobind Singh: Historical and Ideological Perspective*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 234- 235. Also see, H.S. Singha (2000), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism (over 1000 Entries)*, published by Hemkunt Press, New Delhi, p.193.

by Guru Hargobind Sahib (sixth Sikh Guru) from the seat of Akal Takht Sahib that the term ‘Takht’ came to be associated with the Sikh world.⁹

The Akal Takht Sahib was founded or revealed by Guru Hargobind Sahib on *Har Sudi Panchmi 1663 Bikrami Sammat* (June 15, 1606)¹⁰ and was established as the place from where the spiritual and temporal concerns of the Sikh community could be acted upon.¹¹ In the Sikh sense, ‘Akal Takht’ signifies "timeless or everlasting throne" or “throne of the Timeless One”, i.e. the God. As ‘Akal Takht’ is a combination of two words ‘Akal’ (the Almighty) and ‘Takht’ (Throne), the sureme institution of Akal Takht Sahib signifies the “*Throne of the Almighty*”, and it is only ‘His Throne’ that could be called as immortal.¹² The word ‘Sahib’ denotes its sublimity i.e. it belongs to ‘Sahib’, the Almighty. The Akal Takht Sahib is recognized as the guardian of spiritualism, righteousness, morality, liberty, equality and justice. Akal Takht Sahib is the supreme seat of the authority in Sikh nation, and all Sikhs owe their loyalty solely to this throne.¹³

The Sikhs recognize four other holy places as Takhts, namely: Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib¹⁴, Anandpur Sahib, Takht Sri Harimandar Sahib, Patna¹⁵, Takht

9 Nirbhai Singh (2003), *Sikh Dynamic Vision*, published by Harman Publications, New Delhi, pp. 347- 350. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold, Volume 2 of History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708*. Atlantic Publishers, pp. 487-489

10 The date is generally accepted, but some scholars have contested it. This is a matter which need not be inquired here.

11 The foundation stone of the building of Akal Takht Sahib was laid by Guru Hargobind Sahib himself and the rest of the structure was completed by Baba Buddha (an elderly Sikh nobleman) and Bhai Gurdas (intellectual leader of the Sikh nation) only. The Akal Takht was built on a site where there existed only a high mound of earth across a wide open space. The original Takht was a simple platform, 3.5 metres (11 ft high), on which Guru Hargobind Sahib would sit in court to receive petitions and administer justice. See, Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold : Volume 2 of History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708*. Atlantic Publishers, pp. 488-489. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (1995), *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp.8-10.

12 Akal Takht means the “Throne of the Immortal” and is the highest political institution of the Sikhs. "Akal" means "The Timeless One" -another term for God. "Takht" means "throne" in Persian. See, R.P. Malhotra & Kuldeep Arora (2003), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Punjabi Literature A-L Volume 1*, Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi, pp. 9-10.

13 H.S. Dilgeer (1997), *The Sikh Reference Book*, published by Sikh Educational Trust for Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp. 88-89. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold : Volume 2 of History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708*. Atlantic Publishers, pp. 491-492.

14 Takht Kesgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib : The third seat of authority is called - Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib. The township of Anandpur was founded by the Ninth Guru in 1665 but the Takht there in owes its importance to the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh Ji on Baisakhi Day of 1699.

15 The second seat of authority is known as - Takht Sri Patna Sahib. Guru Tagh Bahadur Sahib Ji lived with his family here in 1665. Here was born Guru Gobind Singh Ji (then known as Sri Gobind Rai).

Sachkhand Hazur Sahib, Abchalnagar, Nanded¹⁶, and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib¹⁷, Talwandi Sabo also known as “Guru ki Kashi”.¹⁸ As per Sikh religious history and tradition, above mentioned four ‘Takht Sahibs’ are connected with the life of Guru Gobind Singh (1666 - 1708), the tenth Sikh Guru. Although, all five Takhts are equally venerated but the seat of Akal Takht Sahib at Amritsar enjoys supremacy, special status and extraordinary authority. Historically, Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) along with Akal Takht Sahib - constitutes the capital of Sikhism. Meetings of Sarbat Khalsa that represent the natives of the entire Sikh Panth are traditionally summoned at Akal Takht Sahib, and it is only here that cases connected with serious religious offenses committed by prominent Sikhs are heard and decided.¹⁹ The ‘Hukamnamas’ (edicts) or decrees issued by the Akal Takht Sahib are universally applicable to all Sikhs and religious institutions. Such is the sanctity and authority of the institution, the Akal Takht Sahib.²⁰ An eminent historian C. H. Loehlin writes:

“The Akal Takht is a preaching centre and also the seat of political and religious conferences. In fact today, the Akal Takht is a symbol of political activity of the Sikhs. All great movements have been led from this seat of the Sikhs.”²¹

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- 16 The fourth seat of authority is- Takht Sri Hazur Sahib. Sachkhand Hazur Sahib, Nanded (Maharashtra) is the place where the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji left for heavenly abode and bestowed Guruship upon Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Gobind Singh remained at this place for some time in the last days of his life and ordained the Sikhs to accept Guru Granth Sahib as eternal perpetual living Guru. See, Madanjit Kaur (2007), *Guru Gobind Singh: Historical and Ideological Perspective*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 33-34
- 17 The fifth seat of authority is known as - Takht Damdama Sahib or Guru ki Kaashi. This place owes its importance to the literary work of Guru Gobind Singh Ji done during his stay in 1706. Here the Tenth Guru prepared the authentic and complete edition of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji to which he gave perpetual succession before leaving for heavenly abode. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) officially recognized Damdama Sahib as the fifth Takht on November 18, 1966. The Government of India declared Damdama Sahib as the fifth Sikh Takht in April 1999 during tercentennial celebrations of the advent of the Khalsa. See, Madanjit Kaur (2007), *Guru Gobind Singh: Historical and Ideological Perspective*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp.160-161
- 18 Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, stayed at this place after fighting battles against Mughal atrocities. Before leaving to visit Sikh *sangats* in the Deccan, Guruji blessed Talwandi Sabo as ‘Guru Ki Kashi’. The Title ‘Guru Ki Kashi’ was given because of the intense literary activities (the compilation of Sikh scriptures) that Guru Gobind Singh engaged in during his nine month stay here. This sacred place became the centre of Sikh learning. It was here at Damdama Sahib (Guru Ki Kashi) that Guru Gobind Singh prepared the revised and authentic version of the Adi Granth which is now being honored by the Sikhs as Guru Granth Sahib. It was transcribed by Bhai Mani Singh.
- 19 J.S. Aluwalia & H.S. Dilgeer (1994), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 32-34. Also see, K.S. Duggal (1995), *Akal Takht and other Seats of Sikh Polity*, UBS Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 4-14
- 20 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1999), *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 79-81.
- 21 C.H. Lohelin (1964), *The Sikhs and their Scriptures*, Lucknow Publishing House, Lucknow, p. 79

There cannot be any other Takht parallel to that of the historical significance and authority of Akal Takht Sahib. There is hardly any evidence showing the establishment, recognition and declaration of any of other four Takhts by the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. An eminent Sikh scholar Kashmir Singh explains the authority of Akal Takht Sahib in the following words:

*“The Guru (Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru) had exercised the power that emanated from Akal Takht Sahib while issuing the Hukmnama (edict) from various places. Issuing ‘Hukmnama’ by the Guru from a particular place do not confer the status of ‘Takht’ upon that place. The Guru had issued hukmnamas from Paonta Sahib also but that is not known as Takht. It seems that the Sikhs had themselves started the use of this terminology for some important places connected with the Tenth Guru.”*²²

Historical Background of Akal Takht Sahib

To the sacred and holy space of Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, was added the Akal Takht Sahib by Guru Hargobind (sixth Sikh Guru) as the centre of temporal activity. The Akal Takht Sahib is an impressive building that sits directly in front of the causeway leading to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Constructed in the manner of a fortress/ place of worship, its very structure speaks credible volumes to its military and political history. Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Sikh Guru, induced a spirit of nationhood in the forerunners of the Khalsa, a nation which would be solely run by the ‘Panth’ and no other body or institution. To this end, in the fashion of the Mughal state of the time, the Guru decided to erect a seat one which would defy all political entities and emphasize on a mixture of religion and power.²³

Guru Hargobind Sahib raised the height of the platform to twelve feet defying the royal edict of Mughal ruler Jahangir that no other person except the emperor himself can sit on a raised platform of more than three feet. Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, would regularly sit on the raised platform, the Takht, with all marks of royalty and dispensed justice for all disputes of Sikhs.²⁴ The Guru’s warrior mentality, a messiah-like zeal, and sense of fashion soon saw Akal-Takht Sahib earn the connotation of being labelled as the court of Sikh nation. **At the time it was built higher than the central**

22 Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, in *Understanding Sikhism –The Research Journal*, Vol.3 No.2, July-December 2001, pp. 30-31.

23 G.S Dhillon (1996), “Akal Takht and Sikh Heritage”, in Kharak Singh (ed.), *Current Thoughts on Sikhism*, Published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 210-217.

24 It is here at Akal Takht Sahib that Guru Hargobind Sahib used to hold his Court and receive ambassadors, emissaries, diplomats and other dignitaries. In the evenings this was a place for signing of heroic ballads by the "dhadis"(ballad singers), in order to infuse the spirit of "Charhdi Kala" (the Sikh concept of Euphoria) among the Sikhs.

Mughal Court at Delhi, but lower than Harmandir Sahib in reverence to the almighty but in denial of any worldly polity. The Akal Takht was built a fraction lower than the Harimandir Sahib, implying the order of importance, that the search for spiritual grace was always to lead.²⁵ A similar balancing of spiritual and temporal functions was built into Guru Hargobind Sahib's daily routine that highlighted the throne platform with clear assertion of sovereignty and temporal authority.²⁶

Akal Takht represents the whole of the magnitude of the Almighty. It is illogical to believe that the throne of the almighty negates spiritual domain.²⁷ On the other hand, construction of the structure of Akal Takht Sahib near Harmandir Sahib means that one is the 'Darbar' (the court) and the other one is 'Takht' (the throne), and the Almighty supervises. 'His' Court and 'His' Throne complements each other.²⁸ It is here at Akal Takht Sahib that Guru Hargobind Sahib used to hold his Court and receive ambassadors, emissaries, diplomats and other dignitaries. In the evenings this was a place for signing of heroic ballads by the '*dhadi*' (ballad singers) in order to infuse the spirit of "Charhdi Kala" (the Sikh concept of euphoria) among the Sikhs.²⁹ Renowned

25 Today's Akal Takht is a large 5-storey modern structure. Three of the storeys were added by Maharaja Ranjit Singh with inlaid marble and a gold-leafed dome. 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 floor 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 cusped 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 Sahib was seated on the first floor, where the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also took his seat. For concerned information see, Sardar Harjeet Singh (2009), *Faith & Philosophy of Sikhism -Volume 4 of Indian religions series*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 278-279. Also see, "Sikh Political Institutions and Movements" available at <https://www.thesikhencyclopedia.com/sikh-political-institutions-and-movements/akal-takht>, accessed on 27/06/2016.

26 The Guru started the day with worship in the Harimandir Sahib; he would then go on a hunt in the late morning and grant audience from the Akal Takht in the afternoon; in the evening he would return to the shrine for prayers and hymns, and at night he and his followers would return to the Akal Takht to listen to martial songs of heroic deeds. Guru Hargobind Sahib held his court and decided matters of military strategy and political policy. Later on, the Sikh commonwealth (Sarbat Khalsa) took decisions here on matters of peace and war and settled disputes between the various Sikh groups.

27 The building of Akal Takht Sahib was constructed in front of Darbar Sahib. Some writers believe that the Darbar Sahib stands for spiritual guidance and Takht Sahib represents temporal activities. This notion is not based on Sikh ideology. The Throne that belongs to the Almighty cannot be a mere temporal seat. Two flags flutter over Akal Takht Sahib. One representing Miri (temporal authority) and other represent the *Piri* (spiritual authority).

28 J.S. Ahluwalia & H.S. Dilgeer (2009) , *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 29-33

29 Gurbachan Singh (1998) , *Guru Haragobind in Sikh Tradition: Based on Acknowledged Conventional Sources*, published by National Book Organization, New Delhi, pp.76-80. Also see

writer and Sikh historian Khuswant Singh has described the unique seat of Akal Takht Sahib as follows:

"Across the Harimandir, he built the Akal Takht (the throne of the Timeless God) where instead of chanting hymns of peace, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and, instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military conquests."³⁰

Khuswant Singh also adds:

"Guru's (Guru Hargobind Sahib) abode became like that of an Emperor. He sat on a throne and held court. The Akal Takht became a spiritual place, a military centre, a political office, a court, a place for gatherings, a durbar and a throne issuing Hukmnamas (the royal edicts)."³¹

By the beginning of the 17th century, a severe repression from the Mughal rulers culminated in the martyrdom of Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, who had laid aside the garb of a 'faquir' (the saint) and was called 'Sachha Patshah' (the true king).³² It was Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Guru, who gave visible expression to the title of 'Sachha Patshah' by wearing two swords as the emblems of his spiritual and temporal positions - *Miri and Piri*.³³ By the time of Guru Arjun Dev's (fifth Sikh Guru) martyrdom, Sikhism was more than just a small spiritual community with a formidable history, and a unique and widely respected scripture. Symbolically acknowledged even by the Emperor Akbar, Sikhism had become a significant presence in Indian society.³⁴ A model of self-governance was necessary by which Sikhs could systematically explore and direct their temporal and spiritual affairs. From the days of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith, down to the year 1604, the movement ran on peaceful lines, continuously developing a distinct socio-cultural identity of the Sikh followers.³⁵

Amrita Sharma (1998), *The life and teachings of Guru Har Gobind*, published by Learners Press, New Delhi, pp. 45

30 As quoted by Khuswant Singh. See Khushwant Singh (1991) *A History of the Sikhs, Volume 1, 1469-1839*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 63

31 Khuswant Singh (1963), *History of Sikhs*, Vol. 1, published by Princeton University Press, p. 63.

32 Prithi Pal Singh (2006), *The History of Sikh Gurus*, published by Lotus Press, New Delhi, pp. 186-187

33 Joginder Singh (2004), "Princely preceptor: Guru Hargobind Sahib", *Sikh Review*, 52 (2), pp. 19-21

34 J.S. Grewal (1998), *The Sikhs of the Punjab, Volumes 2-3*, published by Cambridge University Press, New York, pp. 42-47. See also Pritam Singh Gill (1978), *History of Sikh Nation: Foundation, Assassination, Resurrection*, New Academic Publication, Jullundur, pp. 124-129

35 Pritam Singh Gill (1978), *History of Sikh Nation: Foundation, Assassination, Resurrection*, published by New Academic Publication, Jullundur, pp. 96-99, 154-158. Also see Hari Ram Gupta (1984), *History of the Sikhs: The Sikh Gurus, 1469-1708*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 405-413

Guru Arjan Dev's supreme sacrifice was a tragic turning point that left deep impression on the Sikh psyche in the form of a sharp and sudden awareness of the concept of martyrdom. Out of it grew the community's tradition of taking an implacable stand against injustice and the vagaries of tyrannical rulers. A new and lasting dimension was now added to the Sikh sense of mission and purpose. The change of emphasis from a peaceful propagation of the faith to the declaration of the right to defend the faith by forces of arms strengthened the sense of consolidation and cohesiveness among the Sikh community.³⁶

Before the end of Sikh rule, the Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, had become the foremost centre of Sikh pilgrimage. Amritsar, a major city of Punjab, was an acknowledged seat of Sikh assertiveness.³⁷ With the establishment of Sikh rule, the religious imagination of the Sikhs, their emotions, and their sense of piety made it the premier Gurdwara for the rulers and the ruled. The Akal Takht Sahib gained increasing importance in the eighteenth century till the occupation of territories by the Khalsa forces and establishment of the Sikh rule. The individual rulers had no problem with accepting a common coin as the symbolic declaration of their sovereignty and venerating the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar³⁸) as the foremost sacred space of the Sikhs.³⁹

In the 18th century, Ahmed Shah Abdali and Massa Rangar⁴⁰ led a series of attacks on Akal Takht Sahib and Harmandir Sahib. However, the destruction of

36 Jagjit Singh (2007), *Percussions of History: the Sikh Revolution, In the Caravan of Revolutions*, published by Nanakshahi Trust, SAS Nagar, pp. 145-149. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (2006), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold: 1606-1708 C.E.*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 479-483.

37 Importance of Amritsar - Sikh religious leaders had the sole direction of all religious affairs at Amritsar. Their Bunga was the centre of their activity. They had great interest in maintaining the religious and political traditions of the Khalsa as established by Guru Gobind Singh. Their role was unthinkable without Amritsar.

38 The foundation of the town Ramdasapur (modern Amritsar) was laid in 1577 by Guru Ram Das (1534-81). The Guru added to the sanctity and splendor of this historical place by building Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar. Guru Ram Das encouraged people from various trades and professions to take up residence here. As a result, the city became a center of trade and many other activities. The city of Amritsar became very important in shaping the future of the Sikh Religion and political power. For a comprehensive study about the historical, economical and cultural aspects of city Amritsar see, Fauja Singh (ed.), (1978), *The City of Amritsar: A Study of Historical, Cultural, Social, and Economic Aspects*, Oriental Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi. Also see, Jagjit Singh (1998), *Temple of Spirituality or Golden Temple of Amritsar*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi.

39 For detailed information about various historical places within Golden Temple Complex and their significance, see, Jagjit Singh (1998), *Temple of Spirituality or Golden Temple of Amritsar*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, pp. 62-84.

40 Massa Rangar was traitor who desecrated the Golden Temple in 1740. He was appointed by Zakaria Khan, Governor of Lahore, as an officer in charge of Amritsar in 1740. Massa Rangar occupied Golden Temple and converted it into den of vice. Smoking, gambling dancing of nauch

Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib could not dampen the spirit of the Sikhs to fight against Ahmad Shah Abdali. The political discussions and military strategies to fight Ahmad Shah Abdali were evolved in these assemblies at Akal Takht Sahib. That is why Ahmad Shah Abdali and his generals repeatedly tried to destroy this sacred place of the Sikhs. The building of Darbar Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib were destroyed twice by the Afghans in 1757 and 1762.⁴¹ All along this, an alarming tendency was also gathering strength. Slowly but surely, the Sikh religious shrines started becoming the hub of political activity, particularly after the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. It was in the early thirties that the Akal Takht Sahib within the Golden Temple complex became the centre of Sikh politics.⁴²

Miri Piri Doctrine - The Basis of Akal Takht Sahib

The institution of Akal Takht Sahib is based on Guru Hargobind Sahib's revolutionary ideology of 'Double Sovereignty' which stands for 'Miri-Piri' (temporal-spiritual) sovereignty of the Sikh Panth.⁴³ In order to understand the concept of 'Miri-Piri', it is important to understand its meaning and historical context. Miri-Piri is a compound of two words; and has been adapted into Sikh tradition to connote the close relationship between the temporal and the spiritual aspects.⁴⁴ The term 'Miri-Piri', derived from Persian word 'Miri', itself a contraction of the Arabic word 'amir' (commander, governor, lord, prince), signifies temporal power. The term 'Piri' is a derivation from Persian word 'pir' (saint, spiritual guide) that stands for spiritual authority.⁴⁵

girls/prostitutes was order of the day and a strong small force was posted in the complex for his safety. Two devoted Sikhs, Suka Singh and Mehtab Singh cut off Massa Rangar's head and put him to death. Sukha Singh and Mehtab Singh, two Sikhs who were living near Bikaner, Rajasthan, when they heard the desecration of Golden temple, took upon themselves to free the holiest of Sikh site from the clutches of Massa Rangar and punished the tyrant for daring to defile the sanctity of the holiest site of Sikhs.

41 Darbar Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib were destroyed twice by the Afghans in 1757 and 1762. In 1757 Baba Deep Singh fell along with his fearless companions while fighting Ahmad Shah Abdali's general Jehan Khan.

42 Jaspal Singh (1995), "Sikh Institutions Akal Takht: A Study in its socio-spiritual political background", *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, 14 (2), July-December, 1995, pp. 76-80.

43 Vikram Singh (1996), "Miri-Piri - The Concept of Temporal and Spiritual Sovereignty", *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, 15(10), January-June 1996, pp. 86-95.

44 Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (1991), *Religion and Politics: The Sikh perspective*, published by Guru Nanak Dev Mission, Patiala pp. 14-18. Also see, Gurdeep Kaur (200), *Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib: The Concept of State*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp.117-121.

45 Miri (worldly grandeur) is the function of a 'Mir' (chieftain) and Piri (saintliness; spiritual grandeur) is the function of a 'Pir' (saint). Both these words are of Person-Arabic origin. The term 'Pir' is used for spiritual greatness; as in this very sense it has been used in Gurbani, the word Pir connotes spiritual grandeur. The term - Miri-Piri represents for the Sikhs is a basic principle

Guru Hargobind Sahib is famously called “Miri Piri da Malik”⁴⁶ (the lord of the spiritual and temporal domains). An eminent Sikh intellectual Sirdar Kapur Singh calls this step the starting point of “Double sovereignty”.⁴⁷ Here, the peculiar Sikh doctrine of “Double Sovereignty” was born, the essence of which is that a man of any religion must never submit to the exclusive claim of the secular State to govern the bodies and minds of men. The doctrine of Miri and Piri proclaimed by Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Sikh Guru was in keeping with the basic orientation and ideological direction provided to the Sikh movement by Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. The revelation of the ‘Miri –Piri’ concept⁴⁸ was fulfilment of Guru Nanak’s mission of welding the spiritual and the empirical, the transcendent and the imminent, into a harmonious whole. Guru Hargobind Sahib donned two swords, one of ‘Miri’ and the other of ‘Piri’ at the time of his initiation as ‘Guru’, thereby making clear the future role the Sikh society was to play.⁴⁹

The fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev, had constructed Harimandar Sahib (at Amritsar) as the central Sikh shrine. The sixth Guru, Hargobind Sahib, raised Akal Takht (the throne of the Timeless) side by side with the Harmandir Sahib, signifying that the Sikhs professed independence of any earthly leaders and owed their primary allegiance to none else than the *Akal Purakh* (The Timeless one). **Two flags of Miri and Piri were raised at the common compound between Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib distinctly symbolizing the ‘Double sovereignty’⁵⁰, one in the**

which has influenced their religious and political thought and governed their societal structure and behaviour.

- 46 The term "Miri Piri da Malik" was conferred on the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib, because of his wisdom having mastery on worldly/political matters as well as spiritual matters. This correlation between the mundane and spiritualism has in fact been conceptualized from the teachings of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji who was the founder of Sikh faith. See, T.K. Anand (1997), *Essence of Sikhism –The Lives and Teachings of the Sikh Gurus*, Vikas publishing House, New Delhi, p. 47. Also see, H.S. Dilgeer , *The Akal Takht* (1980), published by Punjabi Book Company, Jullundur, p. 22.
- 47 Kapur Singh (1984), *The Golden Temple: Its Theo-Political Status*, published by Academy of Sikh Religion & Culture, Patiala, pp.17-20. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708 C.E.*, (latest edition), Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, p.489
- 48 Before the Sixth Guru , the authority of the Guru was considered only in the spiritual field. Guru Nanak Dev was called Nanak Shah Faqir , the Guru of Hindus and Pir of Muslims. By wearing two swrods, the sixth Guru made the addition of the field of worldly grandeur alongwith the field of spiritual greatness. But this fact should not be forgotten that in Sikhism, the emphasis has been laid from the time of the first Guru on the combination of both worldly and spiritual life. See, Daljeet Singh(1992) , “Sikhism : A Miri Piri System”, in Jasbir Singh Mann & Kharak Singh (eds), *Recent Researches in Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 42- 56.
- 49 Joginder Singh Talwara (1996)\, “ Miri Piri Siasat Dharm”, *Sikh Review*, 37(9), pp. 23- 25
- 50 The term ‘Double Sovereignty’ was used by renowned Sikh scholar Sirdar Kapur Singh. He uses this term in context to Sikh philosophy as established by the Sikh Gurus. On the basis of Sikh philosophy and Sikh history of struggle and sovereignty, Sirdar Kapur Singh explains ‘double sovereignty’ as very basic doctrine of Sikhism. Later, various Sikh scholars, historians and writers like Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia, H.S. Dilgeer, Surjit Singh Gandhi, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, etc

empirical and the other in the religious sphere.⁵¹ Thus Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) at Amritsar became an integrated complex symbolizing the integrated Sikh doctrine in which both the spiritual concerns of the human soul and the temporal concerns of man's daily life were taken care of. Not only Harmandir Sahib but also all other Gurudwaras came to acquire a theo-political status.⁵²

The doctrine of 'Miri- Piri' is a whole life system that has been embedded in the Sikh theology and philosophy since Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith. However, there are some historical events that gave it a definite shape and character. The most vital such event was the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Sikh Guru, which occurred during the rule of Mughal emperor Jahangir.⁵³ The fact is that until the martyrdom of the fifth Guru (Guru Arjan Dev), the Sikhs were a peaceful community. The supreme martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev radically changed the entire character of Sikhism from a passive people to courageous, the 'saint soldiers'. Guru Arjan Dev sowed the seed of martyrdom which became the heritage in Sikh religion and tradition.⁵⁴ In this context, an eminent writer and historian Gopal Singh writes :

“It was the martyrdom of the fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev at the behest of Mughal emperor Jahangir which compelled the Sikhs to be militarized.

have used the term 'Double Sovereignty' as an established Sikh doctrine, in context to concept of Miri-Piri, and the establishment, role and status of Akal Takht Sahib.

- 51 Surain Singh Dhanoa (2005), *Raj Karega Khalsa*, Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi, pp.60-63.
- 52 The Guru came to be looked upon by his disciples not only as the light or Satguru (spiritual guide) but also as Sachcha Patshah (True King). The assembly of his followers came to be known as *Darbar* or court and his seat as the Takht or throne. See, W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi (2000), *A Popular Dictionary of Sikhism: Sikh Religion and Philosophy*, Routledge, New York, pp. 55-57. Also see, Talwara, Joginder Singh (1989) , "Miri Piri Siasat Dharm" in *Sikh Review*, Vol. 37 No. 9, September 1989, pp. 25-27.
- 53 During the Guruship of Guru Arjan Dev, more and more people of all castes were embracing the Path of the Guru and becoming Sikhs, which included Hindus and Muslims. The Muslim priests did not like this and saw Guru Arjan Dev as a big threat to the propagation of Islam. As a consequence of this they made plans against Guru Sahib. In May 1606, Guru Arjan Dev was arrested and brought to Lahore where the Guru was subjected to severe torture. The Mughal Emperor Jahangir ordered that Guru Arjan Dev Ji, be tortured and sentenced to death after the revered Sikh Guru had refused to stop the preaching of Sikhism as started by Guru Nanak Dev Ji. After enduring five days of unrelenting torture, Guru Arjan Dev was allowed to take a cooling bath in the nearby river, Ravi. As thousands watched the Guru, he entered the river never to be seen again.. Guru Arjan Dev embraced martyrdom on Jeth Sudi 4th (1st Harh) Samvat 1663, (May 16, 1606).
- 54 For detailed analysis of circumstances, events and outcomes related to supreme sacrifice of Shri Guru Arjan Dev, see, Prithipala Singh Kapur & Mohinder Singh (2006), *Guru Arjan Dev: Life, Martyrdom and Legacy*, published by Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, pp. 21-34. Harbhajan Singh (2007), *A Saga of Supreme Sacrifice: Martyrdom of Shri Guru Arjan Dev*, published by J Chandramohan Printers, Chennai pp. 13-19. Also See, Louis E. Fenech (2000), *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the "Game of Love"*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.77-84. For theological and historical dimensions of Guu Tegh Bahadar's supreme sacrifice see, Gurbachan Singh Talib (1976), *Guru Tegh Bahadur - Background and the Supreme Sacrifice, A collection of Research Articles*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala.

*And the beheading of the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur at Delhi by Aurangzeb convinced the Sikhs that there was no option left before them but to resort to arms. If the relations of the Guru (Guru Arjan Dev) had remained as cordial as they were during Akbar's time (second, third, and fourth Guru Period), there was no questions of the Sikhs taking up arms under the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. So the gigantic tree of Khalsa power grew out of the seeds of martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur.*⁵⁵

After the final rites of Guru Arjan Dev were concluded⁵⁶, Baba Budha Ji⁵⁷ entrusted Guruship to Hargobind Sahib. During the ceremonial rites for the inauguration of Guru Hargobind Sahib as the sixth Sikh Guru, Baba Budha Ji donned Guru Hargobind Sahib with two swords. It is pertinent mention here that earlier it was the 'Seli' (woollen cord worn on the head which had been passed down on each successive Guru since Guru Nanak) which had been used for the authorization of earlier Gurus to Guruship.⁵⁸ In this context, an eminent historian M.A. Macauliffe writes:

*"Guru Hargobind ordered that the seli should be placed in the treasury apparently because it was not suited to the altered political condition of the Sikhs. He then addressed Bhai Buddha, "My endeavours shall be to fulfill they prophecy. My seli shall be a sword-belt, and I shall wear my turban with a royal aigrette. He then sent for his arms, and arrayed himself in martial style so that as the Sikh chronicler stages, his splendor shone like the sun."*⁵⁹

55 Gopal Singh (1994), *Politics of Sikh Homeland, 1940-1990*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, p.21

56 As per various Sikhs sources, before Guru Arjan Dev was tortured to death, he gave a strong parting message to his young son. Bhai Santokh Singh in Sri Gur Suraj Parkash Granth provides a similar account:

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸੰਗ ਮਿਲੀਜੈ। ਹਮ ਦਿਸਿ ਤੇ ਬਹੁ ਧੀਰਜ ਦੀਜੈ।
ਕਰਹੁ ਨ ਸ਼ੋਕ ਗੁਬਿੰਦ ਗੁਨ ਗਾਵੈ। ਅਪਰ ਸਰਬ ਕੋ ਕਹੈ ਮਿਟਾਵੈ।
ਸਾਜੁਧ ਹੋਇ ਤਖਤ ਪਰ ਰਾਜਹੁ। ਜਥਾ ਸ਼ਕਤਿ ਸੈਨਾ ਸੰਗ ਸਾਜਹੁ।

Translation: "I have succeeded in effecting the object of my life. Go to my son (Guru Hargobind) and give him from me ample consolation. Bid him not mourn or indulge in unmanly lamentations but sing God's praises. Let him also restrain from grief the other members of my family. Let him sit fully armed on his throne, and maintain an army to the best of his ability."

57 Baba Buddha is a unique personage and Grand Old Man of Sikhdom. In Sikh history, it is hard to find an individual like the great Baba Budha Ji. Guru Amar Das Ji called Baba Budha Ji the pillar of Sikhism. He was one of the earliest disciples of Guru Nanak. He performed the formal coronation ceremonies of 5 Sikh gurus, till Guru Hargobind. When the Adi Granth was prepared, Baba Budha Ji was appointed the First Granthi (Priest) of Darbar Sahib.

58 Trilochan Singh (2001), *The Turban and the Sword of the Sikhs: Essence of Sikhism : History and Exposition of Sikh Baptism, Sikh Symbols, and Moral Code of the Sikhs, Rehitnāmās*, published by Bhai Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Publishers, Amritsar, p. 102-105. Also see, W.H. McLeod (1997), *Sikhism*, published by Penguin Books, London, pp.33-35.

59 S.S. Gandhi (1978), *History of the Sikh Gurus: A Comprehensive Study*, published by Gur Das Kapur & Sons, Delhi, p. 279. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1998), *Guru Haragobind in Sikh Tradition: Based on Acknowledged Conventional Sources*, National Book Organization, New Delhi, p.65

As per the relevant historical records, Baba Budha Ji donned two swords on Guru Hargobind Sahib, one on the right and other on the left side.⁶⁰ The two swords donned by Baba Budha ji signified ‘Miri’ and ‘Piri’ - Temporal Power and Spiritual Power. Soon after his ascension to Guruship in 1606, Guru Hargobind Sahib laid the foundation of the unique institution, the Akal Takht Sahib. The temporal nature of the Akal Takht Sahib and the spiritual nature of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) highlighted the dual concept of “Miri and Piri” introduced by the sixth Sikh Guru.⁶¹

Guru Hargobind Sahib adopted the style of a soldier and ordered his Sikhs to bear arms. As Guru Hargobind Sahib realized that self-defence was necessary, the Guru started to build an army to protect the religion and maintain separate identity. Militarization of the Sikh community and the transformation of Sikh movement by the sixth Guru was not in any way deviation from the principles laid down by the earlier Gurus.⁶² It was rather a continuation and confirmation of the philosophy of Guru Nanak who had condemned cowardliness and the attitude of submission to an unjust ruler dubbing it as a shameful act. Though the Sikhs under Guru Hargobind Sahib did not launch any violent struggle in the initial phases, the spirit and essence of ‘Miri-Piri’ expressed itself in fearlessness and non-conformity against oppression and cruelty.⁶³

Understood properly, the concept of the Miri-Piri unity, in the ease of differentiated unity means that Sikhism is concerned with the other-worldly salvation of the soul as much as with this-worldly amelioration of society and state. The Miri-Piri doctrine expounded by the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib, means that Sikh philosophy is concerned with both spiritual as well as temporal or worldly aspects.⁶⁴

This blend of religion and politics also denoted that Sikhs are not only a religious entity but also a political community. The unique doctrine of Miri-Piri implies that

60 Gurdarshan Sing Dhillon (1991), *Insights into Sikh Religion and History*, Singh and Singh Publishers, Chandigarh, pp.49-52. Joseph. T.O’Connell & W.H. McLeod (1991), *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp.41- 43.

61 *ibid.*

62 Gurdeep Kaur (2000), *Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib: The Concept of State*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 106-110. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1998), *Guru Haragobind in Sikh Tradition: Based on Acknowledged Conventional Sources*, National Book Organization, New Delhi, p. 70-73

63 Daljit Singh (1994), *Essentials of Sikhism*, published by Singh & Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 136-139. Also see, Jasdev Singh Rai (2001), “Sovereignty of Akal Takht”, *Sikh Review*, 39 (10), October- 2011, pp. 13-16.

64 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1999) , *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 89-91. Daljit Singh (1994), *Essentials of Sikhism*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 210-213

politics and governance should be religion based or valued based. The Miri-Piri concept justifies the desire of Sikhs to acquire political and state power, but it should only be used for the welfare of whole mankind.⁶⁵

The Sikh concept of 'Miri-Piri' and its domain is obliged to impart righteousness and justice as one is supposed to be the defender of 'Dharma' (Righteousness) and a man of the domain of Piri must not be a silent spectator to tyranny, injustice and inhumanity. This is not unity of temporal and transcendental but "oneness" of the both. In the Sikh concept of 'Miri- Piri', both do not stand apart or distinct from each other, but resonate each other.⁶⁶ Hence, the Sikhism's concept of *Miri and Piri* is the saviour of justice, humanity, righteousness and spiritualism. The spiritual sovereignty of God having become embodied in the 'Sahabad Guru', the Harmandir Sahib, with Guru Granth Sahib installed therein, as such, comes to be deemed as the highest seat of spiritual authority and guidance, while Akal Takht Sahib is envisaged as the symbolic seat of the temporal, secular authority vested in the Sikh people.⁶⁷

Spiritual sovereignty of God (Piri) was bestowed by Guru Gobind Singh on the Adi Granth, which became as such Guru Granth Sahib while the temporal sovereignty (Miri) was vested in people-hood with the Panth as its concrete sociological determination; the Sikh Panth was raised to the status of 'Guru Panth' or 'Khalsa Panth', and was institutionalized as such through the baptism ceremony ('amrit sanchaar') on the Baisakhi day of the year 1699 at Sri Anandpur Sahib.⁶⁸ In other words through this sacrament, the ethno-religious evolution of the Sikhs got institutionalization into a corporate identity of ethno-political character. Thus, Sri Akal Takht Sahib is the symbol of 'Miri' vesting in the Guru Panth or Khalsa Panth just as Sri Harimandir Sahib is the symbol of spiritual sovereignty embodied by Sri Guru

65 S.S. Dhanoa (1992), "The Doctrine of Miri-Piri", *Khera Journal of Religious Understanding*, Volume 11, Issue 1, pp. 93-97. Also see, J.S. Ahluwalia & H.S. Dilgeer (2009), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 39-41.

66 Jaspal Singh (1993), "Miri-Piri Doctrine – The basis Sikh Concept of State", in *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religions*, Volume XII, No.2, July-December 1993, pp. 83-87. Also see Nirbhai Singh (2003), *Sikh Dynamic Vision*, published by Harman Publications, New Delhi, pp.347- 350.

67 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (2003), *Liberating Sikhism from 'The Sikhs'- Sikhism's Potential for World Civilization*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 80-83 . Also see, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (1994), "Religion and Politics (A Sikh Perspective)", in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab – Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, pp. 195-197

68 Fauja Singh (1999), "Foundations of the Khalsa Commonwealth : Ideological Aspects", in Shiv Kumar Gupta (ed.) *Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak's Mission : Khalsa Tercentenary Commemorative Volume*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 18-21. Also see, Madanjit Kaur (2000), *Guru Gobind Singh and Creation of Khalsa*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 61-64.

Granth Sahib.⁶⁹ The two divinely-ordained institutions of Sikhism—*Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Guru Panth*—flow out of the ‘Miri-Piri’ concept which if properly understood and practiced would enable mankind to realize genuinely the modern values of liberalism, secularism and universalism.⁷⁰ The State seal of the Khalsa issued during the rule of Banda Singh Bahadur began with: “*We hereby place our impress of sovereignty upon both the worlds, the seen and the unseen.*”⁷¹ Thus, the basic doctrine of Sikhism, that of ‘Double Sovereignty’, was reiterated by the Sikhs under Banda Singh Bahadar.⁷² In this context, a renowned Sikh scholar Sirdar Kapur Singh writes:

“A man of religion must always owe his primary allegiance to Truth and morality, and he must never submit to the exclusive claim of the secular state to govern the bodies and minds of men.”⁷³

The underlying principle of ‘Double Sovereignty’ is derived from Guru Nanak Sahib’s egalitarian, freedom loving and asserting, and revolutionary ideology. It needs to be understood in the context of ‘Guru Granth Sahib’- ‘Guru Panth’ twin track approach to Sikh theo-political affairs, and why and how the position of the institution of Akal Takht Sahib is supreme in the Sikh tradition and psyche.⁷⁴ Akal Takht has

69 Surinder Singh Kohli (1989) “Sikh Dharma Vich Miri ate Piri di Parampra” in Lal Singh and Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (eds.), *Miri Piri da Sidhant*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 64-67. Also See, J.S. Ahluwalia & H.S. Dilgeer (2009), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 30-32

70 Tarlochan Singh, “Miri and Piri: Religion and Politics in Sikhism with Special Reference to the Sikh Struggle (1947-1999)” – *A paper read at International Sikh Conference*, available at <https://www.scribd.com/document/148342131/Tarlochan-Singh-Miri-Piri-Doctrine-in-Sikhism>, accessed on 14/08/2016.

71 The couplet on Sikh state coins issued under Banda Bahadur began with - “Sikka zad bar Har do alam” (Persian). English translation of the couplet in Persian as given by renowned Sikh scholar, Sirdar Kapur Singh. See, Kapur Singh (1984), *The Golden Temple: Its Theo-Political Status*, published by Academy of Sikh Religion & Culture, Patiala, p. 5. Also see, Gurmukh Singh (2015) “Guru Granth-Guru Panth & the Institution of Sri Akal Takht Sahib”, *Sikh Missionary Society*, U.K., available at <http://www.sikhmissionarysociety.org/sms/smsarticles/advisorypanel/gurmukhsinghsewauk/gurugranthgurupanthandinstitutionofsriakaltakht.html>, accessed on 12/06/2016.

72 As Banda Singh Bahadur declared the independence of Sirhind province in 1710, the Khalsa under his leadership adopted this legend on their State Seal. The Sikh Empire had its own currency for the first time under the iconic Sikh general, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. The use of these coins was carried on by subsequent kings of Punjab and reached its epitome under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who laid the foundations of Sikh Empire. Baba Banda Singh made a start towards the creation of an independent Sikh State (Punjab) and assumed political authority. His areas of control stretched from Lahore to Panipat in India. He ruled the territory between the Sutlej river and the Yamuna river, established a capital in the Himalayas at Lohgarh and struck coinage in the names of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. See, Harbans Kaur Sagoo (2001), *Banda Singh Bahadur and Sikh Sovereignty*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 147-156. Surjit Singh Gnadhi (1999), *Sikhs in the Eighteenth Century: Their Struggle for Survival and Supremacy*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 475-482,

73 Kapur Singh (1984), *The Golden Temple: Its Theo-Political Status*, published by Academy of Sikh Religion & Culture, Patiala, p.4

74 Bhupinder Singh in his paper “Raj Karega Khalsa: Understanding the Sikh Theory of Religion and Politics”, highlights the need and relevance of ‘Miri-Piri’ doctrine in contemporary socio-

always been considered the highest seat of temporal authority among the Sikhs worldwide. During the 18th century when there was period of struggle, it symbolized unity and solidarity of the Sikhs. It gained considerable political importance in the eyes of contemporaries. Non-Sikhs, especially Persian writers began to call it ‘Akal Bunga’, like other ‘Bungas’⁷⁵ surrounding it. During the period of turmoil, after the heavenly abode of the tenth Guru, when Guru Granth had been invested with Guruship, Akal Takht Sahib was developed as the highest seat of Sikh Panth’s political authority.⁷⁶ No doubt, the supreme authority of Akal Takht Sahib has therefore played very significant role in the history and struggle of Sikh community.⁷⁷

Role and Authority of Akal Takht Sahib

The Akal Takht Sahib from where the religious edicts called ‘Hukamnamas’ are issued to the Sikh community is a symbol of the correlation of ‘Miri and Piri’ which is central to the Sikh doctrine. The aim and object of this temporal sovereignty is the realization of a new socio-political order characterized by the values of equality, liberty and justice, without any distinction of caste, creed or race, as described by Guru Arjan Dev as “Halemi Raj”.⁷⁸ The practice of Gurmatta’ (collective decision in the name of Guru Panth)⁷⁹ to give directions to the activities of Sikh community also began from the seat of Akal Takht Sahib.⁸⁰ A Gurmatta was often passed after due deliberations.⁸¹ Such

economic and political scenario. The author convincingly argues that the Sikh theory of religion and politics stands for multi-centred, plural, egalitarian, democratic and non-totalitarian society. See Bhupinder Singh (1999), “Raj Karega Khalsa: Understanding the Sikh Theory of Religion and Politics”, in Pritam Singh & Shinder S. Thandi (eds), *Pre-Colonial and Colonial Punjab: Society, Economy, Politics and Culture*, published by Oxord University Press.

75 Bunga is Persian word meaning a ‘building’. See, R.P. Malhotra & Kuldeep Arora (2003), *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Punjabi Literature A-L Volume 1*, Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi, p. 9.

76 Jasdev Singh Rai (2001), “Sovereignty of Akal Takht”, *The Sikh Review*, Volume 49 Issues 5-12, October 2001, pp. 16-17.

77 Balwant Singh Dhillon (1988), “The Religio-Politico Institution of the Akal Takht : Its emergence, nature and impact”, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, 15 (1), February 1988, pp. 61-68

78 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (2003), *Liberating Sikhism from ‘The Sikhs’ - Sikhism’s Potential for World Civilization*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, p. 51.

79 The term ‘Gurmatta’ is a compound term meaning, literally, ‘intention of the Guru’. The belief that ‘Guru’ was present among the Khalsa aided the evolution of the institution of Gurmatta, which played a vital role in bringing together the Sikh community especially in times of social, religious or even political crises. The convention came to be established after the death of Banda Singh Bahadur that all major social, political and religious problems would be discussed by the Khalsa Panth in the presence of the holy Granth. See, K.S. Thapar (1996), “Gurmata”, in Harbans Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism Vol. II*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 152-155

80 Some of the well known Gurmattas are: the issue of acceptance of Jagir (1733), Construction of Sikh fort (1747), Formation of Dal Khalsa (1748), to recognize Rakhi (1753 and 1758), to attack Lahore (1760), to emphasize the supremacy of Sarbat Khalsa (1765), the petition of Jaswant Rao Holkar (1805), to form SGPC (1920), to form Gurdwara Sewak Dal, later named Akali Dal (1920) etc. The Gurmatta is an unusually interesting feature of Sikh history, one which in any account of the period warrants more than a passing reference.

decisions represented the collective resolve and will of the entire Khalsa Panth. Akal Takht Sahib also became a seat of the Sarbat Khalsa. Akal Takht Sahib is a “Theo-Political” seat of the Sikhs that retains its validity till the present times.⁸²

The nature of the authority of Akal Takht Sahib as envisaged in Sikh doctrine, and as wielded by it in Sikh history can be best comprehended in the context of the basic postulates of Sikh faith. Sikhism attributes to Godhead both spiritual and temporal sovereignty. Symbolizing these two sovereignties, Guru Hargobind Sahib, the creator of the seat of Akal Takht Sahib put on the two swords of ‘Miri’ (temporal sovereignty) and ‘Piri’ (spiritual sovereignty).⁸³ These two attributes remained the prerogative of the Guru-Person upto Guru Gobind Singh who conferred the spiritual sovereignty on Guru Granth Sahib and the temporal sovereignty on the Panth.⁸⁴ Akal-Takht Sahib soon became a place of meeting for the Khalsa Panth during its bloodiest period. It was from the Akal Takht that edicts were issued to mobilize, centralize and unite the Sikh Panth in order to make it worthy of receiving political power. Knowing this, many enemies of the Panth constantly attacked it and reduced it to rubble, but just as the Khalsa Sikh spirit rose perpetually like the phoenix after each and every attack, so too did the Golden dome of the 'Takht' itself.⁸⁵

The magnetic pull of Akal Takht Sahib was reinforced by the doctrine of Guru Panth which provided the moral and religious bond for the concerted action. The Akal Takht became virtually an actor in their struggle for sovereignty.⁸⁶ Its image is enshrined in the Panth's psyche globally and the 'Takht' itself has been a forerunner in

81 During the eighteenth century, the issues of the Sikhs were decided by way of Gurmata. The leaders of all the groups, Misls, battalions of the Sikhs used to gather at Akal Takht to finalize a particular issue. The decisions were reached by way of Gurmata, a consensus in accordance with the Sikh ideology and principles. This Gurmata was issued to the Sikh nation from Akal Takht Sahib as ‘Hukamnama’ of Sarbat Khalsa or Akal Takht Sahib. This represented the will of the Sikh nation. See, J.S. Grewal (2007), *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 385-387.

82 Surjit Singh Sidhu (1999) , “Authority of the Akal Takht”, *Sikh Review*, 47 (11), January 1999, pp. 60-62. Also see, I.J. Singh (2004), “Moral Authority of Akal Takht”, *Sikh Review*, 52 (2), February 2004, pp. 6-7

83 Before the Sixth Guru, the authority of the Guru was considered only in the spiritual field. Guru Nanak Dev was called Nanak Shah Faqir , the Guru of Hindus and Pir of Muslims. By wearing two swords, the sixth Guru made the addition of the field of worldly grandeur alongwith the field of spiritual greatness. But this fact should not be forgotten that in Sikhism, the emphasis has been laid from the time of the first Guru on the combination of both worldly and spiritual life.

84 J.S. Ahluwalia & H.S. Dilgeer (2009) , *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty):Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 30-31

85 Fauja Singh (1996), “Guru Hargobind” in Harbans Singh (ed.),*The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, Volume II*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala Patiala, pp. 232-235.

86 Harchand Singh (1995), “Guru Hragobind: Dawn of a New Era”, *Sikh Review* , 43 (5), pp. 25 -28.

vetoing and placating internal and external matters of the Sikh Panth worldwide.⁸⁷ Akal Takht Sahib is recognized as a place of justice and temporal issues; the highest seat of earthly authority of the Khalsa Panth, the collective body of the Sikhs, and the office of the Jathedar of Akal Takht is recognized as the highest spokesman of the Sikhs.⁸⁸ Akal Takht is a symbol of divine sovereignty and highest seat of temporal authority vested in the Sikh people, and where spiritual and temporal concerns of the Sikh people could be addressed.⁸⁹

With the revelation of Akal Takht Sahib, the Sikhs evolved as a complete nation. The Sikh Panth had a “Sacha Patshah”⁹⁰ (true king), a throne, its own code of religion, philosophy and jurisprudence (Adi Garth), a distinct cultural, religious, political center-cum- territory (Sikh city of Amritsar), culture of cohesion (langar i.e. sacred Sikh kitchen), a line of spiritual leaders, and golden history as well as a large number of followers throughout the Sikh zone. Akal Takht Sahib, by many measures, remains the most successful universally recognized authority of the Sikh community.⁹¹

Akal Takht Sahib is the primary seat of Sikh religious authority and central altar for Sikh political assembly. Through ‘Hukamnamas’, (edicts), Akal Takht Sahib may issue decrees providing guidance or clarification on any point of Sikh doctrine or practice referred to it. Akal Takht Sahib may also lay moral or religious punishments on personages charged with violation of religious discipline or with activity prejudicial to Sikh interests or solidarity.⁹² The Takht may also place on record its admiration of outstanding services rendered or sacrifices made by individuals espousing the cause of Sikhism or of the Sikh community. The five ‘Takhts’ have authority in their respective jurisdictions, and recommend punishments for specific religious offences called

87 J.S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs – Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 113-115.

88 The current Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib is Giani Gurbachan Singh.

89 Kaur, Gurdeep (2000), *Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib: The Concept of State*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 134-136. Also see, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia & Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (2009), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp 30 – 35.

90 Surjit Singh Gandhi(2007), *History of Sikh Gurus Retold 1606-1708.*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, p. 491

91 Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (1991), “Akal Takht :Its Doctrinal Significance”, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, 15 (1) February 1988, pp. 76-81.

92 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1993), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 32-35. Also see, Ganda Singh (1996), “Hukamnama”, in Harbans Singh (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Vol. 2 published by Punjabi University, Patiala, , pp. 288-291.

‘Tankhaah’. As Akal Takht Sahib is considered as the supreme throne, the decisions of Akal Takht Sahib take precedence over all Panthic decisions.⁹³ A renowned Sikh scholar, Singh explains the authority behind the decisions of Akal Takht Sahib as follows:

“John Malcolm in his book “Sketch of the Sikhs”, attracts our attention towards one very important fact. He says that there are not much ways to implement the decisions or Gurmattas passed by the Akal Takht, but still there has been no such time in the history when the Akal Takht decisions/edits were violated. The reason behind this tradition is that Akal Takht is backed by religious power – the power which is much stronger than the power of any military dictator. Sikhs have accepted and upheld the decisions of Akal Takht, even by risking their lives. The Sikhs have firm faith that Gurmatta of Akal Takht comprises of spiritual power and acknowledgement of the Guru.”

(English Translation of excerpt in Punjabi)⁹⁴

Jaspal Singh further adds:

“Akal Takht is the Takht of entire Sarbat Khalsa. It is based on the Gurmat’s principle of ‘ਜਹਾਂ ਜਹਾਂ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਹਾਂ-ਤਹਾਂ ਰੱਛਿਆ ਰਿਆਇਤ’. Sikhs with different thinking and ideologies can attain guardianship of Akal Takht, only on basis of one condition that their ideology should not be violative of the basic principles of ‘Gurmat’. Apart from this, every Sikh living in Punjab, in other parts of the country and the Sikh community all over world, lies within the jurisdiction of Akal Takht. Akal Takht’s authority cannot be limited within territorial boundaries. Akal Takht has the right to guide and direct the Sikh brethren living across the globe.” .

(English Translation of excerpt in Punjabi)⁹⁵

93 Gurbir Singh (1994), “Sikhs, Akalis and the Panth”, in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab – Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, pp. 183-188. Also see Gurdeep Kaur (2000), *Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib: The Concept of State*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 102-104.

94 As quoted by Jaspal Singh in his book titled “Sikh Dharm Te Rajneeti”. The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here : “ਆਪਣੀ ਪੁਸਤਕ “ਸਕੈਚ ਆਫ਼ ਦੀ ਸਿਖਸ” ਵਿਚ ਜਾਨ ਮੈਲਕਮ ਨੇ ਇਕ ਮਹੱਤਵਪੂਰਨ ਤੱਥ ਵੱਲ ਸਾਡਾ ਧਿਆਨ ਆਕਰਸ਼ਿਤ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਉਸਦਾ ਕਹਿਣਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਉਪਰ ਹੋਏ ਫੈਸਲੇ ਅਰਥਾਤ ਗੁਰਮੱਤਾ ਲਾਗੂ ਕਰਾਉਣ ਦੇ ਕਈ ਸਾਧਨ ਮੌਜੂਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਨ ਪਰ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਐਸਾ ਮੌਕਾ ਦੇਖਣ ਵਿਚ ਨਹੀਂ ਆਇਆ ਜਦੋਂ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਫੈਸਲਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਉਲੰਘਣਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੋਵੇ। ਕਾਰਣ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੇ ਫੈਸਲੇ ਪਿਛੇ ਧਰਮ ਦੀ ਸੱਤਾ ਹੈ। ਜਿਹੜੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਸੈਨਿਕ-ਤਾਨਾਸ਼ਾਹ ਦੀ ਸੱਤਾ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਧ ਸ਼ਕਤੀਸ਼ਾਲੀ ਹੈ। ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਫੈਸਲਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੀ ਜਾਨ ਤੇ ਖੇਡ ਕੇ ਵੀ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਹੈ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦਾ ਵਿਸ਼ਵਾਸ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੇ ਗੁਰਮੱਤੇ ਵਿਚ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਅਧਿਆਤਮਕ ਸੱਤਾ ਤੇ ਸਵੀਕ੍ਰਿਤੀ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ।” See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (in Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, p. 46

95 As quoted by Jaspal Singh in his book titled “Sikh Dharm Te Rajneeti”. The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here: “ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਸਰਬਤ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਦਾ ਤਖਤ ਹੈ। ‘ਜਹਾਂ ਜਹਾਂ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਹਾਂ-ਤਹਾਂ ਰੱਛਿਆ ਰਿਆਇਤ’ ਦੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਦਾ ਧਾਰਣੀ ਹੈ। ਹਰ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਚਾਰਧਾਰਾ ਤੇ ਸੋਚ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਿਖ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੀ ਸਰਪ੍ਰਸਤੀ ਹਾਸਲ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਨ। ਸ਼ਰਤ ਇਕੋ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਸੋਚ ਤੇ ਵਿਚਾਰਧਾਰਾ ਗੁਰਮਤ ਦੇ ਮੁਢਲੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ ਦੀ ਉਲੰਘਣਾ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੀ ਨਾ ਹੋਵੇ। ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਇਲਾਵਾ ਹਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦਾ ਰਹਿਣ ਵਾਲਾ, ਪੰਜਾਬ ਤੋਂ ਬਾਹਰ ਪੂਰੇ ਦੇਸ਼ ਦੇ ਕੋਨੇ-ਕੋਨੇ ਵਿਚ ਵਸਣ ਵਾਲਾ, ਤੇ ਫਿਰ ਪੂਰੇ ਵਿਸ਼ਵ ਵਿਚ ਫੈਲਿਆ ਸਿਖ ਸਮਾਜ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੇ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਖੇਤਰ ਵਿਚ ਹੈ। ਅਸਲ ਵਿਚ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਖੇਤਰੀ ਹਦਬੰਦੀ ਵਿਚ ਸੀਮਤ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ। ਪਰੇ ਵਿਸ਼ਵ ਦਾ

The institution of Akal Takht Sahib has been important for many reasons. It gave the Sikhs a rallying point and emerged as a symbol of Sikh identity, self-respect and honour. It was the supreme seat of Akal Takht, where the sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind held his court and decided matters of military strategy and political policy.⁹⁶ At the seat of Akal Takht, Guru Hargobind Sahib used to administer justice, and accepted presents of arms and horses. During the period of Guru Hargobind Sahib, the Sikhs increased in number significantly. The Sikhs under the institution of Akal Takht Sahib and leadership of Guru Hargobind (sixth Sikh Guru) transformed and evolved into a kind of separate state within the empire.⁹⁷

From 1721 to 1726, when Sikh survival hung in the balance and recorded history was a luxury, history is silent about the role of Akal Takht.⁹⁸ Even then it was the venue for conflict resolution when Bhai Mani Singh successfully mediated between two factions of the Khalsa. The first conclave of the Sikh nation - Sarbat Khalsa was convened at the Akal Takht in 1726.⁹⁹ Later on, the Sikh commonwealth (Sarbat Khalsa) took decisions on matters of peace and war, and settled disputes between the various Sikh groups from the seat of Akal Takht. Major issues of polity such as the reorganization of the Sikh army into constituent units or the acceptance of a principality bestowed in 1733 upon the Sikh nation by the Government were resolved at Akal Takht by the Sarbat Khalsa. Even after Punjab was parcelled into several Sikh principalities, the Sarbat Khalsa convened twice a year at Akal Takht Sahib. The Sikh chiefs met here at the Sarbat Khalsa and resolved issues critical to Sikh doctrine or survival. Thus, the Akal Takht Sahib remained the actual capital of the Sikh people with determining role in struggle and survival of their independent identity.¹⁰⁰

ਸਿਖ ਭਾਈਚਾਰਾ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਦੀ ਰਹਿਨੁਮਾਈ ਦਾ ਹੱਕਦਾਰ ਹੈ। See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, p. 47

96 Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1978), *Guru Haragobind in Sikh Tradition: Based on Acknowledged Conventional Sources*, National Book Organization, New Delhi, pp. 66-69. Fauja Singh (1978), *The City of Amritsar: A Study of Historical, Cultural, Social, and Economic Aspects*, Oriental Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, pp. 49-54

97 Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India – A Case Study of Punjab*, published by MacMillan Press, London, pp.80-82.

98 After the martyrdom of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716 A.D, there was a wave of repression of Sikhs. Under these circumstances the farsighted Sikhs and Mata Sundari, the revered spouse of Guru Gobind Singh, sent Bhai Mani Singh to Darbar Sahib, Amritsar to organise the Sikhs.

99 Pritam Singh Gill (1978), *History of Sikh Nation: Foundation, Assassination, Resurrection*, published by New Academic Publications, Jullundur, p. 291. See also, Jagraj Singh (2009) , *A Complete Guide to Sikhism*, Published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp.53-56

100 Surjit Singh Gandhi (1999), *Sikhs in the Eighteenth Century: Their Struggle for Survival and Supremacy*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 332-334. D.S. Gill (1991) , “Akal Takht : Its Historic Role”, *Sikh Review*, Vol. 39 (6), June 1991, pp. 11-14.

The symbol of Sikhs as being a ruling race and a great courageous fighting force went deep in the Sikh minds. The institutions of Dal Khalsa, Sarbat Khalsa and Gurmata became symbols of great emotional appeal and inspired the Sikh community to behave as one coherent body.¹⁰¹ **Since then, Akal Takht Sahib has played historic role in the socio-political affairs of the Sikhs, particularly during the eighteenth century when the Sikh community was waging a determined and dynamic struggle for political ascendancy in Punjab.**¹⁰²

The institution of Akal Takht has played notable part in restoring unity in the Sikh folds while retaining its non-partisan character. It was Bhai Mani Singh who as head of the Takht took cognizance of the dissensions between *Bandai Khalsa* and *Tat Khalsa*, and put an end to the infighting between the two forces.¹⁰³ Bhai Mani Singh was successful in showing the Sikhs that the Akal Takht Sahib was the rallying point where Sikhs could hold their deliberations. It was here that *Budha Dal* and *Taruna Dal* were organised to fight against the excesses of the Mughal Government.¹⁰⁴ Again, it was here in 1748 that Dal Khalsa was organized and Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was made the Commander of Dal Khalsa.¹⁰⁵ During the middle of the 18th century, there had been quadruple struggle for the domination of Punjab viz: Mughals, Marathas, Afghans and Akal Takht Sahib Assembly.¹⁰⁶ During the 18th century, Akal Takht Sahib gained much importance because all the important political, military and religious decisions of the Khalsa Panth were made in the assemblies at Akal Takht Sahib. This Assembly has

101 In the beginning of the 1730's, when the Sikh leaders started fighting among themselves and dissipating their energy and unity, the then Akal Takht Jathedar, Nawab Kapor Singh instructed the chiefs of the Mislis to assemble on Diwali before the Akal Takht and told them to forge a united front to oppose the united Mughal oppression and tyranny. The name given to these forces was Dal Khalsa. Dal Khalsa (not to be confused with a recently formed body that has borrowed this name.), the politico-military body corporate of the fighting forces of the community was also resolved to be formed in a congregation at Sri Akal Takht on the Baisakhi day of the year 1748. The Dal Khalsa was to meet twice a year-on Holi and Diwali. Such meetings were known as Sarbat Khalsa (the whole community or the panth). This body used to resolve through Gurmata where and how a battle was to be launched and how in the event of victory its spoils were to be distributed. This unified command gave an added strength to the Khalsa. See, Gopal Singh (1979), *A History of the Sikh People, 1469-1988*, World Book Centre, New Delhi, pp. 382-389

102 Ujagar Singh (1999), 'The Institution of Akal Takht', *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, October – December 1999, 65-71.

103 After reaching Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, Bhai Mani Singh made great efforts to revive the fairs of Baisakhi and Diwali. In this effort, he had to sacrifice his life. Deliberations regarding the welfare of the community were held at Akal Takht.

104 Jugraj Singh (2009) , *A Complete Guide to Sikhism*, Published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, p.312

105 *ibid.*

106 The Marathas captured power from the weak Mughal Emperor Shah Alam and subsequently they were defeated by Afghan Emperor Ahmad Shah Abdali in the third battle of Panipat in January 1761 A.D. Now Sikhs had to face Ahmed Shah Abdali who wanted to annex Punjab to Kabul kingdom.

been described as ‘Central Government’ of the Sikhs because different Misaldars have been ruling at different places, but they were working under the direction of Assembly at Akal Takht Sahib.¹⁰⁷ Thus the concept and institution of Akal Takht became the rising symbol of the political power of the Sikhs.

The Office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib

The term ‘Jathedar’ refers to a leader of a ‘Jatha’, which means a ‘group’.¹⁰⁸ Among the Sikhs, a ‘Jathedar’ is an ordained leader of the clergy and leads a ‘Takht’, a sacred and authoritative seat. Sikh clergy consists of five Jathedars, one each from five Takhts or religious and sacred seats of Sikhs.¹⁰⁹ The Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib makes all the important decisions after consultations with the Jathedars of the other four Takhts. As Akal Takht Sahib was revealed by sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib, the Guru himself was the custodian of the Akal Takht Sahib. Guru Hargobind used this seat to discuss military strategies and take political decisions, and issue ‘Hukmanamas’ (edicts).¹¹⁰

The position of the Jathedar has evolved since the first quarter of the 17th century when Bhai Gurdas was appointed as the first custodian of the Akal Takht Sahib, called *Akal Bunga*¹¹¹ at that time. The Jathedars in the 18th and 19th century were usually selected by the Sikh representatives in an open and true Sikh democratic tradition after setting aside any personal differences.¹¹² Later, various other important Sikh personalities including Bhai Mani Singh, Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia

107 When the Misls gained power, they conquered territory in distant areas in Punjab and used to get them recorded at Akal Takht. All the mutual quarrels and differences were resolved on the occasion of Diwali and Baisakhi when Khalsa used to assemble at Akal Takht.

108 Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p.91. Also see H.S. Singha (2000), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism (over 1000 Entries)*, Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi, p. 112

109 The Five Takhts are the five Gurudwaras and these have a very special significance for the Sikh community. Takht means a throne. They are considered the seats of Sikh religious authority. The important decisions concerning the religious and social life of the Sikh community have been taken here.

110 Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1978), *Guru Haragobind in Sikh Tradition: Based on Acknowledged Conventional Sources*, National Book Organization, New Delhi, pp. 66-69. Harjeet Singh (2009), *Faith & Philosophy of Sikhism*, published by Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 276-279.

111 *Akal Bunga* is the building that houses Akal Takht Sahib in the precincts of Darbar Sahib at Amritsar. Some writers use the term ‘Akal Bunga’ interchangeably with Akal Takht. In real sense, Akal Bunga is the Gurdwara where Akal Takht is located. See, R.P. Malhotra & Kuldeep Arora (2003), *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Punjabi Literature: A-L*, Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi, p. 8. Also see, H.S. Singha (2000) *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism (over 1000 Entries)*, Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi, p. 13

112 H.S. Dilgeer (1995), *The Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, PP. 98- 107. Also see, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1993), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, Published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 14-22

and Akali Phula Singh held that position and played extremely important role in providing leadership and direction to the Khalsa Panth. All important Panthic decisions were taken at Sri Akal Takht Sahib.¹¹³

Bhai Mani Singh took the management of Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht under his control at the behest of Mata Sundri.¹¹⁴ During the *Misl* period, Sarbat Khalsa used to meet at Akal Takht twice in a year on Baisakhi and Diwali days. Historic decisions were taken and strategy was discussed to fight against the Mughal forces and invaders from North-West. In 1800, Akali Phula Singh took charge of Akal Takht and put an end to all anti Sikh rituals and practices.¹¹⁵ In 1805, when Jaswant Rao Holkar, the Maratha chief of Indore, came to Punjab to get Maharaja Ranjit Singh's support against the British, the Sikh Maharaja summoned a meeting of Sarbat Khalsa at Akal Takht Sahib to decide the issue. This was perhaps the last time when he sought the advice of Sarbat Khalsa. After that Maharaja Ranjit Singh started making his own decisions by consulting his Sikh, Hindu and Muslim ministers and advisors. We don't find much activity at Akal Takht Sahib till British took over Punjab.¹¹⁶

113 Fore information about the role of prominent Jathedars Akal Takht Sahib, see, Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.91- 98. Also see, Surain Singh Dhanoa (2005) , *Raj Karega Khalsa*, Sanbun Publishers, pp. 145-148.

114 After the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh (June 24, 1734), there was no one to take care of the shrines at Amritsar during the dark period of the Sikh history. There were Sarbat Khalsa gatherings at Akal Takht Sahib, at least since 1726, but no reference is available as to who convened these gatherings. It is presumed that Jathedars of the Sikh army used to call these gatherings. Later, Budha Dal (the Sikh veterans) took over the charge of the shrines. As the caretaker of Akal Takht Sahib, Bhai Mani Singh introduced authentic Sikh practices at Akal Takht Sahib and Darbar Sahib. Bhai Mani Singh is not referred as 'Jathedar' in any Sikh work.

115 Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and later Akali Phula Singh were the custodians of Akal Takht Sahib and guided the Sikh panth in the critical times. 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 Sahib and accepting for a moral misdemeanour penalty imposed by its custodian, Akali Phula Singh. As per the historic incidence, Jathedar Akali Phula Singh even summoned the powerful Maharaja at Akal Takht for having an affair with Moran, a Muslim nautch girl. Akal Phool Singh ordered the master of the Sikh empire, Maharajah Ranjit Singh, to be whipped for his illicit liaison with a Muslim cabaret dancer. The Maharaja obeyed the summons and duly presented himself before Akali Phula Singh, custodian of the Akal Takht. See, Fauja Singh (1981), *Some Aspects of State and Society Under Ranjit Singh*, published by Masters Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 60-62. Also see, Hari Ram Gupta (1991), *History of the Sikhs: Sikh Lion of Lahore/Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, published by Mushiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, pp. 414-415.

116 Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.93- 99. Also see, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1993), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 12-17

Under the British rule, the Akal Takht Jathedar or custodian gradually started asserting his authority.¹¹⁷ Jathedar Teja Singh Akarpuri was appointed Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib in October 1921. It was the period of turbulent years when Sikh Gurdwara Reform movement had started.¹¹⁸ Teja Singh Akarpuri emphasized on the need of a prescribed 'Rehat' (religious code of conduct) for the Sikhs, though unsuccessful attempts were made earlier by Panch Khalsa Diwan and Chief Khalsa Diwan. It was on his suggestion that a committee of 28 Sikh scholars was appointed to work on the draft of Sikh Rehat Maryada on 15 March, 1927.¹¹⁹ From 1931 to 1934, Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, attended the meetings in this context, and then from 1935 till the "Sikh Rehat Maryada" was finally passed in 1945, Mohan Singh Nagoke, Jathedar Akal Takht, played a very significant role.¹²⁰

Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke provided a solid leadership to the Sikh Panth in the critical times.¹²¹ In 1923, he was arrested when he was leading the very first Jatha in the Jaito Morcha. Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke was widely respected for his character, integrity and sacrifices. He served as the Jathedar Akal Takht for 17 years (1935-52), maximum time any Jathedar held this high religious office. His personality added much power and prestige to this august seat of religious authority, the Akal Takht Sahib.¹²² Many vital historic decisions were taken in his time. For example, in 1936 when

117 For information on historical role of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib during British Rule see, Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Also see, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1993), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh. H.S. Dilgeer (1995), *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark

118 Jathedar Teja Singh Akarpuri provided a solid leadership to the panth in this critical period. In 1923, he was arrested when he was leading the very first Jatha in the Jaito Morcha. He was kept behind bars till 1926. Next year, he was again appointed Jathedar of Akal Takht for the second time and remained in this position till 1931.

119 See, "The Gurdwara Act Of 1925", available at https://archive.org/stream/TheGurdwaraActOf1925/TheGurdwaraActOf1925_djvu.txt. Relevant information also available in W.H. McLeod (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 176-179

120 Jathedar Teja Singh Akarpuri also served as president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) from 1944 to 1948 which put him in much better position to bring the Sikh scholars and experts to an agreement on *Sikh Rahit Maryada*.

121 In 1925, Jathedar Didar Singh was the Akal Takht Jathedar. Akali Dal leaders of that time had come into agreement with the British Government and the agitation was withdrawn. Sikhs started coming out of jails, but some Sikhs in Nabha jail refused to leave the prison and adopted quite an unreasonable attitude. The then Jathedar of Akal Takht, Didar Singh went to the Nabha Jail and advised them to come out. This had the desired effect and they agreed to obey his order. Such was the position of the Akal Takht Jathedar in the Sikh world.

122 Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 216-220. Also see, J.S. Grewal (1996), *The Akalis: A Short History*, Punjab Studies Publications, Chandigarh, p. 114-117

Government banned the wearing of Kirpan by Sikhs, Jathedar Mohan Singh led the first ‘jatha’ (group) of 100 Sikhs in the *morcha* (agitation) against the ban. The agitation ultimately led to the withdrawal of the ban by the Government.¹²³ No doubt, various ‘Jathedars’ have played key role in strengthening the Sikh *Panth* and in upholding the status and authority of Akal Takht Sahib.¹²⁴

Before 20th century, the caretaker, custodian or in-charge of Akal Takht was not called Jathedar.¹²⁵ The title of ‘Jathedar’ Akal Takht Sahib came into being in 1920’s. As per historical records, on October 13, 1920, Singh Sabha reformers took lower caste Sikhs to Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht Sahib to pay homage. Priests in charge of Akal Takht did not like this, but they did not have the courage to face Sikh Sangat, and they slipped away leaving the holy and sacred place vacant. The gathering found the Akal Takht Sahb, the sacred seat of ‘Miri-Piri’ unattended.¹²⁶ Then a ‘Jatha’ (group) of 25 Sikhs was selected to take care of Takht Sahib. Sikh Sangat took over Akal Takht Sahib and appointed Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar in- charge of Akal Takht Sahib. Thus, Bhai Teja Singh Bhucher was appointed as the Jathedar of that Jatha.¹²⁷ Since Teja Singh Bucher was leading the ‘Jatha’ (group) to Akal Takht Sahib, he came to be known as Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. A ‘jatha’ (group) of 25 Sikhs was put at his command to help him to look after Akal Takht Sahib.¹²⁸ Since then, by mistake or due

123 See, “The Gurdwara Act of 1925: Great Panthic Achievement- The Other Perspective; Marginalization of the Sri Akal Takht Institution”, a paper presented by Kuldip Singh at Punjab History Conference (38th Session, March 18-20, 2006) Punjab History Conference (38th Session, March 18-20, 2006), available at <http://globalsikhstudies.net/pdf/Kuldip%20Singh%20-%20Gurdwara%20Act.pdf>. Also see, Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.65-67.

124 Jathedars of Akal Takht Sahib in Chronological order - Teja Singh Bhuchar (1920–1921), before him was Arur Singh (1907-1920), resigned in 1920. Teja Singh Akarpuri (1921–1923) & (1926–1930) Udham Singh Nagoki (1923–1924), Bhai Acchar Singh (1924–1925), Didar Singh (about a month in 1926), Jawahar Singh (very short period in 1926), Giani Gurmukh Singh Musaffar (1930-1931), Mohan Singh Nagoke (1931-1938), Giani Partap Singh (1938-1948), Bhai Sadhu Singh Bhaura (1948-1963), Gurdial Singh Ajnoha (1980-1983), Bhai Kirpal Singh (1963-1965) & (1983-1986), Prof. Darshan Singh (1986), Bhai Jasbir Singh Rode (1986), Bhai Gurdev Singh Kaunke (1986-1993), Baba Gurbachan Singh Manochahal, Prof. Manjit Singh, Bhai Ranjit Singh, Giani Puran Singh, Giani Joginder Singh Vadanti, Current Jathedar: Giani Gurbachan Singh.

125 Bhai Kahan Singh of Nabha published his encyclopedic work, *Mahan Kosh* in 1930. He did not even mention anything such as the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib.

126 Incident at Akal Takht Sahib as documented by historian Harjinder Singh Dilgeer. See H.S. Dilgeer (1995), *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp. 97-100. Also see Kashmir Singh (1991), *Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation: All India Perspective*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 13-15.

127 Ibid.

128 Jathedar Akal Takht Teja Singh Bhucher led a ‘jatha’ (group) to Taran Taran Gurdwara to oust the priests forcefully. He succeeded in his mission after some clashes with the government agents. He also led a ‘jatha’ to free the historical Gurdwaras at Panja Sahib and Pashawar. He also appointed a committee of 15 members to look after the Gurdwara management.

to ignorance, a tradition has developed to use the term 'Jathedar' for caretaker of Akal Takht Sahib.¹²⁹

From Bhai Gurdas and later Bhai Mani Singh, the early "caretakers" of Akal Takht Sahib, none were referred to as 'Jathedar'. There were Sarbat Khalsa gatherings at Akal Takht Sahib at least twice a year since 1726, but no reference is available as to who convened these gatherings. Later, Budha Dal (the Sikh veterans) took over the charge of the shrines.¹³⁰ Even the renowned Sikh scholar, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, in his 'Mahan Kosh' does not mention the word 'Jathedar' of Akal Takht Sahib.

Even after 1920 or 1925 to even 1947, the caretaker of Akal Takht, (though the term 'Jathedar' was being used by the leaders of the SGPC) was not known to be any specific entity. It was on November 29, 1961, when the 'Panj Pyare' (five beloved ones), who hold sacred historical religious authority in Sikhism, gave their verdict from Akal Takht Sahib against Master Tara Singh, Fateh Singh and others, the so-called 'Jathedar' came to be known as something extraordinary.¹³¹ When on October 2, 1962, the Fateh Singh group wrested the control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) from Master Tara Singh group,¹³² Jathedar Achhar Singh, the then 'caretaker' of the Akal Takht Sahib resigned from his position to protest against the mismanagement of the affairs of Harmandir Sahib and other Sikh Shrines. It was on September 26, 1979, when Jathedar Jagdev Singh Talwandi and Gurcharan Singh Tohra approached Akal Takht for settlement of the internal affairs of the Shiromani Akali Dal

129 Kashmir Singh (2001), "Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions", in *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, Vol.3 No.2, July-December 2001, pp. 31-32. H.S. Dilgeer (1999), *The Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp 99-102.

130 Dr H.S. Dilgeer mentions an interesting episode - "On October 12, 1920, when some initiated Sikhs, belonging to so-called low castes, went to Akal Takht Sahib to offer an Ardas (prayer), the caretaker of Akal Takht Sahib and the Granthis slipped away. The gathering found the Takht Sahib unattended. A Jatha (band) of 25 Sikhs was selected to take care of Takht Sahib. Bhai Teja Singh Bhucher was appointed as the Jathedar of the Jatha. Bhai Teja Singh was to be the chief of the Jatha and not Akal Takht Sahib." See, H.S. Dilgeer (1999), *The Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp. 100-101

131 When the factional fight was going on between the two Akal Dal groups named after Master Tara Singh and Sant Fateh Singh, a move was made to unite these two Akal Dal factions by approaching Akal Takht Sahib. A petition was submitted by Master Tara Singh group on November 23, 1961. The five high Priests (Five Takht Jathedars) gave a verdict on November 29, 1961, whereby religious punishment was given to Master Tara Singh for breaking his vow. The verdict from Akal Takht Sahib also included a suggestion that after the completion of the sentence, unity within the Panth must be maintained at every cost. See Kuldip Kaur (1999), *Akali Dal in Punjab Politics: Splits and Mergers*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 32-34. Also see, Dalip Singh (1981), *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, Macmillan India Limited, New Delhi, pp. 88-90.

132 Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (2008), *Kurbanian Te Ghadarian Da Daur* (in Punjabi), published by Sikh University Press, Wareme, Belgium, pp. 1175-1180.

(SAD) that the so called Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib came to be known as some "extra special" entity.¹³³

Since the summoning and appearance of Ragi Darshan Singh at Akal Takht on December 5, 2009, the Sikh religious institution of Akal Takht and the role of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib became the subject of controversy once again. A similar situation divided the community when Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti was forced to resign from his position as Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib on August 5, 2008.

Jathedar and Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925

There is wrong impression prevailing among the people that the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 contains no provision in context to 'Takhts' and 'Jathedars'. In fact, the 1925 Gurdwara Act contains number of provisions applicable to them. A list of Sikh Gurdwaras which are to be managed in accordance with the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 is appended to the Act as Schedule I.¹³⁴ Akal Takht Sahib (*Akal Bunga*), Takht Keshgarh Sahib and Takht Damdama Sahib are included in this Schedule (I) at serial numbers: 27, 118 and 354 respectively. These three Sikh Takhts, the seats of religious authority which are situated in Punjab, are mentioned along with other 350 scheduled Gurdwaras in the Act.¹³⁵

Sikh Gurdwara Act while prescribing the composition of the Board (SGPC) under Section 43-A (1) of the Act provides that the Board (SGPC) shall consist of the 'Head Ministers' of the Darbar Sahib (Amritsar) and the following five Takhts, namely: Akal Takht Sahib (Amritsar), Takht Keshgarh Sahib (Anandpur Sahib), Takht Patna Sahib (Patna, Bihar), Takht Hazur Sahib (Nanded, Maharashtra) and Takht Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda), as ex-officio members, besides the elected and co-opted members.¹³⁶ Takht Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) was given the status and recognition of the fifth Takht by the resolution passed by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) on November 18, 1966. It is pertinent to mention that it was only in 1959 that Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 was extended to the erstwhile Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU) area in which Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo)

133 Bhagwan Singh Danewalia (1999), "Akal Takht Jathedar : Context and Controversy", *Sikh Review*, 47 (1), pp. 56-59

134 See, Schedule I of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925.

135 Kashmir Singh (2001), "Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions", in *Understanding Sikhism –The Research Journal*, Vol. 3 No.2, July-December 2001, pp. 33.

136 Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 385-386. For details, see, section 43-A of *Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925*

is situated. It was as late as 1999 that Takht Damdama Sahib was included in section 43-A (1) by another amendment to the Sikh Gurdwara Act.¹³⁷

The Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 refers as 'Head Ministers' to generally used term 'Jathedar'. The 1925 Act defines the term 'Minister' as the person who controls the management and performance of public worship. Though no specific definition of 'Head Minister' is available in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925, it should be deemed as Senior or Head Minister who performs the duties similar to that of other Ministers and also their supervision.¹³⁸ The Gurdwara Act authorizes and empowers Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to appoint the "Head Ministers" who are popularly known as 'Takht Jathedars'. The Gurdwara Act of 1925 deals in detail regarding the provision of appointment and removal of 'Head Ministers' or 'Jathedars' of Takht Sahibs.¹³⁹ Under Section 136 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is authorized to appoint the Ministers/ Office holders as per the availability of vacancy. As 'Minister' implies 'Head Minister', as such SGPC is also empowered to appoint the 'Head Minister', commonly called as 'Jathedar' of Takht.¹⁴⁰ As per the provisions of Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, the jurisdiction of SGPC extends to three states (Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh), under section 85 of the Act, it can appoint Head Ministers or Jathedars for three Takhts. Thus, Jathedars for Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib (Anandpur Sahib) and Takht Sri Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) are appointed by Shiromnai Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).¹⁴¹

There has never been any doubt or debate that the term 'Head Minister' means anything else than 'Jathedar' of the Takhts. Right from the time of establishment of

137 Kashmir Singh (2004) , *Commentary on the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925*. Amritsar: published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 264. Also see, Kashmir Singh (2001), "Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions", in *Understanding Sikhism –The Research Journal*, Vol.3 No.2, July-December 2001, pp. 32-33

138 See, Surjit Singh Gandhi, (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp.227-228. Also see Kashmir Singh (2001), "Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions", *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 28-32.

139 For details, see, Section 2 (4) of the *Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925*. Also see, Kashmir Singh (2001), "Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions", *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 28-32.

140 See, Section 136, Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. For valuable perspective on legal provisions regarding hold of SGPC over Takht Jathedars, see Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (2003) *Liberating Sikhism from 'the Sikhs': Sikhism's Potential for World Civilization*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigar, pp. 146-148.

141 Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi pp. 131-132. For details see, Section 136 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925.

SGPC and enforcement of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, the Jathedars of Takhts have been attending the meetings of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) as members. It is also very clear that Takht Jathedars are referred to as ‘Head Ministers’ in the official records of SGPC. For an example, the minutes of the meetings of SGPC that mark the presence of members, refer to Jathedars of Takhts as “Head Ministers”.¹⁴² The term “Head Minister” is not defined in the Sikh Gurdwara Act but term “Minister” is defined in Section 2 (4) of the Act as follows: “*Minister meant an office-holder to whom either solely or along with others the control of management or performance of public worship in a Gurdwara and of the rituals and ceremonies, observed therein is entrusted*”.¹⁴³ So as per the Act term ‘Minister’ refers to an office-holder who is entrusted with either control of management or performance of public worship. To be a ‘Head Minister’, one must fulfil the qualifications of a ‘Minister’ and only the ‘Head Ministers’ can be the members of the SGPC and of the committees of management for other Gurdwaras. Taking the ‘Head Minister’ and ‘Jathedar’ as synonymous, he should be a person who holds the office at the respective ‘Takht’ by fulfilling the duties, functions and powers of management and performance of public worship.¹⁴⁴

From legal point of view, it is very important to note that the term ‘Head Ministers’ of the ‘Takhts’ is used in the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. There is no mention of the term ‘Jathedar’ which is now widely used within and even outside the Sikh community. On the basis of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, one can say that ‘minister’ is a managerial, administrative or official term and not a religious one.¹⁴⁵ It shows that nomenclature ‘Jathedar’ for the Spokesmen of the Akal Takht Sahib, was not prevalent in the twenties of the last century when Gurdwara Act 1925 came into force. The practise of wide usage of the term ‘Jathedar’ became common only afterwards.¹⁴⁶

142 See, Section 45 and 46 of Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. Also see, Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 32-33.

143 Definition of the term ‘Minister’ - as given in Section 2 (4) (vii) of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925.

144 Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 32-33.

145 Kirpal Singh (2002), *Institutional Failure in Punjab with Respect to Sikhism & Missing Sikh Prisoners*, Published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 30-32. Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi pp. 131-132.

146 H.S. Dilgeer (1999), *The Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp 99-102. Also see Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, p.35

Hukamnama of Akal Takht Sahib

The term 'Hukamnama' is a combination of two words - 'Hukam' and 'Nama'. The word 'Hukam' alludes to 'permission', 'proclamation', 'judgment', 'immortal decree', 'a corrective', and the word 'Nama' means 'personally addressed' or a 'written Letter'.¹⁴⁷ As such 'Hukamnama' is that written letter which is addressed as an order. In general parlance, we can say that *Hukamnama* is that written order which is obligatory to acquiesce, and which cannot be ignored. *Hukamnama* literally means "Royal Order".¹⁴⁸ In Sikh sense, the Akal Takht Sahib is the 'Throne of the Almighty', and the orders issued by Akal Takht Sahib are called 'Hukamnamas'.¹⁴⁹

During the period of Sikh Gurus, whatever the letters were sent to the Sikhs, those were also deemed as Hukamnamas.¹⁵⁰ The 'Hukamnamas' (edicts) of the Sikh Gurus was a matter of pride and privilege for the followers of the Sikh faith. The sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib, who issued the first ever 'Hukamnama' from Akal Takht Sahib set the pattern for the subsequent invocation of the (temporal) authority of this sacred seat bestowed with religious and political authority. The first 'Hukamnama' was issued by Guru Hargobind Sahib on June 30, 1606.¹⁵¹ In the first Hukamnama (edict) of Akal Takht Sahib, Guru Hargobind Sahib directed his followers to make offerings of arms and horses.¹⁵² Claiming inherent right to possess arms and maintain forces, this very first 'Hukamnama' of Akal Takht Sahib was in clear assertion of Guru's temporal authority.¹⁵³

In real sense, the 'Hukamnama' is not merely a sacred letter related with Sikh religious philosophy, but it is the certified historical document of a contemporary period where from we get full information about historical names, places and various objects.

147 See official website of Akal Takht Sahib :- www.akaltakhatsahib.com.

148 Jagraj Singh (2009), *A Complete Guide to Sikhism*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, p. 176.

149 Joginder Singh (2002), *Kesri Pustak - Guru Gyan*, Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi, p.189. See also, Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (1997), *The Sikh Reference Book*, Sikh Educational Trust for Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp. 51-52

150 In the middle ages, the orders from the worldly rulers were also known as 'Hukamnama' but the people carried out the orders under compulsion.

151 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1993), *Sri Akal Takht (A Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh., pp. 33-34. Also see, Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh Identity and National Integration*, published by Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp.21-22

152 The first Hukamnama from Akal Takht Sahib was issued by Guru Hargobind Sahib himself. This Hukamnama asked the Sikhs to wear arms for self defense. Since then several Hukamnamas have been issued .

153 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1999), *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, p.79. Also see, H.S. Dilgeer (1995), *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, p.11

Much is learnt about the various aspects of preaching and expansion of Sikhism from the edicts written to the Sikh masses at different times.¹⁵⁴ Describing the importance of *Hukamnamas*, Ganda Singh, a renowned Sikh historian, writes:

“As personal letters prove to be the best source material for scientific research, similarly these hukamnamas work as unique reservoir of the most valuable rudimentary stuff for religious, political and social activities for it.”¹⁵⁵

Akal Takht Sahib is the prominent and senior-most seat of Sikh authority. The *Hukamnamas* (edicts) issued from Akal Takht Sahib are obligatory for each and every Sikh, and a Sikh daring to defy the ‘Hukamnama’ of Akal Takht ceases to be a member of the Sikh *Panth*. Akal Takht Sahib and its ‘Hukamnama’ represent the will of the Sikh nation and it is morally and religiously binding on every Sikh.¹⁵⁶ In Sikh tradition, it was through *Hukamnamas* only that preparations were made for religious crusade and demands were sent for weapons, financial offerings, horses, elephants and riders also. Also, the *Hukamnamas* have been simple, straight and dependable media for making contacts with the Sikh congregations. Through *Hukamnamas* (edicts), the ‘Gursikh’ masses used to be informed of the decisions taken on behalf of the ‘Guru-Ghar’ (on the name of Guru).¹⁵⁷

After the heavenly abode of Guru Gobind Singh with whom ceased the line of living Gurus in Sikhism, ‘Hukamnamas’ (edicts) were issued in the name of the Khalsa Panth from the different Takhts, especially Akal Takht Sahib 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.¹⁵⁸ *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 ‘Ardaas’, the daily prayer of supplication, as a particular historical situation might demand.¹⁵⁹

154 Shamsheer Singh Ashok (1967), *Nisan Te Hukamname*, published by Sikh Itihaas Research Board – SGPC, Amritsar, pp. 13- 17.

155 Also see official website of Akal Takht Sahib. A quoted by Ganda Singh, available at <http://www.akaltakhtsahib.com/english/hukamnama.php>

156 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti (in Punjabi)*, Navyug Publication, New Delhi, pp. 43-47.

157 For example, the *Hukamnamas* conveyed important information to the Sikh congregations such as to reach the Guru-place or celebration of *Gurpurabs* and delinking of relations with *Masands*

158 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.

159 On June 8, 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;

No communication made under the name of any saint, priest or some revered person can be deemed as ‘Hukamnama’. Even the attendants, officials or priests also cannot issue any order at their own until these are approved by ‘five Chosen Ones’ – *the Panj Pyare* – through the congregation and the same has been duly discussed for its purpose. Its assemblage is essential at any of the Five Takhts – the seats of authority in Sikh Panth.¹⁶⁰ Any order issued in contrariness to the Guru’s ideology and principles cannot be taken as ‘Hukamnama’. The edict or ‘Hukamnama’ of Akal Takht Sahib is different from a verdict given from Akal Takht Sahib in some disputes. Decisions in the cases of the Sikhs who surrender at Akal Takht for their anti-Sikh activities are not *Hukamnamas*.¹⁶¹ .

Hukamnamas regarding excommunicating persons or cults guilty of harming the *Panth* or for acts of blaspheme have been issued by Akal Takht Sahib from time to time.¹⁶² The excommunications of Gurdial Singh Nabha, Teja Singh Bhasaur and his associates, Nirankari cult, Giani Zail Singh, Buta Singh, Santa Singh, Rachhpal Singh, Surjit Singh Barnala, Pashaura Singh, etc. are few of the famous examples.¹⁶³ The year 1998 can rightly be called the “Year of the Hukamnamas” as that year in every Sikh

likewise, on 30 Bhadon 1988 sk/15 September 1931, Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh was honoured for his outstanding services to the Panth. .

- 160 H. S. Singha (2000), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism (over 1000 Entries)*, published by Hemkunt Press, New Delhi, p.101. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (2003), *Liberating Sikhism from ‘The Sikhs’ - Sikhism’s Potential for World Civilization*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 83-85.
- 161 See, Ganda Singh (1996), “Hukamname” in Harbans Singh (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Volume 2*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 288-292. Also see, Nirpinder Singh (1990), *The Sikh Moral Tradition: Ethical Perceptions of the Sikhs in the Late Nineteenth/early Twentieth Century*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp.233-235. H.S. Dilgeer (1995) , *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark, pp.106-110
- 162 Excommunication, in the Sikh tradition, means expelling a member of the Sikh community from the socio-religious order of the Sikhs. The five head priests (Jathedars of five Takhts) led by the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib pronounce such an order. As per the tradition, a Sikh is excommunicated for committing ‘bajar kuraihat’ (unpardonable offence) that covers four major offences — shaving off hair, keeping illicit relations, killing a daughter, and for demeaning Guru Granth Sahib or the Ten Gurus and keeping faith outside the religion. There are some minor offences that entail minor punishment (*tankhah*). In the older days, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib used to act unilaterally. Now, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib works in consensus with other four head priests (Jathedars) as an authority of the Sikh panth. The decision taken by them is considered final and binding on the Panth. See, Girpreet Singh Nibber (2018), “Know meaning and history of excommunication in Sikhism”, *The Hindustan Times*, April 14, 2018. Also see, “Former minister Langah excommunicated by Akal Takht”, *The Tribune*, October 5, 2017, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/former-minister-langah-excommunicated-by-akal-takht/477768.html>, accessed on 27/11/2017.
- 163 See, Khushwant Singh (2006), *The Illustrated History of the Sikhs*, published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 239-242. Pashaura Singh & Louis E Fenech (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, pp.90-92. Also see, “Excommunication of Sucha Singh Langah by Akal Takht – By KS Chawla”, available at <http://www.yespunjab.com/national/guest-writer/item/136131-excommunication-of-sucha-singh-langah-importance-of-akal-takht-by-ks-chawla>, accessed on 14/05/2018.

gathering, the ‘Hukamnamas’ of Akal Takht Sahib continued to be discussed and the Sikhs were vertically divided.¹⁶⁴ The year 1998 could be called the “Year of Hukamnamas” not only because this year a large number of *Hukamnamas* (edicts) were issued from Akal Takht Sahib, but also because *Hukamnamas* issued from there remained the main subject of heated discussion at every Sikh gathering. Under administrative code of ‘Guru-Panth’, the tradition of issuing *Hukamnamas* from Akal Takht Sahib - the supreme seat of Sikh religious authority, has been in practice since years and is in vogue even now. The tradition of issuing ‘Hukamnama’ (edict) became a great tool in developing a sense of common obedience to one supreme command. Many have been issued from the Akal Takht since 1721¹⁶⁵ regarding important social, religious and even political issues by the Khalsa represented by the “five beloved ones” – *the Panj Pyare*.¹⁶⁶ The tradition of following one command by the whole community became significant in filtering a sense of unity and strength.

Sarbat Khalsa at Akal Takht Sahib

Whenever any important issue arose, the Sikh nation held a meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa* (the Sikh Commonwealth) at Akal Takht Sahib. Sarbat Khalsa does not mean a big gathering of the thousands of the Sikhs ; it is a meeting of the representatives of all the sections of the Sikhs having faith in Sikhism and ‘Gurmat’ and who are loyal to the sanctity and authority of Akal Takht Sahib. This representative house of the Sikh community resolves a ‘Gurmatta’ (the Sikh consensus) with regard to

164 On April 1998, a Hukamnama was issued under the seal of Akal Takht Sahib bearing the signature of Jathedar Akal Takht, Bhai Ranjit Singh. The Hukamnama directed all the Sikhs to partake ‘Guru Ka Langar’ while squatting on the floor. This Hukamnama was unanimously approved by all Takhts which included - the Jathedar Takht Kesgarh Sahib (Bhai Manjit Singh), Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo (Bhai Kewal) Singh), and high priests of the Golden Temple and Akal Takht Sahib. While most Gurdwaras followed it, some Gurdwaras abroad especially in Vancouver area (Canada) and parts of California did not follow the Akal Takht Sahib Hukamnama. Since this edict immediately affected the Sikhs living abroad, they became more vocal in their opposition to it.

165 In 1721, Bhai Mani Singh took Harmandir Sahib and Akal Takht under his control at the behest of Mata Sundri. During the Misl period, Sarbat Khalsa used to meet at Akal Takht twice a year on Baisakhi and Diwali days. Akal Takht became the centre of Sikh activities under the leadership of Bhai Mani Singh. With Bhai Mani Singh assuming the responsibility as the custodian of the Akal Takht Sahib, Sikh power shifted from Delhi to Amritsar. In the year 1721, Bhai Mani Singh arranged a successful meeting at the Akal Takht between the Tat Khalsa and Bandhies. See, Nahar Singh Jawandha (2010), *Glimpses of Sikhism*, Published by Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 56-58. Surjit Singh Gandhi (1978), *Struggle of the Sikhs for Sovereignty*, published by Gur Das Kapur, Delhi, pp. 55-58

166 Two collections of *Hukamnamas* are available in print form, one edited by Ganda Singh and the other one by Bhai Shamsher Singh Ashok, both published in 1968 by Punjabi University and the S.G.P.C. respectively. See Ganda Singh (1967), *Hukamnama* (ed.), published by Punjabi University, Patiala. Also see, Ganda Singh (1996) “Hukamnama” in Harbans Singh (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Vol.2, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 289-92.

a particular question.¹⁶⁷ The 'Gurmatta' is issued as a 'Hukamnama' to the Sikh nation by the caretaker/Jathedar of the Akal Takht Sahib.¹⁶⁸ 'Gurmatta' means counsel of the 'Guru' or a resolution passed in a council presided over by the 'Guru'.¹⁶⁹ In practice, the Sikh congregation would sit together, with the Holy Granth, Guru Granth Sahib in their midst, and deliberating over questions of common interest would give their decision in the form of resolution called "Gurmatta". The practice of participating in *sangat* (holy congregation) and passing the resolution with consensus (*Gurmatta*) on important religious matters at the Akal Takht Sahib began on eve of Diwali in 1745.¹⁷⁰ This unique concept of *Gurmatta* was the central assembly of the Sikh *Misls* (confederations) and often met at Akal Takht to lay down a common programme against the Muslim Governors and invaders. A 'Gurmatta' as the Guru's decision is respected by the entire Sikh community.¹⁷¹

No other institution, better than the Sarbat Khalsa has so far emerged before the Sikhs which can represent the 'Guru Panth'. The call for Sarbat Khalsa is rooted in the

167 The convention came to be established after the death of Banda Singh Bahadur that all major social, political and religious problems would be discussed by the Khalsa Panth in the presence of the holy Granth. This doctrine eventually found an explicit practical expression in the institution of the *Gurmatta*, in the theory that corporate decisions of the Sarbat Khalsa were to be regarded as the word of the 'Guru' with the full force of his authority to back it. The resolution adopted by the Sarbat Khalsa is known as *Gurmata* and has moral and religious binding on the Sikh Community. See, William Owen Cole (1982), *The Guru In Sikhism*, published by Darton, Longman & Todd, Limited, London, pp. 78-80. Also see Gurdeep Kaur (2000), *Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib: The Concept of State*, Deep & Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp.134-135.

168 There are certain issues which cannot be covered by *Gurmata or Hukamnama*. These include the basic principles, postulates or doctrines of Sikhism. A *Gurmata* which applies to the whole of the Sikh nation must represent the will of the whole nation and must not be a decision of hand-picked assembly of special invitees by a party or faction or self-styled religious leaders. All the *Gurmata*s are not *Hukamnamas*. When a resolve to execute some planning is made, it is called *Gurmata* and it applies to the persons who participate in it. But, if this *Gurmata* is of national importance then it is released to the Sikh nation. In that case it becomes *Hukamnama*. Sarbat Khalsa made several *Gurmata*s in the eighteenth century.

169 A *Gurmatta*, literally rendered, means the Guru's resolve. The first *Gurmatta* was passed in 1748 when the Sikhs, divided into twelve clans or *misls*, and fighting among themselves as much as against the foreign marauders. The resolutions passed in the meetings of the *Misl* chiefs were called '*Gurmattas*' which had religious overtones with 'Gurus' name attached. Their resolutions were considered binding on the parties. The sanctions are moral and religiously in nature. See, Gurdeep Kaur (2000), *Political Ethics of Guru Granth Sahib: The Concept of State*, Deep & Deep Publication, New Delhi, 140-141. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1979), *Sikh Polity and Political Institutions*, Oriental Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 86-88.

170 Mansukhani, Gobind Singh (1982), *Aspects of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi Writers Cooperative Industrial Society, New Delhi, p.157. Also see, Surjir Singh Gandhi (1999), *Sikhs in the Eighteenth Century: Their Struggle for Survival and Supremacy*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 133-135

171 For explanation of the concept of *Gurmatta* and its objective, see, Kharak Singh (1996), *Current Thoughts on Sikhism*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 140-143. Also see, Gobind Singh Mansukhani (1982), *Aspects of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi Writers Cooperative Industrial Society, New Delhi, pp.181-186

Sikh history when Guru Gobind Singh called a Sarbat Khalsa in 1708.¹⁷² The tradition of calling such congregations had been continuing since then during the times of crisis and conflict. During troubled times, the Akal Takht continued to be a source of inspiration and spiritual rejuvenation for the Sikhs. Usually on Baisakhi and Diwali days, defying all hazards, the scattered bands of Sikhs, converged upon Akal Takht Sahib to hold Sarbat Khalsa assemblies and discuss important matters of policy and strategy. For instance, the historic Sarbat Khalsa held at Akal Takht Sahib on March 29, 1748, formed the Dal Khalsa (Army of the Khalsa) consisting of 12 *Misls* (confederations) of the Sikhs.¹⁷³ The Sikhs in Punjab ultimately established a mighty Sikh empire under Maharaja Ranjit Singh by the end of the 18th century.¹⁷⁴ The institutions of Sarbat Khalsa and Gurmatta shaped the destiny of the Sikh people during their ascent to political power during the eighteenth century. The Sarbat Khalsa institution represented the unified corporate personality of the Sikh community. In recent history, a Sarbat Khalsa was called after ‘Operation Bluestar’ to decide on the responsibility to be given for the reconstruction of Akal Takht Sahib.¹⁷⁵

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- 172 Harjinder Singh Dilgeer (1997), *The Sikh Reference Book*, Sikh Educational Trust for Sikh University Centre, Denmark, p.96. Also see, Harvinder Khetal (2015), “Take leap from hollow to hallow” *The Tribune*, November 29, 2015.
- 173 By March 1748, there were 65 groups operating in different parts of the Punjab. They carried out their operations generally independent of one another, though they still acknowledged the prominent position of Nawab Kapur Singh. On the day of Baisakhi, 29 March 1748, the Sikhs gathered at Amritsar to celebrate the festival. A Sarbat Khalsa (a general assembly of the Sikhs) was convened which decided to offer organized resistance to Mughal oppression, and the entire fighting force of the Khalsa was unified into a single body called the Dal Khalsa, under the supreme command of Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. The Dal was divided into two sections - The Budha Dal, the army of the veterans, and the Taruna Dal, the army of the young. The 65 bands of fighters were further grouped into 12 Misls or divisions each under its own chief having a separate name and banner. See, Hari Ram Gupta (1999), *History of the Sikhs: Evolution of Sikh Confederacies*, published by Mushiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, pp. 93-97. Louis E Fenech & W.H. McLeod (2014), *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, published by Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, UK, p.88. Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1979), *Sikh Polity and Political Institutions*, Oriental Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, pp. 98-104. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1999), *Sikhs in the Eighteenth Century: Their Struggle for Survival and Supremacy*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 171-172, 387-395.
- 174 Hari Ram Gupta (2001), *History of the Sikhs: The Sikh commonwealth or Rise and Fall of Sikh Misls*, published by Mushilal Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 3-10. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1999), *Sikhs in the Eighteenth Century: Their Struggle for Survival and Supremacy*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 387-392.
- 175 The sacred edifice, Akal takht Sahib, 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 former Union Home Minister, Buta Singh, was excommunicated from the Sikh Panth for his role in Operation Bluestar in 1984. The reconstructed building was demolished in early 1986 to be replaced by one raised through car seva, voluntary free service of the Panth and by money accruing from voluntary donations. See, Giani Kirpal Singh (1995), *Akhi Datha Saka Neela Tara (Eyewitness to Operation Blue Star)*, Bhai Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Publishing, Amritsar, pp. 19-33. Giani Kirpal Singh was Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib at the time when the Indian army attacked the Akal Takht Sahib.

In can be concluded that since its inception in 1606, the Akal Takht Sahib has a glorious history and the office of Jathedar Akal Takht has guided the Sikhs during very critical and crucial times. The very history of Akal Takht Sahib pays obeisance to the warrior spirit of the Khalsa *Panth*. Sikhism does not entrust any priestly class with interpretational functions or ritualistic duties. The Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar has no inherent claim or right to dogmatize on any fundamental issue of Sikh philosophy and identity. Most of the Jathedars of Akal Takht Sahib served as warriors in the Khalsa army and many fell in battle earning a residence for themselves in the Sikh Panth's columns of martyrs. The custodian (Jathedar) of Akal Takht Sahib is the highest Spokesperson of the Sikh community and is meant to be a spiritual leader of the community without any direct or indirect control or influence from any politically motivated group, party or organization.

The politico-religious authority of Akal Takht Sahib has remained intact and the State has never challenged it in any manner.¹⁷⁶ No doubt, all the places where other four 'Takhts' are situated are certainly historical and sacred places for the Sikhs, but they are not 'Takhts' in the sense the Akal Takht Sahib is. In Sikh tradition, the Akal Takht Sahib is recognized as supreme seat of religious and temporal authority. The Sikh concept of *Miri-Piri* on which the establishment and authority of Akal Takht Sahib is based reflects the real identity of Sikhs as shaped by the Sikh Gurus. The establishment and authority of the supreme seat of Akal Takht Sahib are very much based in the roots of Sikh religious doctrine and unique history of the Sikh *Panth*.¹⁷⁷

He was an eyewitness to the Operation Blue Star. Also see, "Sin and atonement: The politics of apology at Golden Temple" *Hindustan Times*, July 19, 2016, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sin-and-atonement-the-politics-of-apology-at-golden-temple/story-htz8DDtNCnjiEOP6Ebpe7N.html>, accessed on 18/09/2016.

176 There are in fact instances of the State showing subservience as in the case of Maharaja Ranjit Singh himself responding to the summons from Akal Takht and accepting for a moral misdemeanour penalty imposed by its custodian, Akali Phula Singh, who had fought as a loyal soldier in several of the Maharaja's military campaigns.

177 Few significant works on the establishment, concept and authority of Akal Takht Sahib are mentioned here : J.S Ahluwalia & H.S. Dilgeer (2009), *Sri Akal Takht (a Symbol of Divine Sovereignty): Contemporary Historical Record Relating to Its Transcendental Supremacy and Sanctity*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh. Roop Singh (2012) *Hukamname- Aadesh Sandesh Sri Akal Takht Sahib (1606 A.D. – December 2011 A.D.)*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar. H.S. Dilgeer (1995) , *Akal Takht Sahib*, published by Sikh Educational Trust in collaboration with the Sikh University Centre, Denmark. J.S. Ahluwalia (1983), *Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine (Sikhism in the Perspective of Modern Thought)*, Bahri Publications, New Delhi.

II

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC): Background and Establishment

The Sikh shrines known as 'Gurdwaras' hold vital place in the social and religious life of Sikh community. Gurdwaras which form an integral part of the Sikh tradition have served as strong centres for cementing the bonds of brotherhood among the Sikh people. It is noteworthy that originally the 'Gurdwaras' were known as "Dharamsalas".¹⁷⁸ The Gurdwaras gradually became centres of religious, social, cultural and even political life of the Sikhs. In Sikh history, Gurdwaras have been one of the most important centers in forging a sense of separate identity among the Sikhs.¹⁷⁹ As far as the management of these historic Gurdwaras was concerned, earlier there were no specific rules. During the early eighteenth century, there occurred large-scale persecution of the Sikhs at the hands of Mughal rulers. As large number of Sikhs along with the Sikh preachers was forced into exile, the Sikh shrines passed into the hands of *Udasis*.¹⁸⁰ Some of them started admitting followers and became heads of Gurdwaras

178 The word 'Gurudwara' literally means (a) through the Guru (b) the gateway of the Guru. It is a place of worship founded either by one of the Ten Gurus or later established in their memory from Guru Nanak till Guru Arjun Dev, they were known as Dharamshalas. However in Guru Hargobind's time they came to be known as Gurdwaras. After the last Guru, all those shrines connected with the ten Gurus came to acquire historical importance. The practice of having a place of worship of their own led to the building of Gurdwaras by the Sikh community- where the holy Guru Granth Sahib was installed. See, Kahan Singh (1960) *Mahan Kosh*, published by Language Department, Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 496. Also see, Sewa Singh Kalsi (2005), *Religion of the World – Sikhism*, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia (USA), pp. 53-55. For study of historical origin and evolution of the institution of Gurdwara, see, W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi (1999), *Sikhism Beliefs and Practices*, Adarsh Books, New Delhi, pp. 58-65.

179 Gurdwaras are the places for worship for the Sikhs. In the early days Gurdwaras were called *Dharmshalas*. Gradually, these *Dharmshalas* became a centre of Sikh community, where, apart from worship and religious ceremonial activities connected with births, baptisms, marriages and obsequies were observed. Almost every Gurdwara has free kitchen, the *Guru-Ka-Langar*. With establishment and evolution of Akali Dal and SGPC, the Gurdwaras also became the centres of Sikh politics. Khushwant Singh (1966), *A History of the Sikhs, Vol. II*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, pp.192 -194. Also see Gurdarshan Singh (2000), "Gurdwaras in Sikhism", *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, 19(2), Jul-Dec 2000, pp. 90-97.

180 The word 'Udasi' is derived from the Sanskrit 'udasin', which means grief or dejection. 'Udasi' means "one who is indifferent to or disregarding of worldly attachments, a stoic, or a mendicant." The Udasi sect owes its origin to Baba Sri Chand, the eldest son of Guru Nanak Dev. The Udasis do not reject the Sikh Gurus, but attach greater importance to the line of succession from Guru Nanak Dev through Baba Sri Chand to the Udasi mahants. They interpret the message of Guru Granth Sahib in vedantic terms and do not abide by the Khalsa Rehat Maryada. Udasis protected and managed many Sikh Gurdwaras in the 18th and 19th century including the historical Sikh shrines at Sri Anandpur Sahib, Sri Hazoor Sahib, (Nanded) and Amritsar Sahib for over a hundred years. They were respected and patronized by Maharaja Ranjit Singh through land grants and responsibility of temples. See, Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, (1981) latest edition, *Guru Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh*, p.7, For details, see Sher Singh, *Itihas Baba Sri Chand ate Udasin Sampardai*, sources on the life of Guru Nanak special number of the Punjab Past and Present, pp. 116-119, 190-193. Relevant information also available in Opinderjit Kaur Thakar (2014), "Sikh

and came to be known as *Mahants*. Gradually, they gave-up the basic values tenets of *Udasi* sect and the *Gaddi* began to be passed on from the father to the son and the institution of *Mahant*¹⁸¹ became hereditary.¹⁸² The increase in the income of Gurdwaras derived from revenue from free *jagirs* bestowed on most of the historic Sikh shrines¹⁸³ by Maharaja Ranjit Singh and other Sikh Misl rulers¹⁸⁴ led to the deterioration in life styles of these Mahants.¹⁸⁵ The self-interested Mahants indulged into numerous corrupt practices and started converting the Gurdwara properties into their personal possessions. Moreover, the *Mahants* reverted back to some of the discarded Hindu religious ceremonies, rituals and practices in the Gurdwaras in order to attract greater crowds and earn more money from the offerings.¹⁸⁶

The time the first Sikh reformation started sprouting over hundred years ago in the embryonic form of the Singh Sabha movement that arose in the last quarter of the 19th century, the Sikh praxis had already become feudalized with the correlative processes of vedanticisation of the Sikh doctrine and Brahminisation of the Sikh society. Coupled with this phenomenon was the question mark over the very survival of

Sects” in Pashaura Singh & Louis E. Fenech (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford University Press. pp. 375–377.

- 181 During the period immediately following the death of Banda Singh Bahadur in 1716 and upto the rise of Sikh misls, the Sikhs were under the control of Bahadur Shah, Farrukh Siyyar and their Governors in Punjab. During that period, large number of Sikhs were forced to live in exile. The Gurdwaras came under the control and management of Udasis. Most of them, who looked for priestly jobs in different Gurdwara were not attached to any particular shrine but some who established institutions admitted followers and became heads of their *deras*, *akharas* and Gurdwaras. They came to be known as Mahants.
- 182 Mohinder Singh (1988), *The Akali Struggle : A Retrospect*, Atlantic Publisher & Distributors, New Delhi, pp. 3-6. Surjit Singh Gandhi (1978), *History of the Sikh Gurus: A Comprehensive Study*, published by Gur Das Kapur & Sons, Delhi, pp. 210-214
- 183 For basic information of historic Sikh Shrines in India see, Mehar Singh (1975), *Sikh Shrines in India*, Publication Division - Government of India, New Delhi, pp. 1-35
- 184 Patwant Singh and Jyoti M. Rai (2008), *Empire of the Sikhs- Life and Times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Hay House Publication, New Delhi, PP. 228-233. See also, Giani Partap Singh (1951) , *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 20-22.
- 185 Under the rule of Sikh misls and thereafter under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh Shrines were assigned large estates. Thus Gurdwaras and their *Granthies* had sizeable Jagir of lands and the income derived from land of the Gurdwaras assumed princely proportions. But after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, the *Mahants* of the Gurdwaras became negligent and corrupt in their duties. After the annexation of Punjab by Britishers in 1849, the management of the most of the Sikh shrines went into the hands of those hereditary *Mahants* who were appointed and protected by the British administration. These appointed *Mahants* always worked in the interests of British Government. *Mahants* were usually greedy, corrupt and immoral. Mahants became the virtual proprietors of the Gurdwaras and their income. In many cases, with the help of Government officials, the priests became the owners of Gurdwara properties. See, Giani Partap Singh (1951), *Gurdwara Sudhar Arthat Akali Lehar*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 20-22.
- 186 Teja Singh (1922), *Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, Desh Sewak Agency, Jalandhar pp. 15-17. Bakhshish Singh Nijjar (1996), *History of the United Panjab, Volume 1*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 83-87

the Sikhs and their distinct identity after the loss of political power in 1849.¹⁸⁷ So the first task was that of physical survival of the Sikhs that necessitated participation in the system and institutions of the British Raj in Punjab. After this came the question of revival of the Sikh faith in its pristine purity - a process in which the liberation of the Sikh shrines from the hereditary *Mahants* played crucial role.¹⁸⁸

Chronologically, the first incident that could be called the foundation of Gurdwara Reform Movement was the Rikabganj affair¹⁸⁹ which demonstrated the vulnerability of the Chief Khalsa Diwan's claim to represent Sikhs politically.¹⁹⁰ This was the beginning of the organization of local Akali 'Jathas' (groups) to launch peaceful agitation for dislodging the *Mahants* and taking control of the Gurdwaras. In the course of their struggle, the Akali volunteers launched various *morchas* (battle fronts) and were successful in liberating over two hundred large and small Gurdwaras from the control of Mahants who had strong support of the governing British authorities.¹⁹¹

From 1913 onward, the elite Sikh body, the Chief Khalsa Diwan, came under constant fire over handling of issues such as the right to wear *Kirpans*, Sikh claims concerning holidays and Punjabi in the schools, and most heatedly - the Sikh demands for one-third of the seats in the Punjab legislative council under the proposed 1919 reforms. As Chief Khalsa Diwan had trouble consolidating the Sikh community, its

187 J.S. Grewal (1998), *The Sikhs of the Punjab, Volumes 2-3*, published by Cambridge University Press, UK, pp. 99-101. Shinder Purewal (2000), *Sikh Ethno Nationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 3-8

188 W.H. McLeod (2000), *Sikhism*, published by Penguin Books, London, pp. 81-83. Yog Raj Sharma (1992), *State Autonomy & National Integration: Identity Crisis of the Sikhs*, published by Vinod Publishers & Distributors, Jammu, pp. 36-39

189 The Gurdwara Rikabganj Sahib marks the site, where Lakhi Shah Banjara and his son Bhai Naghaiya burnt their own house to cremate the body of the ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, martyred by Aurangzeb. The Gurdwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, built in 1783 is a historic Gurdwara near Parliament House in New Delhi.

190 After the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911, when in process of building the new capital, the Government acquired land attached to Gurdwara Rikab Ganj in Delhi and demolished an old boundary wall. This aroused the wide anger and resentment among the radical Sikhs against the British Government. The radical reformers, known as the Tat Khalsa or neo-Sikhs, launched the first peaceful agitation over the issue of demolition of a wall of Gurdwara Rikab Ganj in Delhi in 1912. There was plan of launching a Morcha but due to the war, the issue was postponed. After the end of war, the agitation of Rikab Ganj was further started by the radical and extremist Sikhs. See, Sukhmani Bal (1990), *Politics of the Central Sikh League*, Book N' Book publishers, Delhi, pp. 78-81. Teja Singh (1922), *Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, (2017, Classic Reprint) Desh Sewak Agency, Jalandhar pp. 49-52. Also see, Teja Singh (1944), *Essays in Sikhism*, Published by Sikh University Press, Lahore, pp. 140- 146

191 *Sohan Singh* Josh projects the political aspects of the Akali movement along with its religious achievements. For account of Akali Movement see, Sohan Singh Josh (1920), *Akali Morchain Da Itihaas*, Navyug Publishers, Delhi, pp. 2-5, 26,91,117,119. Sohan Singh Josh was a member of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and Shiromani Akali Dal in the early 1920s. Later, he became a communist.

ability to deliver a coherent programme and successes in the broader political system proved even more difficult. The British had their own agenda which included maintaining control over the Golden Temple and Khalsa College¹⁹² to insure that radical, anti-Government factions did not use those institutions to destabilize the foreign rule. Many Sikhs expected the Chief Khalsa Diwan to combat the rulers on such related matters which the central organization did with only marginal success.¹⁹³ Under the heated environment of the 1919 disturbances, the Amritsar massacre, and the public confrontations over control of Sikh shrines, the centrality of the Chief Khalsa Diwan eroded quickly¹⁹⁴ to be replaced by an emerging Sikh religious and political power, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and its volunteer force, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).¹⁹⁵

Formation of SGPC

Akal Takht Sahib, the supreme seat of religious and temporal concerns of Sikhs, issued a 'Hukamnama' (edict) calling upon the entire Khalsa to congregate on November 15, 1920¹⁹⁶ in front of the Akal Takht Sahib for the purpose of electing a

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- 192 With the efforts of Chief Khalsa Diwan, the Khalsa College, Amritsar was founded in March 5, 1892, by Sir James Lyall. Although, the Singh Sabha leaders were not opposing the British rule politically, yet the development of the education among the Sikhs made them conscious of their religion and political backwardness and disabilities. Increase in education awoke large number of Sikhs and prepared the ground for the genesis of Gurdwara Reform Movement directed against the Mahants and Pujaris on the one hand and against the British imperialism in Punjab on the other. See, G.S. Chhabra (1973), *Advanced History of Punjab, Vol. II*, Parksah Brothers, Jalandhar, pp.460- 461. For detailed history of Khalsa College, see, Singh, Ganda (1949), *A History of the Khalsa College*, published by Khalsa College, Amritsar.
- 193 Chief Khalsa Diwan leaders felt that the future of the minority Sikh community rested upon strengthening of British patronage combined with improved influence over official decision-making. The Chief Khalsa Diwan therefore protested loyalty while criticizing specific policies. For detailed study of the role of Chief Khalsa Diwan see, N. Gerald Barrier (1988), "The Sikh and Punjab Politics, 1882-1922", in Paul Wallace (ed.), *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*, Published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 518-529. For detailed study of historical, ideological aspects and political strategy aspects of Chief Khalsa Diwan, see, Surjit Singh Narang (1998), *Sikh Politics – The Study of Elite Perspective*, published by Punjab Development Society, Jalandhar, pp 92-98.
- 194 For detailed study of the Chief Khalsa Diwan see, S.S. Narang (1981) 'The Chief Khalsa Diwan-An analytical Study of the perspective', *Punjab Journal of Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 1 June 1981, pp. 67-881.
- 195 Mohinder Singh is his known work "The Akali Movement: A Retrospect", traces the historical background of the Akali Movement. The author in this work provides insights into base, organization and leadership of the movement. The work is a comprehensive account of the five year (1920- 25) Sikh struggle to free the Sikh shrines from the control of Mahants. The book also documents the internal link between the Gurdwara Reform Movement and Indian National Movement and its leaders. Based on evidence gathered from the private papers of the contemporary British officials and the national leaders, this analytical work throws light on various social and political implications of the successful Akali Movement. See Mohinder Singh (1988), *The Akali Struggle: A Retrospect*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 12-24
- 196 Gurdev Grewal (2006), *The Searching Eye – An inside look at the Punjab Crisis*, Rupa Publications, New Delhi, p.4

representative committee of the Sikh 'Panth' (Sikh community) for the management of the Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) and all other Gurdwaras.¹⁹⁷ Invitations were sent by the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib to other Takhts, the Gurdwaras, Sikh educational institutes, the Sikhs in the Army and other Sikh bodies to send their representatives in the concerned conference. The meeting which was held on 15th and 16th of November, 1920, was attended by over 10,000 Sikh representatives from various parts of the country. This General Body meeting of the 'Sikh Panth' elected a 175-member committee, including 36 Government nominees.¹⁹⁸ This newly formed historic Sikh body was named as Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, i.e. the SGPC.

Thus, Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) came into existence on 15th November, 1920 to look after the management of Gurudwaras which they were wresting from vicious and corrupt Mahants. The inaugural meeting of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee came off at the Akal Takht Sahib on December 12, 1920 and the pioneer Sikh institution was registered on April 30, 1921. Baba Kharak Singh who was actively associated with the Gurdwara Reform Movement from its inception was elected the first President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).¹⁹⁹ Harbans Singh Attari was elected as vice-president and Sunder Singh Ramgarhia as secretary.²⁰⁰ A prominent Sikh leader Master Tara Singh who was also one of the 175 members elected to the committee was instrumental in organising the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Master Tara Singh remained the President of SGPC for seven terms between 1930 and 1961, serving for

197 The Sikhs of all shades of opinion from different parts of the country, including the Sikh States, came to the big meeting held on 15th and 16th November, 1920, and resolved to form a committee of 175 members to control all the temples (Gurdwaras) of the Sikhs whether in the Punjab or elsewhere.

198 Harbans Singh (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism Vol. II*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 115-116. Raj Pal Singh (2004), *The Sikhs: Their Journey of Five Hundred Year*, published by Bhawna Books and Prints, New Delhi, p.174-176. Also see, S.C. Mittal (1977), *Freedom Movement in Punjab, 1905-1929*, Concept Publishers, Delhi, pp. 150- 152.

199 Sunder Singh Majithia was the first president of SGPC when it was formed in 1920. He held the office from 12/10/1920 to 14/08/1921. Sardar Majithia was succeeded by baba Kharak Singh in 1921 who held the office from 14/08/1921 to 19/02/1922. After the implementation of Sikh Gurdawara Act 1925, it was Baba Kharak Singh who became first elected SGPC President. He then held the office from 02/10/1926 to 12/10/1930. See, official website of SGPC. Relevant information available at <http://sgpc.net/honble-presidents-of-sgpc/>, accessed on 18/07 /2017. Also see, Ranjit Singh (2008), *Sikh Achievers*, Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi, p.30. Raj Pal Singh (2004), *The Sikhs: Their Journey of Five Hundred Year*, published by Bhawna Books and Prints, New Delhi, p.183

200 Narain Singh Jhabber (1959), *Akali Morche Ate Jhabbar*, Manjeet Printing & Publishing Company, Patiala, pp. 72-74. See also Teja Singh (1922), *Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Sikh Awakening*, Desh Sewak Agency, Jalandhar pp. 47-48.

approximately 17 years in total. The formation of SGPC provided a focal point for the movement for the reformation of Sikh religious places.²⁰¹

With the establishment of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), a month later, on December 14, 1920, a new Sikh organization known as Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) came into existence to liberate other Gurdwaras from the *Mahants*. Shiromani Akali Dal - the new political Sikh body instituted by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was supposed to implement all the works of SGPC. Shiromani Akali Dal was meant to function under the overall control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee making available to it, the volunteers, when required. **The establishment of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) proved to be a turning point in the history of the Sikhs.**²⁰² The establishment of a democratically elected apex religious organization, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, (SGPC) to oversee the Gurdwara administration was a milestone in the history of Sikh homeland.²⁰³

SGPC and Gurdwara Reform Movement

The Gurdwara Reform movement popularly known as ‘Akali Movement’ began as an attempt of the Sikh reformers to purify their religious places from the evil and anti-Sikh practices, and their liberation from the hereditary control of the *Mahants*, priests and Government-appointed managers and other vested interests.²⁰⁴ The *Mahants* had become evil and immoral. The Gurdwara Movement soon took a political turn with the Government in Punjab coming out in open support of the vested interests and the nationalist forces in the country lending active sympathy and support to the Akalis in their struggle against the foreign Government. The period of the Akali movement

201 Master Tara Singh remained at the helm of affairs both in SGPC and Akali Dal until 1961, when he was ousted by Sant Fateh Singh in SGPC elections. See, Pashaura Singh & Luis E. Fenech (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, published by Oxford University Press, UK, pp . 265-266. Also see Amrik Singh (2000), *The Partition in Retrospect*, published by Anamika Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, p. 72

202 Gurbachan Singh Nayyar (1979), *Sikh Polity and Political Institutions*, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, pp. 28-39. Also see ,Shamsher Singh Ashok(1982), *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Da Panjah Sala Itihas* (from 1926 to 1976)”, published by Sikh History Research Board –SGPC, Amritsar, pp. 3-16.

203 Shinder Purewal (2000), *Sikh Ethno-nationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 42-45

204 The Gurdwara Reform Movement had started at a time when the whole country was seething with discontent in the wake of Non-Cooperation Movement. It can safely be assumed that these movements in Punjab reinforced each other. The Gurdwara Reform Movement developed into a mass movement with a strong anti-Government slant, but it was riven by contradictions from within. Moreover, since the focus was on religion, the majority of participants continued to think more in terms of *Panth* than of the national cause. This explains why Gurdwara Reform Movement did not merge itself completely in the national mainstream.

represented the third phase of Anglo-Sikh relationships when the bonds of interest and identity between the British and many Sikhs were broken.²⁰⁵

The Akali Movement that began in 1920 as a non-violent agitation is sometimes described as the “Third Sikh War” of 1920’s, although it is better known as the Gurdwara Reform Movement.²⁰⁶ Gradually, the organized Akalis became a big threat to the authority of these British supported *Mahants*. After the ouster of *Mahants* at Nankana Sahib²⁰⁷ (birth place of Guru Nanak Dev), Guru Ka Bagh and at other places, the Shiromani Akali Dal and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) firmed up their mass base and succeeded in defeating the designs of the British Government.²⁰⁸ SGPC regained the administrative control of Golden Temple and compelled the British to vest control of Gurudwaras in this statutory body of the Sikhs.²⁰⁹ With two consecutive victories of the Akalis against the British Government-

205 Daljeet Singh & Kharak Singh (1997) *Sikhism: Its Philosophy and History*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 598-600. James Massey (2010), *A Contemporary Look At Sikh Religion – Essays on Scripture, Identity, Creation, Spirituality, Charity and Interfaith Dialogue*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 56-62.

206 Ganda Singh (1965), *Some Confidential Papers of the Akali Movement*, published by Sikh Itihaas Research Board, SGPC, Amritsar, pp. 9 -13.

207 Gurdwara Nankana Sahib (now in Pakistan) - being the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev Ji - is one of the most sacred pilgrimage centre for the Sikhs. The Gurdwara had large estate and property attached to it, and it had huge income. The Mahant of this place - Narain Das, was specially notorious for his licentious behavior and misuse of Gurdwara funds. The major holocaust took place at Nankana Sahib where the death of one hundred and thirty volunteers on February 20, 1921 sent waves of anger and shock throughout the country. The news spreads like wild fire. Bands of Akali workers, who were greatly outraged over the tragedy, started pouring in from distant towns of Punjab. The Punjab as well as national press condemned the incident and blamed the government for supporting the Mahants. The national leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and others visited the place of tragedy and conveyed their sympathy and support. See, Har Jagmandar Singh (2008), *A Story of the Sikhs (Pursuit of Sovereignty)*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp.151-158. Also see, J.S. Grewal (1998), *The Sikhs of Punjab Volume 2-3*, published by Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, pp. 159-162.

208 Babbar Akali group was responsible for adding a new dimension to the Akali struggle. Babbar Akalis did not believe in non-violent struggle and wanted to overthrow the twin enemies- i.e. the Mahants from the Gurdwaras, and the British from India, through violent means. The main targets of their attacks, therefore, were the agents of the British Government on the one hand and the Mahants and the Sikh aristocracy on the other. This was an element of militancy in the Gurdwara reform movement. For study of ideology and strategies of Babbar Akalis during Gurdwara Reform movement, see Malwinder Jit Singh Waraich & Gurdev Singh Sidhu (2007), *The Babbar Akali Case Judgement: From Liberation of Gurdwaras to National Liberation*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 418-428.

209 The return of keys of the Golden Temple to Baba Kharak Singh, President of SGPC, and the release of Sikh prisoners gave much moral boost to the Sikhs in their religious struggle. The Akalis started ejecting the Mahants from the Gurdwaras. So far the Akalis had gained control over the important Sikh shrines through peaceful means and without shedding much of blood. But the tragedy of Nankana Sahib in which over 130 peaceful Sikh reformers were done to death by Mahant Narain Das and the mercenaries hired by him, proved a turning point both in the annals of the Sikh struggle for liberation of Gurdwaras.

the *Keys agitation* and *Guru ka Bagh Morcha*, the Gurdwara reform movement gained considerable strength and momentum.²¹⁰

The Akali Jathas after successfully gaining control over Gurudwara Babe-di-Ber, Sialkot, through peaceful agitation, next paid their attention to the premier Sikh shrines at Amritsar. Corrupt and non-Sikh practices in the precincts of Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), and the official control over its management had been the cause of great discontentment among the Sikhs much before the beginning of the Gurdwara Reform Movement.²¹¹ The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) launched various *morchas* (agitations) for religious, economic and political reasons. Several important *Akali Morchas* of the first half of the 20th century took place between 1919 and 1925. Sikh gurdwaras have always been sites of Sikh political gatherings and launching of political agitations (*morchas*). Some of the most important *Morchas* of this period include: (i) Nanakana Sahib Da Morcha (1921), (ii) *Chabian* (Keys) da Morcha (1921-22), (iii) Guru ka Bagh Marcha (1922), (iv) Jaito da Morcha (1923).²¹²

The British Government was fully aware of the importance of combination of religion and politics in Sikhism and knew that Sikh politics gets inspiration and strength from its religion. Thus they wanted to separate the two.²¹³ The British knew that whoever controlled the Sikh Gurdwaras controlled Punjab so much so that the control of the Sikh Gurdwaras by them was considered a “State within a State”. British did not want a strong Sikh religious body taking over the control of Gurdwaras that they knew could be as powerful as the Punjab Government. A century of British rule in the Punjab confronted Sikhs with numerous religious and political challenges. In general, western ideas and missionary activities helped sharpen the self-identity, boundaries, and

210 Madanjit Kaur (1983), *The Golden Temple: Past and Present*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 76-79. Sukhmani Bal Riar (2006), *The Politics and History of the Central Sikh League 1919-1929*, Published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 76-79.

211 M.L. Ahluwalia (1985) (ed.), *Gurdwara Reform Movement 1919-1925: A Era of Congress- Akali Collaboration – Select Documents*, Ashoka Publications, New Delh, pp.32-46.

212 Sohan Singh Josh (1972) , *Akali Marchian Da Itihas*, Navyug Publishers, New Delhi, , pp. 37- 43. Also see, Ram Sahni (1965), *Struggle for Reforms in Sikh Shrines*, Ganda Singh (ed.), published by Sikh Ithihaas Research Board – SGPC, Amritsar, pp. 59 -61. Gobinder Singh (1986), *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, Deep and Deep Publications, pp.75-82.

213 Gobinder Singh (1986), *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, pp. 64-68. Also see, N. Gerald Barrier (1997), “Sikhism from Century to Century”, in Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (ed), *Sikhism and The 21st Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 82-87.

institutions of Punjab religious communities.²¹⁴ This led to substantial internal struggle within Sikh groups and the creation of new associations defending specific traditions and attacking others.²¹⁵

A new movement called Gurdwara Reform Movement which was launched against the *Mahants* and their British mentors with the purpose of wresting the control of the Gurdwaras continued for five years. The success of mass protest activities of the Akalis in the early 1920s discredited the official stance of the British authorities that the Sikhs could be controlled through the institution of *Mahants* and *Pujaris* (priests) of the temples, and through official management of the Golden Temple, Amritsar. The Akali answer was given in the agitations over the Keys Affair at Guru-ka-Bagh, at Jaito and elsewhere.²¹⁶

The Gurdwara Reform Movement though itself a product of the general awakening and growing political consciousness within the Sikh community, greatly strengthened the forces of nationalism in Punjab by rejecting the mahants, the landed aristocracy and other pro-British and vested interests in the Sikh community who had been declared the natural leaders of Sikhs by the official machinery. The Akalis confrontation with the British Government brought Sikhs in the national politics. Due to its anti-imperialist character, the Gurdwara Reform movement became an auxiliary to the national movement and also brought large number of Sikhs in the national struggle. Mahatma Gandhi regarded the non-violent character of the Akali Movement/Gurdwara Reform Movement as a victory for the brand of Indian nationalism.²¹⁷

214 A crucial role in the process of politicization of separate Sikh identity was played by the British colonial rulers. It fitted very well into their policy of divide and rule. They gave economic and political concessions to the Sikhs who adhered to the Khalsa symbols (*the five K's*) symbols. This also included giving separate representation in the army on the basis of their religious identity. There were special instructions to the recruiting officers on this issue and the result was that many Hindus converted themselves to Sikhism in order to be recruited to the armed forces.

215 See, Sheena Pall (2013), "Issues of Sikh Identity: Sanatanist-Sikh Debate", in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Volume 20, 2013 pp. 196-210. Also see, Bidyut Chakrabarty (2003) *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century*, published by Oxford University Press, pp. 272-275. Also see, Hatjot Oberoi (1997), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, published by University of Chicago Press, pp. 22-36.

216 *The Politics and History of the Central Sikh League, 1919-1929*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 76-79, 88-91. J.S. Grewal (1998), *The Sikhs of Punjab Volume 2-3*, published by Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), pp. 159-162. Also see, Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 167-169, 186-189.

217 M.L. Aluwalia (1985), *Gurdwara Reform Movement, 1919-1925, An era of Congress-Akali Collaboration: Select Documents*, Ashoka International Publishers, New Delhi, 375-387. Mohinder Singh (1993), *Baba Kharak Singh and India's Struggle for Freedom*, published by National Institute of Sikh Studies, New Delhi, pp. 25-28

Akalis maintained the distinct identity of their religious struggle from the national movement. But tactically they always maintained close relations with Congress keeping in view two main objects. First, they secured material and moral support from the national organization, and secondly, their association with Congress worked as a pressure upon the British Government.²¹⁸ After ensuring active cooperation of the Indian National Congress, the Khilafat and other nationalist forces, the Akalis broadened the scope of their initial struggle for Gurdwara reform²¹⁹ and launched a two pronged attack directed towards the hereditary *Mahants* on one hand and British imperialism on the other.²²⁰

With the huge influence and success of Gurdwara Reform Movement, the prestige and power of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) tremendously increased. By April 1923, about 125 Gurdwaras came under the management and administration of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). But taking over the Gurdwaras from the *Mahants* was hardly any solution to the problem. The Sikhs wanted a law which could provide them a central representative committee as trustee of all historical Gurdwaras.²²¹ The British, who were earlier against the movement and made all efforts to crush it, had to concede the demand of handling over the management of the Gurdwaras to the Sikhs. The Akali campaign was finally terminated by the drafting and passing of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Indeed, the passing of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, which gave SGPC the status of

218 Partha N. Mukherji (1985), "Akali and Violence – An Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Non-Violence", Amrik Singh (ed.), Ajanta Publications, Delhi, pp. 110-118. Also see, Mohinder Singh (1994), "Akalis and the Nationalist Politics", in Dharam Singh (ed.), *Sikhism and Secularism – Essays in Honour of Professor Harbans Singh*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 263-275.

219 It was mainly due to the Akali-Congress association during the Akali Movement that the two leaderships came closer to each other and the Sikhs got involved in Congress activities. Actually, the two groups among the Sikhs-(i) the Akali advocates of purely religious reform, and (ii) others who looked upon the Gurdwara reform only as a part of the larger programme of the country's freedom-remained united till 1939, initially under the leadership of Baba Kharak Singh and later that of Master Tara Singh. See Mohinder Singh (2000), "The Gurdwara Reform Movement" in Harish K. Puri & Paramjit Singh Judge, *Social and Political Movements: Readings on Punjab*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 171-92.

220 Since the Akali struggle became regional manifestation of the larger movement for country's freedom, early Akali victory during the key's affair was described by Mahatma Gandhi as 'the first decisive victory of the forces of Indian nationalism'. Meanwhile, the Sikhs participation in national movement registered a significant advance. With the settlement of the Gurdwara question, the Sikhs confrontation with the government finally came to an end. Their religious grievances were redressed. The new Gurdwara Act gave complete control of Gurdwaras in the hands of Panth.

221 Narain Singh Jhabber (1959), *Akali Morche -te- Jhabbar*, Manjeet Printing & Publishing Company, Patiala, pp. 62-73.

Constitutional entity and legal authority to administer the control over the Gurdwaras, may be seen as one of the first victories of organized mass resistance to colonial rule.²²²

The agitation which actually started in 1920 and continued for five years, was soon directed and controlled by the two representative bodies of the Sikhs, viz: the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). The inalienable right of the Sikhs to self-manage their shrines was recognized through Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 after a long saga of sacrifices for the liberation of Gurdwaras from the Mahants backed by the British Government. Sir Gokul Chand Narang described Sikh Gurdwaras Act as the “*most extra-ordinary measure*” and observed, “*I am not aware that in any country any religious community felt so keenly about its holy places and made such sacrifices for their preservation and protection. Those who object to the Bill for its sweeping character must find solace in the fact that those who got it have paid and paid very heavily for it.*”²²³

The Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 represented a British withdrawal from an institutionalized connection with Sikh religious institutions.²²⁴ On the outcome of Gurdwara Reform Movement and passage of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, a known Sikh intellectual Prof. Teja Singh commented: “*Inspite of a few losses, the Sikh nation has over all been benefitted by this movement. We have got not only the Gurdwaras but also the full freedom to manage them in the way we like. We have got the rights in the management of the Gurdwaras which are not available even to the English people in the management of their churches in their country.*”²²⁵ As a compromise between the Sikh legislators and the Government, the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 originally used the word ‘Board’ for the Central Gurdwara Management body, and provided that the ‘Board’, in its first meeting, could choose its new name by 3/5th majority of its members and approval by the Provincial Government. The ‘Board’ unanimously named itself as Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which was also approved by the

222 K.S. Duggal (2008), “Sikhs in the Freedom Struggle”, *Mainstream Weekly*, Volume, XLVI No 35, August 2008, available at <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article891.html>, accessed on 07/11/2017. Giorgi Shani (2007), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, published by Routledge, New York, pp. 36-38.

223 Statement of Sir Gokul Chand Narang in PLC, *Punjab Legislative Council Debates (PLCD)*, July 7, 1925, p. 1294.

224 M.L. Ahluwalia (1990), *A History of Sikh Politics and Gurdwara Reforms*, Ashoka International Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 4-16. Joginder Singh (1997), *The Sikh Resurgence*, published by National Book Organization, New Delhi, pp. 84-77.

225 Teja Singh (1934), *Gurdwara Sudhar Lehar de Labh te Haan*, Updeshak (Gurdwara Parbandh Number), Amritsar, November.-December 1934, reproduced in Singh Sabha Patrika, December. 1977. Statement also reproduced in Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 152

Government.²²⁶ The Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 under which the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) got the legal and constitutional status extended to the pre-partitioned Punjab and covered the historical shrines as well as the Gurdwaras notified under the Act.²²⁷

SGPC and Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925

Events surrounding the 1919 disturbances and the spread of Sikh consciousness and movement focusing on control of all Sikh shrines had the initial effect of bolstering the Chief Khalsa Diwan's authority.²²⁸ By 1921 Chief Khalsa Diwan's attempts to balance community needs with good relations with the British broke down, and while several of its leaders continued to be prominent in Sikh and provincial affairs, the mantle of authority passed swiftly to the new Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). For the remainder of the century, the new organizations and leadership had to tackle the problem of Sikh identity and politics in turbulent and often dangerous conditions.²²⁹ By the end of the 1920s, the political and religious landscape of Sikh community had changed dramatically. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) moved to consolidate its premier position by combining religious and political issues, and got strengthened in 1925 by the passage of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act. The 1925 Act also set up the legal parameters within which Sikh public figures operated, and replaced informal procedures with specific requirements that became actionable in the courts.²³⁰

The formulation of Sikh Gurudwara Act 1925 posed new questions about Sikh identity. The crucial question that arose was about what type of Sikh identity should be considered legitimate, and therefore, who should be eligible to be a member of constituted body (SGPC) responsible for representing the Sikhs and looking after the

226 Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp.128-131. Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.307-310.

227 Kashmir Singh (1991), *Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation: All India Perspective*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 6-8. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (2003), *Liberating Sikhism from 'The Sikhs' - Sikhism's Potential for World Civilization*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 135-138

228 N. Gerald Barrier (1999), "Sikh Identity in Historical and Contemporary Perspective", N. Gerald Barrier (1999), "Issues of Sikh Identity", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity – Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 34 -40.

229 Dalip Singh (1981), *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, Macmillan Publications, New Delhi, pp. 24-34. Also See J.S. Grewal (1996), *The Akalis: A Short History*, Punjab Studies Publications, Chandigarh, pp. 12-29.

230 Rajinder Kaur (1992) , *Sikh identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 39-42. Surjit Singh (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 46-49. Also see, W.H. McLeod (1989), *Who Is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity*, published by Clarendon University Press, Oxford, pp. 97-102

management of Gurudwaras.²³¹ However, Chapter 1 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925 defines a Sikh as following:

“Sikh - "Sikh" means a person who professes the Sikh religion or, in the case of a deceased person, who professed the Sikh religion or was known to be Sikh during his lifetime.”²³²

The Act further says:

“If any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he shall be deemed respectively to be or not to be a Sikh according as he makes or refuses to make in such manner as to the [State] Government may prescribe the following declaration: I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus, and that I have no other religion.”²³³

The important point to be noted in this SGPC definition is that the definition of a ‘Sikh’ was based upon modernist assumption that doctrine dominates practice. This was the beginning of the definition of a ‘Sikh’ by legislation. The definition was deliberately broad because legislators did not want to be specific in terms of either detailed beliefs or practices and boundaries. This approach indeed set the precedent later continued by the Sikh Rehat Maryada (1950) and all the way up to 1971 Delhi Gurdwara Act.²³⁴

The Sikh Gurdwaras Act provides for two-tier management of Gurdwaras. Section 41 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 provides that the management of every Sikh Gurdwara shall be administered by the Committee of management constituted thereof, the Board and the Commission in accordance with the provisions of the Act. About ninety important historical Gurdwaras are listed in section 85 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and provides that the Board (SGPC) shall be the Committee of management for these Gurdwaras.²³⁵ For other Gurdwaras left out of this sub-section, independent Committees of management are directly managing them and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is only a supervisory body. Clause (1) of sub-section (1) of Section 85 (Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925) mentions about Akal Takht

231 ibid.

232 See, Sikh Gurdwara Act (Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 2)

233 ibid.

234 Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2016), *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs*, published by Routledge, New York, pp.17-23. Devinder Singh Chahal (2002), “ Defining A Sikh”. *Institute of Understanding Sikhism*, Volume 4, No. 2, pp. 41-44, available at <http://www.iuscanada.com/journal/articles/definingASikh.pdf>, accessed on 11/12/2016

235 See, Section 41 and Section 85 of The Sikh Gurdwaras Act. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 162-163. M.L. Ahluwalia (ed.) (1985), *Gurdwara Reform Movement 1919-1925: A Era of Congress- Akali Collaboration – Select Documents*, Ashoka Publications,, New Delh, pp.323-326.

Sahib at Amritsar and Takht Keshgarh Sahib at Anandpur for which SGPC is given the responsibility as Committee of management also.²³⁶

It may be mentioned that in the original Act of 1925 only the two institutions: Akal Takht Sahib (Amritsar) and Takht Keshgarh Sahib (Anandpur Sahib) were included in section 85 and were put under the direct management of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). This was the only distinction that was recognised between the 'Takhts' on one hand and other historic Gurdwaras on the other.²³⁷ However, by an amendment in 1944 in the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, this distinctive position is not retained for the 'Takhts' when other Gurdwaras are also brought under the direct management and control of SGPC by their inclusion in section 85 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act. The amendments made to the Sikh Gurdwara 1925 Act in 1944, 1959 and 1998 and 2010 added around one hundred important Gurdwaras to list giving their direct management and control to the SGPC.²³⁸

The 1925 Gurdwara Act envisages a single Board named as the Shiromani Gurdwara²³⁹ Parbandhak Committee that directly manages under section 85 certain notified Gurdwaras in Punjab, Union Territory of Chandigarh, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, as well as the Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar), the Akal Takht Sahib, and the two 'Takhts' at Anandpur Sahib and Damdama Sahib. For other notified Gurdwaras in the above-mentioned areas, the Act provides for management committees under section 86 with SGPC having the general powers of superintendence and supervision over the committees. Section 43 of the Act provides for the constitution of New Board.²⁴⁰ Section 45 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 lays down qualifications of

236 Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.185-187. See also Sikh Gurdwara Act - *Chapter VII, Section 85, Clause 1*.

237 Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi pp. 229-231. Pashaura Singh & Luis E Fenech (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, published by Oxford University Press, UK, pp. 335-337. Also see, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1999), *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp.128-129.

238 *ibid.*

239 All though the Sikh Gurudawra Act 1925 refers to the term 'Gurudwara' in his title and frequently throughout its content, yet definition of a 'Gurudwara' has not been in corporate in the Act.

240 Section 43 of Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925 reads as under:

- (i) *One hundred and Thirty two elected members*
- (ii) *The head ministers of Drabar Sahib, Amritsar, and the following four Takhts, namely:- the Sri Akal Takht Sahib, Amritsar, the Sri Takht Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur, the Sri Takht Patna Sahib, Patna, and Sri Takht Hazur Sahib, Hydrabad Deccan.*
- (iii) *Twenty-five members resident in India whom at least twelve shall be residents of PEPSU, at least twelve shall be residents of other parts of India than Punjab and PEPSU and more*

elected members and Section 49²⁴¹ lays down qualifications of the electors, are important provisions to understand the process of elections of SGPC, a Sikh religious body which has been called “Parliament of Sikhs” and also a “State within the State”.²⁴² As per the virtue of Sikh Gurudwara Act 1925, the regular elections were to be held for constituting the organization of Gurdwara Management Committee. The Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 gave constitutional recognition to a Central Board for the control and management of historic Gurdwaras. Its elected members gave it the name of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to identify it with the body formed in 1920. Originally, the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, provided for 84 elected, 5 ex-officio and 12 nominated members for the top Sikh religious body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). However after various amendments, at present, the SGPC has 190 members which include 170 elected members. Among 20 non- elected members of the SGPC, 15 members are co-opted and 5 are ex-officio members. Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts are ex-officio members without having any voting rights.²⁴³ The elections for the SGPC are to be conducted by the Central Government, and the tenure of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and of the local committees is five years or until the constitutions of the new Board/Committee after elections (whichever be later).²⁴⁴ The elections of SGPC are held after five years but the executive committee including the President are elected for

than four of Punjab. Co-opted by the members of the Board as described in clauses (i) and (ii). For details, see Section 43, Sikh Gurudawars Act, 1925.

241 Section 49 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 that prescribes qualifications of the electors of the SGPC Board, which is reproduced here:

“Provided that no person shall be registered as an elector who –

- a) Trims or shaves his beard or keshas;
- b) Smokes ; and
- c) Takes alcoholic drinks.”

“Qualifications of electors – Every person shall be entitled to have his name registered on the electoral roll of a constituency constituted for the election of a member or the members of the Board who is a resident in that constituency and is a Sikh more than twenty-one years of age, who had his name registered as a voter in such manner as may be prescribed.”

242 Gobinder Singh (1986), *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, p.279. Also see, Baldev Raj Nayyar (1966), *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, New York, p.177

243 See, Section 43 of Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 248- 249. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi p.228

244 See, Section 51 of Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. For current information see, “SGPC to elect its 42nd President Today”, *The Times of India*, November 29, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/sgpc-to-elect-its-42nd-prez-today/articleshow/61843119.cms>, accessed on 08/12/2017. Also see, , Pashaura Singh & Louis E Fenech (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford Universty Press, United Kingdom, p.334

the term of one year by the General House of SGPC. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is the largest representative institution of the Sikhs which is directly elected by an electorate of the Sikh community who are registered as voters under the provisions of Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925. The elections to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have always been delayed after the Union Government entered into the scene on the passing of Punjab Re-organisation Act 1966. After 1965, the SGPC elections were held in 1979, 1996, 2004 and 2011 after a gap of 14, 17, 8 and 7 years respectively, that too after High Court's directions to conduct the elections to the pioneer Sikh body.²⁴⁵

The 1925 Gurdwara Act exposed another dilemma faced by the Sikh community in the 1920s. The Act was applicable only within the British Empire; Sikhs living in the Princely States were excluded from taking part in the election of their central body, the SGPC. On the other hand Sikh rulers were empowered to nominate their representatives for SGPC. Moreover, the jurisdiction of SGPC was not universal; it was restricted to the historical Gurdwaras located in the British Punjab only. The Sikh contemporary reactions towards the provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 ranged from extreme appreciation to critical acceptance and even to the rejection of the Act. The demand for All India Gurdwaras legislation has been raised by the Sikhs from time to time over the past many decades. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in its meeting in November 1926 passed a resolution of extending the 1925 Act to cover all the Gurdwaras in India including the princely states.²⁴⁶

The Nehru-Tara Singh Pact of 1959 also envisaged enactment of an All India Gurdwaras legislation. Master Tara Singh who led both the SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) remained the key figure in Akali Dal and the nationalist politics till 1939, when he resigned from the working committee of the Congress over the issue of Sikh recruitment to the Indian Army.²⁴⁷ The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) became an

245 The first formal SGPC election was held in June 1926 after enactment of The Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925. See, "Creation, courts and crisis: recalling SGPC's Journey", *The Indian Express*, November 25, 2015. Also see, Sukhmani Bal Riar (1990), *The Politics and History of the Central Sikh League, 1919-1929*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 96-97. Very relevant information available in Kashmir Singh (2014), "The Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 – Critique", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. XVI, Issue 4, October - December 2014, available at https://sikhinstitute.org/oct_2014/7-kashmirsing.html, accessed on 21/11/2016.

246 Gobinder Singh (1986), *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, p.239-240. Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi pp.239.

247 Rajwant Kaur Bhullar (1990), "Master Tara Singh and Struggle for Sikh Representation 1920-47", *The Punjab Past and Present*, Volume 24, Punjab Historical Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala,

independent political party basing its politics on distinct Sikh identity.²⁴⁸ The British Government did not want a central committee that controlled all the Gurdwaras because they were afraid it would become too powerful to control. However, the Punjab Re-Organisation Act 1966 passed by Indian Parliament made the SGPC an inter-State body corporate to operate in the successor States of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Union Territory of Chandigarh. Thus, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) acquired national character and the Sikh Gurdwaras Act became an inter-State Act.²⁴⁹

It will be relevant to mention the promises made by the leaders of the Gurdwara Reform Movement during the first quarter of the last century when they were agitating to acquire the control of Gurdwaras for the community from the corrupt Mahants. They said that if they were successful to get the Gurdwara Act passed and bring the statutory Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) into existence, they will: (a) Properly utilize the income and the property of the Gurdwara, (b) propagate Sikhism to every corner of the world, (c) educate every Sikh, (d) open technical and industrial schools, and (e) eradicate unemployment to root out evils like drinking and litigation, and open free dispensaries and schools along with Gurdwaras in every village.²⁵⁰

Sikh Rehat Maryada by SGPC

The Gurdwaras Act of 1925 placed the management of Sikh shrines in the hands of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). As a result, SGPC found itself in the position of having to define Sikh belief, practice and code of conduct. There had been no uniformity in these matters for years, during which many Hindu rituals and practices had crept into Sikh way of worship.²⁵¹ In 1931, a meeting was held at the Akal

pp. 125-126. Ajmer Singh (2007), *Vihvin Sadi Di Sikh Rajniti* (Punjabi), Printwell Publishers, Amritsar, pp. 184-192

248 Jugdip Singh Chima (2015), "The Shiromani Akali Dal and Emerging Ideological Cleavages in Contemporary Sikh Politics in Punjab: Integrative Regionalism versus Exclusivist Ethnonationalism", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Volume 22, 2015. pp.146-151. Kharak Singh (1996), *Current Thoughts on Sikhism*, published by Institution of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 123-128. Also see, J.S. Grewal (1996), *The Akalis: A Short History*, Punjab Studies Publications, Chandigarh, pp. 29-35.

249 Baldev Raj Nayar (1966), *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, New York, pp.177. Ram Narayan Kumar, Georg Sieberer (1991), *The Sikh struggle: Origin, Evolution, and Present Phase*, Chankaya Publications, Delhi, pp. 192-194. Also see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi pp.240-242.

250 Kashmir Singh (2014), "Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee :An Overview", in Pashaura Singh & Louise E. Fenech (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Published by Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, pp.235-237.

251 N. Gerald Barrier (2004), "Authority, Politics, and Contemporary Sikhism", in Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier & W. H. McLeod (eds.) *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 207-211.

Takht Sahib, where it was decided to draw up a code to regulate individual and corporate life of Sikhs. The views of all prominent scholars, experts and Sikh organizations were canvassed.²⁵² The result strongly reflected the influence and dominance of the Singh Sabha and Akali movement of the early twentieth century. The apex institution of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), constituted a sub-committee in 1936 to consider the formulation of a universal Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct and conventions).²⁵³

In October 1931, a detailed draft was prepared by a sub-committee of the SGPC which included prominent Tat Khalsa members. The representatives of various Sikh associations and Takhts deliberated for a long time and formulated an authorized version which was published in 1945.²⁵⁴ The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) enshrined the Tat Khalsa narrative of Sikh identity in the Sikh Rehat Maryada²⁵⁵ which purports to provide a code of conduct for all Sikhs.²⁵⁶ It is equally important to underline the historical coincidence that Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) published the standard manual of the Sikh Code of Conduct known as “Sikh Rehat Maryada” in 1950 to define “who is a Sikh” and to regulate the religious affairs of the Sikh community both at individual and collective (panth) level.²⁵⁷ The manual- Sikh Rehat Maryada published by SGPC begins by defining a Sikh in the following terms:

“ਜੋ ਇਸਤਰੀ ਜਾਂ ਪੁਰਸ਼ ਇਕ ਅਕਾਲ ਪੁਰਖ, ਦਸ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਤੋਂ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤਕ), ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅਤੇ ਦਸ ਗੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੇ ਸਿਖਿਆ ਅਤੇ ਦਸਮੇਸ਼ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਉਤੇ ਨਿਸਚਾ ਰਖਦਾ ਅਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਕਿਸੇ ਧਰਮਨੂੰ ਨਹੀ ਮੰਨਦਾ ਉਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਹੈ ॥”²⁵⁸

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- 252 Teja Singh, Jodh Singh and Sher Singh, the eminent Sikhs, were three of the scholars. Three others who should be named were Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha who had assisted M.A. Macauliffe, Bhai Vir Singh- the poet, and Ganga Singh of the Sikh Shahid Missionary College, Amritsar.
- 253 Gobind Singh Manasukhani (1989), “Sikh- Rehat Maryada and Sikh Symbols”, in Jasbir Singh Mann & Harbans Singh Sarao (eds), *Advanced Studies in Sikhism (Papers Contributed at Conference of Sikh Studies, Los Angeles, December 1989)*, published by Sikh Community of North America, California, USA, pp. 189-190.
- 254 (i) Discipline of the word : liturgical texts, Ardas, Gurdwaras, reading of Guru Granth Sahib, etc. (ii) Discipline of sacrament : Birth and Naming ceremony, Anand marriage, Amrit ceremony, Death ceremony. (iii) Discipline of Service : Free Kitchen (Langar) (iv) Discipline of Organization : Guru Panth, Gursangat, Gurmatta, etc. (v) Disciplinary Action : Imposition of punishment , penance, Re-Batism, Etc.
- 255 The word ‘Rehat’ means how to live and ‘Maryada’ means the tradition and practice of the faith. Sikh Rehat Maryada started with Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh faith .
- 256 To this day, the wide circulation of SGPC published Sikh Rehat Maryada represents a measure of success o the Singh Sabha Movement.
- 257 Paramjt Singh Judge (2005), *Religion Identity and Nationhood – The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 80-82
- 258 “Sikh” as defined in SGPC Sikh Rehat Maryada. See Article I of the Sikh Rehat Maryada (the Sikh Code of Conduct). See, *The Sikh Rehat Maryada*, 1945, published by the SGPC, Amritsar.

The literal translation of this definition is as follows:

“Any human being who faithfully believes in One Immortal Being, Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, The Guru Granth Sahib. The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and the baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion, is a Sikh.”²⁵⁹

Although the SGPC’s definition of a ‘Sikh’ was wide enough to include Sehajdhari and other non-Khalsa Sikhs, it firmly drew the boundaries between Sikhism and other major religions. Henceforth, according to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), it was not possible to be both a Sikh and a Hindu; a choice had to be made. *Udasis, Nanak-panthis* and other *Sanatanists* had to conform to the Rehat Maryada if they wished to be considered ‘proper’ Sikhs and participate in SGPC electoral process.²⁶⁰ This entailed undergoing baptism and becoming ‘Amritdhari’ (baptized Sikh) and joining the Khalsa Panth. Once the religious boundaries between Sikhs and others had been established, and multiple religious identities outlawed in the Panth, it was only a step to making the case, as Kahn Singh Nabha had done, for regarding the Punjabi-speaking Keshdhari Sikhs as an ethnic group.²⁶¹

The standard manual entitled as “Sikh Rehat Maryada” was published in 1950 under the auspices of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee after reaching a general consensus within the Sikh community.²⁶² It has ever since been regarded as an authoritative statement of Sikh doctrine, practice and behaviour. It is pertinent to note that Sikh Rehat Maryada was produced as a result of the Tat Khalsa reforms, which represented the dominant component of the Singh Sabha movement of early 20th Century.²⁶³ The pioneer Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak

Definition also available at official website of SGPC at http://old.sgpc.net/rehat_maryada/section_one.html, accessed on 12/11/2016.

259 English translated version of the definition of a “Sikh” as given in *Sikh Rehat Maryada* (Sikh Code of Conduct), prepared and published by SGPC. See Article I of the Sikh Rehat Maryada (the Sikh Code of Conduct). See, *The Sikh Rehit Maryada*, 1945.

260 Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, published by Oxford University, New Delhi. Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2016), *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs*, published by Routledge, New York, pp 103-107. Also see, Paramjit Singh Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity, and Nationhood: The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 92-94

261 J.S. Grewal (1999), “Nabha’s Ham Hindu Nahin : A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity”, in Pashaura Singh, Norman Gerald Barrier (eds) , *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, pp. 231-237. Also see, Dipankar Gupta (1996), *The Context of Ethnicity: Sikh Identity in a Comparative Perspective*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 73-81

262 Pashaura Singh & Louis E Fenech (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, p.599. Relevant information about Sikh Rehat Maryada given at official website of SGPC, available at <http://sgpc.net/sikh-rehat-maryada-in-punjabi/>.

263 Harjinder Singh, Sukha Singh and Jaskeerat Singh (2015), *Sikh Code of Conduct*, published by Akaal Publishers, United Kingdom , pp. 7-9, 24-30. Giorgi Shani (2007), *Sikh Nationalism and*

Committee (SGPC) maintains that 1950 Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct and conventions) is a representative manual of the collective personality and identity of the Sikh *Panth*. SGPC Rehat Maryada seeks to establish Sikhism as a monolithic, codified and refined religion with universal norms of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The reading of SGPC Rehat Maryada certainly accentuates the image of a uniform Khalsa identity.²⁶⁴

SGPC and Politicization of Sikh Identity

Shiromani Akali Dal was founded towards the end of 1920, soon after the formation of the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak committee (SGPC). The primary purpose of both these organizations was the administrative control of the Gurdwaras associated with Sikh Gurus and Sikh martyrs, and to manage their affairs as representatives of the Sikh community.²⁶⁵ What enabled the Akalis to put forth the claim to control the Gurdwaras and to manage their affairs was the doctrine of ‘Guru Panth’.²⁶⁶

Kahn Singh Nabha's declaration “Hum Hindu Nahin” (“We are not Hindus”), published in 1898 became a key text of the period that strongly asserted for Sikh identity as distinct and separate from Hinduism.²⁶⁷ The Singh Sabha’s successful introduction of a set of distinctive life-cycle rituals for the Sikhs further justified that claim. Later with the grand success of the Gurdwara Reform Movement, Sikhism gained an institutional structure and mechanism through the establishment of Shiromani

Identity in a Global Age, published by Routledge, New York, pp. 14-15. W. H. McLeod (1997), *Sikhism*, published by Penguin Books, London, pp. 134- 136. Also see, W.H. McLeod (1989), *Who is a Sikh?: The Problem of Sikh Identity*, published by Clarendon University Press, Oxford, pp. 30-32

264 Gurinder Singh Mann (2005), *Sikhism Religions of the World*, published by Prentice Hall, New Jersey, pp. 65-66. W.H. McLeod (1999), *Sikhs and Sikhism*, published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 95-96.

265 With the establishment of Sikh rule, individual rulers began to exercise power in the name of the Khalsa, and the doctrine of Guru Panth was relegated to the background. It was revived by the leaders of the Singh Sabha Movement in the late nineteenth century. The intrinsic importance of Gurdwaras and the doctrine of Guru Panth inspired the Singh Sabha leaders to demand their control and management on behalf of the Sikh Panth. The pursuit of this objective resulted in the formation of the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal.

266 Paul R. Brass (1974), *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, published by Cambridge University Press, London, pp. 315-317, 352-353. Baldev Raj Nayyar (1966), *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, New York, p.169-17. Also see, Gurharpal. Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India: A Case-Study of Punjab*, Published by MacMillan Press Ltd, London pp. 99-101.

267 The famous work titled “Ham Hindu Nahin”²⁶⁷, by **Kahan Singh Nabha** is a clear-cut declaration of Sikh identity registered by a Sikh scholar towards the close of the nineteenth century. The statement constitutes the basic dictum of the book which appeared under this challenging title in 1898. The esteemed Sikh scholar Kahn Singh Nabha vigorously and vehemently pressed for separate and distinctive Sikh identity. See, Kahan Singh Nabha (1992), *Ham Hindu Nahin* (Punjabi edition), Singh Brothers Publications, Amritsar. Also see, J.S. Grewal (1999), “ Nabha’s Ham Hindu Nahin : A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity”, in Pashaura Singh, Norman Gerald Barrier (eds) , *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, pp. 231-237.

Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) that further separated Sikh religious authority from Hindu influence.²⁶⁸ The Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 implicitly reflects the 'Tat Khalsa' understanding of the Sikh religion as separate and distinct from other major religions when it defines a 'Sikh' as one who has 'no other religion'.²⁶⁹

The long drawn out controversy over the passage of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 was of immense importance. The Bill made the issue of separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs an issue of intense public debate. Whereas the Sikh leaders asserted their separate identity, the Hindu leaders launched a persistent campaign through press and public platforms that Sikhs were a sect within Hinduism. The overlapping identities of the Sikh and Hindu communities had been an issue of public debate. But the 1925 Sikh Gurdwara Act officially gave statutory recognition to the communal division and identity assertion by Sikh politico-religious leadership. This historic development had crucial significance in the formation of Sikh communal consciousness and its politicization.²⁷⁰

The Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 institutionalized the role of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) which was set up to manage the Gurdwaras and preaching of Sikhism. This historic development transformed SGPC's political wing, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) into a political party representing Sikh interests and distinct Sikh identity. Moreover, the Sikh Gurdwara Act institutionalized its control through Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), an elective body that can be conceptualized as a 'political system'. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) has close relations with the ruling Governments and with Sikh community worldwide, and other sections that relate to SGPC and Sikh concerns.²⁷¹ Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 restricts the SGPC electorate to Punjab and adjacent territories, but a verdict delivered by this representative institution of the Sikhs impact the Sikhs

268 Attar Singh (1985), "The Management of Gurudwaras", in Amrik Singh (ed.), *Punjab in Indian Politics – Issues and Trends*, Ajanta Publications, pp. 191-195.

269 Paramjit Singh Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity, and Nationhood: The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp. 83-86. Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh Identity and National Integration*, published by Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp.37-39. Also see, Pashaura Singh & Louis E Fenech (2014), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, pp. 324-326.

270 Pashaura Singh (2010), "Revisiting The Evolution of Sikh Identity", in *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Volume 17, 2000, pp.66-68. Paul R. Brass (1974), *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, published by Cambridge University Press, London, pp. 282-284. Also see, Giorgi Shani (2007), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, published by Routledge, New York, pp. 38-40.

271 N. Gerald Barrier (2004), "Authority, Politics and Contemporary Sikhism: The Akal Takht, the SGPC, and the Law", in Pashaura Singh & N.G. Barrier (ed) *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 195-209. Jitender Kaur (1986) *The Politics of Sikhs: A Study of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee*, published by National Book Organization, Delhi, pp.26-28. Also see, Kashmir Singh (1991), *Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation: All India Perspective*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp.13-15.

worldwide. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has assumed the right to act as recognized authority in matters of doctrine and religious practices as well as in issues concerned to administration of Gurdwaras across the globe.²⁷²

The legal precedent grew out of the troublesome relationship between Delhi Gurdwaras and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). Prior to Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, local managers of the thirteen historical Gurdwaras in Delhi gave control of their institutions to SGPC, and after 1925, a separate Delhi Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee supervised the local Sikh shrines, a Sikh body that is considerably influenced by SGPC through elections and nominations.²⁷³ In May 1971, the President of India appointed a five member Board to evaluate the situation and despite SGPC resistance, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Act was passed.²⁷⁴ The emergence of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) independent of SGPC control henceforth served as a model for Sikhs beyond Punjab.²⁷⁵ The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee created a second major political arena for Sikhs with direct influence on the Indian Government due to its proximity.²⁷⁶ As regards the Gurdwaras in other parts of India, there are diverse management systems lacking symmetry and coherence.²⁷⁷

272 Kasmir Singh (2001), "SGPC in the Twenty First Century", in Harchand Singh Bedi (ed.) *The Sikhs in the New Century*, Published by Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp.199-205. Also see, "Role of the SGPC is rooted in Religio-Political Dynamics of Punjab", *Punjab Update*, June 15, 2017, available at <https://punjabupdate.com/role-sgpc-rooted-religio-political-dynamics-punjab.html>, accessed on 27/11/2017.

273 The *Mahants* in Delhi voluntarily and without the kind of crusade that took place in Punjab in the pre-1925 period passed on the control of the Gurdwaras to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). This parent body managed these shrines through nomination of representatives as well as elections till 1942 when the Delhi Gurdwaras Committee got registered by the SGPC under the Societies Registration Act. Subsequently, there came into being the Delhi Gurdwaras Management Act in 1971

274 The Delhi Gurdwara Act provided for a Committee of forty-six members including four ex-officio (the Jathedars of the Takhts), and some nominees. The SGPC expected to exert continuing influence over the shrines, but that varied with time and issue.

275 A quite different pattern has been reflected in the politics surrounding a sister administrative body, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee. Established in 1938, Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) came under the strict control of the SGPC in matters of elections and finances until the late 1950's when as a result of Akali politics in the Punjab, divisions appeared, and the courts got involved in the issue of whether Delhi Gurdwaras were independent of SGPC direction.²⁷⁵ Uncertain and a pattern of violent struggle among Delhi Sikhs eventually led to the creation of an independent body in 1971, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee.²⁷⁵ See, Jitender Kaur (1986), *The Politics of Sikhs: A Study of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee*, published by National Book Organization, Delhi, pp.14-18. Nirmal Singh (2008), *Searches in Sikhism*, Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 254-257.

276 Giorgio Shani (2008), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, Routledge Publication, London, pp. 35-39.

277 The management of the Sikh shrines at Nanded in Maharashtra is regulated by the Nanded Sikh Gurudwara Sachkhand Sri Hazur Abchal Nagar Sahib Act of 1956.²⁷⁷ The Gurdwaras in Jammu and Kashmir are governed by the J&K Sikh Gurdwaras & Religious Endowments Act, 1973. The

Though established and constituted as a religious body to manage Sikh religious shrines, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak (SGPC) also leads the Sikhs in political, social and cultural affairs with its vast resources and strong influence. The SGPC claims itself to be the exclusive spokesman of the Sikh community and the sole interpreter of Sikh religious opinion.²⁷⁸ Being the central representative body of the Sikhs, it takes up the matters of Sikh interests and grievances with the Government and others. In fact, it is the moral duty of the SGPC to act as a custodian of the Sikh interests. It is supposed to spearhead action whenever there is danger or threat to any Sikh institution or Sikh principles and ideology anywhere in the world. The democratization of governance of Sikh institutions by the elected SGPC and close links between SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal often make it difficult to clearly distinguish between the religious and political activities of the Sikh community.²⁷⁹

As a representative body of the Sikhs elected periodically on the basis of adult franchise, the democratic framework and electoral process of SGPC elections involve active political participation by various politico-religious groups among the Sikhs. The decision making process and the positions within the SGPC establishment are highly conducive for developing political images for fulfilment of power aspirations of the Sikh leaders. It has been regular feature of Punjab politics that politically motivated Sikh leaders have frequently used the SGPC as highly conducive platform to establish their careers in local and national politics.²⁸⁰ Being an elected body, the SGPC electoral process provides significant opportunity to various competing political parties and groups to control the administration of this religious institution, and also win over the support of Sikh masses.²⁸¹

management of the Patna Sahib Takht and other associated Gurdwaras there rests with the District Judge, Patna, under the provisions of the Religious Endowments Act 1863, who has the powers, inter-alia, to appoint the Manager of the Takht.

278 Kasmir Singh (2001), "SGPC in the Twenty First Century", in Harchand Singh Bedi (ed.) *The Sikhs in the New Century*, Published by Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp.199-202. Gobinder Singh (1986), *Religion and Politics in the Punjab*, Deep and Deep Publications, pp. 85-88. Also see, Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India – A Case Study of Punjab*, published by MacMillan Press, London, pp.101-103.

279 Darshan Singh Tatla (2008), *Sikhism and Development: A Review*, published by International Development Department, University of Birmingham, UK, pp 65-67. Mohinder Singh (2001), *Punjab 2000: Political and Socio-Economic Developments*, Anamica Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, pp. 100-103

280 Here are the names of few prominent Sikh leaders who served in SGPC, and also gradually made their strong political images and careers in Sikh Politics:- Master Tara Singh, Sant Fateh Singh, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Manjit Singh Calutta, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, Tota Singh, Sucha Singh Langah, Bibi Jagir Kaur, Avtar Singh Makkar, etc.

281 Satwinder Singh Dhillon in his book titled, "SGPC Elections and Sikh Politics", comprehensively studies the process of politicization of the SGPC after 1947, and rise and fall of the Sikh leadership vis-à-vis their influence in the SGPC. See, Satwinder Singh Dhillon (2009), *SGPC Elections and*

The supremacy of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in case of Sikh religious affairs was fully established. Though it remained purely a religious body, SGPC influenced the nature of Sikhs politics in subsequent years. As Gurdwara Management is not under the subject of study, apart from this the issues that attract the attention of the SGPC are the matters like encroachment of Gurdwara property, disrespect to the Sacred Sikh scriptures, wrongful detention of Sikhs, restrictions on wearing *Turban* and *Kirpan*, propagation of Sikh religion, Gurdwara management in other parts of globe, religious affairs of Sikhs in foreign lands, relationship of Sikhs with governing authorities, etc. **To this day, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) continues to be the primary and most powerful institutional expression of distinct and separate identity of the Sikhs.**²⁸²

The Sikhs became a force to reckon with, which they really were not before the formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). In the earlier period, the Sikhs had few resources or opportunities to influence Government policies or society's attitude towards them. But behind all the multi-dimensional changes, the complexion of politics, their motivation remained basically the same, i.e., how to secure maximum advantage for their community. Moreover, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) which had practically worked under the supervision of SGPC leadership in case of Gurudwara reforms also gained enormous strength in Punjab politics.²⁸³ Since the time of their formation, these two organizations (SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal) continue to be important sites of political and religious struggles among various factions in the Sikh community, and hence a forum for political debates and crystallization of political strategy and demands.²⁸⁴ It was very vital and crucial role played by Shiromani

Sikh Politics, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar. Also see, Subrata Banarjee (2008), *Punjab in the 20th Century: The Crucial Years*, Shubhi Publications, New Delhi, pp.291-295.

- 282 Kharak Singh (2004), *Guru Granth-Guru Panth*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 25-28. Shashi Bala (2000), "Religion and Politics: The Sikh Perspective", in *Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies*, July-December 2004, pp. 285-287, available at <http://www.dharmaramjournals.in/ArticleFiles/Religion%20and%20Politics%20The%20Sikh%20Perspective-Shashi%20Bala-July-December-2000.pdf>, accessed on 05/06/2017. Also see, Satwinder Singh Dhillon (2009), *SGPC Elections and Sikh Politics*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp.14- 29.
- 283 Yogesh Sneh (2014), "Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 49, Issue No. 34, August 2014, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2014/34/reports-states-web-exclusives/vicissitudes-gurdwara-politics.html>, accessed on 21/06/2016. Subash Chander Arora (1990), *Turmoil in Punjab Politics*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, pp. 226-228. Dalip Singh (1981), *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, published by Mac Millan, New Delhi, 73-78.
- 284 Rajinder Kaur (1994), "Identities, Integration & the Sikhs (Conceptual & Historical Context)", in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab – Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, pp. 32-34, 38-42. Also see, Gurharpal Singh (2000), *Ethnic Conflict in India – A Case Study of Punjab*, published by MacMillan Press, London, pp.100-104.

Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) that lead to politicization of Sikh identity on religious basis.²⁸⁵

A Glance at SGPC Resources

As on October 2017, there were as many as 88 Sikh religious shrines under Section 85 (Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925) in Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh which are managed directly by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). There are another 700 Gurudwaras which are managed by it under Section 87 (a) and under Section 87 (b) of the Sikh Gurudwara Act.²⁸⁶ The income derived from religious property and offerings of devotees provide the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) with enormous financial resources.²⁸⁷

The idea of the financial strength of leading Sikh body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), can be made from its annual budget and various sources of revenue. SGPC Annual Budget for the year 2015-16 was Rs. 999.3 crore.²⁸⁸ For the annual year 2016 -17, the budget allocation increased to Rs 1,064.14 crore. For the year 2017-2018, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) passed its annual budget of Rs 1,106 crore.²⁸⁹ It was an increase of 42 crore or around 8 per cent from last year's (2016-17) budget of Rs 1,064.14 crore. Out of total expenditure of 1106 crore under SGPC annual

285 Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh Identity and National Integration*, published by Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 36-41. Laurent Gayer, (2002) "The Globalization of Identity Politics: The Sikh Experience", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Volume 7, No.2, pp. 235-255. Research Paper also available at https://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/sites/sciencespo.fr/cei/files/artlg_0.pdf, accessed on 24/06/2017. Also see, Gopal Singh (1994), *Politics of Sikh Homeland, 1940-1990*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, pp. 45-49.

286 See, Section 85 and Section 87 of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925.

287 "SGPC passes Rs 1159 crore annual budget", *Business Standard*, March 30, 2018, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/sgpc-passes-rs-1159-crore-annual-budget-118033000766_1.html, accessed on 18/05/2018. Also see, Baldev Raj Nayar (1966), *Minority Politics in Punjab*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp. 177-180.

288 The SGPC Annual Budget for the year 2015-16 was 999.3 crores. (i) Keeping in view the increasing number of devotees who visit the Golden Temple and as such ever growing need of langar facilities, SGPC estimated Rs. 60 crore expenses up from Rs 17 crore for the purpose earmarked during the financial year, 2015-16. (ii) For propagation of Sikh religion abroad, especially in US, SGPC earmarked in all Rs 4.5 crore in its Rs 993.24 crore annual budget for 2015-16.(iii) Rs 1.50 crore was set aside for Sikh Mission, Kathmandu. (iv) In India, budgetary provisions were made for Sikh Missions at Haryana, UP and Madhya Pradesh. SGPC allotted (v) Rs 6 crore for cancer patients. (vii) SGPC earmarked Rs 3 crore for setting up three hockey academies and development of playgrounds. This data and information regarding the yearly (2015-16) financial resources and expenditures of SGPC was collected from relevant and concerned officials / sources at SGPC Headquarter, Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Amritsar.

289 The budget for the year 2017-18 was passed under the supervision of SGPC president Kirpal Singh Badungar and presented by religious body's General Secretary Amarjit Singh Chawla, who also highlighted the religious activities undertaken last year. Information as collected from SGPC Headquarter, Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Amritsar.

budget for the year 2017-2018, a total of Rs 254 crore was allocated for Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) and some other historical Gurdwaras attached to it.²⁹⁰

During the financial year 2017-2018, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) allocated Rs. 227 crore (out of total estimated expenditure of 1106 crore) for education against Rs 218 crore during last fiscal year (2016-2017).²⁹¹ In its 2017 -18 annual budget, the pioneer religious institution of the Sikh community, the SGPC, provided a total Rs 73 crore to its *Dharam Parchar Committee* to spend for religious promotion activities and programmes.²⁹² Under its recent annual budget for the year 2017-2018, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) also decided to honour Sikhs with contribution in religious and community fields for which a total of Rs 45 crore was earmarked. In its efforts to help cancer patients, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) allocated Rs. 9 crore on the treatment of cancer patients under the budget allocations for the year 2017-2018. As per the information collected from relevant official sources at -Teja Singh Samundri Hall, (SGPC Headquarters) Amritsar, SGPC had spent Rs 26 crore in the previous years for this cause. Apart from these expenditures, various miscellaneous fund allocations were made under the SGPC annual budget for the year 2017-2018.²⁹³

As on October 2017, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) runs 38 colleges and 53 schools, 2 full-fledged hospitals, 3 printing presses, besides the management and supervision of about 1000 Gurdwaras and running free community

290 About 2017-18 SGPC Budget - Amount of Rs. 10 crore was sanctioned for a new inn with 1000 rooms that has been proposed in Akali market near Golden Temple, Amritsar. Rs 4 crore was allocated for under-construction new building of community kitchen (langar hall) inside the Golden Temple premises. Rs 30 crore was reserved for running the langar (community kitchen) and Rs 75 lakh for power back-up for Golden Temple, Amritsar. Rs 1.50 crore was set aside for the proposal to construct residential accommodations for the SGPC staff. Information as collected from concerned officials at SGPC Headquarter - Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Amritsar.

291 SGPC kept 227 crore (out of 1106 crore total annual budget for the year 2017-2018) for education funds. Out of this 227 crore, an amount of Rs 6 crore was kept for proposed Miri Piri Medical College at Shahbad Markanda in Haryana. Information as collected from concerned officials at SGPC Headquarter - Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Amritsar.

292 As art of Sikh religious preaching, Rs. 7 crore was set aside for reward for those Sikh students with unshorn hairs who crack competitive exams or achieve big in field of research. Information as collected from concerned officials at SGPC Headquarter - Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar.

293 Few other miscellaneous fund allocations under SGPC annual budget 2017-2018 : (i) Rs 30 lakh on buying projectors to show religious movies and (ii) Rs 90 lakh to buy video vans. (iii) Rs 35 lakh to launch a mobile application for devotees to listen and watch live Kirtan from Golden Temple, booking rooms in inns and avail other services. The SGPC decided to make these investments in order to equip itself with new technology to spread the message of Sikhism. (iv) SGPC also kept aside Rs 61 lakh to help the families of Sikh prisoners in jails. (v) The SGPC has also been raising hockey teams of Sikh players with unshorn hairs, for which it will spend Rs 1.20 crore. (vi) Rs. 63 lakh has been reserved for disaster management. Information as collected from concerned officials at SGPC Headquarter, Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar.

kitchen (*Langar*) in almost all these Gurdwaras. The SGPC also runs two printing presses at its Headquarter- Teja Singh Samundari Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar. The religious literature of the Sikh institution is published from this centre.²⁹⁴ For all these activities, it is being assisted by more than 4000 of its employees.²⁹⁵

The historical Sikh Gurdwaras fall under direct management and control of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Numerous non-historical shrines are also managed by local committees under SGPC's supervision. Each Gurdwara gives about 30 per cent of its annual income to SGPC, out of which 10 per cent is allotted for *Dharm Prachar* (religious propagation), 10 per cent for education (SGPC runs around 95 aided and unaided schools and colleges) and another 10 per cent as *dasvand* (one-tenth contribution for the community). The remaining 70 per cent remains with each Gurdwara to manage its affairs. Large amount of money is spent on *langar* (community kitchen)²⁹⁶ and to pay the salaries of employees.²⁹⁷

The budget of the SGPC was Rs. 650,25, 312 in 1980 which increased by 577.41% in the next 15 years.²⁹⁸ The income receipts of leading Sikh shrines have been increasing exponentially. Thus, the SGPC has at its command funds un-paralled by any other comparable organization. The huge income from the Gurdwaras provided it financial sustenance. All this gave the SGPC a great hold not only in religious matters but also in political matters.²⁹⁹ The formation of the SGPC and the Shiromani Akali Dal emerged as the primary institutional expression of Sikh communal and political

294 Information collected form SGPC Headquaters – Teja Singh Samundri Hall (within the Golden Temple comlex) Amritsar.

295 At present, the colleges and schools run by SGPC include - 2 engineering colleges, 2 medical colleges, 1 dental college, 12 degree colleges, 24 public schools and 12 senior secondary schools. Based on information collected from concerned officials at SGPC Headquarteres (Teja Singh Samundri Hal), Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar.

296 Langar (free community kitchen) is available in almost all the Gurdwaras managed by the SGPC. Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) runs the largest community kitchen (langar) in the world feeding freshly cooked vegetarian food to more than 50,000 devotees on weekdays and over one lakh on weekends and festivals. See “Golden Temple paid Rs 2 crore as GST on langar items in 7 months”, *The Indian Express*, February 11, 2018. Also see, “Rs 2-cr GST paid on langar items at Golden Temple”, *The Tribune*, February 12, 2018, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/rs-2-cr-gst-paid-on-langar-items-at-golden-temple/542578.html>, accessed on 17/02/2018.

297 Harnik Deol (2000), *Religion and Nationalism in India: The Case of the Punjab*, Routledge, London, pp. 67-76.

298 V.D. Chopra (1984), “The Gurdwaras and Akailis”, in V.D. Chopra et.al (ed.), *Agony of Punjab*, Patriot Publishers, New Delhi, p.70.

299 It is pertinent to mention here that various amendments in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 also increased the financial resources and autonomy of the SGPC over them. Under an amendment to section 108 (section 108-B), the SGPC Board established and administers a Research and Religious Fund. See, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 211-212.

consciousness and identity. The Akali Dal persistently advocated the maintenance of Sikh communal distinctiveness and politicized the Sikh identity in a planned and organized manner.³⁰⁰

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) keeps very strong contingent of personnel with administration running approximately into tens of thousands. The premier Sikh religious institution, the SGPC, maintains substantial number of specialized and differentiated services for the performances of its multi-dimensional religious tasks. The SGPC has large number of personnel on its pay rolls. Apart from its administrative and managerial staff at Amritsar, it permanently recruits field staff specifically to preach and propagate the Sikh religion and its philosophy in Punjab and other part of the globe.³⁰¹ Its paid personnel include numerous *Ragis* (hymn singers), *Dhadis* (ode singers), *Kavishers* (stage poets), *Pracharaks* (preachers of the religion)³⁰², *Sevadaras* (attendants), etc. SGPC definitely has important religious and social responsibilities, and to fulfill them and work as an effective representative religious body, it has access to vast human, economic and organizational resources.³⁰³ Access to huge funds and economic resources enabled the SGPC to establish schools, colleges and hospitals. It is only due to surplus funds and resources that SGPC has a large network of officials and employees working at various specialized offices, positions and ranks.³⁰⁴

The control over management of Sikh shrines³⁰⁵ enables the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) with access to enormous resources of these shrines derived from religious property and daily offerings. SGPC possesses significant

300 Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp.38-47. Also see, K.R. Bombwell (1987), "Sikh identity and Federal Polity: A Critique of Akali Position", in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab Today*, published by Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 157-163.

301 SGPC maintains separate Religious Fund that is controlled by Dharm Parchaar Committee (DPC) of SGPC. This fund is meant specifically for the promotion and propagation of the Sikh religion. Information collected from SGPC Headquarters, Amritsar.

302 The SGPC also runs colleges for the training of its preachers and provide financial grants to various Sikh educational institutions. Information collected from concerned officials at Teja Singh Samundri Hall – the Headquarters of SGPC, Golden Temple Complex Amritsar.

303 Information based on field visit to various Gurdwaras under management of SGPC. Relevant information was also collected from SGPC employed managers, officials, *Ragis*, *Granthis*, etc employed at various Gurdwaras.

304 Based on information collected from executive and administrative staff members of SGPC. Significant information was also collected from concerned officials at SGPC Headquarters – Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar.

305 For brief historical account of leading Sikh Shrines (Gurdwaras) in India, see, Mehar Singh (1975), *Sikh Shrines in India*, Published by Publication Division - Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, pp. 12-47

human, communicational, religious and financial resources of the historical Sikh Gurudwaras. These resources have together created an effective network of patronage for the premier Sikh religious institution, the SGPC. The effective utilization of substantial financial resources and its patronage provides the SGPC with enormous leverage in seeking and maintain support from powerful and dominant segments within the Sikh community.³⁰⁶ Access to enormous funds and financial resources has made Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) - a high level forum and power base for Sikh political action.³⁰⁷

As the role of Gurudwaras has always been multi-functional, they not only provide forums for religious meets of the Sikh community but also provide substantial economic and social facilities. The utilization of these funds for any non-political purpose and the distribution of patronage in the form of variety of jobs required for the management of Sikh Shrines enable Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to gather support from various groups within the Sikh community. Due to its administrative control over the Gurudwaras, the SGPC leadership holds complete control over monetary, personnel and the institutional aspects which in- turn empowers the SGPC with effective institutional forum for identity mobilization of Sikh community.³⁰⁸

Summing up, it is a fact that sense of Sikh identity was sharpened with the politico-religious movements launched by Sikhs during the 19th and 20th centuries for control over the management of Sikh shrines and for the creation of Punjabi Suba.³⁰⁹ The religious and political organizations of Sikhs – Shiromani Akali Dal, Chief Khalsa Diwan and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have played crucial role in defining the identity of the Sikhs as a separate and distinct religious community. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is a legal constitutional institution of the Sikhs for managing the Sikh Gurudwaras, and propagation of the Sikh religion. The impact of the Sikh

306 Shinder Purewal (2000), *Sikh - Ethno Nationalism and the Political Economy of Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 89-98. Gopal Singh (1994), *Politics of Sikh Homeland, 1940-1990*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, pp. 46-51.

307 “SGPC passes Rs 1,159 crore Budget; Rs 228 crore for Euducation”, *The Times of India*, March 31, 2018. Also see, “Power politics behind controversy over gurdwara control”, 16 August 2009, available at <https://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20090816/1319971.html>. Baldev Raj Nayar (1966), *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton University Press New York, pp.177 – 183.

308 Rajinder Kaur (1992), *Sikh identity and National Integration*, Intellectual Publishing House, New Delhi , pp.39-42. Paramjit Singh Judge (2005), *Religion, Identity, and Nationhood: The Sikh Militant Movement*, Rawat Puncations, Jaipur, pp. 79-86. Also see, Giorgi Shani (2007), *Sikh Nationalism and Identity in a Global Age*, published by Routledge, New York, pp. 36-38.

309 Joyce J.M. Pettigrew (1994), “Growth of Community Consciousness among Sikhs, 1947-1966”, in Dharam Singh (ed.), *Sikhism and Secularism – Essays in Honour of Professor Harbans Singh*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, 22-26.

Gurdwaras Act of 1925 made SGPC have access to enormous political and economic benefits. Gradually, due to its strong politico-religious authority and influence, the SGPC came to be appropriately known as - “State within State” and “Parliament of the Sikhs”. The Sikh Gurudwara Act of 1925 provided the SGPC with a legal platform to establish its legitimacy and to extend its reach to the Sikh community at the global level.

With the significant increase in its influence and reach, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) established its institutional and political authority among the Sikhs. The SGPC assumed the right to act as a legitimate institutional authority in matters of doctrine and religious practice as well as in issues which concerned the management of Gurdwaras and identity matters of the Sikhs. With its huge resources of income and large managerial staff, SGPC in contemporary times, assume greater significance in the Sikh religious and political circles than ever before. In Sikh history, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has played vital role in institutionalization and politicization of the Sikh identity.³¹⁰

The Chapter attempted to understand the historical evolution, doctrinal basis, nature of authority and legal parameters in context to pioneer Sikh politico-religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The sense of spirituality, religious background and unique doctrine of *Miri-Piri* make Akal Takht Sahib stand as an institution with highest authority in religious and temporal affairs of the Sikh community. The establishment and evolution of Akal Takht Sahib was landmark development towards the institutionalization of Sikh religion and identity. The historical establishment of SGPC in turbulent times, and then its evolution as a premier Sikh institution legitimized it as an entity to represent and maintain the identity of Sikhs as a separate and distinct religious identity. The process of institutionalization of Sikh identity through historic and crucial roles of Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was the focus of the chapter.

310 Few very remarkable works on historical establishment and earlier role of SGPC are mentioned here : Paul Wallace & Surendra Chopra (ed.) (1988), *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Joginder Singh (1999), *Sikh Leadership: Early 20th Century*, published by Guru Nannak Dev University, Amritsar. Kashmir Singh (1991), *Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation: All India Perspective*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar. Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi. Mohinder Singh (1988), *The Akali Struggle- A Retrospect*, Atlantic Publisher & Distributors, New Delhi. Harchand Singh Bedi (ed.) (2001), *The Sikhs in the New Century*, published by Khalsa College, Amritsar. Gurnam Singh (1999), *Sir Sundar Singh Majithia and His relevance in Sikh Politics*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi. Dalip Singh (1981), *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, Macmillan India Limited, New Delhi. Baldev Raj Nayyar (1966), *Minority Politics in the Punjab*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Chapter 3

Divisions within the Sikh Community

(Sehajdharis and Caste Factor)

Role of Akal Takht and SGPC

The contemporary Sikh society is divided and fragmented on the basis of critical socio-economic and politico-religious factors. The issue of Sehajdhari Sikhs and categorization of a 'Sikh' on the basis of Amritdharis and Sehajdharis has further complicated the matters, gradually resulting in very critical rift within the Sikh community worldwide. Another factor that has led to marked and pronounced divisions within the Sikh community is the institution of caste and caste based social hierarchy. At present, Sikh community is rigidly divided and segregated on caste basis. Both issues, the Sehajdhari identity and caste factor, are highly contentious issues which are further dividing the already minority religious community into categories and sub categories.

It is pertinent to mention that caste factor has deep historical roots, the genesis and implications of which are entirely distinct from the issue of identity of Sehajdharis in Sikh community. The impacts of caste factor within the Sikh community are extremely vigorous and harsh, and are related with various social, economic and political realities. On the other side, the issue of identity and voting rights (in SGPC) of Sehajdhari Sikhs has different background, with varying connotations and implications which are more of religious and political in nature. However, both the issues (Sehajdhari and Caste issue), although of entirely different nature, have evolved as strong divisive factors within the Sikh community. Both have created identity based segregation and exclusion in the Sikh religion and community across the globe.

This chapter is an attempt to explain and analyse two critical issues- the identity debate and voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in SGPC, and caste factor within the Sikh community. It is very important to explore and understand the role of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), in context to these contentious issues which are directly related with identity aspects of Sikhs. Thus primary focus of this chapter is to study the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in regard to Sehajdhari Sikh identity and caste factor in contemporary Sikh society. As both these issues are entirely distinct from each other, the chapter will deal with them in two independent parts. Part I of this chapter deals with Sehajdhari issue and Part II dwells on the

caste factor in Sikh community, with emphasis on the role of Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

I

The increasing political power and authority of the 'Khalsa' allowed it to begin recasting Sikh society after its own image. During the course of the eighteenth century tens of thousands of Sikhs took to the 'Khalsa' identity, some in pursuit of worldly power and others out of deep religious conviction.¹ The dramatic story of political triumph of the 'Khalsa Sikhs' begins to unfold in the early eighteenth century with heroics of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur.² For seven eventful years no efforts were spared by the peasant armies of Banda Bahadar to obliterate all vestiges of Mughal control over Punjab. Aimed with hardly anything except the powerful teachings of the Sikh Gurus and an ordained sense of victory, they wrote a new chapter in the history of the Khalsa Sikhs.³

The newly attained liberties under the great Sikh commander Banda Singh Bahadur did not last for long. By 1716 the Mughal State managed to regain political authority in Punjab. The Sikh movement suffered a serious setback with the execution of Banda Bahadur and his major collaborators. In the post- Baba Banda Bahadur phase, the Khalsa Sikhs

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- 1 The rural poor, the urban under privileged and other who persisted on the margins of Punjabi society readily responded to the Khalsa's campaign to turn the existing world upside down. Whatever else may have been, the rebellions of the early eighteenth century were also very obviously an expression of the wrath of the lower classes. In so far as the Sikhs were concerned, the rejection of caste differentiation by the gurus had attracted a very large number of low-caste followers. See, W.H. McLeod (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 215 – 224.. Shiv Kumar Gupta (1999), *Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak's Mission : Khalsa Tercentenary Commemorative Volume*, Published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 215-228. Relevant information on transformation of low castes into Khalsa discipline, also available in Dalip Singh (1992), *Guru Gobind Singh and Khalsa Discipline*, Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp. 205-212.
 - 2 Baba Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1716) was a prominent disciple of Guru Gobind Singh from his last days in central India. Under Banda Bahadur, a bloody offensive was launched to uproot the Mughal state in Punjab. In 1710, Sikh Army under Baba Banda Bahadar captured Sirhind and killed the Governor of Sirhind, Wazir Khan who was responsible for the martyrdom of the two youngest sons of Guru Gobind Singh. Banda Singh Bahadur waged many wars against the Mughal empire who considered him big threat to their sovereignty. See, Amar Singh (2001), "Matchless Saint Warrior: Banda Singh Bahadar", *Sikh Review*, Volume 49 (4), April 2001, pp. 62-65. To Study Banda Singh Bahadur's role objectively, his Life and achievements, see Harbans Kaur Sagoo (2001), *Banda Singh Bahadur and Sikh Sovereignty*, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi. pp. 144-173.
 - 3 Baba Banda Singh Bahadur established the first independent sovereign state under Sikh rule, with state coins and seal. Although his rule was short-lived (1708-1716), it put the Sikhs on the path to establish their own empire in the Punjab. His rule paved the way for the establishment of the Sikh Missals and later the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1799. See, Harish Dhillon (2003), *First Raj of the Sikhs: The Life and Times of Banda Singh Bahadur*, Hay House Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 154-163. Nikky- Gurinder Kaur Singh (2011), *Sikhism: An Introduction*, I.B. Tauris, London, pp. 170-175. Also see, Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries – Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 74-76.

sought to re-establish their power by regrouping into political units called Misl.⁴ By the 1770s, the Khalsa Sikhs controlled the Mughal Suba of Punjab and large portions of the provinces of Multan and Shahjahanabad. The solidarity infused through the rituals of *Gurmatta* and *Sarbat Khalsa* was a crucial ingredient in the making of these Khalsa Sikhs

Sehajdharis in Sikh History

In mid eighteenth century, with the dramatic triumph of the Khalsa, the Khalsa Sikhs and Khalsa Sikh identity became dominant. The Khalsa mode attained hegemony within the Sikh tradition and socio-political life.⁵ However, it simultaneously came to be accepted that there were alternative ways of being a Sikh; the Sikh Panth was not coterminous with the Khalsa and it was possible to be a Sikh without being a 'Khalsa'. All those Sikhs who did not transform into 'Khalsa Sikhs' and certainly did not seem to have been numerically insignificant since the days of Guru Gobind Singh, were often referred to in the mid eighteenth century as 'Sehajdharis'.⁶ Although it is difficult to provide a precise list of those who constituted the Sehadhari sector within Sikh tradition, it can be said with confidence that it included those called 'Nanak-Panthis' as well as 'Udasis'.⁷

Sehadhari Sikhs in many ways were inverted 'Khalsa' categories of thought and religious boundaries. Whereas Khalsa Sikhs maintained their hair unshorn, Sehadharis cut their hair, Khalsa Sikhs had to undergo an initiation, Sehadharis did not, Khalsa Sikhs were obliged to carry arms while Sehadharis obeyed no such norm.⁸ The description of radical differences between Khalsa and Sehadhari modes of identity raises the question: Why, after the Khalsa transformation was there a duality in Sikh identity? It is not easy to answer this

4 Hari Ram Gupta (2001), *History of the Sikhs: The Sikh Commonwealth or Rise and Fall of Sikh Misl*, Mushiram ManoharLal Publishers, pp. 13-29.

5 By the early eighteenth century social forces, coupled with the religious initiatives of the tenth Guru of Sikh faith, Guru Gobind Singh, had endowed Sikhs with a distinctive religious identity in the form of the 'Khalsa'. Unlike the Nanak-Panthis, the Khalsa Sikhs wished to be viewed as a separate religious entity.

6 Harbans Singh (1998), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism – Volume 4*, Published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 13-18.

7 Indu Banga (1997), *Five Punjabi Centuries: Policy, Economy, Society, and Culture, C. 1500-1990: Essays for J.S. Grewal*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 470-473.

8 Trilochan Singh (2001), *The Turban and the Sword of the Sikhs: Essence of Sikhism : History and Exposition of Sikh Baptism, Sikh Symbols, and Moral Code of the Sikhs, Rehitnāmās*, B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh Publishers, pp. 190-198.

question as within Sikh historiography the post Guru Gobind-Singh history is simply a history of the expansion and triumph of the Khalsa.⁹

During the 18th century, there was considerable heterogeneity in Sikh identity. The Khalsa Sikhs were numerically a small segment of the Sikh society. In their quest for political power, they used all the allies they could get and what better allies than those who were very much the part of Sikh tradition. The Sehajdharis may not have subscribed to the Khalsa model, but even the most heterodox among them for instance - the *Udasis*, recognized Nanak as “Guru”, read and recited verses from Guru Granth Sahib, served in large numbers as custodians of significant Sikh shrines, and perhaps most importantly wrote mythical narratives of Sikh Gurus and textual commentaries on Sikh scriptures¹⁰.

Early Sikh tradition did not seek to fully disengage its constituents from the society in which they lived. The few distinctive religious doctrines and cultural practices that did emerge among the *Nanak Panthis* or followers of Guru Nanak were in themselves not pronounced enough to push Sikhs towards a separate religious identity. As the ‘Khalsa’ identity being hegemonic, its constituents did not seek to abolish other modes of identity within the Sikh tradition. It is this extraordinary fusion of Khalsa and non-Khalsa identities which marks out Sikh tradition in the late eighteenth century from what was to follow under colonial rule. Paradoxically, the increase in the number of Khalsa Sikhs did not imply a corresponding reduction in the number of Sehajdhari Sikhs.¹¹

Sehajdhari Sikhs have continued to participate in Sikh life right up to modern times and have associated themselves with Sikh religious institutions and organizations such as Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Chief Khalsa Diwan, Shiromani Akali Dal, and the All-India Sikh Students Federation. The Singh Sabhas used to have seats on their executive committees reserved for the Sehajdhari Sikhs.¹² Among their own

9 W.H. McLeod (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 59-66. Also see, Himadri Banerjee (2002), *The Khalsa and the Punjab; Studies in the Sikh History to the Nineteenth Century*, Published by Tulica Books, New Delhi, pp. 20-33.

10 Bhai Harbans Lal (1999), “Sehajdhari Sikhs: Their Origin and current Status within the Panth”, in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp.110 -26. Also see, Pashaura Singh (1999), “Early Markers of Sikh Identity: A Focus on the Works of the First Five Gurus”, in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 70-84.

11 The Khalsa Sikhs, in their drive to carve out an empire for themselves realized that for their ambition to succeed they required allies both within and outside the Panth. An internal alliance was quickly forged with the Sehajdharis, and their religious culture was conceded to be legitimate. For information on origin and evolution of Sehajdhari Sikhs, see, Bhai Harbans Lal (1999), “Sehajdhari Sikhs; Their Origin and Current Status within the Panth”, in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity – Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 11-115.

12 Mohinder Singh (2007), *Sikh: Forms And Symbols*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp 90-96.

societies confined prior to the migrations of 1947, mainly to north-western India, were the Sehajdhari Committee of Multan, Guru Nanak Sehajdhari Diwan of Panja Sahib and Sri Guru Nanak Sehajdhari Jatha of Campbellpore. The Sehajdhari Diwan of Panja Sahib attained the status of their central forum. Their India-wide forum was the Sarab Hind (All-India) Sehajdharis Conference which rotated from town to town for its annual session.¹³

The Sehajdharis share with the main body of the Sikhs all of their religious and social customs and ceremonies, and join the religious congregations in the Gurdwaras. The population of Sehajdhari Sikhs according to 1891 Census was 397,000 (20% of the total Sikh population), according to 1901 Census, it was 297,000 (13% of the total Sikhs), according to 1911 Census, 451,000 (14.9% of the total Sikhs), according to 1921 Census, 229,000 (7% of the total Sikhs), and according to 1931 Census, 282,000 (6.5% of the total Sikhs).¹⁴ Outside Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province and Sindh had considerable Sehajdhari population. Consequent upon the partition of India in 1947, Sehajdharis became widely dispersed in the country.¹⁵

Sehajdhari : The Conceptualization

Sehajdhari is a compound of two words: ‘sehaj’ and ‘dhari’. In Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan languages, the word ‘Sehaj’ means - “spiritual state of equilibrium”, and the word ‘dhari’ means the "adopter". The term comes from the word ‘Sehaj’, which means slow; ‘Sehajdhari’ thus means “a slow adopter of the faith”.¹⁶ In Sikh sense, the term ‘Sehajdhari’ refers to a Sikh who is slowly moving towards Sikhism but is not yet a baptized Sikh. Sehajdhari Sikhs are those Sikhs who are slowly learning and adopting the path of Sikhism, its doctrine, ethics and tenets. ‘Sehajdhari’ was the term used specifically for ‘Sindhi Sikhs’ who resided far away from Punjab, and took time to learn the Sikh faith and adopt the religion in its purest form.¹⁷

13 Harbans Lal (1999), “Sehajdhari Sikhs : Their Origin and Current Status in the Panth”, in Pashaura Singh and N. Greal Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 112-126. Also see, Harbans Lal (1998), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism – Volume 4 of The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, 14-17.

14 Figures as given in Harbans Lal (1998), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism -Volume 4 of The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Published by Punjabi University, Patiala, 14-15.

15 Harjot Oberoi (1995), “The Making of the Religious Paradox : Sikh, Khalsa and Sehajdhari as modes of early Sikh Identity”, in David Lorenzen (ed.), *Bhakti Religion in Northern India*, published by State University of New York Press, Albany, pp.45-54..

16 Kristen Haar, Sewa Singh Kalsi (2005), *Sikhism- Religions of the World*, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia (USA), pp. 6-7. Also see, Harbans Lal (1999), “Vaisakhi of 1699 and Sehajdhari Sikhs”, *Sikh Review*, Volume 47, Issue 9, September 1999, pp. 41-42.

17 Mohinder Singh (2009), “Sehajdharis are our Brothers”, *The Sikh Review*, Volume 46, Issues 535-540, pp.48-51

At one time, the term ‘Sehajdhari’ in Sikh tradition denoted - as the meaning of the word signified, “those who take time” - the halfway house to the objective of transforming into Khalsa Sikh fold. Sehadharis are thus believed to be ‘gradual adopters’ of Sikhism.¹⁸ Broadly speaking, Sehadhari Sikh is a person who believes in the tenets of Sikhism but is not initiated as Amritdhari Sikh (Khalsa - a baptized Sikh). Sehadhari Sikhs may or may not keep the *five ks* because they have not been initiated into Khalsa form, a concept that is apparently unique to Sikhism.¹⁹ A Sehadhari Sikh believes in all the tenets and values of Sikh faith and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, but may or may not adopt the ‘five articles of faith’ (Five Ks) that are the integral part of Khalsa Sikh identity. Sehadhari Sikhs are those non-initiated Sikhs who wish and plan to get baptized as ‘Amritdhari Sikhs’ sometime in their lives.²⁰

The definition of Sehadhari Sikh is clearly evident in the ‘Mahan Kosh’ of Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha²¹, a classic literary work termed as “encyclopaedia of the Sikh literature”, where the ‘Sehadhari Sikhs’ are defined as:

“The integral part of the Sikhs who are followers of the Ten Gurus and Sri Guru Granth Sahib, who do not par take Amrit (adopt baptism) and do not stick to the 5 kakkars (Kach, Kara, Kanga, Kesh, Kirpan) but are the firm followers of Sikhism, who do not follow any other religion as binding except Sikhism.”²²

Renowned Sikh scholar and prolific writer Khushwant Singh aptly notes the requirements of a Sikh:

“It proves that the sense of belonging to the Sikh community requires both the belief in the teachings of the Adi Granth and the observance of the Khalsa

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- 18 I.J. Singh (1994), *Sikhs and Sikhism – A View with A Bias*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 79-83. Also see, Kristen Haar, Sewa Singh Kalsi (2005), *Sikhism- Religions of the World*, Chelsea House Publishers, Philadelphia (USA), pp. 6-8.
- 19 J.S. Grewal (2007), *Sikh Ideology Polity, and Social Order: From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 131-134. W.H. McLeod (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa – A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 202-204.
- 20 Ian Charles Harris (1991), *Contemporary Religions: A World Guide*, published by Longman Group, Essex (UK) pp.304-305. Mohinder Singh (2007), *Sikh: Forms And Symbols*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp 91-94
- 21 Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha (1861-1938) has been the most erudite Sikh scholar, a multi-talented author, administrator, diplomat, historian and interpreter of Sikh scriptures. In 1885, he met with Max Arthur Macauliffe which led to a life-long friendship. Macauliffe depended a great deal on his advice and guidance in his work related to Sikh history and Sikh scriptures. From among Bhai Kahn Singh's works, *Gurushabad Ratanakar Mahan Kosh* (1930), an encyclopedia of Sikh literature will remain a permanent monument in Sikhism related works. In 1898, he published ‘*Ham Hindu Nahin*’ which forcefully asserted for distinctiveness of Sikh identity.
- 22 **Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition) , *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh* , published by Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930).**

*tradition initiated by Guru Gobind Singh; and that there is no such thing as a clean-shaven Sikh – he is simply a Hindu believing in Sikhism.”*²³

Most Sehajdhari start the process by keeping one of the five Ks (most wear the Kara). All Khalsa Sikhs were Sehajdhari Sikhs at one point in their lives because no one is born a baptized Sikh – a Khalsa. They may have aspirations of receiving the rites of Khalsa baptism one day and maintaining the Five Ks, nevertheless, the ultimate ideal which they must realize in their lifetime is to become a baptized Sikh known as Khalsa Sikh (*Amritdhari Sikh*). Thus, ‘Sehajdhari’ is a process towards attaining tenants, values and ideology of Sikhism, and then adopting it in its purest form – the Khalsa Sikh.²⁴

Bhai Gurdas Ji²⁵ had written in one of his ‘Vaars’: “ਸਹਿਜੇ ਰਚਿਓ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਸਾਬਤ ਮਰਦਾਨਾ”²⁶

These words by esteemed Sikh scholar, writer and historian, reveal that the invention of Khalsa occurred slowly from Guru Nanak Sahib, the founder of Sikh faith, to Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, who created and established the distinct and unique Khalsa Sikh identity. The reasons for a Sehajdhari Sikh not yet adopting the ‘Khalsa Sikh identity’ can be many, including not being disciplined enough to maintain the Khalsa code of conduct or due to personal reasons of them not believing that they have enough commitment to become a full Khalsa Sikh. In the Sikh community, these reasons are considered valid as to renege upon them or break the Khalsa code of conduct once becoming a baptized Khalsa Sikh is considered one of the greatest sins in Sikhism.²⁷

Categorization of Sikhs under Sikh Gurdwaras Act

From the authoritative treatise along with the definition given in the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, it is quite manifest that a Sikh is a person who believes in ten Gurus and in Guru Granth Sahib, and has no other religion. The term ‘Sikh’ has been further classified broadly

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- 23 Khuswant Singh (2004), *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume 2, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 303.
- 24 Trilochan Singh (1994), Ernest Trumpp and W.H. McLeod as *Scholars of Sikh History Religion and Culture*, Published by International Centre of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 401-404. Also see, W.H. McLeod (1999), *Sikhs and Sikhism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.92.
- 25 Bhai Gurdas Ji (1551-1636) was an esteemed Sikh writer, historian and preacher. It was under the supervision of the fifth Sikh Guru that Bhai Gurdas inscribed the first copy of Sikh Scripture, then called the “Adi Granth”, which is now respected as the perpetual Guru of the Sikhs and is central to the Sikh religion. He was also responsible for various writings in his own right which have gained much respect in the Sikh community. His “Varan” have been referred to by Guru Arjan Dev ji as the “Key” (“kunjee”) to the Guru Granth Sahib. His famous work, “Varan Bhai Gurdas”, consists of a differing number of *Pauris* (sections, paragraphs). The composition is a collection of detailed commentary and explanation of theology and the ethics of Sikh beliefs as outlined by the Gurus. Many of the principles of Sikhism are explained in simple terms by Bhai Gurdass ji.
- 26 Bhai Gurdass Ji, Vaar 41.
- 27 Sukhbir Singh Kapoor & Mohinder Kaur Kapoor (2008), *Making of the Sikh Rehatnamas (The Sikh Code of Conduct)*, Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi, pp.103-114. Bhagwant Singh Dalawari (2002), “Significance of Amrit”, *Sikh Review*, Vol. 50 (4), April 2002, pp. 25-27.

into two categories i.e. Amritdharis and Sehajdharis. In the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, Sikhs have been classified into only two categories, i.e. - Amritdhari and Sehajdhari, and there is no category of Keshdhari Sikh. The term ‘Keshdhari’ has nowhere been defined in the Sikh Gurdwara Act. It is important to understand the various categories of Sikhs as devised by apex Sikh religious institution- the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.²⁸

An ‘Amritdhari Sikh’ is a baptized Sikh who has partaken of *Amrit* (holy nectar), abide by the strict code of Sikhism i.e. *Rehat Maryada* (as approved and prescribed by SGPC), and keeps the five symbols (Five Ks) of the Khalsa identity. The five symbols or five Ks (*Panj kakkar*) are: (i) *kesh* (unshorn hair) (ii) *kara* (metal bracelet/bangle) (iii) *Kachha* (short drawers) (iv) *Kirpan* (sword) (v) *Kangha* (comb).²⁹

Section 2, Sub Section 10 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 gives the definition of an ‘Amritdhari Sikh’. The definition under this section of the Act is reproduced below:

“Amritdhari Sikh means and includes every person who has taken khande-ka amrit or khanda pahul prepared and administered according to the tenets of Sikh religion and rites at the hands of five pyaras or beloved ones.”³⁰

The Sehajdhari Sikhs are those who abide by Sikh tenets and values, but are not yet baptized and don’t follow the Khalsa strict code of conduct. They fully believe in Guru Granth Sahib and perform all their ceremonies and rituals according to Sikh rites, but may trim or shave their beard and hair.³¹ Through an amendment made in the year 1959, a new Section (10A) was added to the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. Section 2, Sub- Section 10 -A of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, provides for the definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ which is in the following terms:

“Sehajdhari Sikh means a person”³²:-

28 Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (2005), *Sikh Identity: An Exploration of Groups Among Sikhs*, Ashgate Publishing, New York (USA), pp. 56-67. Also see, W.H. McLeod, (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 172-176.

29 Trilochan Singh (2001), *The Turban and Sword of the Sikhs*, published by B. Chattar Singh Jiwan Singh, Amritsar, pp. 134-136. Madanjit Kaur (2000), *Guru Gobind Singh and Creation of Khalsa*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.31-33. Also see, Madanjit Kaur (2007), *Guru Gobind Singh: Historical and Ideological Perspective*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 59-64.

30 See, Section 2, Sub Section 10 of Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925. Also see, Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 349. Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, p. 267

31 Harbans Lal (1999), “Sehajdhari Sikhs : Their Origin and Current Status in the Panth”, in Pashaura Singh and N.. Gread Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 112-126. Maan Singh Nirankari (2008) , *Sikhism, a Perspective*, Unistar books, Chandigarh, pp. 159-160.

32 See, Section 2, Sub- Section 10 A of Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925

- i. *Who performs ceremonies according to Sikh rites ;*
- ii. *Who does not use tobacco or Kutha (halal meat) in any form;*
- iii. *Who is not a Patit; and*
- iv. *Who can recite Mul Manter*”³³

The section 2 (11) of the Sikh Gurdwara Act defines another class or category of Sikh as “Patit”. The definition of ‘Patit’ as given in the Act is reproduced below:

“Patit means a person who being a Keshadhari Sikh trims or shaves his beard or keshas or after taking amrit commits any one or more of the four kurahits.”³⁴

According to the definition of ‘Patit’ given in Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, a ‘Patit’ is a Sikh who may have flouted the tenets and principles of Sikhism but have returned to the fold after undergoing religious punishment and are reinstated through baptism. A ‘Patit’ is a Sikh born in a Sikh family but who does not practice Sikhism, that is, does not keep unshorn hair. It also includes those who were once baptized, but not following the *Rehat Maryada* (Sikh religious code) any longer.³⁵

It is also provided in the SGPC *Rehat Maryada* (Sikh religious code of conduct) that in the event of the commission of any of the four mentioned ‘kurahits’³⁶ (transgressions), the transgressor must get re-baptized.³⁷ It is worth mentioning here that the ‘kurahits’ (transgressions) are not defined in the Sikh Gurdwara Act. The four tabooed practices as listed in the Sikh Reht Maryada, approved by Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC).³⁸

33 The ‘Mool Mantar’ (also spelt as ‘Mul Mantra’) is the supreme composition contained within the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the holy scripture of the Sikhs; that provides the basis of Sikhism. It’s significance is emphasised by the fact that it is the first composition in the Sikh Holy Scripture and eternal living Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib. The *Mool Mantar* is the first composition of Guru Nanak Dev ji. *Mool Mantar* can be considered as the moral or the sole truth of the universe and a brief description of the God. It is a most brief composition encompassing the entire universally complex theology of the Sikh faith. The rest of the Bani (Japuji Sahib) that follows is regarded as an elaboration of the main *Mool Mantar*.

34 See, Section 2 (11), *Sikh Gurdwara Act*, 1925.

35 W.H. McLeod (2003), *Sikhs of the Khalsa: A History of the Khalsa Rahit*, published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp.440-453. Also see, Jasbir Singh Sabar (2001), “Main Transgression of the Sikh Code of Conduct, *Journal of Sikh Studies*, Vol.25, No. 1, pp.1-8.

36 The said four Kurahits (transgressions) have been summed up in the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct and conventions) as prescribed by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). These are as following- (i) Dishonoring of hairs (ii) Eating of meat of an animal slaughtered in Muslim way (iii) Cohabiting with a person other than one’s spouse (iv) Using tobacco. See, *Sikh Rehat Maryada* (in Punjabi) as published by Dharm Parchaar Committee (DPC) , SGPC, pp.30-31

37 As per ethical rules of SGPC published - Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct)

38 Kashmir Singh (2014), “ The Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 – Critique”, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. XVI, Issue 4 , October – December 2014,available at https://sikhinstitute.org/oct_2014/7_kashmirsing.html, accessed on 21/11/2016.

Hereby, one point is very clear that ‘Patit’ is a person who was an ‘Amritdhari Sikh’ (baptized Sikh), however, he has committed any one of the four ‘kurahits’ (transgression), whereas ‘Sehajdhari’ is a Sikh who has not been baptized and is not obliged to keep unshorn hair as per scheme of Gurdwara Act of 1925.³⁹ The terms "Amritdhari Sikh" and "Patit" were incorporated in the Sikh Gurdwara Act in the year 1944, while the term "Sehjdhari" was added in 1959.⁴⁰

SGPC defines ‘Sehajdhari’ in Gurleen Kaur Case

In a SGPC executive meeting held on December 3, 2008, the members of the SGPC executive led by then SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar, laid down the definition of a ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’. Sticking to the definition given in the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, the SGPC executive committee members stated that ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ are those who are born in non-Sikh families but follow the tenets of Sikhism.⁴¹ As per the definition adopted by “Parliament of the Sikhs”, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) : **“A *Sehajdhari Sikh is thus a non-Sikh who performs ceremonies according to Sikh rites; who does not use tobacco, does not consume halal meat in any form; who is not a “patit” and who recites the mulmantra : Proem to Sri Guru Granth Sahib.*”**⁴²

In the resolution passed, the SGPC pointed out that definition of ‘Sehajdhari’ given in the Section 2 (10-A) of the Sikh Gurdwara Act states that the word “sehajdhari” consists of two words “sehaj” (slowly) and “dhari” (adopt a religious path), and hence these are those “novices” who slowly and gradually move on the path of Sikh faith to adopt its doctrine, ethics and tenets. A “Sehajdhari” according to SGPC is one who has entered the path of Sikhism and will continue to be a Sehajdhari Sikh till he fully accepts the moral and

39 Argument based on elements of classification of Sikhs as - Amritdhari, Keshdhari and Sehajdhari in the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925. SGPC published Rehat Maryada also provides for similar logic and classification.

40 Davinder Singh Chahal (2008), “Controversy over Sehajdhari Sikh, But Who is a Sikh”, *Institute for Understanding Sikhism*, Dec 31, 2008, available at <http://www.iuscanada.com/journal/articles/sehjdhari.pdf>, accessed on 27/09/2016.

41 Also see, “Sikhs with shorn hair patit: SGPC” *The Indian Express*, December 5, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikhs-with-shorn-hair-patit-sgpc/394424/>, accessed on 17/06/2017

42 “A person trimming hair, beard can’t claim to be Sehajdhari”, *Sant Sipahi*, June 11, 2009, available at <http://santsipahi.org/a-person-trimming-hair-beard-cant-claim-to-be-sehajdhari/>, accessed on 17/10/2016. “Who is a 'sehajdhari'”, *Times of India*, September 2, 2011, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Who-is-a-sehajdhari/articleshow/9830416.cms>, accessed on 17/07/2016. Also see, Amandeep Sandu (2016), “The Question Of Sehajdhari Rights Is Also A Question Of Sikh Identity”, *The Caravan A Journal of Politics and Culture*, March 20, 2016 available at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/punjab-sehajdhari-rights-question-sikh-identity>, accessed on 19/07/2017.

spiritual vows of Sikhism, to be called a practicing Sikh.⁴³ The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) submitted an amended affidavit (Gurleen Kaur vs. State of Punjab) in the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Providing the definition of a Sehajdhari Sikh, the SGPC affidavit said:

"Once a Sehajdhari becomes a keshadhari Sikh, he under no circumstances by cutting or trimming his/her hair, beard or eyebrows can claim to be a Sehajdhari. Similarly, a person born into a Sikh family cannot claim to be a Sehajdhari by trimming or cutting his/her hair, beard or eyebrows in any manner."⁴⁴

The amended definition of a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' by SGPC though appeased conservative religious organizations also caused considerable unease within the wider Sikh community. By many it was seen as increased rigidity and intolerance in a religion that was born out of reaction to fundamentalist forces in medieval times. The SGPC resolution was strongly opposed and condemned by the Sehajdhari Sikh Federation (SSF) on the basis that it was against the teachings of the Sikh religion. The opposition to the SGPC's rigid stance on defining a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' also came from within the Sikh clergy.⁴⁵ In the context, former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh argued :

"As I see it, 'patits' (apostates) are only those who have defaulted (trimmed their hair) after becoming Amritdhari Sikhs (baptized Sikhs). It does not apply to non-baptized Sikhs. The rights of a Sikh born into a Sikh family cannot be taken away on these grounds."⁴⁶

It all began quite innocuously, when a young student (Gurleen Kaur) was denied admission (in MBBS course) under the 'Sikh quota' in an SGPC-run educational institution (Sri Guru Ramdas Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Amritsar) on the grounds that

43 See, "Who is a 'sehajdhari'?", *The Times of India*, September 2, 2011, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Who-is-a-sehajdhari/articleshow/9830416.cms>, accessed on 17/07/2016. Also see, Chander Suta Dogra (2009), "Shorn Of Identity", *The Outlook*, February 16, 2009, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/shorn-of-identity/239733>, accessed on 15/07/2016.

44 "Sikh definition: SGPC submits affidavit in HC", *The Indian Express*, December 11, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikh-definition-sgpc-submits-affidavit-in-hc/396829/>, accessed on 17/06/2017. "Sikhs with shorn hair patit: SGPC" *The Indian Express*, December 5, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikhs-with-shorn-hair-patit-sgpc/394424/>, accessed on 17/06/2017.

45 Chander Suta Dogra (2009), "Shorn Of Identity", *The Outlook*, February 16, 2009, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/shorn-of-identity/239733>, accessed on 15/07/2016. Also see, "Sikhs with shorn hair patit: SGPC", *The Indian Express*, December 5, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikhs-with-shorn-hair-patit-sgpc/394424/>, accessed on 13/08/2016.

46 Chander Suta Dogra (2009), "Shorn Of Identity", *The Outlook*, February 16, 2009, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/shorn-of-identity/239733>, accessed on 15/07/2016.

she did not qualify as “Sikh” because she had plucked her eyebrows.⁴⁷ A petition challenging the denial of admission was filed by *Gurleen Kaur and Others* before the Punjab and Haryana High Court, in which the petitioners contended that they were 'Sehajdhari Sikhs'. At this, the Punjab and Haryana High Court asked the SGPC to define a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' exactly and the importance of hair in Sikh religion.⁴⁸

In its response, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), filed an affidavit where the Sikh body stated that it wasn't mandatory for a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' (which it defined as “novices” entering the Sikh faith) to preserve body hair. However, the SGPC, also pointed that if a ‘Sehajdhari’ trims or cuts his hair after becoming a 'Keshdhari', then he becomes a 'Patit' (apostate).⁴⁹ The response to this definition by SGPC triggered a furious debate within the Sikh community on an issue that is vital to their identity. The conservative and radical Sikh organizations balked at this accommodating definition, accusing the SGPC of diluting the faith and playing into the hands of radical Hindu organization - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Sikh organizations including Akali Dal (Panch Pardhani), Shiromani Khalsa Panchayat, Sant Samaj, Damdami Taksal, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, American Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, and many others took strong exception to the SGPC overturning its own resolutions and ignoring the Panthic view on the definition of a ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’.⁵⁰

The widespread criticism forced the SGPC to file an amended affidavit in Punjab and Haryana High Court, in which it categorically declared that those who trim or cut their hair had no place in Sikh religion. This, in effect, extended recognition to only two categories of Sikhs—Amritdharis (baptised Sikhs) also called 'Khalsa', and Sehajdhari or “novice” Sikhs. The new SGPC definition put the non- baptized Sikhs who also trim/cut their hair, beard or eyebrows in the category of “Patits” (apostates), even if they are born in

47 The institution (Sri Guru Ramdas Institute of Medical Sciences and Research, Amritsar) enjoys minority status courtesy a Punjab Government notification, which enabled the SGPC to reserve 50% of its seats for Sikh students.

48 Girl who plucked eyebrow not true Sikh, says HC “, *The Times of India*, May 31, 2009, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Girl-who-plucked-eyebrow-not-true-Sikh-says-HC/articleshow/4598931.cms>, accessed on 17/10/2016.

49 Amandeep Sandhu (2016) , “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016. Also see, “Sikhs with shorn hair patit: SGPC”, *The Indian Express*, December 5, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikhs-with-shorn-hair-patit-sgpc/394424/>, accessed on 13/08/2016.

50 Chander Suta Dogra (2009), “Shorn Of Identity”, *The Outlook*, February 16, 2009, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/shorn-of-identity/239733>, accessed on 15/07/2016. Also see, “Sikh definition affidavit to be withdrawn as SGPC buckles”, December 29, 2008, available at <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/sikh-definition-affidavit-be-withdrawn-sgpc-buckles>, accessed on 16/07/2016.

Sikh families, believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, and perform rituals and ceremonies as per Sikh traditions.⁵¹

Given the sensitive nature of the case, the Punjab and Haryana High Court in *Gurleen Kaur vs. State of Punjab* summoned not only lawyers but also Sikh intellectuals and scholars to deliberate on the concerned matter.⁵² After listening to an array of diverse views, the Hon'ble Court concluded that it could take a decision on Sikh identity only according to the Sikh *Rehat-Maryada* (Sikh code of conduct and conventions). In its order, the constitutional bench of Punjab and Haryana High Court stated that Guru Granth Sahib makes no reference to the terms 'Amritdhari', 'Sehajdhari' and 'Patit'. In 152 page order, the full bench of justices JS Khehar, Jasbir Singh and Ajay Kumar Mittal said that keeping unshorn hair was an essential and fundamental component of the religion.⁵³ The historic judgement read:

“Retaining hair unshorn is a fundamental tenet of the Sikh religion and a Sikh is one who keeps unshorn hair and does trim beard or pluck eyebrows.”⁵⁴

The Judgment also read:

“Even an act of dishonouring hair is taken as a tabooed practice. An act of dyeing one's hair is treated as an act of dishonouring hair. It would, therefore, not be incorrect for us to conclude, that maintaining hair unshorn is a part of the religious consciousness of the Sikh faith.”⁵⁵

51 “Sikh definition: SGPC submits affidavit in HC”, *The Indian Express*, December 11, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikh-definition-sgpc-submits-affidavit-in-hc/396829/>, accessed on 17/06/2017. Also see, “Sikh who trims beard, hair becomes outcast”, December 30, 2008, available at <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sikh-who-trims-beard-hair-becomes-outcast-1217488>, accessed on 17/06/2017.

52 In *Gurleen Kaur vs. State of Punjab*, the Punjab and Haryana High Court invited scholars, learned elders and paracharaks. The judges commended the contribution of Mr. Anupam Gupta, Senior Standing Counsel for the Union Territory of Chandigarh, who with his work dug through the literature from Macauliffe and Mcleod, historical rehat naamas, the current Rehatnama, the Punjab Gurdwara Act with its Amendments, the Delhi Gurdwara Act, the Sikh Ardaas, as well as the Guru Granth Sahib

53 “Girl who plucked eyebrow not true Sikh, says HC”, *The Times of India*, May 31, 2009, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Girl-who-plucked-eyebrow-not-true-Sikh-says-HC/articleshow/4598931.cms>, accessed on 17/10/2016. Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016.

54 “Justice Khehar had defined Sikh identity”, *The Times of India*, September 12, 2011, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Justice-Khehar-had-defined-Sikh-identity/articleshow/9949820.cms>, accessed on 23/11/2016. Also see, See, “The Judgment: Gurleen Kaur V. The State Of Punjab”, June 25, 2009, available at <https://www.sikhphilosophy.net/threads/the-judgment-gurleen-kaur-v-the-state-of-punjab.25565/>, accessed on 18/11/2016

55 See, “Gurleen Kaur vs State Of Punjab And Others on 7 August, 2009”, August 7, 2009, available at <https://www.legalindia.com/judgments/gurleen-kaur-vs-state-of-punjab-and-others-on-7-august-2009>, accessed on 18/11/2016. Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016

The decision of the Punjab and Haryana High Court cost Gurleen Kaur her seat at the college, while the judgement led to celebrations within the SGPC circles. Reacting to the landmark judgement, the then chief of the SGPC, Avtar Singh Makkar, stated : “*We are happy with the judgment. Our stand that unshorn hair is of paramount importance for Sikhs has been vindicated.*”⁵⁶ The verdict was hailed worldwide, especially in the Diaspora, where the Sikh community is engaged in legal cases with foreign Governments over the identity issues related with wearing of *Turbans* and *Kirpans*. The judgment delivered by Punjab and Haryana High Court in the concerned case (*Gurleen Kaur vs. State of Punjab*) is of profound significance as it was grounded on identity based in Sikh religious beliefs and practices. However, the Court’s decision also split the Sikh community. A large section of the Sikh community was of the view that Courts and human institutions had no right to pronounce on beliefs, values and tenets of the Sikh religion.⁵⁷

SGPC & Sehajdhari Sikhs :The Politics of Voting Rights

In pre-partition days in certain areas of west Punjab, there were significant number of people who believed only in ideology of Sikh Gurus, Guru Granth Sahib and Gurdwaras. At that time certain facilities were given to the Sikhs by the Government and Sehajdhari Sikhs were also entitled for these facilities.⁵⁸ At that time, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) issued the certificates for the Sehajdhari Sikh. Sehajdharis were following and observing all the ceremonies according to Sikh rites and traditions only, and they felt pride in calling themselves as Sehajdhari Sikhs.⁵⁹

Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in its meeting on 12th May, 1938, had the occasion to define a ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’. The desired qualifications of Sehajdhari Sikh were discussed by the Dharmik Salahkar Committee of SGPC in 1938,⁶⁰

56 “Girl who plucked eyebrow not true Sikh, says HC”, *The Times of India*, May 31, 2009, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Girl-who-plucked-eyebrow-not-true-Sikh-says-HC/articleshow/4598931.cms>, accessed on 17/10/2016.

57 “Justice Khehar had defined Sikh identity”, *The Times of India*, September 12, 2011, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Justice-Khehar-had-defined-Sikh-identity/articleshow/9949820.cms>, accessed on 23/11/2016. Amandeep Sandhu (2016) , “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016

58 Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, p. 272. Also see, “Sehajdhari Issue As Old As Gurdwara Act”, September 2011, available at <https://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/62997-sehajdhari-issue-as-old-as-gurdwara-act/>, accessed on 21/01/2016

59 ibid

60 Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba (2009), “ Can a ‘Sehajdhari Sikh Continue to Shave? An In-depth Analysis”, June 11, 2009, *Sant Sipahi*, available at <http://santsipahi.org/can-a-sehajdhari-sikh-continue-to-shave-an-in-depth-analysis-gurcharanjit-singh-lamba/>, accessed on 17/06/2017. Also see, “Can a

which decided that the following conditions must be fulfilled by a person claiming to be a ‘Sehajdhari’ :

- (i) Should keep beard, (ii) Should not use barber’s razor, (iii) Should make at least one of his children a Singh, (iv) Should observe all rites in accordance with Gurmat, and (iv) Should not consume tobacco.

(English translation of excerpt in Punjabi)⁶¹

Recognizing the healthy contributions made by Sehadhari Sikhs to the Sikh religion and community coupled with their unflinching and uncompromising commitment to the Sikh faith, the word ‘Sehadhari’ was for the first time incorporated in the Sikh Gurdwara Act in the year 1944 through an amendment. With this vital amendment, the nomenclature - ‘Sehadhari’ got the legal recognition in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, and the Sehadhari Sikhs were given SGPC voting rights in 1944 under the British rule.⁶² As Sehadhari Sikhs only got the voting rights but not the ‘right to contest’ the elections, they could not become the members of the leading Sikh religious institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁶³

The aforesaid amendment came into being when this realization dawned upon the Government that majority of the Sikh population was Sehadhari and were not *Amritdhari* Sikhs (baptized Sikhs). The need was felt that Sehadhari Sikhs should have good say and active participation in the administration of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), management of Sikh Gurdwaras and the important decision making process in Sikh religious affairs.⁶⁴ Realizing the fact that vast majority of population which believed in all tenets of Sikhism and who had no other religion other than Sikhism constituted the major

‘Sehadhari Sikh Continue to Shave? An In-depth Analysis Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba’, available at <http://religiondocbox.com/Christianity/74796571-Can-a-sehadhari-sikh-continue-to-shave-an-in-depth-analysis-gurcharanjit-singh-lamba.html>, accessed on 18/08/2017

61 The desired qualification for a ‘Sehadhari Sikh’ as set by SGPC in its meeting on May 12, 1938: ਸ਼ਿਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸਲਾਹਕਾਰ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਰਾਏ ਵਿੱਚ ਹਰ ਇੱਕ ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਵਿੱਚ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਹੋਏ ਜ਼ਰੂਰੀ ਹਨ।

(i) ਦਾੜੀ ਰੱਖੇ, (ii) ਕੇਸਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਉਸਤਰਾ ਨਾ ਲਾਵੇ, (iii) ਆਪਣੀ ਔਲਾਦ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਿਸੇ ਨਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜ਼ਰੂਰ ਸਜਾਵੇ, (ਜਡ) ਸਾਰੇ ਸੰਸਕਾਰ ਗੁਰਮਤ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੋਵੇ, (ਡ) ਤੰਬਾਕੂ ਨਾ ਪੀਵੇ।

62 See, “HT Explainer: What’s behind excluding Sehadharis from Sikh body polls?”, *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2016, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/who-are-sehadharis-more-about-sikh-gurudwara-act-amendment-in-lok-sabha/story-fcsAFqeKzrrQijz1OPRkEL.html>, accessed on 18/07-2017. Also see, “SGPC sticks to old definition of Sehadhari”, December 5, 2008, available at <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/sgpc-sticks-old-definition-sehadhari>, accessed on 15/07/2016.

63 Namit Hans (2016), “Why Sehadhari Sikhs are opposing the SGPC Act Amendment Bill”, *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016.

64 See, Harbans Singh (1998), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism: S-Z*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 144-146. Also see, “Sehadhari Sikhs are still mentioned in Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925”, *The Times of India*, April 29, 2016, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Sehadhari-Sikhs-are-still-mentioned-in-Sikh-Gurdwara-Act-1925/articleshow/52042640.cms>, accessed on 18/08/2017.

part of the Sikh masses, by an amending Act i.e. Punjab Act No. 11 of 1944, the then competent legislature introduced the word 'Sehajdhari Sikh' by incorporating it in section 2 Sub Section 10 - and corresponding amendments were made in Section 49 and 92 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. The concerned amendments were recognized and connected with right to vote in the elections of the Boards and Committees of the SGPC. Thus by the way of amendment in Section 2 as well as in Section 49 and 92 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, the word 'Sehajdhari' was consciously incorporated.⁶⁵

For the period of 59 years (1944-2003), Sehajdhari Sikhs continued to exercise their right of franchise for elections to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in a peaceful and democratic manner. The form circulated by Gurdwara Election Commission for enrolment as voters has separately prescribed 'Form -1' for Keshadhari Sikhs and Form - 1A for Sehajdhari Sikhs.⁶⁶ The arrangement made in the Sikh Gurdwara Act by amendments in 1944, continued for 59 years and the Sehajdhari Sikhs continued to vote in numerous SGPC elections without any hitch and problem. The system worked smoothly for 59 years without any problem/issue because in the ultimate analysis, the control of the management of the Gurdwaras vested with Amritdhari Sikhs, who alone possesses eligibility for contesting elections and being members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and its various committees.⁶⁷

Notification to Disfranchise Sehajdhari Sikhs

In 1973 General House meeting of the SGPC, while demanding that the so-called 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' be disfranchised from Sikh Gurdwara Act, the apex Sikh body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), adopted the resolution that:

“At the time of enactment of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, in the year 1925, there were Sehajdharis in some districts of Punjab who fulfilled the required qualifications. But after the partition (1947) except for negligible number this sect has virtually

65 Information based on Civil Writ Petition filed in the Hon'ble Punjab and Haryana High Court by Sehajdhari Sikh Party versus Union of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The writ petition filed on 22/05/2017 by Sehajdhari Sikh Party against the Sikh Gurdwara (Amendment) Act, 2016 which after being passed by Lok Sabha, got the assent of the President on 0/05/2016. As per Sikh Gurdwara (Amendment) Act, 2016 Sehajdhari Sikhs were deprived of right to vote in SGPC elections. Also see, Harbans Lal (1999), "Sehajdhari Sikhs : Their Origin and Current Status in the Panth", in Pashaura Singh and N. Gread Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 112-126

66 The Form -1 meant for Keshadhari Sikhs is seen as complete violation of the provisions of the Act because the word Keshadhari has nowhere been defined in the Sikh Gurdwara Act.

67 "HT Explainer: What's behind excluding Sehajdharis from Sikh body polls?", *Hindustan Times*, April 17, 2016, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/who-are-sehajdharis-more-about-sikh-gurudwara-act-amendment-in-lok-sabha/story-fcsAFqeKzrrQijz1OPRkEL.html>, accessed on 17/05/2017. Also see, Namit Hans (2016), "Why Sahajdhari Sikhs are opposing the SGPC Act Amendment Bill", *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016.

*become extinct. Of these Sehajdharis some have become 'Singhs' and some have become part of the Hindu culture.'*⁶⁸

The Sikh Gurdwara Act under Section 2 (Clause 10 and 10-A) permits both Keshadhari Sikhs and Sehjdhari Sikhs to vote and become members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The right to vote to the Sehjdhari Sikhs for the first time was introduced in the Act in 1959, when the Gurdwaras in PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union) were brought under the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925.⁶⁹ However, the clamour to debar Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting rights in SGPC elections began in the 90s, on the ground that they were misusing this right. In the year 2001, SGPC secretary Manjit Singh Calcutta moved a resolution to once deny the 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' the right to vote in the SGPC elections.⁷⁰ The Akali demand to disfranchise Sehajdhari Sikhs didn't get much attention until the first National Democratic Alliance regime led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee took power and agreed to it. In 2003, during Bharatiya Janata Party - led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime, the Union Home Ministry sought to amend the Gurdwara Act of 1925 by way of a notification to exclude 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' and debar them from voting rights in SGPC elections.⁷¹

The stand of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was accepted by the Government of India on 8th October, 2003. Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at the Centre issued a notification whereby the word 'Sehajdhari' was omitted from Section 49 and 92 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act.⁷² As per this notification of Union Government 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' were deprived of their right to vote in the elections of the Boards and Committees of SGPC, though as per definition of Section 2 Sub

68 Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba (2009), "Can a 'Sehajdhari Sikh Continue to Shave? An In-depth Analysis", June 11, 2009, *Sant Sipahi*, available at <http://santsipahi.org/can-a-sehajdhari-sikh-continue-to-shave-an-in-depth-analysis-gurcharanjit-singh-lamba/>, accessed on 17/06/2017. Also see, "Sikhs with shorn hair patit: SGPC" *The Indian Express*, December 5, 2008, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/sikhs-with-shorn-sgpc/394424/>, accessed on 17/06/2017 .

69 See, Section 2 (Clause 10 & 10-A) of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925. Also see, "Panel to take up SGPC poll issue with ministry", *The Tribune*, August 14, 2001, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010814/punjab1.htm>, accessed on 15/06/2015.

70 Amandeep Sandhu (2016), "The Question Of Sehajdhari Rights is Also A Question Of Sikh Identity", *The Caravan A Journal of Politics and Culture*, March 20, 2016, available at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/punjab-sehajdhari-rights-question-sikh-identity>, accessed on 19/07/2017. Also see, " Why Sahajdhari Sikhs are opposing SGPC Act Amendment Bill", *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016.

71 See, Gurpreet Singh Nibber (2016), "What's behind excluding Sehajdharis from Sikh body polls?", *Hindustan Times*, June 26, 2018. Also see, Kamal Deep Singh (2016), "Sikh bodies welcome barring of Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting", *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016

72 "High Court notices on Sehajdharis Issue", *The Hindu*, January 4, 2012, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/high-court-notices-on-sehajdharis-issue/article2772915.ece> , accessed on 14/05/2017. Also see, "Sehajdhari voting row: High court issues notice to Centre, Punjab Govt", *Hindustan Times*, May 27, 2017.

Section 10- A, the Sehajdhari continued to be Sikhs. The NDA Government at the Centre (by Gazette Notification No.S.O.1190 E) disfranchised the ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ and provided that only ‘Keshadhari Sikhs’ would be entitled to vote in the SGPC managed Gurdwara elections.⁷³

The Sehajdhari Sikh Party, then known as Sehajdhari Sikh Federation (SSF), responded by filing a writ petition challenging the said notification of 2003 that deprived the Sehajdhari Sikhs of voting rights.⁷⁴ The concerned notification was challenged on various grounds including lack of legislative competence of the Central Government. As the case dragged on, the elections took place and the Sehajdhari Sikhs were not able to participate in various SGPC elections.⁷⁵

In the year 2011, the controversial notification (dated: October 8, 2003) issued by National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led Government of India to debar the ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ from the voting rights in SGPC elections was quashed by the Punjab and Haryana high Court on a petition by the Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP),⁷⁶ saying that the concerned amendment to debar the ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ from voting rights had to come through proper legislative process. The Hon’ble Full Bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court after hearing the matter in great length ruled in favour of the Sehajdhari Sikhs and restored their voting rights for their electoral participation in SGPC elections.⁷⁷ As, the Punjab and

73 Navjeevan Gopal (2015), “Creation, courts and crisis: Recalling SGPC’s Journey”, *The Indian Express*, November 25, 2015, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/creation-courts-and-crisis-recalling-sgpcs-journey/>, accessed on 19/05/2017. Also see, “HC Stays Order on Voting Rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs”, *The Outlook*, September 6, 2011, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/hc-stays-order-on-voting-rights-of-sehajdhari-sikhs/733800>, accessed on 19/05/2017

74 Even before 2003, in 2001, the SAD (Mann) opposed the participation of ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ in the SGPC elections. That same year, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), led by Simranjit Singh Mann, also filed a case in the Punjab and Haryana High Court against the Sehajdhari Sikhs right to vote. See, Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “The Question Of Sehajdhari Rights is also a Question Of Sikh Identity”, *The Caravan A Journal of Politics and Culture*, March 20, 2016, available at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/punjab-sehajdhari-rights-question-sikh-identity>, accessed on 19/07/2017. Also see, “Why Sahajdhari Sikhs are opposing SGPC Act Amendment Bill”, *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016.

75 See, “Why Sahajdhari Sikhs are opposing the SGPC Act Amendment Bill”, *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/why-sahajdhari-sikhs-are-opposing-the-sgpc-act-amendment-bill-2773158/>. Information also available in Civil Writ Petition filed in the Hon’ble Punjab and Haryana High Court by Sehajdhari Sikh Party versus Union of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The writ petition filed on 22/05/2017 by Sehajdhari Sikh Party against the Sikh Gurdwara (Amendment) Act, 2016 which after being passed by Lok Sabha, got the assent of the President on 0/05/2016.

76 The Punjab and Haryana High Court had quashed the 2003 notification of debarring Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in 2011. A Bench, headed by Chief Justice Sanjay Kaul, dismissed the petition filed by the Shiromani Akali Dal (Mann), going by a full Bench judgement of 2011, which quashed a notification issued by the Union Government. But elections for 170 members of SGPC General House had been held just before that, by excluding the Sehajdhari as per that very notification of 2003.

77 The Hon’ble Punjab and Haryana High Court came to the conclusion that notification dated 08.10.2003 was bad in law because power under Sub Section 2 of Section 72 Of 1966 Act to modify the Central Act, State Act or Provincial Act does not include the power to amend such Acts and that the delegate

Haryana High Court in the year 2011 had quashed the 2003 notification of debarring ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ in SGPC elections, the court’s decision nullified 2011 SGPC elections.⁷⁸

Without legitimate elections, the SGPC was forced to carry on with a working committee and not as a full-fledged body. In the interim, the court put the five-yearly SGPC polls on hold, and tasked the last-elected executive committee to run the SGPC.⁷⁹ The order was agreed by all parties concerned including the State Government and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The SGPC moved the Supreme Court of India, which gave temporary relief by freezing the elected General House of SGPC. The apex Court allowed the pre-election 15-member executive body of the SGPC to remain functional. That was to be until a final call was taken by the legislature through proper legislative process.⁸⁰

Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Act, 2016 – Exclusion of Sehajdharis

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) argues that after the partition of the country Sehajdhari Sikhs have virtually ceased to exist as some have become ‘Singhs’ and some have fallen back to the fold of Hindu religion. The largest representative body of the Sikhs, the SGPC alleges that the identity and status of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ is now being misused to enlist non-Sikhs as voters for the Gurdwara management elections. With this explanation, SGPC constantly demanded from Government of India that the Sikh Gurdwara Act be amended to include only ‘Keshadhari Sikhs’ as voters since there are virtually no Sehajdharis that exist.⁸¹

has no authority to take a decision regarding legislative policy of the 1925 Gurdwara Act. The Hon’ble Court held that 2003 Notification dated 08.10.2003 did not satisfy the ingredients of Section 72 of the Punjab Reorganization Act of 1966, and consequently 2003 Notification was quashed.

78 “SGPC moves SC over Sehajdharis Voting Right”, *The Tribune*, May 11, 2016, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/sgpc-moves-sc-over-sehajdharis-voting-right/235158.html>, accessed on 09/11/2017. Also see, “Apex court reinstates SGPC elected in 2011”, *The Indian Express*, September 16, 2016, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/apex-court-reinstates-sgpc-elected-in-2011/> accessed on 09/11/2017.

79 When the case was pending, two elections were held to the SGPC. The September 2011 elections were nullified, and the SGPC could not hold its first meeting, because the board was notified, subject to the outcome of the writ, which had become in-fructuous after the High Court judgment. Then SGPC filed a special leave petition in the Supreme Court, where no interim stay was granted on the verdict of the High Court. But an interim arrangement was made, with the court passing an agreed order, allowing the old executive committee of 15 members to function.

80 “SGPC house waits for Centre’s letter to hold first meet, elect new president”, *The Indian Express*, October 13, 2016. Also see, “HT Explainer: What’s behind excluding Sehajdharis from Sikh body polls?”, *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2016.

81 Vipin Pubby (2016), “Sikhs and the SGPC: Baptism by Fire in Punjab?”, April 23, 2016, available at <http://www.indialegallive.com/viewpoint/religion-news/sikhs-and-the-sgpc-baptism-by-fire-in-punjab-10781>, accessed on 14/05/2017. Also see, “SGPC challenges Sehajdhari Sikhs' vote in SGPC elections”, *Hindustan Times*, April 22, 2011, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/sgpc-challenges->

As Narendra Modi- led NDA (National Democratic Alliance) regime came to power in 2014, its alliance partner- the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) started to lobby hard to get the amendment to debar the Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in SGPC elections introduced and passed in the Union Parliament. Ultimately, in year 2016, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government at the centre amended the changes brought in 1944 in the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. The sole objective of the amendments made in the Gurdawara Act was to make Sehajdhari Sikhs ineligible to vote in the elections to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁸²

Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh presented a Bill to amend Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925 with the objective to debar the Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights. As the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dominated NDA had clear majority, they easily got the Bill (to debar the ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ from voting rights in SGPC elections) passed in both the houses of the Parliament of India.⁸³ After the Bill was cleared by Lok Sabha , it got the assent of the Hon’ble President of India on October 5, 2016. Thus, the Sikh Gurdwara (Amendment) Act, 2016 was passed and published in Extra Ordinary Gazette of India. The BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal’s plan to debar Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in Gurdwara management elections in the Act’s application area - Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh cleared the Parliament and legislative test.⁸⁴ With Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) Government at the Centre, the SGPC succeeded in disfranchising the Sehajdhari Sikhs. This is how one right wing, the Akali Dal played into the hands of another right wing, the *hindutva* forces lead by BJP.⁸⁵

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- sehajdhari-sikhs-vote-in-sgpc-elections/story-AfjPRPB4kutUsdVwdFRQmJ.html, accessed on 14/05/2017.
- ⁸² “SAD for implementing Bill”, *The Pioneer*, April 26, 2017, available at <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2016/state-editions/sad-for-implementing-bill.html>, accessed on 07/05/2017. Also see, Vipin Pubby (2016), “Sikhs and the SGPC: Baptism by Fire in Punjab?”, April 23, 2016, available at <http://www.indialegalive.com/viewpoint/religion-news/sikhs-and-the-sgpc-baptism-by-fire-in-punjab-10781>, accessed on 14/05/2017.
- ⁸³ The Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2016, was passed by the Rajya Sabha about a month ago, was later passed by the Lok Sabha by voice vote. A couple of Sikh members belonging to the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) present in the Lok Sabha chose not to say anything and it was passed by a voice vote. Thus the bill- Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2016 was passed unanimously.
- ⁸⁴ It was during the last BJP-led NDA regime, in 2003, that the Union home ministry sought to amend the Act of 1925 by way of a notification to exclude ‘Sehajdhari’. But that was quashed by the Punjab and Haryana high court on a petition by the Sehajdhari Sikh Party in 2011, saying that the amendment had to come through the legislature. Then, as the Narendra Modi -led NDA regime came in, SAD started lobbying hard. See, “SGPC fails to raise Sehajdhari row with PM”, *The Tribune*, March 30, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/sgpc-fails-to-raise-sehajdhari-row-with-pm/60426.html>, accessed on 16/05/2017.
- ⁸⁵ Amandeep sandhu (2016), “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016.

Reactions over politico-religious exclusion of Sehajdharis

As Indian Parliament passed the Bill to amend a 91-year-old law to exclude Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in the elections to Sikh religious bodies, this BJP - Akali Dal move was both appreciated and criticized in the Sikh religious and political circles. The then SGPC president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Avtar Singh Makkar, welcomed the Parliament nod to the exclusion of Sehajdhari Sikhs from Gurdwara polls, terming it a “*historic move*”.⁸⁶ Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Akali Dal argue that people belonging to communities other than Sikhs and many political parties have been masquerading as “Sehajdharis” and have been trying to influence the electoral process of SGPC. Thus SGPC and Akali Dal pushed for the amendment in the Sikh Gurdwara Act to the effect that it disfranchises the Sehajdhari Sikhs from elections of the largest representative body of the Sikh community, the SGPC.⁸⁷ Shiromani GurudwaraParbhandak Committee (SGPC) recognizes the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) as an essential piece of legislation for the Sikh community on the grounds that it will curb the problem of people from other communities and parties trying to influence the SGPC elections and thus will only help in maintaining the sanctity of the largest religious body of the Sikhs.⁸⁸ Veteran Akali leader and former SGPC chief secretary, late Manjit Singh Calcutta welcomed the move. In the context, Mr. Calcutta said:

“The issue has been misrepresented. Any person with shorn hair never had any right to vote. There is no question of exclusion of 70 lakh voters from SGPC elections. There are some Sehajdharis and that too only in Pakistan. As of now, there are no Sehajdharis in Indian Punjab.”⁸⁹

86 Gurreet Singh Nibber (2016), “HT Explainer: What’s behind excluding Sehajdharis from Sikh body polls?”, *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2016, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/who-are-sehajdharis-more-about-sikh-gurdwara-act-amendment-in-lok-sabha/stfcsAFqeKzrrQijz1OPRkEL.html>, accessed on 17/05/2017 .

87 Based on conversation with various former and present members of SGPC. Few active Akali Dal leaders were also consulted. Both SGPC and Akali Dal have been strongly pressing for exclusion of Sehajdhari Sikhs from SGPC and Gurdwara management committees. Union Minister and Akali Dal Leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal stated that passing of Gurdwara Amendment 2016 was a victory for the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) which was determined in not to let outsiders to vote by proxy in the SGPC elections through the ‘Sehajdhari’ Route. See, “Harsimrat Badal Hails passage of Gurdwara Amendment Bill”, *The Pioneer*, March 17, 2016, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/chandigarh/harsimrat-hails-passage-of-gurdwara-amendment-bill.html>, accessed on 11/08/2017. Also see, Rajiv Khanna (2017), “Punjab2017: Will keeping Sehajdharis out of SGPC help the Akalis?”, February 14, 2017, available at <http://www.catchnews.com/politics-news/will-keeping-sehajdharis-out-of-siromani-gurudwara-prabhandhak-committee-help-akali-dal-in-2017-punjab-assembly-election-1458225347.html>, accessed on 11/08/2017.

88 *ibid.*

89 See, “Sikh bodies welcome barring of Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting”, *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016.

Most of the radical Sikh bodies which are otherwise critical of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) supported debarring of Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in Shiromani Gurudwara Parbhandak Committee (SGPC) elections that came into effect with the passage of the Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2016, in the Indian Parliament. United Akali Dal (UAD)⁹⁰ which was on the forefront to organize ‘Sarbat Khalsa’ in 2015, also supported the move to debar ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ from voting in SGPC elections.⁹¹ Similarly, radical Sikh bodies like Dal Khalsa and Panch Pardhani too welcomed the amendment. Dal Khalsa spokesperson, Kanwarpal Singh said: *“All Sikh religious and political bodies had unanimously decided in 2003 that the amendment to disfranchise Sehajdhari Sikhs was necessary to stop the incursion of fake voters of other religions in the management of pioneer Sikh religious institutions. Those born in Sikh families and have shorn their hair are ‘Patit’ and never had voting rights.”*⁹²

Ravneet Singh Bittu, a Congress leader who is a Member of Parliament from Ludhiana Lok Sabha constituency, was very much opposed to the said amendment and termed this BJP-Akali Dal move as “partisan” and “highly discriminatory”. He categorically stated: *“I am opposed to the idea of making SGPC exclusive for a few. But I did not press for my amendment, as it was bound to be defeated.”*⁹³ Participating in the discussion, Congress Member Parliament Ravneet Bittu vehemently opposed the BJP- Akali Dal move to debar the Sehajdhari Sikhs from their voting rights in the SGPC elections. Citing 2011 Census of India, he claimed that state of Punjab had 1.75 crore Sikhs, out of which about 55 lakh were ‘Amritdharis’ (baptized Sikhs), and therefore have the right to vote in SGPC elections. Member Parliament Ravneet Bittu confirmed that as the result of the new amendment in Gurdwara Act, nearly 70 lakh ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ were disfranchised and

90 United Akali Dal is a Sikh-centric political party floated on 22 November 2014 at Amritsar by leaders of United Sikh Movement and Insaaf Lehar . United Akali Dal is led by former Damdami Taksal leader and known Sikh personality Bhai Mokham Singh. The party was formed with the motive of providing a political alternative to the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal)-Bhartya Janta Party nexus in Punjab. One of the important objective behind the formation of United Akaali Dal is to free the Sikh institutions from the clutches of Badal family and Akali Dal. Information based on extended conversation with Bhai Mohkam Singh, the leader and president of United Akali Dal (UAD).

91 Information based on extended conversation with Bhai Mohkam Singh, the president of United Akali Dal.

92 Statement made by radical Sikh organization Dal Khalsa’s spokesperson, Kanwarpal Singh, who out rightly favoured the 2016 Amendment that debarred the Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights in SGPC elections. Statement was recorded during my discussion with Dal Khalsa Spokesperson on the concerned issue.

93 “Sehajdharis to lose SGPC voting rights, Parliament clears amendment to gurdwaras Act”, *The Tribune*, April 26, 2016, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/sehajdharis-to-lose-sgpc-voting-rights/227874.html>, accessed on 23/ 07/2016.

excluded from participating in biggest Sikh religious elections.⁹⁴ In the context, Congress MP Ravneet Singh Bittu firmly stated:

“BJP - Akali Dal are trying to divide Sikh families through conspiracy. They are doing wrong with 70 lakh Sikhs who had voting rights in SGPC for more than 60 years. This amendment will further divide the already minority community of Punjab into a sub-minority community.”⁹⁵

In view of the 2016 amendments in Sikh Gurdwara Act, Congress MP Ravneet Bittu stated that, ***“Sikh Gurdwaras Act should be renamed as Badal Gurdwaras Act.”***⁹⁶ During the discussion on the Bill in the Lok Sabha⁹⁷, acrimonious scenes were repeatedly witnessed as Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) members led by Harsimrat Kaur Badal, exchanged heated words with Congress and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) members. Intervening in the discussion, Union Cabinet Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal said that the Bill dealt with an issue which does not affect any community other than the Sikhs⁹⁸. She argued: ***“This is a bill about the Sikhs. It is for the Sikhs to decide who should vote for their Gurdwaras and who should not. I do not think non-Sikhs are in a position that they should decide who is a Sikh and who is not.”***⁹⁹ Harsimrat Kaur Badal also stated that by passing the amendment with retrospective effect from October 2003, the Rajya Sabha has corrected a ***“historical wrong”***. She described the said Amendment made in the Sikh Gurdwara Act as a victory for the Shiromani Akali Dal which has been ***“steadfast in its resolve not to let outsiders vote by proxy”*** in SGPC elections ***“through the ‘Sehajdhari’ route.”***¹⁰⁰ She firmly asserted: ***“The SAD and its***

94 “Bill to exclude Sehajdharis from Gurdwara polls gets LS nod too”, *Hindustan Times*, April 26, 2016. Relevant information also available at “Par passes bill to bar Sahejdhari Sikhs from voting”, *India Today*, April 25, 2016, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/par-passes-bill-to-bar-sahejdhari-sikhs-from-voting-596125-2016-04-25>, accessed on 23/07/2017.

95 “Lok Sabha passes Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Bill”, *The Tribune*, April 25, 2016. Also see, “Par passes bill to bar Sahejdhari Sikhs from voting”, *India Today*, April 26, 2016, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/par-passes-bill-to-bar-sahejdhari-sikhs-from-voting/1/651126.html>, accessed on 17/07/2016. available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/story/227334.html>, accessed on 17/07/2016.

96 “Parliament passes Bill to bar Sehajdharis from voting”, *The Hindu*, April 26, 2016. Also see, “Lok Sabha passes Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Bill”, *The Tribune*, April 25, 2016.

97 Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Bill-2016 was staged in Rajya Sabha by the Home Minister Rajnath Singh where it was passed unanimously on March 16, 2016. The Bill was then presented in the Lok Sabha and was passed there on April 25, 2016. The Bill has terminated the voting right given to ‘Sehajdhari’ Sikhs in 1944 to elect SGPC members and members of internal committee. The new amendment bill will come into force retrospectively from October 8, 2003.

98 At one point, Biju Janata Dal’s Tathagatha Satpathy stood up in support of the Bill but hastened to add that any attempt being made to create exclusivity and divisions among communities was unwarranted.

99 “Parliament passes gurdwara amendment bill after heated debate in Lok Sabha”, *Daily World*, April 25, 2016, available at <https://dailyworld.in/parliament-passes-gurdwara-amendment-bill-after-heated-debate-in-lok-sabha/>. Also see, “Parliament passes gurdwara amendment bill after heated debate in Lok Sabha”, available at http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/parliament-passes-gurdwara-amendment-bill-after-heated-debate-in-lok-sabha-116042501305_1.html, accessed on 21/03/2017.

100 “Passage of Gurudwara amendment bill denying voting rights to Sehajdharis, a historic moment: Harsimrat”, *Punjab Today*, March 16, 2016, available at <http://punjabtoday.in/punjabtodayin/>

*MPs have succeeded in correcting a historical wrong by convincing the Upper House to pass this amendment unanimously and also sent out a signal to those conspiring to weaken the community that their designs will not be allowed to succeed.”*¹⁰¹ Aam Aadmy Party’s famous leader and Member Parliament from Sangrur constituency Bhagwant Mann constantly argued with Harsimrat Kaur Badal during the debate in Lok Sabha on Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Bill (2016). He vehemently opposed the concerned Bill and firecly put forth the crucial point that the said amendment in the Gurdwara Act will further tighten Akali Dal's control and dominance over the pioneer Sikh religious institution, the SGPC.¹⁰²

Congress stalwart and current Chief Minister of Punjab Captain Amarinder Singh also criticized the 2016 amendment in the Sikh Gurdwara Act that debarred Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights in SGPC elections. He termed this BJP- Akali Dal decision as most **“unfortunate, regressive and retrograde.”**¹⁰³ While referring to passage of Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) in the Indian Parliament, Captain Amarinder Singh stated: **“Debarring Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights in Sikh religious institution means slamming your door on hundreds and thousands of Sikhs and dividing the Sikh community.”** Captain Amarinder Singh further added: *“It’s an irony that the very democratic legislative procedure was misused to disenfranchise a large section of the society.”*¹⁰⁴ He equated this move by Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) with their demand for Punjabi Suba which ended in fragmenting and dividing Punjab into small pieces. Amarinder Singh argued: *“Like for the narrow sectarian and partisan interests they (Akali Dal leadership) slashed Punjab into pieces so that they could form the Government of their own, which still they never could, they have now repeated the formula to retain their dominant control over the SGPC by virtually throwing out a majority of the Sikhs and dividing the community.”*¹⁰⁵

punjab.php?comment&entry_id=1458138514&title=passage-of-gurudwara-amendment-bill-denying-voting-rights-to-sehajdharis-a-historic-moment-harsimrat. See also, “Punjab2017: will keeping Sehajdharis out of SGPC help the Akalis?”, available at <http://www.catchnews.com/politics-news/will-keeping-sehajdharis-out-of-siromani-gurudwara-prabhandhak-committee-help-akali-dal-in-2017-punjab-assembly-election-1458225347.html>, accessed on 13/07/2016.

101 ibid.

102 ibid.

103 See, “Amarinder Terms Amendment as Most Unfortunate”, *The Pioneer*, April 26, 2016, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/chandigarh/amarinder-terms-amendment-most-unfortunate.html>. Also see, “Amarinder says SGPC Act amendment unfortunate; will divide community”, *Hindustan Times*, April 26, 2016, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/amarinder-says-sgpc-act-amendment-barring-sehajdhari-sikhs-from-casting-votes-unfortunate-will-divide-community/story-BdxCHXtWlItMv9y51lilrK.html>, accessed 07/05/2017.

104 “Amarinder terms SGPC Act amendment as unfortunate”, *The Hindu*, April 26, 2016. Also see, “SGPC Act amendment unfortunate: Amarinder”, *The Indian Express*, April 26, 2016.

105 “Debarring Sehajdharis from polls will strengthen Akali hold on SGPC”, April 27, 2016, available at <http://www.catchnews.com/politics-news/debarring-sehajdharis-from-polls-will-strengthen-akali-hold-on-sgpc-1461744374.html>, accessed on 09/05/2017.

Response of Sehajdhari Sikh Party

Sehajdhari Sikh Party headed by Paramjeet Singh Ranu claims to be first and the only party that represents the interests of the Sehajdhari Sikhs.¹⁰⁶ Sehajdhari Sikh Party was previously known as Sehajdhari Sikh Federation and is a Registered Political Party by the Election Commission of India under section 29(A) of the Representation of People Act 1951. The national president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP), Paramjeet Singh Rannu firmly recognises Sehajdhari Sikhs as very integral part of the Sikh community. In the context, Mr. Ranu explains:

“Sehajdhari Sikhs are integral part of the Sikh religion and therefore are not outsiders. When a person born in Hindu family is a Hindu, a person born in Muslim family is a Muslim, a person born in Christian family is a Christian; then why not a person born in Sikh family be called a Sikh? A Sikh is born Sikh but a Khalsa Sikh has to be baptised Sikh (Amritdhari Sikh). There are only two broader divisions of Sikhs - The baptised are the Khalsas (Amritdharis) and all others who are the followers of the ten Gurus and Sri Guru Granth Sahib and who have no other religion are Sikhs or can be called as Sehajdhari Sikhs.”¹⁰⁷

The president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) Paramjeet Singh Ranu explains the formation and background of the party in the following words :

“The Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) was formed on 13 April, 2001 by holding Ardas at Gurudwara Tahliana Sahib, Raekot (Ludhiana) in protest against the Akali Dal -BJP Government’s strategies to debar the Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights and thus divide the Sikh community into various categories and groups. The Party was formed by likeminded secular persons especially those Sikhs who were born in Sikh families, who realized and perceived the hidden agenda of the SGPC which was bent upon to divest the Sikh religion into two parts. The formation of the Party took place when certain resolutions were being passed by the SGPC to disfranchise the voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in SGPC elections, and later attempt was made to amend the Sikh Gurudwara Act 1925 by the BJP led NDA Government at the Centre by issuing a notification dated 8/10/2003.”¹⁰⁸

In context to struggle for rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in the Sikh religious affairs, Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) chief Paramjeet Singh Ranu clarified that Sehajdhari Sikhs are seeking only voting rights and do not claim to contest as the candidates in SGPC elections.

106 Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP), formerly known as Sehajdhari Sikh Federation (SSF), is a political party registered under section 29(A) of the Representation of the People Act 1951 by the Election Commission of India. This federation was formed in sharp reaction to the SGPC resolutions which were passed to disfranchise the voting right of Sehajdhari Sikhs in SGPC elections.

107 During my field study, I held various discussions with Dr. Paramjeet Singh Rannu, the National President of Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) on the issue of Sehajdhari Sikh identity and their status and role in Sikh community. The statement and explanation regarding the definition of Sehajdhari Sikhs were recorded during discussions with Mr. Rannu.

108 Statements regarding the origin and background of the party as made by Dr. Paramjeet Singh Rannu, president Sehajdhari Sikh Party. Statement and explanation recorded during my in- depth discussions with Mr. Rannu on the concerned issue.

He stated: ***“Sehajdhari Sikhs are not asking for the right to contest the elections to the most powerful Sikh religious institution, the SGPC. As per the provisions of Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 (Section 45) only ‘Amritdhari Sikhs’ (baptised Sikhs) can contest the SGPC elections.”***¹⁰⁹ The SGPC definition of a ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ is fully opposed and condemned by. Sehadhari Sikh Party (SSP) on the grounds that the definition is ***“unconstitutional, against the principles of Sikhism and teachings of the Sikh religion.”***¹¹⁰ In his sharp reaction and opposition to SGPC’s definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’, Parmajeet Singh Rannu said:

“As of now, nearly 80 percent per cent of the total world Sikh population consists of non-Amritdhari Sikhs(non-baptized). Approximately 70 lakh Sikhs were not enrolled as voters in the last SGPC elections. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) by declaring non-baptized Sikhs with shorn hair, born in Sikh families, as ‘patits’, is playing in the hands of anti Sikh forces, the RSS.”¹¹¹

For past several years, the Sikh community has been besieged by confusion and legal conflicts in the absence of clarity on the term ‘Sehajdhari’. It is often seen in debates, discussions and media reports that terms ‘Sehajdhari’ and ‘Patit’(apostate) are used synonymously. Reacting to this misinterpretation, the chief of the Sehadhari Sikh Party Parmajeet Singh Ranu emphasized that confusion created by the leading Sikh body, the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbhandak Committee (SGPC), between the ‘patits’ (apostates) and ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ should be cleared. Clarifying his firm stand that ‘Sehajdhari Sikhs’ are not ‘patits’ (apostates), Paramjeet Singh Rannu argued: ***“As the ‘patit’ word was applicable only for the ‘Amritdhari Sikhs’ (baptised Sikhs). Whenever an ‘Amritdhari Sikh’ violates the ‘amrit’ code of conduct (code of conduct for Khalsa baptism) by any transgression, he becomes a ‘patit’ (an apostate) and had to be re-baptised, but a person who had never been baptised in his life couldn’t be termed as ‘patit’. Sehadhari Sikhs have never been baptized so there is no point of violating the conduct and rules of Khalsa***

109 Statement made by Dr. Paramjeet Singh Rannu, president Sehadhari Sikh Party. The Statement was recorded during discussion with Mr. Rannu in context to the issue of Sehadhari voting rights and the surrounding controversy. Discussions with Mr. Rannu were held on the specific issues, which are – Sehadhari Sikh identity, issue of Sehadhari voting rights and the role and intentions of SGPC in this whole episode. As Mr. Rannu is the petitioner representing the Sehadhari Sikh Party in the court of law, the amendment made in the Sikh Gurdwara Act in 2016 was also discussed .

110 *ibid.*

111 Statement made by Paramjeet Singh Rannu, president Sehadhari Sikh Party. The Statement was recorded during discussion with Mr. Rannu in context to the issue of Sehadhari voting rights, fact and reasons behind Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016), and the surrounding controversy. The discussions with the chief of Sehadhari Sikh Party (SSP) were highly beneficial to explore and analyze the role of SGPC, BJP and Akali Dal. He has been fighting a legal battle for Sehadhari Sikhs against SGPC dominance since 2003.

*baptism. As such, Sehajdhari Sikhs cannot be called ‘patits’ (apostates).”*¹¹² The Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) president Paramjeet Singh Ranu claimed that radical Hindu organization, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), is trying to take advantage of this situation with the motive of creating divisions in the Sikh community. In this context, he stated: *“RSS is trying to take advantage of the situation by fuelling the feeling of alienation among 70 lakh Sehajdhari Sikhs who are born in Sikh families and excluded from voting rights in largest religious body of the Sikhs, the SGPC.”*¹¹³

Criticizing and condemning the SGPC definition of a ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’, Mr. Rannu, the President of Sehajdhari Sikh Party, argues:

*“A child born in a Muslim family is Muslim, in a Hindu family is Hindu, and in a Christian family is Christian. What is a child born in a Sikh family if the child decides not to grow or trim his/ her hair? What will be the religion of the child? Going by the SGPC’s definition of Sehajdhari Sikh, such a person is left without any religion. So this definition by SGPC and amendment of the Sikh Gurdwara act leads to further fragmentation and groupism within the Sikh society.”*¹¹⁴

While clarifying his objections and stand on the issue of voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in the Sikh religious bodies, especially the SGPC, Paramjeet Singh Ranu, the President Sehajdhari Sikh Party, said:

*“We are not in favour of voting rights for non-Sikhs. We have no problem with debarring the voting rights of those who have come from other religions in the process of adopting Sikhism. We want voting rights only for Sehajdhari Sikhs as they are born in Sikh families only.”*¹¹⁵

Sehajdhari Sikhs forcefully protested against this Amendment Bill (2016) passed by Indian Parliament which excludes them from voting in the SGPC elections. The Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) argues that such an amendment in Gurdwara Act will prevent more than

112 The Statement was recorded during discussion with national president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party Mr. Paramjeet Singh Rannu. The discussion took place in context to the definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ as given by SGPC in Sikh Gurdwara Act and the Sehajdhari Sikh identity according to the principles and teachings of Sikh Gurus.

113 Statement made by Paramjeet Singh Rannu, president Sehajdhari Sikh Party. The Statement was recorded during discussion with Mr. Rannu in context to the issue of Sehajdhari voting rights, fact and reasons behind Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) and the surrounding controversy. The discussions with the chief of Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) were highly beneficial to explore and analyze the role of SGPC, BJP and Akali Dal in regard to concerned issue. He has been fighting a legal battle for Sehajdhari Sikhs against SGPC dominance since 2003.

114 The Statement was recorded during discussion with national president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party Paramjeet Singh Rannu. The discussion took place in context to the definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ as given by SGPC in Sikh Gurdwara Act and the Sehajdhari Sikh identity according to the principles and teachings of Sikh Gurus.

115 Statement made by Dr. Paramjeet Singh Rannu, president Sehajdhari Sikh Party. The Statement was recorded during discussion with Mr. Rannu in context to the issue of Sehajdhari voting rights, fact and reasons behind Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) and the surrounding controversy.

70 lakh community members from exercising their franchise in SGPC elections. Paramjeet Singh Ranu, the president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party, claims that the concerned Amendment Bill (2016) was sponsored by the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to maintain its hegemonic control over Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Paramjeet Singh Ranu alleged that the decision regarding the recent amendment in the Sikh Gurdwara Act (to disfranchise Sehajdhari Sikhs in SGPC elections) was taken under pressure from the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which wants to reap political benefits from this political move.¹¹⁶ Mr. Ranu alleged: ***“The SGPC has been accused of being involved in corrupt activities and we see this amendment in the Sikh Gurdwara Act which results in debarring the Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights - as a communal agenda of BJP and Akalis.”***¹¹⁷

For the rights and identity of Sehajdhari Sikhs, Sehajdhari Sikh Party has been protesting against the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) for several years.¹¹⁸ Parmajeet Singh Ranu, the National President of Sehajdhari Sikh Party, considers the SGPC’s decisions, policies and actions as proof of it being highly influenced by the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Hindu right wing (RSS) , which wishes ***“to further dilute and divide the other religious minorities.”***¹¹⁹ Paramjeet Singh Ranu also criticized the Congress and other parties for not opposing the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Bill (2016) by raising the voice in a strong and forceful manner, especially in the Rajya Sabha where BJP is still in minority. He alleged: ***“The most unfortunate part is that barring Captain Amarinder Singh and Ravneet Singh Bittu no one has even raised their voice against the injustice being done to Sehajdhari Sikhs. The Congress and other parties kept mum in the Rajya Sabha, where the BJP is in a minority. The BJP dominant NDA Government on its part reversed the protocol by first getting the Bill passed in the Rajya Sabha rather than in the Lok Sabha.”***¹²⁰

The Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) has been contesting a legal battle for the voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in the election of largest representative institution of the Sikhs,

116 Based on extended conversation with Sehajdhari Sikh Party President Paramjeet Singh Rannu.

117 The statement and views were recorded during discussion with national president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party, Paramjeet Singh Rannu.

118 The voting rights for Sehajdhari Sikhs were existing since 1959 and was disfranchised in 2003 by the Union Government’s (NDA) notification. The Hon’ble High Court quashed the notification and revived the voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs. The SGPC filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the High Court verdict and the matter is under adjudication.

119 ibid.

120 This is the statement and explanation given by Sehajdhari Sikh Party president Mr. Rannu. The statement was recorded during in-depth discussion with him regarding the reaction of Sikh politicians on the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) and the concerned role of SGPC.

the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).¹²¹ The party has been protesting against the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) passed by Indian Parliament in April 2016, which excludes the Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in elections to the pioneer Sikh religious body, the SGPC. The Party has legally challenged the recent amendment and the matter is still pending adjudication before the Supreme Court of India.¹²² The legislation regarding the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) has been brought in haste without waiting the judgement of the Apex Court of India.¹²³

Sehajdhari Sikhs have continued to participate in Sikh religious and political life right up to contemporary times and have associated themselves with Sikh institutions and organizations. The Sehajdhari Sikh Party has been contesting a legal battle for the voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in SGPC elections which were existing since 1959, and were disfranchised in 2003 by a Union Government's notification. Shiromani Akali Dal and other *Panthic* groups have been consistently opposing the inclusion of Sehajdharis Sikhs as voters in elections of SGPC. The court interventions have further complicated the

121 The voting rights for Sehajdhari Sikhs were existing since 1959 and was disfranchised in 2003 by the Union Government's (NDA) notification. The Hon'ble High Court quashed the notification and revived the voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs. The SGPC filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the High Court verdict and the matter is under adjudication.

122 The Sehajdhari Sikh Party filed a PIL in the Punjab and Haryana High Court through its National Chief Paramjeet Singh Ranu challenging the constitutional validity of the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act 2016, enacted by the Indian Parliament. A specific liberty was granted by the Supreme Court to the Sehajdhari Sikh Party to challenge the constitutional validity of the Amendment Act 2016 while disposing off the SLP of the SGPC. The petitioner alleges that neither proper facts nor any figures were placed before the competent authority to take such a drastic step just for the political cause of NDA partner Akali Dal (Badal). The Sehajdharis have demanded the quashing of the Amendment (by which the provision of Section 49 and 92 of the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925 has been amended retrospectively w.e.f. 08.10.2003 by removing the exemption given to Sehajdhari Sikhs) which according to Sehajdhari Sikh Party is an abuse of power by the Union Government and proper procedure has not been carried out as per the rules of the Parliament. In the Amendment Bill the 'Objects' were given but no 'Reasons' were forthcoming which were mandatory provisions for a bill to be passed. The exemption given to Sehajdhari Sikhs was being removed especially when this right was conferred on Sehajdhari Sikhs by competent legislature after due deliberations and application of mind way back in the year 1944 by amending the Gurdwara Act, and the said amendment had stood test of time. Also, 'Sehajdharis' still remain in the definition of Sikh in the Act. The petitioners (Sehajdhari Sikh Party) alleged that there ought to have been some material or cogent reasons before the Modi led NDA Government to undertake this ill advised action at the behest of its political ally Shiromani Akali Dal and was a clear case of political expediency and appeasement. *Information is based on Civil Writ Petition filed in the Hon'ble Punjab and Haryana High Court by Sehajdhari Sikh Party versus Union of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The writ petition filed on 22/05/2017 by Sehajdhari Sikh Party against the Sikh Gurdwara (Amendment) Act, 2016. Information also based on extended conversations with Sehajdhari Sikh Party national chief Paramjeet Singh Ranu.*

123 After the passing of Sikh Gurdwara Amendment (2016) Act, a specific liberty was granted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India to the Sehajdhari Sikh Party to challenge the constitutional validity of the amendment Act 2016 while disposing off the SLP of the SGPC. Information provided by Sehajdhari Sikh Party president Paramjeet Singh Ranu. Mr. Ranu has been fighting a long and hard battle for the rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs in the court of law.

matters which have crucial implications for SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Gurdwara elections and Punjab politics.

Ignoring Sehajdharis and distorting the definition of ‘Sikh’ has divided the Sikhs into another sub-minority and large number of Sikhs has been thrown out of the mainstream of the Sikh religion. This issue of Sikh identity has significant implications for elections to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). It’s a critical identity crisis within the Sikh Community. The crux of the debate related to Sehajdhari Sikhs and the issue of their identity can be summed up in the words of Jaspal Singh, an eminent Sikh scholar. He says:

“It’s very unfortunate, that presently a debate over the issue of Sehajdharis is going on. In our opinion, this debate is unwanted and untimely. It is hard to understand that in present day sensitive scenario, why a question mark has been raised over Sehajdhari tradition and identity. Already, within and outside the country, tireless efforts have been made to divide the Sikh society, and we (Sikhs) are facing dire circumstances from that. Now another new issue (Sehajdhari issue) has come up. It seems as this is very much the part of the same conspiracy that has already damaged our (Sikh) identity. Walls have been built around us so that Sikhism is unable to flourish.”¹²⁴

*(English Translation of excerpt in Punjabi)*¹²⁵

A large section of the Sikh population consists of the non-baptized Sikhs, who are born in Sikh families and have no other religion except Sikhism, and believe in Guru Granth Sahib only. It is an established historical fact that all Khalsa Sikhs were Sahajdhari Sikhs at one point in their lives because no-one is born a ‘baptized Sikh’ (*Amritdhari Sikh*). Also, the definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ has no religious sanction as far as the fundamental tenets of the Sikh religion are concerned. This nomenclature (term ‘Sehajdhari’) was added to the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, under a particular set of circumstances which too are questionable. By severe attack on their identity and labelling non baptized Sikhs as “Patit” (apostate) or non-Sikhs shall create a wedge within the Sikh community worldwide.

124 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam Te Rajniti* (in Punjabi), Navyug Publishers, New Delhi, p.137.

125 As quoted by Dr. Jaspal Singh. The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here:

“ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਅੱਜਕਲ੍ਹ ਇਕ ਬਹੁਤ ਮੰਦਭਾਗੀ ਬਹਿਸ ਫਿੜੀ ਹੋਈ ਹੈ। ਸਾਡੀ ਰਾਇ ਵਿਚ ਇਹ ਬਹਿਸ ਬੇਲੋੜੀ ਤੇ ਬੇਵਕਤ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਸੁਆਲ ਸਾਡੇ ਜਿਹਨ ਚ ਨਹੀਂ ਉਤਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਕਿ ਅੱਜ ਦੇ ਅਤਿ-ਨਾਜ਼ੁਕ ਮਾਹੌਲ ਵਿਚ ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀ ਪਰੰਪਰਾ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਨ ਚਿੰਨ ਕਿਉਂ ਲਾਇਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ? ਪਹਿਲਾ ਹੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਮਾਜ ਨੂੰ ਦੇਸ਼-ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਵਿਚ ਅਲੱਗ-ਥਲੱਗ ਕਰਨ ਦੀਆਂ ਅਣਥੱਕ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ਾਂ ਹੋ ਚੁੱਕੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਭਿਆਨਕ ਨਤੀਜੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਭੁਗਤ ਰਹੇ ਹਾਂ। ਇਹ ਇਕ ਹੋਰ ਨਵਾਂ ਮਸਲਾ ਕਿਉਂ ਉਠ ਖੜ੍ਹਾ ਹੋਇਆ। ਇੰਝ ਨਹੀਂ ਲੱਗਦਾ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਵੀ ਉਸ ਚਲੀ ਆ ਰਹੀ ਸਾਜਿਸ਼ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹੈ ਜਿਸਨੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਹੀ ਸਾਡੇ ਅਕਸ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਫੀ ਵਿਗਾੜਿਆ ਹੈ, ਸਾਡੇ ਆਲੇ-ਦੁਆਲੇ ਦੀਵਾਰਾਂ ਖੜ੍ਹੀਆਂ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਤਾਂ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦਾ ਫੈਲਾਅ ਨਾ ਹੋ ਸਕੇ।” See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam Te Rajniti* (in Punjabi), Navyug Publishers, New Delhi, p.137.

Summing up, it can be argued that 2016 Amendment made in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act by Bharatiya Janata Party regime on the behalf of SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal has legally left Sehajdhari Sikhs without any religion. They are not Hindus and do not belong to any other religion, and legally they cannot claim to be ‘Sikhs’. According to the 2011 census of India, the population of Punjab was 2.4 crore of which Sikhs comprised about 60%. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) listed 5.5 million Keshdhari Sikh voters - a third of the Sikhs in Punjab – as ‘real Sikhs’. The rest of the Sikhs - above 70 lakh in Punjab alone and approximately 1 crore across the globe have lost their unique status and identity. The two rulings – the Gurleen Kaur case and the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act (2016) – have clearly established a sharp divide in the Sikh community ever since political and religious power got concentrated in the hands of the vested interest. The issue of exclusion of Sehajdhari Sikhs from the mainstream Sikhism forms very critical identity crisis within the Sikh Community, which have vital religious and political implications.¹²⁶

II

In a way, caste system is now regarded as the feature of Indian sub-continent. It seems that while determining the correspondence and separation among caste hierarchies, it is important to situate Brahmin and the practice of caste endogamy. The absence of Brahmin in the non-Hindu religious communities structured the caste hierarchy in distinct forms which were different from the Hindu caste hierarchy.¹²⁷ To understand the issue of distinct caste hierarchies, it is important to make a distinction between the ideal construction of caste hierarchy and the empirical reality.¹²⁸

Sikh faith had a significant liberating influence on the dalits (former untouchable castes), especially in Punjab. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus, the revolutionary concepts of ‘sangat’ and ‘langar’, *Kirat Karo, Vand Chhako, Naam Japo* (“do labour, eat by sharing and recite God’s name”), and establishment of the unique Khalsa order- all together aimed at emancipation and empowerment of the weaker sections of the society. The concepts and institutions of Sikhism aimed at establishing social equality by creating a community in which distinctions and discriminations based on caste, creed and status were absent.

126 Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016.

127 Surinder S. Jodhka (2015), *Caste in Contemporary India*, Routledge, New Delhi, pp. 2-5. 22-26

128 Ethne K. Marengo (1976), *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 20-32 and 130-133. For detailed information about practice of caste in Sikh society, see W.H. McLeod (1975), *The Evolution of the Sikh Community: Five Essays*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp. 84-97.

Sikhism out rightly condemns the institution of caste and any form of discrimination on the basis of birth, caste, race and creed. Every thought, idea and practice that gave birth to caste based discrimination in society was completely rejected by the Sikh Gurus. Rejection and condemnation of casteism and caste based discriminations is one of the most fundamental tenet and principle of Sikhism. In fact, it was one of the main reasons behind the origin and evolution of Sikh faith and ideology. This goal of Sikhism for fulfilment of equality was given final form and colour by the historic establishment of Khalsa Panth.¹²⁹

Rejection of Varnashrama and caste based social hierarchy by 20th century Singh Sabha leadership was the key factor in the process that asserted for a separate and distinct identity of Sikhs to underline their boundary demarcation from Hindus.¹³⁰ In view to improve their social and economic status, large number of people from untouchable castes converted to Sikh religion. However, there has been a wide gap between the teachings of Sikh Gurus and social practice within the Sikh community.¹³¹

Caste in Contemporary Sikh Society

From seventeenth century to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule¹³², low caste Sikhs played remarkable role in Sikh political struggles and religious movements. In the post Maharaja Ranjit Singh phase, Brahmanical values, rituals and practices resurfaced with caste and untouchability began to afflict the Sikh social and political life in such a way that there was danger of its re-absorption into Hinduism. The twentieth century socio-economic developments in Punjab and rise in the consciousness has enabled the Dalits to raise questions on the dominant historiographical praxis by attempting to recover the lost ground.¹³³ Caste has not only been an ideological reality, it has shaped land relations and

129 S. Grewal (2009), *The Sikhs – Ideology, Institutions, and Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 192 -198.

130 One of the most prominent ideologues of the Lahore Singh Sabha was Giani Ditt Singh. Giani Ditt Singh came from an untouchable caste and had become a baptised Sikh, changing his name from Ditt Ram to Ditt Singh.

131 Ethne K. Marengo (1974), *The Transformation of the Sikh Society*, Hi- Pi Press, Portland, pp. 20-26. Harish K. Puri (2003), "The Scheduled Castes in the Sikh Community- A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701

132 Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the founder of the Sikh Empire based in the Punjab region. He came to power in the early half of the 19th century, and his empire existed from 1799 to 1849. Popularly known as *Sher-e-Punjab*, or "Lion of Punjab", Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the Commander of the Sukerchakia Misl—one of 12 Sikh Misls in Punjab during the 18th century.

133 Some significant works comprehensively explain the phenomenon of Dalit resistance and assertion in Punjab. Few of these works are; Ronki Ram (2004), "Untouchability, Dalit consciousness, and the Ad Dharm Movement in Punjab", *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Volume 38, Issue 3, pp. 323-349. Ronki Ram (2008), "Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab (India)", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 4, November 2008, pp. 1341-1364.. Parween Swami (2003), "Growing Dalit Resistance" *Frontline*, Volume 20, Issue 25, December 2003,

conditioned entitlements and rights of various communities. Economically, Dalit population of Punjab remains the most marginalized section and has been victim to social and cultural exclusion too. Punjab has also been witness to active Dalit politics which can be located in the changing socio-economic and political environment of the region.¹³⁴

The religious demography of Punjab has always been very distinct from the country as a whole. Majority of its population (nearly 58 percent) identifies with Sikhism, a religion that ideologically and theologically decries the institution of caste.¹³⁵ However, caste based divisions, fragmentation and discriminations have been quite prominent in the region. Nearly one-fourth of Punjab's population has been treated as "out-caste" by the socially and economically dominant sections of the Punjabi society. Although, the institution of caste was entirely denounced by the Sikh Gurus, it still continues to exercise a fundamental influence on the social and political life of the Sikh community. Whereas the doctrine of the 'Sikh Panth' expressly condemns caste, a substantial majority of Sikhs observe certain significant features of caste in practice.¹³⁶

As per 2011 Census of India, Punjab has the highest percentage of scheduled caste population amongst all states of the Country. The scheduled caste population in Punjab is

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- available at <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2025/stories/20031219002304500.htm>, accessed on 09/07/2016. Karthik Venkatesh (2017), "The Various Strands of Dalit Assertion in Punjab", *The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy*, January 25, 2017, available at <https://www.thehinducentre.com/the-arena/current-issues/article9501894.ece>, accessed on 21/10/2017. Arvinder Singh (2014), "Deravad-An Off-shoot of Discontentment Among Dalit Sikhs in Punjab", *International Journal of Research*, Volume 01, Issue 01, February 2014, available at <http://internationaljournalofresearch.org/>, accessed on 21/10/2017.
- 134 Ronki Ram (2011), "Caste and Marginality in Punjab", in Ashutosh Kumar (ed.), *Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions within Regions*, Routledge India, New Delhi, pp. 387-390. Surinder Singh Jodhka, "Making Sense of Ravidasis: The Caste System in Punjab", *International South Asian Forum*, available at <http://www.insafbulletin.net/archives/604>, accessed on 17/09/2017.
- 135 The Government of India released the religion wise population data of Punjab and other states in August 2015. According to this data, the majority of population of Punjab belongs to Sikh religion. The percentage of Sikh population in Punjab is 57.69% of the total population of the state. Punjab is the only state in India having majority of population belonging to Sikh community. According to figures given by Census of India 2011, at national level, Sikh population is 20833116 (2.08 Crore) which forms 1.7% of the total population of India. The next major religion in Punjab is Hindu religion, which is followed by the 38.49% of the total population. The Sikh and Hindu community forms more than 96% of the total population of State. See, "Scheduled Caste Sub Plan 2017-18", published by *Government of Punjab, Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes & Minorities*, available at <http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/PDF/SCSP/Archives/SCSP-2017-18-Eng.pdf>. Relevant information also available at <http://www.punjabdata.com/Population-of-Punjab.aspx>.
- 136 Surinder S. Jodhka (2004), "Sikhism and the caste question: Dalits and their politics in contemporary Punjab", *Contributions to the Indian Sociology*, Volume: 38 Issue: 1-2, February 1, 2004, pp. 165-188. Harish K. Puri (2003), "Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701. Also see, Surinder Singh Jodhka (2014), "Changing Manifestations of Caste in the Sikh Panth", in Pashaura Singh and Louis E. Fenech (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, published by Oxford University Press, UK, pp. 584-588

about 88.60 lakh which is 31.94% of the total population of the state.¹³⁷ Punjab also accounts for 2.3% of the total population and 4.3% scheduled caste population of India.¹³⁸ Another interesting feature of the Dalit population of the Punjab is that the concentration of scheduled castes is much higher in some districts of the State. In the prosperous Doaba sub-region of Punjab, dalit population is over 35 percent, which is much larger than the state average.¹³⁹ The scheduled caste population of Punjab is predominantly rural. As per the figures of 2011 Census of India, the majority of the Dalit population of Punjab (73.33%) live in the rural areas¹⁴⁰ whereas 26.67% dalit population resides in urban areas of Punjab.¹⁴¹

Although Sikhism has no place for caste and emphasizes on the concept of social equality and brotherhood irrespective of caste, creed , race and status ; the census conducted between 1881 and 1931- recorded over 25 castes within the Sikh community living in Punjab.¹⁴² These castes, included: *jats, ramdasis, mazhabis, khatris, aroras, ramgarhias, ahluwalias, bhatras, sainis, labanas, lohars, kambohs, chhimbas, nais, jheers, etc.*¹⁴³ Considering the caste based hierarchy existing within the Sikh community, there can be

137 “Half of India’s dalit population lives in 4 states”, *The Times of India*, May 02, 2013, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Half-of-Indias-dalit-population-lives-in-4-states/articleshow/19827757.cms>. Also see, “SCs and STs form 25% population, Census 2011 data”, *The Tribune*, May 01, 2013, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/scs-sts-form-25--of-population-says-census-2011-data/1109988/>, accessed on 24/06/2015.

138 Data according to 2011 Census of India. See Scheduled Caste Sub Plan 2017-18 published by *Government of Punjab, Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes & Minorities*, available at <http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/PDF/SCSP/Archives/SCSP-2017-18-Eng.pdf>. Also see “Who got quota in jobs? Badal Govt. has no idea”, *The Times of India*, June 22, 2016, accessed on 29/10/2017.

139 The distribution of SC population among the districts of the Punjab state indicates that percentage of SC persons is high in the districts of Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar (42.51%), Sri Muktsar Sahib (42.31%), Ferozpur (42.17%), Jalandhar (38.95%), Faridkot (38.92%), Moga (36.50%), Hoshiarpur (35.14%), Kapurthala (33.94%), Tarn Taran (33.71%), Mansa (33.63%), Bathinda (32.44%), Barnala (32.24%) and Fatehgarh Sahib (32.07%). These are figures as per 2011 India Census. For concerned information, see official website of Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, Punjab. Data available at <http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/SCPopulation.html>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

140 Over 70 per cent of the people belonging to scheduled castes live in the rural areas of Punjab. Punjab’s villages are therefore, mostly populated by Sikhs and dalit sections. Among Sikhs, Jats own most of the agricultural land. See, Reeta Sharma (2003), “Flames of Caste”, *The Tribune*, June 21, 2003, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030621/windows/main1.htm>, accessed on 07/06/2016.

141 Figures as per 2011 Census of India .For concerned information see official website of Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, Punjab. Data available at <http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/SCPopulation.html>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

142 Archana B. Verma (2002), *The Making of Little Punjab in Canada: Patterns of Immigration*, Sage Publications India, New Delhi, p.33. Caste structure in early Sikh society has been comprehensively explained in Ethne K. Marengo (1976), *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, pp.133-145, 151-164.

143 Ronki Ram (2007), “Burden of Past and Vision of Equality: Political Sociology of Social Exclusion and Jat-Dalit Conflicts in Punjab”, *Ambedkar Times*, September 1, 2007, available at <http://www.ambedkartimes.com/page6.html>, accessed on 25/09/2016 . Also see, Shayamala Bhatia (1987), *Social Change and Politics in Punjab, 1898-1910*, ENKAY Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 166-168

various classifications that can be made on the basis of the castes. Jatt Sikhs who were actually land-tillers, have turned out to be the strongest community among Sikhs by virtue of its economic resources and political dominance.¹⁴⁴

Then, there are Mazhabi Sikhs and Ramdasias, the two Dalit castes among the Sikhs which have been subject to various forms of social and religious discriminations. Among various castes within the Sikh community, Mazhabi Sikhs still remain the most deprived section both economically and socially.¹⁴⁵ The Dalit caste population within the Sikh community has been forced to live in separate settlements¹⁴⁶, and the harsh upper caste attitude has even forced the Dalit sections to establish separate Gurdwaras and cremation grounds.¹⁴⁷ Numerous cases of resistance, violence and conflict over the caste based Gurdwaras have been reported among the Sikh community from villages of Punjab during last few years. Construction of separate Gurdwaras by specific caste groups has been a symbol of the assertion of the Dalit communities, which is also the cause of resentment among the Jat Sikhs.¹⁴⁸

There is a widespread belief – and that belief has been consistently and continuously claimed to be true – is that Sikhism does not preach caste inequality. Sikh Gurus altered the brahmnical principle that knowledge is acquired and produced only by priestly class. There does not exist any priestly class in Sikhism that is authorized to provide religious and spiritual knowledge. Sikh religion and its philosophy established direct relationship between Man and God. Kahn Singh Nabha and Bhai Vir Singh in the 19th century, and the SGPC

144 Jatt Sikhs enjoy the monopoly of being on top most among all castes in Sikhs. The most prominent leaders in the state belong to this community and the top level state executive positions (ministries) also have been dominated by Jatt Sikhs. More than 80% of the agricultural land of Punjab is owned by the Jatt Sikhs, while large majority of the low caste Sikhs have no land. Power in Punjab revolves around the axle of land. Much of the available agricultural land (more than 80 per cent) is owned by the Jatt Sikhs, and a very large majority of the scheduled castes. Over 95 percent SC population of Punjab is landless. See, Paramjit Singh Judge (2002) "Religion, Caste, and Communalism in Punjab", *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 51, No. 2, September 2002, pp. 89-190. Also see, Daljinder Singh Johal (1997), "Society in Punjabi Literature, 1750-1850" in Indu Banga (ed.) *Five Punjabi Centuries*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp.404-410. Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.42, No.40, October 6-12, 2007, pp. 4066 -67

145 Harish K. Puri (2003), "The Scheduled Castes in the Sikh Community - A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701

146 In most of the villages of Punjab, Dalit sections have been forced to live in separate settlements, contemptuously called *thhattis* or *chamarhrees*, located on the western side and away from the main body of the villages. See, Ronki Ram (2011), "Caste and Marginality in Punjab", in Ashutosh Kumar (ed.), *Rethinking State Politics in India: Regions within Regions*, published by Routledge India, New Delhi, pp. 386-390

147 Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.42, No.40, October 6-12, 2007, pp. 4066 -67.

148 Ronki Ram (2004), "Untouchability in India with a Difference : Ad Dharm, Dalit Assertion and Caste Conflicts in Punjab", *Asian Survey*, XLIV (6), pp. 895-912

after independence have claimed that there is no caste among the Sikhs.¹⁴⁹

The caste question in the Sikh community has been both muted and loud - an apparent paradox prevalent as a result of the disjunction between claim and empirical reality. One may argue that such paradoxes could be found among all religions and religious communities. Unlike in Hinduism where certain scriptural sources provided ideological legitimacy to the idea of caste hierarchy, it had no place in Sikhism. However, empirically, the caste identities continue to be important in contemporary Punjab, and among followers of the Sikh faith.¹⁵⁰

Another important dimension of the distinctive attribute caste within Punjab concerns traditional purity and pollution regulations and restrictions.¹⁵¹ While caste is a significant feature of Punjabi society, caste identities themselves undergo change, never having functioned as pure ideological systems.¹⁵² In the case of Sikhs, the ideological basis of caste was eliminated, but the caste system continued. At the same time the caste hierarchy among the Sikhs could not be understood in the light of *Varna* scheme, because Sikhism did not share the justification of caste system with Hinduism.¹⁵³

The Jatt Sikhs - Shudra caste in the light of the Hindu tradition – became the upper caste within the Sikh community. However, the Jatts were not the only one who improved their caste status. Other castes such as Tarkhans, Kalals, etc. were also able to remove the

149 In his masterpiece work titled “Ham Hindu Nahin”, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha very convincingly explains that there is no caste discrimination in Sikhism and Sikh philosophy regards every human being as equal. Equality and absence of caste based social hierarchy was one of the main explanation on the basis of which Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha claimed and declared Sikh religion and identity as entirely separate and independent from Hinduism. See, Kahan Singh Nabha (1897), *Hum Hindu Nahin* (in Punjabi), Bhasha Vibhag Punjab, Patiala.

150 Surinder S. Jodhka (2010), “Sikhs Today: Development, Disparity and Difference”, in Gurpreet Mahajan & Surinder S. Jodhka (eds.), *Religion, Community and Development – Changing Contours of Politics and Policy in India*, published by Routledge, New Delhi, pp. 184-193.

151 Joyce Pettigrew has noted that contrary to historical caste regulations, these, regulations do not generally prohibit various caste groups such as the Jats, Khatris, and Aroras from eating together. However, when the ‘untouchability factor’ is brought to the fore, namely, when relations between Mazhabis or Sikhs from the Dalit or untouchable caste and the dominant caste group, Jats, are examined, the latter refrain from visiting, eating, and intermarrying with the Dalits. Thus, when it comes to untouchable castes, social relationships continue to be defined ‘through the idiom of ritual purity and avoidance behaviour’. See, Joyce Pettigrew (1975), *Robber Noblemen (A Study of the Political System of the Sikh Jats)*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, pp.43-45.

152 Paramjit Singh Judge (2002), “*Religion, Case and Communalism in Punjab*”, *Sociological Bulletin*, 51(2), pp. 175-194, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0038022920020202?journalCode=soba>, accessed on 09/10/2015.

153 Sewa Singh Kalsi (1992), *The Evolution of a Sikh Community in Britain: Religious and Social change among the Sikhs of Leeds and Bradford*, published by Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, UK, pp. 16-256, 39-44. Also see, Kharak Singh (1996), *Current Thoughts on Sikhism*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp. 228-235

low caste stigma and emerged as the major caste groups within the religious community.¹⁵⁴ Such a change could not take place among the low untouchable castes, particularly the Mazhabi Sikhs.¹⁵⁵ Among the various low castes, which were later on included in the schedule of the list of depressed castes of the Indian Constitution, were Mazhabi¹⁵⁶ and Ramdasia Sikhs. The Mazhabi Sikhs and the Balmikis with overwhelming majority are more prominent than other categories which were included in the list of scheduled castes. Mazhabi Sikhs with nearly 31 percent of scheduled caste population of Punjab constitute the single largest group of the Dalit population in the State.¹⁵⁷

Association with the Army gave a boost to the Mazhabi's sense of dignity, marking them out in distinction to the other untouchable castes. It may be noted that the valiant Mazhabi image was not solely sustained by their recruitment to the British army.¹⁵⁸ It was the participation of Mazhabis in Akali movement in the second and third decades of 20th century that reinforced their identity and image. The struggle for better status among the lower castes has taken many routes one of which is religious conversion. The conversion to Sikhism has created a distinct caste of Mazhabis who have distinguished themselves from their Hindu Balmiki counterparts.¹⁵⁹

Numerous recent sociological and empirical studies highlight the presence of caste and caste based discriminations within the Sikh community. W.H. McLeod, who remained

154 Ethne K. Marengo (1976), *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, pp.133-145, 151-164.

155 The Mazhabis are the most numerous among scheduled caste groups in Punjab according to the census of 2011. Their population in 2001 was recorded at just a little over 22 lakhs. They constituted some 31 per cent of the total SC population of the state. They are the ones with the lowest literacy rate (42.3 per cent) among the SCs in Punjab. More than half (55.2 per cent) of the mazhabis work as agricultural labourers. As of 2011, there were 2,633,921 Mazhabis in the Indian state of Punjab, of whom 2,562,761 declared themselves to be Sikh and 71,000 as Hindu. Obviously, Sikhism plays an important role in their lives. *Figures as per 2011 Government of India Census*. See, "SC-14 Scheduled Caste Population By Religious Community (States/UTs) – Punjab" (XLS, *The Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India*, retrieved 07/06/2017). Also see, Harish K. Puri (2003), "A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, Issue No. 26, pp. 2693-2701.

156 Term 'Mazhabi' literally means 'religious' or 'faithful'. The Mazhabis are concentrated in the major pockets of Punjab, particularly Amritsar, Bathinda, Mansa, and Ferozpur, . On the other hand , the Balmikis are concentrated in the Doaba region.

157 Surinder S. Jodhka (2015), *Caste in Contemporary India*. Routledge, New Delhi, pp . 84-88.

158 Jaspal Singh (2016), "Mazhabi Sikhs in the British Army in Colonial Punjab 1849-1947", *The Criterion: An International Journal In English*, Volume 7, Issue 4, August 2016, available at <http://www.the-criterion.com/V7/n4/008.pdf>, accessed on 05/11/2017. Karam Singh Historian (2005) , "Ranghrete Jan Mazhbi Singh" in Hira Singh Dard (ed.), *Karam Singh Historian di Itihasak Khoj (Historical Research by Karam Singh Historian) part 3*, published by Sikh Itihaas Research Board (SGPC), Amritsar, pp. 5-9.

159 Ethne K. Marengo (1976), *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, pp 298-302. Harish K. Puri (2003), "Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701

engaged in the study of Sikh religion for nearly half a century, also admitted such a tendency. In the context, McLeod says:

***“To Understand Sikh history and religion adequately, one must first grasp the true nature of Sikh society. It is here that caste becomes significant. To understand the Sikh Society, one must comprehend the nature of caste as it affects the Panth. An understanding of the future development of the Sikh religion makes an understanding of the caste as practised by Sikhs absolutely imperative. Social scientists already recognize this, although some of their books or articles may skate round it or omit all mention completely. For those who of us are historians, it is likewise imperative. Without it our understanding of both the Panth and its religion must inevitably be flawed.”*¹⁶⁰**

The empirical reality is that among the non-Hindu religious communities, Sikhs are covered under the constitutional provision according to which certain castes among them are identified as scheduled castes. All such castes are covered under the reservation policy. So far, despite the anti-caste rhetoric, neither Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) nor any Sikh leaders have demanded the end of reservation policy for the scheduled caste Sikhs. The existence of castes and caste based hierarchy among the Sikhs has never been an issue of contestation among the scholars, intellectuals and academia. Various studies on castes among the Sikhs have shown that caste system exists among the Sikhs, and they are divided and fragmented along caste lines.¹⁶¹

In its true ideological and egalitarian spirit, Sikhism integrates the lowliest of the low, the dalits, into its fold.¹⁶² But caste based hierarchy and discrimination in Sikh rituals and practices has been the biggest paradox of Sikh religion which theoretically has been characterized as emancipatory and sociologically as revolutionary.¹⁶³ Sikh institutions and main political parties have remained under the control of economically dominant Jatt

160 W.H. McLeod (2007), “Sikhs and Caste”, in Tony Ballantyne (ed.), *Textures of the Sikh Past: New Historical Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.106

161 M.S. Dhami (1988), “Caste, Class and Politics in Rural Punjab : A Study of Two Villages in Sangrur District”, in Paul Wallace (ed.), *Political Dynamics and Crisis in Punjab*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 219-224. Also see, Neeru Sharma (2012), “Caste in Punjab: Political Marginalization and Cultural Assertion of Scheduled Castes in Punjab”, *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Volume 19, No.1, Spring 2012, pp. 27-43,, available at http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.gisp.d7_sp/files/sitefiles/journals/volume19/no1/5-GhumanSikhCommunity_19_1.pdf, accessed on 14/06/2016.

162 Surjit Hans (1986), *Sikh Kee Karan? Sikh Dharam da Laukik Virsaa* (What Sikhs ought to do? Secular Tradition of Sikh Religion) (in Punjabi), Balraj Sahni Yadgar Publication, Amritsar, pp.5-8

163 For a scholarly study from this angle, see, Gurnam Singh (2006), “Sikhism's Emancipatory Discourses: Some Critical Perspectives”, *Sikh Formations*, 2:2, Dec 2006, pp. 135-151. Also see, S. Lourduathan's “Khalsa and its Emancipatory Logic”, a paper presented at Khalsa Tricentenary Seminar held at Madurai Kamaraj University in March 1999, available at <http://sikhpectrum.com/072002/khalsa.htm> , accessed on 26/09/2016.

Sikhs.¹⁶⁴ A comprehensive understanding of the caste social hierarchy in contemporary Sikh society points towards competing pattern of social hierarchies, parallel to that existing in Hindu society. Such understanding requires deeper insight into economic factors and political dynamics that has been further sharpening the caste based divisions.¹⁶⁵

SGPC and Caste Factor

The issue of caste within Sikh society has long distressed and bewildered both scholars and students of Sikh studies in terms of its seeming inherent nature and relative complexity among members of the Sikh community. Caste is one area that is highly perplexing and emotionally challenging for students of Sikh origin living in and outside India. On one hand, they are taught to take immense pride in the Sikh philosophy and unique contributions of the Sikh Gurus in their rejection of caste within the wider religious and cultural milieu of India. On the other hand, in realistic and practical sense, they are confronted with evil effects of caste system and caste based discriminations at various stages and various aspects of life. They come across the very real ramifications of a fairly rigid caste ideology when it comes to their parents or even their own choosing of a life partner. Many are also aware that significant numbers of Sikh Gurdwaras exist today are caste-based in terms of their constituency and management, and that conflicts have emerged within Gurdwaras between different caste groups striving for control and dominance over the management committees.¹⁶⁶

(i) Caste based Reservation within SGPC

Despite the absence of casteism both in the teachings of Sikh Gurus and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) drafted Sikh code of conduct (Rehat Maryada), the reality remains that SGPC has reserved constituencies for scheduled castes and women candidates for its membership. The provision regarding the reservation of seats in SGPC for

164 Jagjit Singh (1981), *The Sikh Revolution: A Perspective View*, Bahri Publications, Delhi. Also see, Attar Singh (1994), "Secularism and Sikhism", in Dharam Singh (ed.), *Sikhism and Secularism – Essays in Honour of Professor Harbans Singh*, Harman Publishing House, New Delhi, pp. 88-90.

165 Reeta Sharma (2003), "Flames of Caste", *The Tribune*, June 21, 2003, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030621/windows/main1.htm>, accessed on 07/06/2016. Also see, Ranjit Singh Ghuman (2012), "The Sikh Community in Indian Punjab: Some Socio-Economic Challenges", *Journal of Punjab Studies*, Volume 19, No.1, Spring 2012, pp. 87-98, available at http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.gisp.d7_sp/files/sitefiles/journals/volume19/no1/5-GhumanSikhCommunity_19_1.pdf, accessed on 12/06/2016.

166 Harish K. Puri (2003), "Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701. Reeta Sharma (2003), "Flames of Caste", *The Tribune*, June 21, 2003, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030621/windows/main1.htm>, accessed on 07/06/2016. Surinder Jodhka (2002), "Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(19), January 2002, pp. 1813-1823.

scheduled castes was not made in the original Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925. The Act ensured that the Board (SGPC) will include 12 members representing Mazhabi Sikhs, Ramdasia Sikhs and Kabir Panthi Sikhs.¹⁶⁷ It was in 1953 that an amendment to the 1925 Sikh Gurdwara Act allowed the reservation of 20 out of 140 seats in the SGPC for the members of the Sikh scheduled castes.¹⁶⁸ At present, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has a total of 190 members, out of which 170 are elected, 15 are nominated members, and the remaining six “Head Ministers” (Jathedars) of the five Takhts and Head Granthi of the Golden Temple. **Total 170 members are elected from 120 constituencies, including 50 reserved constituencies. Out of 50 reserved constituencies, 20 are reserved for scheduled caste members of Sikh community and 30 for Sikh women. Out of 30 seats reserved for Sikh women to be elected, 5 of them must belong to scheduled castes.**¹⁶⁹ All reserved constituencies are double constituencies electing one female or scheduled caste candidate along with a male or from a general category member.¹⁷⁰

Apart from the caste based reservation provisions, **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) adopted a convention that the Junior Vice-President in the Executive Committee of the SGPC would be chosen from Scheduled Caste Sikh members.** In the case of notified Gurdwaras, not managed directly by the SGPC, it was provided that in the 5-member local Gurdwara management committees, one member in each case will be chosen from the Scheduled Caste Sikhs.¹⁷¹

Some scholars of Sikh studies are of the view that the scheduled caste reservation clause was included in the Sikh Gurdwara Act in 1953 to prevent Dalit Sikhs from converting to Hinduism since scheduled caste Hindus were enjoying benefits from

167 As per the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, the provincial Government in consultation with the Board (SGPC) were empowered to select 12 constituencies among the constituencies specified in Schedule IV of the Act. The selected constituencies were to be plural constituencies with each constituency returning two members, among whom one would be Mazhabi Sikh, Ramdasia Sikh or Kabir Panthi Sikh and other would be a Sikh other than aforementioned. See, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, p.209.

168 Harish K.Puri (2003), “Scheduled Castes in Sikh Community: A Historical Perspective”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701.

169 Sub clause 2 of Clause 44 of Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 - says that the State government shall from time to time, and after such consultation with the board or as it considers proper, select 20 plural constituencies, each returning two members of whom one shall be a Sikh belonging to any of the Scheduled Castes notified as such under Article 341 of the Constitution and the other shall be a Sikh who does not belong to any of of the Scheduled Castes . See, *Section 43 and 44 of Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925*. Also see, Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.390-392

170 *ibid.*

171 Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions – Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 176, 182, 188.

Government under caste reservation policy. In this context, Kashmir Singh¹⁷², a learned Sikh scholar who has done extensive study on legal aspects of Sikh religious affairs, says: ***“In 1950s about one lakh Sikhs had embraced Hinduism in Uttar Pradesh alone following which a movement was initiated under the aegis of Master Tara Singh for reservation to scheduled caste Sikhs.”***¹⁷³ Kashmir Singh, however, argues that: : ***“Reservation for scheduled caste Sikhs or Hindus was violation of secular principle which was basic structure of the Constitution.”***¹⁷⁴ Suggesting that reservation should be on economic criteria only and not based on religion, he emphasizes : ***“The reservation clause should be done away with in the Act but should be related with the national polity as merely deleting the clause from the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925 could again pose threat of mass conversions of Sikhs merely for economic benefits.”***¹⁷⁵

No sincere efforts have been made to do away with the reservation clause from Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) even as Sikh intellectuals have made numerous calls for its amendment. Few Sikh scholars blame Sikh politicians for not raising their voice against removal of the reservation clause from the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, as their career thrives on caste-based politics. The institution of caste and caste based social hierarchy plays crucial role in electoral process and functioning of largest representative body of Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

(ii) Caste Coloumn in SGPC Voter Form

This study brings to light that Voter Forms published for SGPC elections have a column for specifying whether a person belongs to any scheduled caste. Top Sikh religious body Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) asked Sikhs not to mention their castes or sub-castes while filling up the Census Form for 2011 Census of India. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) chief Avtar Singh Makkar appealed to the Sikh community to abstain from mentioning their caste in the Government of India’s Census survey 2011. The then SGPC president Mr. Makkar claimed that *“caste has no place in*

172 Prof. Kashmir Singh retired as a Senior Professor in the faculty of Law, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. He specializes on law of religious institutions and has written extensively on Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925.

173 See, “Quota has no place in SGPC Poll’, *The Times of India*, December 10, 2003, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Quota-has-no-place-in-SGPC-poll/articleshow/349083.cms>, accessed on 21/06/2106.

174 *ibid.*

175 “Quota has no place in SGPC poll’, *Times of India*, December 10, 2003, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Quota-has-no-place-in-SGPC-poll/articleshow/349083.cms>, accessed on 06/07/2016

*Sikhism and the community members should not report their caste to the Census teams.*¹⁷⁶ SGPC President also affirmed that Sikhism rejects caste system and if Sikhs mention their caste for Government records, *"they would be violating the basic tenets of their religion"*.¹⁷⁷ The SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar seemed to be in doubt over backward class Sikhs. Condemning the Union Government for adding the caste column on the census form, he said: *"Even in Punjab, Sikhs should desist from identifying themselves according to their castes, particularly those who belong to the backward classes."*¹⁷⁸ Many other radical Sikh organizations like Dal Khalsa and Akali Dal (Mann) have also asked community members not to mention their caste identities in the Census Form.¹⁷⁹

The Voter Form published by the Gurdwara Election Commission says at the end that a Voter From scheduled castes should specifically mention and declare - whether he/she is a scheduled caste Sikh as prescribed by Article 341 of the Indian Constitution. While according to clauses 9 and 10 of Section 2 of Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925: *"Sikh is one who faithfully believes in one immortal God, 10 gurus from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Granth Sahib and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion or to any personal Guru"*,¹⁸⁰ the grave error lies in the omission of a qualifying condition in the SGPC Voter Form.

On the concerned issue of separate caste coloumn in SGPC voter form, late Manjit Singh Calcutta, former SGPC Secretary, said: *"Any classification or categorization on the basis of caste is taboo in the Sikh Panth. The rights and interests of the backward and weaker sections of society are fully protected under the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwara Act."*¹⁸¹ Known Sikh leader Manjit Singh Calcutta firmly opposed the caste reservation policy and caste based functioning of the largest representative body of the Sikhs, the

176 "No caste in Census: SGPC chief to Sikhs", *The Indian Express*, May 20, 2010, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/no-caste-in-census-sgpc-chief-to-sikhs/621135/>, accessed on 13/07/2016. Also see, "Caste, Census & Avtar Singh Makkar", March 31, 2011, available at <http://punjabtodayweekly.blogspot.in/2011/03/caste-census-avtar-singh-makkar.html>, accessed on 13/07/2016

177 ibid

178 "Don't mention caste in census: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee", May 19, 2010, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-don-t-mention-caste-in-census-shiromani-gurdwara-prabandhak-committee-1384776>, accessed on 21/07/2016.

179 Based on information collected during discussions with members of Dal Khalsa, Akali Dal (Mann), United Akali Dal (UAD), etc. Also see, "Don't Mention Caste in Census: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee", May 19, 2010, available at <https://www.sikhphilosophy.net/threads/dont-mention-caste-in-census-shiromani-gurdwara-prabandhak-committee.30483/>, accessed on 21/07/2-16.

180 See, Clause 9 & 10, Section 2 of Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925

181 The statement was recorded during in discussion on the concerned issue with former SGPC Secretary, late S. Manjit Singh Calcutta.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. In this context, former SGPC Secretary late Manjit Singh Calcutta stated:

“The SGPC voter form has separate declaration from the Scheduled Caste and OBC voters regarding their caste. This is totally against the teachings of Sikh Guru Sahibs and principles of Sikhi (Sikh ideology). The SGPC voter form requiring a Sikh to mention his caste ideology, therefore, should be withdrawn immediately.”¹⁸²

Thus, it was found that on one hand, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) exhorted Sikhs not to mention their caste during the Government of India Census of 2011 on the grounds that it was against the teachings of Sikh Gurus, Sikh ideology and principles; but on the other hand SGPC voter form itself had a separate caste column which requires the Sikh voter to declare his/her caste. It is extremely hard to understand that if SGPC so firmly and frequently states that mentioning caste name, and thus recognizing and practising caste based hierarchy and discrimination is against the Sikh philosophy and principles, then what is the purpose and objective of having a separate caste declaration column in the voter form. This study on role of SGPC in context to caste factor in Sikh community and issue of Sikh identity highlights and documents dubious standards and significant differences in ideology and praxis (in context to caste) of the pioneer Sikh religious institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

(iii) Caste factor in SGPC Leadership

Avtar Singh Maker, the 39th President of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), was born into a Arora Sikh family. A retired Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) officer who belongs to Ludhiana, was a senior vice president of the SGPC before being appointed as SGPC President.¹⁸³ Although he publically dropped his surname ‘Makkar’ in year 2005, yet majority of the people from religious and political circles know and recognize him with his surname. Avtar Singh Makkar made very feeble

182 The statement was recorded during my discussion with late S. Manjit Singh Calcutta, former SGPC Secretary. The discussion took place to explore and understand the logic and rationale behind caste based reservation in SGPC management and its functioning on caste lines. Being a former Akali leader and having served in SGPC as core member for long time, Manjit Singh Calcutta shared very useful experiences, insights and perspectives.

183 Information based on discussion with core SGPC members.

183 Former SGPC President, Avtar Singh Makkar,, was elected as an SGPC member during the elections for the first time from Ludhiana (West). He lost Punjab Assembly election 2002 to Congress candidate, Harnam Dass Johar with more than 13,000 votes. He was elected member of SGPC in 2005 and after that he was elected SGPC president. Avtar Singh Makkar is known as the “yes-man” of Mr. Badal, See “Makkar is SGPC chief- Bhaur back as General Secy”, *The Tribune* (online edition), November 24, 2005, available at "<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20051124/main2.htm>"<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2005/20051124/main2.htm>, accessed on 07/07/2016.

and completely fruitless attempt to request the media not to suffix his sub-caste ‘Makkar’ with his name after he became the SGPC president. The surname still sticks to him.¹⁸⁴

After the implementation of the Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925, no SGPC President had ever used his caste identity or surname with his name. All the previous presidents of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) commonly used the name of their village as suffix with their names,¹⁸⁵ while many of them would not use any suffix at all. They included Sunder Singh Majithia, Baba Kharak Singh, Shree Bahadur Mehtab Singh, Master Tara Singh, Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke, Gopal Singh Qaumi, Jathedar Channan Singh Urara, Pritam Singh Khuranj, Isher Singh Majhail, Gyan Singh Rarewala, Bawa Harkrishan Singh, Prem Singh Lalpura, Kirpal Singh Chak Sherewala, Sant Channan Singh, Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Kabul Singh, Baldev Singh Sibia, Bibi Jagir Kaur Begowal, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Kirpal Singh Badungar and Alwinderpal Singh Pakhoke.¹⁸⁶

Former SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar has a valid point of view when he says that caste has no place in Sikhism and that Sikh ideology rejects the caste system and caste based social hierarchy. Mr. Makkar was quoted as saying that if Sikhs mention their caste for Government records, “*they would be violating the basic tenets of their religion.*”¹⁸⁷ But in total contradiction, Avtar Singh Makkar, former SGPC president himself happily used to issue the statements on letterheads that pronounced his name as “Makkar”. Had he not used his caste surname, a practice which has wrongly emerged as a strong indicator of social

184 See “Caste, Census & Avtar Singh Makkar”, *Punjab Today*, March 13, 2011, available at spot.in/2011/03/caste-census-avtar-makkar.html <http://punjabtodayweekly.blogspot.in/2011/03/caste-census-avtar-singh-makkar.html>, See also “Avtar Singh Makkar Drops Surname”, November 28, 2005 *The Sikh Times*, available at Yperlink "http://www.sikh-times.com/news_112805a.html" http://www.sikh-times.com/news_112805a.html, accessed on 13/09/2016.

185 In the past, people only used “Singh” or “Kaur” after their first name. Traditionally, popular Gursikhs have used the name of their villages or towns with their name. Popular politicians have also used their villages or towns with their names e.g. Parkash Singh Badal, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Harchand Singh Longowal, Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Manjit Singh Calcutta, Partap Singh Kairon, etc. Historically too Sikhs have used their villages and towns with their names e.g. Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Sunder Singh Majithia, Bhai Mohan Singh Nagoke, Gurcharan Singh Tohra, etc.

186 Information collected from officials/members of SGPC at SGPC Headquarters – Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar. Relevant information about SGPC presidents also available at official website of SGPC, i.e www.sgpc.net.

187 Nischay Pal (2011), “Caste, Census & Avtar Singh Makkar”, *Punjab Today*, March 13, 2011, available at <http://punjabtodayweekly.blogspot.com/2011/03/caste-census-avtar-singh-makkar.html>, accessed on 15/09/2016. Also see, “Don't Mention Caste in Census: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee”, May 19, 2010, available at <https://www.sikhphilosophy.net/threads/dont-mention-caste-in-census-shiromani-gurdwara-prabandhak-committee.30483/>, accessed on 21/07/2016.

status of a man in Sikh community, he would have been more worthy of the highest seat in Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).¹⁸⁸

Akal Takht Sahib's Hukamnama (edict) on Caste Surnames

It is very pertinent to mention here that the Akal Takht Sahib which is universally recognized as supreme religious-political seat or the highest temporal authority of the Sikh Panth, on April 28, 1985, directed the Sikhs to not add caste or descent to their names. The historical landmark 'Hukamnama' (edict) from Akal Takht Sahib read as under :

“ ਕੋਈ ਸਿੰਘ ਜਾ ਸਿੰਘਣੀ ਆਪਣੇ ਨਾਮ ਨਾਲ ਜਾਤ, ਗੋਤ ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਨਾ ਕਰੇ।
ਜਾਤ, ਗੋਤ ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਕਰਨੀ ਮਨਮਤ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਉਲਟ ਹੈ। ”

This is translated as:

“No Sikh (male or female) should use caste or surname with his/her name. The use of caste or surname is ‘Manmat’¹⁸⁹ against the principles as established by Sikh Guru Sahibs.”

(Hukamnama Akal Takht Sahib)¹⁹⁰

As per this historic landmark edict there is crystal clear directive from the Akal Takht Sahib, the highest seat of Sikh religious and temporal authority, which prohibits the Sikhs from using the surnames and denoting their caste identities. This landmark 'Hukamnama' (edict) from Akal Takht Sahib is in total accordance with Sikh philosophy and teachings of the Sikh Gurus. However, it is a fact that in contemporary Sikh society, large number of Sikhs uses their caste surnames, thus disobeying and disrespecting the orders from the Akal Takht Sahib. Such un-Sikh practise and trend is very much evident among the members of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) too.

Mushrooming of Caste based Gurdwaras

Caste-based Gurdwaras have been mushrooming both in the rural and urban areas of Punjab. This study observed that in Punjab, especially in villages separate Gurdwaras for Mazhabi and Jatt Sikhs have come up.¹⁹¹ Interestingly, these caste-based Gurdwaras follow

188 SGPC chiefs normally affixed names of their villages as suffix while many of them would not use any suffix at all. They included Sunder Singh Majithia, Baba Kharak Singh, Bahadur Mehtab Singh, Master Tara Singh, Jathedar Mohan Singh Nagoke, Gopal Singh Qaumi, Jathedar Channan Singh Urara, Pritam Singh Khuranj, Isher Singh Majhail, Gyan Singh Rarewala, Bawa Harkrishan Singh, Prem Singh Lalpura, Kirpal Singh Chak Sherewala, Sant Channan Singh, Jathedar Gurcharan Singh Tohra, Kabul Singh, Baldev Singh Sibia, Bibi Jagir Kaur , Jagdev Singh Talwandi, Kirpal Singh Badungar , etc.

189 Manmat' means something that is against 'Gurbani' or against what have been taught by the Sikh Guru Sahibs and Sikh sacred scriptures.

190 *Hukamnama* (edict) delivered from Akal Takht Sahib on April 24, 1985. Giani Kirpal Singh was the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib at that time. For the concerned *Hukamnama* (edict), see, Roop Singh (2012), *Hukamname- Aadesh Sandesh Sri Akal Takht Sahib (1606 A.D. – December 2011 A.D.)* , (in Punjabi), Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, p.

191 In present-day Punjab, Sikhs constituted nearly 58 per cent of the population and Hindus a little over 38 per cent. The Sikh share in the rural population is higher; about 72 per cent. As per Census 2011, the

all traditional Sikh rituals and worship like other Gurdwaras that are controlled by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and celebrates almost all main Sikh festivals.¹⁹²

Surinder Jodhka, a renowned sociologist conducted an empirical study in 51 villages of Punjab. His study came out with the surprising fact that 41 of the surveyed villages had separate Gurdwaras for Dalit Sikhs and nearly two-thirds of the villages had separate cremation grounds for upper castes and Dalits.¹⁹³ In a similar survey of 116 villages in one sub-division of Amritsar district, Harish K. Puri, a noted Amritsar-based academician and scholar of Dalit issues, found 68 villages had separate Gurdwaras and 72 villages had separate cremation grounds for the Dalits.¹⁹⁴

In an attempt to observe and examine the case of caste based Gurdwaras, few Gurdwaras which have been constructed on caste consideration and are also being managed by particular caste group were visited during the field study.¹⁹⁵ Among the caste based Gurdwaras (which were visited during the field study), few noticeable ones are listed below:

- *Gudrwara Ramgarhia* (Hoshairpur): This Gurdwara which is named on the Ramgarhia Sikh community is located in Hoshairpur City and is managed by the same community. The Gurdwara was also built by the Ramgarhia Sikhs.
- *Gurdwara Baba Jiwan Singh Ji* (Gurdaspur): This Gurdwara is located in village Khunda that lies near Dhariwal (district Gurdaspur). The Gurdwara has been constructed by Mazhabi Sikhs and is under the management of a committee that includes majority of Mazhabi Sikh members. Apart from this, Khunda village also has one Gurdwara that is being managed by Jatt Sikhs.

majority of the SC people (73.33%) live in the rural area, whereas, 26.67% SC people reside in the urban area of the State. Punjab's villages are, therefore, mostly populated by Sikhs and Dalits. Among Sikhs, Jats own most of the agricultural land. See, "Population by religious community: Punjab". *2011 Census of India*. retrieved 27/10/2016. Also see, "Scheduled Caste Population in Punjab- An Overview", *Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes and Minorities Punjab*, available at <http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/SCPopulation.html>, accessed on 22/07/2016.

192 Based on Information obtained from various caste based Gurdwaras during field study. Discussions on functioning of Gurdwaras in context to Sikh Code of Conduct (Rehat Maryada) were held with villagers and members of local Gurdwara management committees. Observations during visit at such Gurdwaras also provided useful insights into the concerned matters.

193 Surinder S. Jodhka (2002) , "Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No.11 , May 2002, pp. 1818- 1819.

194 Harish K. Puri (2003), "The Scheduled Castes in the Sikh Community- A Historical Perspective", *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 38, No. 26 (Jun. 28 - Jul. 4, 2003), pp. 2693-2701.

195 The information about the villages which was collected in each village was regarding the number of Gurdwaras in each village, and if any of the Gurdwaras was constructed on caste basis. The construction of the Gurdwara and its management by a particular caste group was taken as the Caste factor and consideration.

- *Gurdwara Vishkarma* (Garshankar): This Gurdwara was constructed by Ramgharia Sikhs (*Tarkhan Sikhs*) and is also managed by the Gurdwara body that includes majority of members from Ramgharia community. The Gurdwara is located in Garshankar town, district Hoshiarpur.
- *Gurdwara Ramgarhia* (Dera Baba Nanak): This Gurdwara is located in historic and sacred town of Dera Baba Nanak. The Gurdwara has been constructed by Ramgarhia Community and its management also lies in hands of Ramgarhia Sikhs. It is pertinent to mention here that Dera Baba Nanak (Gurdaspur District) is one of the most sacred pilgrimage centers of the Sikhs. The founder of Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev spent last days of his worldly life at Dera Baba Nanak.¹⁹⁶ Although *Darbar Sahib* and *Chola Sahib*, the two highly sacred Gurdwaras associated with the life of Guru Nanak Dev, are located in Dera Baba Nanak; still a caste based Gurdwara (Gurdwara Ramgarhia) exists in the town .
- *Gurdwara Patti Mazhabi Singh*: This Gurdwara lies in village Gaazinangal (district Gurdaspur). The Gurdwara was constructed by Mazhabi Sikhs and is under the management of the same community.
- *Gurdwara Baba Jiwan Singh* (Nihal Singh Wala): This Gurdwara located in Nihal Singh Wala (district Moga) was constructed by Mazhabi Sikh community, and the management of the Gurdwara is also in the hands of Mazhabi Sikh community.
- *Gurdwara Baba Vishkarma Ji*: This Gurdwara is also located in Nihal Singh Wala (Baghapurana Road, Moga). The Gurdwara is managed by ‘Tarkhan’ Sikhs who are also identified as Ramgharia Sikhs.
- *Gurdwara Basti Baurian*: It is one more caste based Gurdwara in Nihal Singh Wala (Moga) that was visited during the field study. The Gurdwara has been constructed by the *Baurian* community and is managed exclusively by the members of this community.
- Village Bhumbli (Gurdaspur) : In the village Bhumbli near Dhariwal town, two Gurdwasrs are under the management of Jatt Sikh community and another two Gurdwaras are being managed by Mazhhabi Sikhs.

196 The city gets its name “Dera Baba Nanak”, from Guru Nanak Dev, the first Sikh Gurus and the founder of Sikh faith. Dera Baba Nanak (Tehsil) town is situated on the left bank of river Ravi, on the Indo-Pak border. Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism settled and mingled with the Almighty near the village Pakhoke, opposite to the present town and named it Kartarpur (now in Pakistan), the place from where Guru Nanak Dev ji left for his heavenly abode. The devotees of Guru Nanak Dev built a new town and named it Dera Baba Nanak. From a point in Dera Baba Nanak, pilgrims can see across the border into Pakistan and get the glimpse of sacred Gurudwara at Kartarpur.

- *Guru Ravidass Gurdwara* (Kharar): The Gurdwara is located in the Kharar town (District Mohali) and its management community include majority of members from Ravidassia Sikh community.
- Few more non-historic Gurdwaras with name of “Guru Ravidass Gurdwara” were also visited as part of the field study. These were: Gurdwara Guru Ravidass Ji (Village Bhaura, District Ludhiana), Shri Guru Ravidass Gurdwara (Village Manjhi, District Hoshairpur), Gurdwara Shri Guru Ravidass Ji (Burail, Chandigarh), Guru Ravidass Gurdwara (Village Ghawaddi, District Ludhiana) Sri Guru Ravidass Ji Gurdwara Sahib (Village Paragpur, Jalandhar) and Shri Guru Ravidass Gurdwara Sahib Ji (Jalandhar). **In all these Gurdwaras, it was found that the Gurdwaras have been constructed by the Ravidassia Sikh community, and were also managed by the Gurdwara committees that consisted of most of the members from the same community.**¹⁹⁷

On the basis of the field study of these non-historic Sikh Gurdwaras located in various regions of Punjab, it can be said that caste consideration is the vital factor in the construction of such Gurdwara. The study found that caste factor was very much manifest in the administration and daily functioning of these Gurdwaras located in different parts of Punjab.

Instances of exclusion in form of separate Gurdwaras and cremation grounds for Dalits in the villages of Punjab came to mark and reconfigure the cultural landscape of the region. In the realm of the sacred too, the segregation is clearly visible. The separate Gurdwaras and separate cremation grounds in nearly half of the villages of Punjab are symbolic both of discrimination and awakening among the Dalits for assertion of their dignity. Their resistance and assertiveness is reflected in increasing incidences of caste tension and conflict.¹⁹⁸

It is not as if either Gurdwaras would deny entry to members of other castes, but the fact remains they are segregated spaces. In principle Gurudwaras are open to all. However, different caste communities have tended to build their own Gurudwaras, generally to assert their separate identity in a caste divided set-up of rural Punjab. The separate caste –based

197 Based on personal visits at concerned Gurdawras and information collected from there.

198 Ronki Ram (2007) , “Social, Exclusion, Resistance and Deras : Exploring the myth of casteless society in Punjab”, *Political and Economic Weekly*, Vol 42 No. 40, October 6-12 , 2007, pp. 4066-67. Also see, Surinder S. Jodhka (2002), “Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab”, *Economic and Political Weekly*”, May 2002, pp. 1813 -23.

Gurdwaras in villages of Punjab are symbolic both of discrimination and awakening among the Dalit sections for assertion of their identity and dignity.¹⁹⁹

Caste Based Gurdwaras : Response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC

(i) Akal Takht Sahib takes note of Caste based Gurdwaras

The Sikh religion institutional authorities have been forced to accept the existence of caste-discrimination with Sikh clergy taking note of the Gurdwaras built on the basis of caste and speaking against this trend. The Sikh clergy, i.e. the five *Singh Sahibs* (Jathedars of Five Sikh Takhts- the centres of authority in Sikh religion) led by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib passed a resolution to this effect. In a strongly worded directive, they said:

*"A Gurdwara is a place of reverence, a place where anyone, irrespective of caste, colour, creed or religion could pay obeisance. Hence, the management committees of all shrines are directed to ensure that there is no form of discrimination or restriction on the entry of devotees."*²⁰⁰

Akal Takht Sahib took serious note of numerous complaints from Sikhs across the globe that requested action on caste based Gurdwaras. In this context, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Giani Gurbachan Singh stated that the foundation of Sikh religion was laid to counter the Hindu caste system, however, ignorant people failed to recognize the ills of the system and started practicing it as a part of the Sikh religion. **While the Sikh clergy's (Jathedars of Five Sikh Takhts) directive proves that the highest Sikh religious authority, the Akal Takht Sahib, has acknowledged the existence of "caste-based" Gurdwaras, it also highlighted the fact that the evil of casteism has taken deep roots in Sikh community. This is ironic for the community that takes pride on its origin and establishment as a casteless religion.**

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) issued a notice to the Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) to investigate and reply to the charges about caste-based segregation in historic Gurdwaras of the State.²⁰¹ In its letter to the NCSC, Pukhraj

199 Statements and argument based on my field observations at caste based Gurdwaras, and also on the basis of numerous discussions with villagers and village Gurdwara management committee members. Various studies on caste issues in Punjab by scholars like Ronki Ram, Harish Puri and Surinder Jodhka also provide very relevant information regarding the caste based Gurdwaras in rural Punjab.

200 See, "Caste-based Gurdwaras: Clergy orders no discrimination against devotees", *Hindustan Times*, June 13, 2012, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/caste-based-gurdwaras-clergy-orders-no-discrimination-against-devotees/story-OQUfC99cRnM3xU9viqzmVP.html>. Also see, "Clergy Acknowledges Caste Gurdwaras", *The Sunday Guardian*, June 24, 2012, available at <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/investigation/clergy-acknowledges-caste-gurdwaras>, accessed on 24/07/2016.

201 The National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) notice that comes on a representation by Abroo, a socio-political initiative working for empowerment of the marginalised in Punjab, was also

Singh, the founder of a non-profit initiative called “Abroo” (working for the empowerment of Dalits of Punjab), said that Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) has acknowledged the existence of caste-based Gurdwaras in the State. His investigation revealed cases of institutionalized and systemic segregation perpetrated by well-entrenched elements of the Sikh establishment.²⁰²

Some notable examples documented in the representation to the NCSC include Sur Singh, a 350-year-old Sikh seminary in Taran Taran (near Amritsar), where Mazhabi Sikhs (Scheduled Castes) are not only given ‘amrit’ (as part of the Khalsa baptism ceremony) from a separate utensil but are also referred to by the clergy as “Chauthey Paurey Wale” (people from the fourth step). The representation further notes that in Gurdwara Raja Ram in Dhotian (district Taran Tarn),²⁰³ Mazhabi Sikhs are barred from performing ‘langar sewa’.²⁰⁴ Calling for an investigation into these transgressions, Mr. Pukhraj Singh demanded that the control of such Gurdwaras be handed over to provisional and progressive bodies. This would reinforce the point that Gurdwaras were not merely religious bodies but centres of social upheaval; places where the common public can take charge to implement the shared ethos. Citing the Gurdwara Reform Movement of early 20th century, the founder of non-profit organization - *Abroo* (for upliftment of Dalits) Pukhraj Singh, said: “*Spiritually sanctioned prejudices in a religion that abhors ritualism, is evidence of deep-rooted subversion of the Sikh philosophy and its spiritual tenets.*”²⁰⁵ Commenting on these findings, the then SGPC president Avtar Singh Makkar stated: “***There is no place for caste-based discrimination in Sikhism, and if such a matter comes to our notice, we (SGPC) persuade***

studied by its own Atrocities and Protection of Civil Rights Wing. Abroo had commenced a project, titled ‘Punjab’s Map of Shame’, after it stumbled upon what it calls several “shocking and blatant cases of apartheid happening in well-known Gurdwaras” in the State. See, Probe caste-based segregation in Gurdwaras, panel tells Punjab DGP”, *The Hindu*, December 5, 2013, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/probe-castebased-segregation-in-gurdwaras-panel-tells-punjab-dgp/article5422572.ece>, accessed on August 24, 2016.

202 Swati Goel (2018) “Prime Sikh Body Wants Upper-Caste And Dalit Sikhs To Pray in The Same Gurudwaras. Will It Work?”, April 06, 2018, available at <https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/prime-sikh-body-wants-upper-caste-and-dalit-sikhs-to-pray-in-the-same-gurudwaras-will-it-work>, accessed on 14/05/2018. Also see, “Probe caste-based segregation in Gurdwaras, panel tells Punjab DGP”, *The Hindu*, December 5, 2013, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/probe-castebased-segregation-in-gurdwaras-panel-tells-punjab-dgp/article5422572.ece>, accessed on August 24, 2016.

203 The Gurudwara is being run by a powerful *baba*, who is well-connected with the SGPC and who has been instrumental in renovating several crumbling historical Sikh shrines in recent years. It goes on to provide several other examples of caste-based injustices from Gurdwaras in Sarhali, Lehra Khana and Joge Wala.

204 “Probe caste-based segregation in gurdwaras, panel tells Punjab DGP”, *The Hindu*, December 5, 2013, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/probe-castebased-segregation-in-gurdwaras-panel-tells-punjab-dgp/article5422572.ece>, accessed on August 24, 2016.

205 *ibid.*

them to stop it. We also issue appeals from time to time to follow the Sikh tenets."²⁰⁶

Reacting to the issue of caste based Gurdwaras, former SGPC General Secretary Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, said:

*"Though caste issues have always plagued Sikhism and from time to time, the SGPC has been passing resolutions that caste-based discrimination is not compatible with the basic tenets of the faith. Many of these Gurdwaras are not recognised by the SGPC as authentic sources for the interpretation of Sikh philosophy. Even an apex seminary like the Damdami Taksal discriminates on caste and gender."*²⁰⁷

Senior member of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) Bibi Kiranjot Kaur admitted that though the influence of caste was ejected from Gurdwaras after the Singh Sabha movement of the early 20th century, it has once again reared its head in the religion mainly due to caste-based politics in recent years.²⁰⁸

(ii) Akal Takht Sahib acknowledges villages with single Gurdwara

In one of the crucial meeting of Sikh clergy (five Takht Jathedars), Sikh high priests met and discussed ways to counter the serious threat posed by casteism to Sikh faith and practice in contemporary times. In an attempt to curb the trend of constructing the Gurdwaras on caste lines, Akal Takht, the highest religious institution of Sikh community, announced that it would felicitate those village Panchayats that retain only one Gurdwara for the entire village. The decision to this effect was taken by the Sikh clergy, i.e. the five *Singh Sahibs* (Takht Jathedars) led by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, in a meeting held at Akal Takht.²⁰⁹ Announcing this decision of Akal Takht Sahib, Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh informed that panchayats which would put an end to the practice of having gurdwaras on caste lines and retain a single Gurdwara for the entire village would be honoured by the Akal Takht, besides being awarded with a certificate of commendation.²¹⁰

206 *ibid.*

207 *ibid.*

208 *ibid.*

209 "Award for villages with single Gurdwara", *The Tribune*, July 12, 2012, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20120713/punjab.htm>, accessed on 17/08, 2016. Also see, "Award for villages with single Gurdwara, Akal Takht", available at <http://sikhsangat.org/2012/award-for-villages-with-single-gurdwara-akal-takht/>, accessed on 17/98/2016.

210 Explanation on the basis of information gathered from Akal Takht Sahib Secretariat, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar. The Sikh clergy (Jathedars of five Takht Sahibs) in a meeting held on April 18, 2002 expressed grave concern over the trend of construction of new Gurdwaras on the basis of caste and personal rivalry. Few very crucial decisions were taken in the meeting to curb this practice within the Sikh community across the globe. Also see, "Don't construct Gurudwaras without permission: Sikh clergy", available at <http://www.uranindia.in/news/don%20t-construct-gurudwaras-without-permission:-sikh-clergy/18526/daily>, accessed on August 23, 2016.

On the issue of numerous Gurdwaras that exist in villages and cities, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh suggested that panchayats should limit the number of such holy places to one or two, depending on the size and population of that particular village. The Jathedar further added that vacant places of worship should be utilised as community centres for the welfare of the villagers.²¹¹ In context to the announcement of this decision, Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh said:

“The Sikh Gurus had put an end to discrimination on caste lines. The Akal Takht has already issued an edict on June 13, directing the community not to construct Gurdwaras on the basis of castes. It is not in the interest of society to create a divide in the name of castes.”²¹²

(iii) Akal Takht Sahib’s permission before constructing a Gurdwara

Mulling over the issue of caste-based Gurdwaras, particularly in rural areas of Punjab, the Sikh clergy sent out a clear-cut message to the Sikh community that no Gurdwara would be constructed anywhere in the country or even abroad without the prior permission of the Akal Takht Sahib. In the context of this issue, Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, directed the Sikh community:²¹³

“Anyone who wishes to construct a Gurdwara must approach the Akal Takht for prior clearance. No one will be allowed to construct a Gurdwara on his own without the permission and sanction of Akal Takht Sahib.”²¹⁴

The decision to get prior permission from Akal Takht Sahib before constructing a Gurdwara was taken in special meeting of the Sikh clergy held on July 12, 2012, at Akal Takht Sahib. Takht Keshgarh Sahib (Ananadpur Sahib) Jathedar Giani Tirlochan Singh, Takht Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) Jathedar Giani Balwant Singh Nandgarh, Takht Patna Sahib Jathedar Giani Iqbal Singh and Giani Mal Singh, a priest of the Golden Temple,

211 Information as gathered from Secretariat, Akal Takht Sahib, Golden Temple Complex (Amritsar). Also see, “Award for villages with single Gurdwara, Akal Takht”, available at <http://sikhsangat.org/2012/award-for-villages-with-single-gurdwara-akal-takht/>, accessed on 17/98/2016.

212 See, “Award for villages with single Gurdwara”, *The Tribune*, July 12, 2012, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20120713/punjab.htm>, accessed on August 18, 2016.

213 See “No new Gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht”, *The Economic Times*, September 10, 2015, available at [att-clearance-from-akal-nation/no-new-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht/articleshow/48904542.cms](http://www.economictimes.com/att-clearance-from-akal-nation/no-new-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht/articleshow/48904542.cms), accessed on August 18, 2016.

214 “No Gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht: Sikh clergy”, available at [no-gurdwara-without-clearance-akal-takht-sikh-clergy](https://www.sikhnet.com/news/no-gurdwara-without-clearance-akal-takht-sikh-clergy)”<https://www.sikhnet.com/news/no-gurdwara-without-clearance-akal-takht-sikh-clergy>, accessed on June 12, 2016. Information also available at, “No New Gurdwara across the Globe with the permission of Akal Takht: Giani Gurbachan Singh, available at [thout-permission-of-akal-takht-giani-gurbachan-singh](http://www.yespunjab.com/sikh/issues/item/75181-no-new-gurdwara-across-the-globe-without-permission-of-akal-takht-giani-gurbachan-singh)”<http://www.yespunjab.com/sikh/issues/item/75181-no-new-gurdwara-across-the-globe-without-permission-of-akal-takht-giani-gurbachan-singh>, accessed on August 15, 2016.

participated in this very significant meeting.²¹⁵ Perturbed over the mushrooming growth of Gurdwaras, especially abroad, which many a times causes embarrassment to the Sikh community, Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh stated: *"Majority of gurdwaras abroad have come out of personal rivalry, ego clashes or for making financial benefits which is a very unfortunate trend and must be stopped."*²¹⁶ Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib warned of stern religious action against persons constructing Gurdwaras without the approval of Akal Takht Sahib.²¹⁷

In the same meeting, Akal Takht Sahib put forth another pre-condition that the piece of land on which the Gurdwara was proposed to be built must be in the name of Guru Granth Sahib. On the basis of the vital decisions taken in the meeting, it was affirmed that the Akal Takht would consider any plea for the construction of the Sikh Gurdwara only if this pre-condition was fulfilled.²¹⁸ After deliberating on the issue with his fellow priests (Takht Jathedars), Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Gurbachan Singh also stated: *"We (the Sikh Clergy) will not allow construction of a Gurdwara on 'shamlat' (Government) land or on land that is in the name of the village panchayat or is the property of any trust or committee. The land must be transferred in the name of Guru Granth Sahib for building a shrine."*²¹⁹ Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh directed that any person or a Sikh religious body willing to construct a new Gurdwara should first inform Akal Takht Sahib which would give permission and approval only after inspecting the site. In the context, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, said: *"A team would inspect the site to see whether there is*

215 "No new Gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht", *India Today*, September 10, 2015, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/no-new-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht-463115-2015-09-10>, accessed on 17/07/2016. Also see, "No gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht: Sikh clergy", *Hindustan Times*, July 12, 2012, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/no-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht-sikh-clergy/story-EVIBywXLgKU3Z0IGAnNgdN.html>, accessed on August 18, 2016.

216 "Need to check mushrooming growth of Gurdwaras: Akal Takht Jathedar", *The Times of India* (online edition), August 09, 2011, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Need-to-check-mushrooming-growth-of-gurdwaras-Akal-Takht-jathedar/articleshow/9536629.cms>, accessed on August 11, 2016.

217 *ibid.*

218 "No Gurdwara Without Clearance from Akal Takht", July 13, 2012, available at <https://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/67516-no-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht/> accessed on 17/08/2016.

219 "No Gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht: Sikh clergy", July 12, 2012, *Hindustan Times* (online edition), available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/no-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht-sikh-clergy/story-EVIBywXLgKU3Z0IGAnNgdN.html>. Information also available at "No gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht: Sikh clergy", available at <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/no-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht-sikh-clergy>, accessed on June 12, 2016.

*any other Gurdwara close by or not, or if there is need for a new Gurdwara at all. We have to ensure that the Gurdwara is not being constructed for financial gain.”*²²⁰

Taking serious note of vast increase in the number of Gurdwaras, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib deplored the continuing practice of formation of trust for running the Gurdwaras. He stated that: *"It is not an ancestral business but a place of worship which is attached with the religious sentiments of Sikhs."*²²¹ While issuing the concerned edict, Jathedar also asked the Sikh community to honour the Akal Takht Sahib edict that banned Gurdwaras on caste lines. He asserted that edict to this effect would be enforced strictly. The Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib made an appeal to Sikh religious and political leaders for not distributing the funds for construction of Gurdwaras on caste lines.²²²

The Sikh clergy that includes Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts expressed grave concern over the trend of construction of Gurdwaras on the basis of caste and personal rivalry.²²³ The Sikh clergy led by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also directed the Dharam Parchar Committee (DPC) of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to take necessary and appropriate measures to check unnecessary construction of Gurdwaras.²²⁴

In villages of Punjab, there is clear presence of separate caste based Gurdwaras, which have been constructed and managed by particular caste section within the Sikh community (Jatt, Mazhabi, Ravidass, Ramdasia, etc.). **The largest representative religious institution of Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) estimates that for a total of 12,854 villages in Punjab, there about 50,000 Gurdwaras.**²²⁵ According to information gathered from relevant sources, the SGPC is currently gathering data on the

220 "Need to check mushrooming growth of Gurdwaras: Akal Takht Jathedar", *The Times of India (online edition)*, August 9, 2011, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Need-to-check-mushrooming-growth-of-gurdwaras-Akal-Takht-jathedar/articleshow/9536629.cms>, accessed on August 11, 2016. Also see, "Don't construct Gurudwaras without permission: Sikh clergy", available at <http://india.ucanews.com/news/don%E2%80%99t-construct-gurudwaras-without-permission:-sikh-clergy/18526/daily>, accessed on 13/10/2016.

221 *ibid.*

222 "No new Gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht", *The Times of India*, September 10, 2015 available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/no-new-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht/articleshow/48910698.cms>. Also see, "No new Gurdwara without clearance from Akal Takht", *The Economic Times*, September 10, 2015, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/no-new-gurdwara-without-clearance-from-akal-takht/articleshow/48904542.cms>, accessed on 28/11/2016.

223 The meeting was held on July 12, 2012 at Akal Takht. The meeting was attended by all five head priests (five Jathedars) of five Sikh Takhts, the centers of religious authority in Sikh Community.

224 The Singh Sahibs (Takht Jathedars) in an important meeting held at Akal Takht Sahib (April 18, 2002) directed the Dharam Parchar Committee of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to take appropriate measures to check unnecessary construction of Gurdwaras. Information as gathered from Secretariat, Akal Takht Sahib, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar.

225 Based on information gathered from relevant SGPC officials at SGPC Headquarters (Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Amritsar). The SGPC was in process to collect the data about number of Gurudwaras in each village of Punjab in order to effectively implement its recent drive called "Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara".

number of Gurudwaras in each village of Punjab to implement its “Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara” (“One Village, One Gurdwara”) drive.

Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara –Recent Campaign by SGPC

In order to curb the trend of constructing caste based Gurdwaras, SGPC, very recently, launched a campaign named “**Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara**” (“One Village, One Gurdwara”).²²⁶ As per the information collected from relevant SGPC sources, the objective behind this new campaign is to check the widespread practise of constructing a Gurdwara on the basis of caste consideration. The SGPC campaign named “Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara” also aims at honouring and facilitating the panchayats or Gurdwara committees of the village which have only one Gurdwara for all in their locality. In the present caste ridden structure within the Sikh community, the move to encourage the Sikh masses living in villages of Punjab to get united at a single Gurdwara Sahib in their villages is seen as a positive initiative by the SGPC.

As per the information collected from SGPC’s Additional Secretary, Diljit Singh Bedi, this recent campaign by SGPC is aimed to encourage the existence of a single centralized Gurdwara in each village of Punjab.²²⁷ Additional Secretary o Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Diljit Singh Bedi also informed that under the ‘Dharam Parchar Lehar’ (religious preaching drive by SGPC), a survey is under way to know about the status of Gurudwaras, their conditions and management.²²⁸ In this context, Mr. Bedi, SGPC additional secretary, said:

“When we are all set to commemorate the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, it is vital to follow the Guru’s teaching of non-discrimination and equality among the masses. Those who shun the caste-based Gurdwara culture will be honoured in the presence of Jathedar Akal Takht Saib and SGPC President at special programmes.”²²⁹

The “**Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara**” (“One Village, One Gurdwara”) SGPC initiative aims to eradicate the divide between Sikh community as most of villages across the state of Punjab have multiple caste-based Gurdwaras. The campaign which is being also endorsed by Akal

226 Information regarding the recent SGPC campaign was collected from SGPC Headquarters (Teja Singh Samudari Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar). Relevant information regarding the aim, objective and schedule of the Campaign was collected from concerned officials of SGPC. The campaign was planned in the month of February 2018, under the presidentship of newly elected SGPC President, Gobind Singh Longowal.

227 “SGPC to felicitate villages under drive against caste divide”, *The Tribune*, March 10, 2018.

228 *ibid.*

229 “SGPC’s ‘1 village, 1 Gurdwara’ concept adopted by Dhurkot”, *The Tribune*, March 15, 2018.

Takht Sahib encourages the existence of a single centralised Gurdwara in each village. The pioneer Sikh institution, the SGPC, claimed to have chalked out a solid program to encourage Sikh masses of all villages to get united at a single Gurdwara in their villages.²³⁰ Under this positive campaign by SGPC, the villagers are to be educated about egalitarian principle of Sikh faith and will be encouraged to have single Gurdwara with the merging of many into one. As per the information gathered from concerned SGPC sources, the vacated buildings of the Gurdwara would be used to establish general schools, kirtan and Gurmat training centres and libraries.²³¹

The SGPC campaign named “Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara” (“One Village, One Gurdawara”) to encourage single Gurdwara for each village began from village Chakar in Jagraon district. This village was selected to kick start the campaign as the village has a population of around 15,000 but there is only one Gurdwara.²³² Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh and current SGPC president Gobind Singh Longowal also participated in the inauguration of the campaign that is being seen as worthy move to check the widespread practice of constructing caste based Gurdwaras in Punjab. In the inaugural programme conducted at village Chakar (Jagraon district), Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh and SGPC president congratulated the villagers and also acknowledged their unity by granting financial aid (Rs. 2.50 lakh) for the upkeep of the historic Gurdwara in the village.²³³

Expressing his concern over rising number of caste based Gurdwars in rural areas of Punjab, newly elected President of SGPC Gobind Singh Longowal stated that it’s the people with hunger of name and fame who establish new Gurdwara in villages and then use them as their personal property. The new SGPC President also alleged that those responsible for

230 “SGPC’S ‘One Village, One Gurdwara’ Campaign, Faridkot village takes lead, goes for merger of Gurdwaras”, *The Tribune*, March 28, 2018.

231 Based on information collected from SGPC officials concerned with this campaign named as - “Ek Pind, Ek Gurdwara.” Discussion with Amrik Singh Shahpur, a known SGPC member from Dera Baba Nanak, who is closely associated with this new campaign, was extremely helpful to know the details behind this new SGPC drive.

232 The Gurdwara in village Chakar (Jagraon, Dictrict Ludhiana) is a historical Sikh Gurdwara. The sixth Sikh Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib visited this place in 1631 during his tour of Malwa region. Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh also visited here in 1705 after the battle of Chamkaur Sahib.

233 The information about the programme is based on my eye witness account. I attended the inaugural program of the SGPC campaign named - “Ek Pind, Ek Gurdwara” (One Village, One Gurdwara), which was held at village Chakar (district Jagraon) on March 13, 2018. Jathedar Akal Takht, Singh Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh also participated in the SGPC programme , and congratulated the villagers for managing the Gurdwara on basis of Gurmat Principles - equality and unity.

constructing Gurdwaras on the name of caste have violated the basic principle of Sikhism of treating every human being equally irrespective of his caste, creed and colour.²³⁴

Under the recently launched “Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara” (“One Village, One Gurdawara”) campaign by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the residents of Sarfkot village near Fatehgarh Churian (district Gurdaspur) merged their five village Gurdwaras into one centralized Gurdwara for the entire village population. For this appreciable move, the residents of Sarfkot village were honoured by the current SGPC President Gobind Singh Longowal, and SGPC also announced to contribute to the construction of a ‘diwan hall’ for the village Gurdwara.²³⁵

However, the response to SGPC campaign- “Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara” (“One Village, One Gurdwara”) has not been very encouraging. As per the news published in *Hindustan Times*, in the first three months, only nine of nearly 13,000 villages of Punjab heeded to SGPC’s call to bridge the caste divide by setting up one centralized Gurdawara in each village in the first three months after Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) launched its campaign.²³⁶ Giving his perspective and opinion on the issue of caste based Gurdwaras, Sikh Scholar Balwant Singh from Department of Guru Nanak Studies, Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar), was of the view that there couldn’t be a blanket ban on construction of new Gurdwaras. In the context of the issue, he said: ***“I am of the view that there is need to create awareness among people and they should decide themselves whether they want a new Gurdwara, especially if there is already one existing nearby.”***²³⁷

234 See, “SGPC to launch ‘One Village, One Gurdwara’ campaign in Punjab”, February 24, 2018, available at <https://www.sikh24.com/2018/02/24/sgpc-to-launch-one-village-one-gurdwara-campaign-in-punjab/#.WqhHeR1ubiU>, accessed on March 10, 2018.

235 Information based on field visit made at Sarafkot village (near Fatehgarh Churian, Gurdaspur). A field visit was made at the village Sarafkot after the news of merging the Gurdwara into one Gurdwara came out. Discussion with villagers and Gurdwara management members was very beneficial in the context of the study

236 Residents of Sarafkot village in Gurdaspur district, Kadrabad in Amritsar, Kamowal in Hoshiarpur, Dhurkot in Faridkot, Dalo Majra in Fatehgarh Sahib, Kotli Biram in Gurdaspur, Awan in Amritsar, Kundran in Sangrur and Dhadrian in Sangrur have set up one Gurdwara under the recent SGPC campaign, “Ek Pind, Ek Gurdwara”. Information ss per information given by SGPC spokesperson Daljit Singh Bedi See,- “Three months in, nine villages adopt SGPC’s one-gurdwara initiative”, *Hindustan Times*, June 14, 2018. Also see, “SGPC’s ‘1 village, 1 Gurdwara’ concept adopted by Dhurkot”, *The Tribune*, March 15, 2018.

237 Need to check mushrooming growth of Gurdwaras: Akal Takht Jathedar”, *The Times of India* (online edition), August 9, 2011, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Need-to-check-mushrooming-growth-of-gurdwaras-Akal-Takht-jathedar/articleshow/9536629.cms>, accessed on August 11, 2016. Relevant information also available at “Need To Check Mushrooming Growth of Gurdwaras: Akal Takht Jathedar”, available at <https://www.sikhphilosophy.net/threads/need-to-check-mushrooming-growth-of-gurdwaras-akal-takht-jathedar.36604/>, accessed on August 11, 2016.

On the contrary, Jodh Singh, Professor of Sikhism and editor-in-chief of *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, Punjabi University (Patiala), felt that there should be a string and effective mechanism to check the mushrooming growth of Gurdwaras, especially in other countries where some organizations construct Gurdwaras as a business proposition.²³⁸ On the SGPC initiative named as “Ek Pind Ek Gurdwara”, a Professor in religious studies at Punjabi University (Patiala), Gurmeet Singh Sidhu said: ***“The idea is constructive but caste-based discrimination cannot be eliminated through this drive alone. That’s because this discrimination is not the sole factor behind separate Gurdwaras. To demolish casteism, it is essential to give adequate space to the so-called lower castes at all levels.”***²³⁹

The irony is that the political parties including Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) issue tickets for SGPC elections on the basis of caste factor. Caste-based politics is the hidden factor of almost all political parties and SGPC elections are no different from others. This clearly presents the denigration of religion by violating the basic principles of Sikhism. Politically, the practice of caste-based politics and construction of Gurdwaras on caste considerations is further enhancing social divisions among the Sikhs.²⁴⁰ One of the managers of a caste-based Gurdwara seeking anonymity said that many a times Gurdwaras are built on ill feelings rather than a genuine spiritual cause. To illustrate increased caste antagonisms, he stated:

“If a group of Sikhs belonging to one particular caste loses control over the management of Gurdwara to group of Sikhs belonging to more dominant caste, they split up and very sharp caste rivalries take place. Ultimately, in order to satisfy their ego, the caste group which have lost control over the management of existing Gurdwara, build another Gurdwara in the village. This is why caste based Gurdwaras in Punjab are on rapid increase.”²⁴¹

238 “Need to check mushrooming growth of Gurdwaras: Akal Takht jathedar”, The Times of India (online edition), August 9, 2011, , available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Need-to-check-mushrooming-growth-of-gurdwaras-Akal-Takht-jathedar/articleshow/9536629.cms>, accessed on August 11, 2016. Also see. Information available at “Need To Check Mushrooming Growth Of Gurdwaras: Akal Takht Jathedar”, available at <https://www.sikhphilosophy.net/threads/need-to-check-mushrooming-growth-of-gurdwaras>, accessed on August 11, 2016.

239 “Three months on, nine villages adopt SGPC’s one-Gurdwara initiative”, *Hindustan Times*, June 14, 2018.

240 Yogesh Snehi (2014), “Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 49, Issue No. 34, 23 August, 2014, available at <https://www.epw.in/node/129911/pdf>, accessed on 22/08/2016. Surinder Singh Jodhka (2003), “Caste Tensions in Punjab: Talhan and Beyond”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 38, No. 28, July. 12-18, 2003, pp. 2923-2926. Also see, Ronki Ram (2017), The Genealogy of a Dalit faith: The Ravidassia Dharm and caste conflicts in contemporary Punjab”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Volume 51, No. 1, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0069966716677411>, accessed on 04/02/2018.

241 Statement of the manager of village Gurdwara that has been constructed and being managed by particular caste group. Statement was recorded during my filed study to few villages where caste based Gurdwaras exist. In a discussion with a manager of the village Gurdwara, an attempt was made to

A manager of another village Gurdwara emphasized on the struggle between different caste groups over the management issues of the Gurdwaras as the major factor responsible for increase in caste based Gurdwaras within the Sikh community. In the context, he explained:

"Nowdays in Punjab, especially in villages, management and administration of the Gurdwaras have become an intense cause of caste antagonism and conflicts. In many villages, we observe that there is a struggle going on between different caste groups for dominance over the management of village Gurdwaras. This results in construction of new Gurdwaras by incurring heavy expenditures, even when the existing village Gurdwara is very nearby."²⁴²

A Sikh preacher (granthi) in a Gurdwara in one of the villages of Punjab firmly blamed the largest Sikh religious body, the SGPC for having not done enough to check the construction of caste based Gurdwaras in rural areas of Punjab. He alleged:

"Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which is the pioneer Sikh religious institution responsible for looking after the Gurdwaras, has not done much to curb the trend of construction of caste based Gurdwaras in the villages of Punjab. As caste based Gurdwaras are against the teachings of Sikh Gurus and principles of Sikhism, it is highly embarrassing to observe that SGPC has been silent spectator to this ant-Sikhi practice."²⁴³

The information regarding the existence of caste based Gurdwaras in the studied villages reflect the existence of caste based divisions among the villagers, and at the same time, it depicts separate localities of various castes. Going by recent trends, it appears that caste-based Gurdwaras are here to stay unless a strenuous effort is made to understand its genesis. This trend clearly reflects the failure of 'Dharm Parchar' drive of the SGPC. This also demonstrates caste divisions at place of worship among Sikhs. Failure of SGPC in checking the growth of the caste based Gurdwaras in Punjab and even abroad is the clear reflection of the fact that the premier legal- religious institution of the Sikhs has drifted away from original Sikh belief and values system in realistic terms. The mushrooming of caste based Gurdwaras also reflect politicization of caste factor in SGPC management, and exclusive social nature of the top Sikh religious institution.²⁴⁴

observe and investigate the actual reasons behind the increasing trend of constructing Gurdwaras on caste considerations.

242 Statement made by a manager of another caste based Gurdwara. The statement was recorded during my discussion with the concerned manager to understand the administrative factors and caste rivalries that result in construction of caste based Gurdwaras.

243 Statement made by a preacher (Granthi) of a local village Gurdwara. Statement was recorded during my discussion with the Sikh preacher (Granthi) who openly blames SGPC for its failure in curbing down the practice of constructing caste based Gurdwaras.

244 Argument based on field observations at various villages and village Gurdwaras. Relevant information also available in Surinder Singh Jodhka (2003), "Caste Tensions in Punjab: Talhan and Beyond",

Cast Consideration in SGPC Establishment

In year 2007, an empirical study of the caste background of SGPC members revealed that 80% of its administrative posts were under the control of the Jatt Sikhs, 15% under other castes and only 5% with Dalits. At the time, all the three secretaries of the SGPC committee were Jatt Sikhs.²⁴⁵ Thus these facts reveal that Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the central governing body of Sikhs, has been under the dominant control of the 'Jatt Sikhs'. As SGPC has been in close nexus with Shiromani Akali Dal (especially under the Badals rule), the Jatt Sikh dominance in SGPC affairs might also be one of the strong reason that Akali Dal has been a weak 'Dalit Sikh' vote bank.²⁴⁶

It was on November 5, 2016, that the General House of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) unanimously elected 74-year-old Kirpal Singh Bandugar²⁴⁷ as its 41st President during a meeting at Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Amritsar.²⁴⁸ Kirpal Singh Bandugar, a known confidant of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) patron and five times Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal²⁴⁹ replaced outgoing SGPC president Avtar Singh Makkar who remained in the post for 11 years. This study found that SGPC Chief Kirpal Singh Badungar belongs to the OBC Bairagi community. Along with SGPC Chief, new executive committee of SGPC was also elected. The newly appointed SGPC executive

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- Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume 38, No. 28, Jul. 12-18, 2003, pp. 2923-2926. For study of dynamics related to caste based Gurdwaras constructed by Diaspora Sikhs, see, Kristina Myrvold & Knut A Jacobsen (2013), *Sikhs in Europe: Migration, Identities and Representations*, Ashgate publishing, Surrey, England, pp. 184-188. Relevant information also available in Gurharpal Singh, Darsham Singh Tatla (2006), *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community*, published by Zed Books, London, pp. 77-89
- 245 Narinderpal Singh, (2007) "Shiromani Committee and Caste, *Desh Sewak*, (Chandigarh Punjabi Daily), Sunday Magazine, July 1, 2007.
- 246 Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political weekly*, October 6, 2007, pp. 4066-69. Also see, Ashutosh Kumar (2004), "Electoral Politics in Punjab: Study of Akali Dal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 14/15 (Apr. 3-16, 2004), pp. 1515-1520.
- 247 Prof. Kirpal Singh Bandngar, 74 years old, hails from Patiala district, and has a postgraduate degree in in English literature. He has written three books on principles of Sikhism. He started his career as a school teacher, also remained office secretary of Shiromani Akali Dal.
- 248 On November 5, 2016 Kirpal Singh Bandungar replaced outgoing SGPC president Avtar Singh Makkar, who remained in the post for 11 years. The election for the SGPC top post was held after nearly six years. He remained SGPC president for about a year in 2002, at the time when Akali stalwart Gurcharan Singh Tohra parted ways with Parkash Singh Badal and was removed from SGPC's presidentship. Prof. Bandugar's nomination was conveyed in a sealed envelope to the first meeting of the new general house of the SGPC (at Teja Singh Samundri Hall) in Amritsar. His name was proposed by senior Akali Dal leader and Punjab agriculture minister Tota Singh and seconded by Akali Dal MLA and former SGPC president Bibi Jagir Kaur.
- 249 Prof. Badungar's name was proposed by Cabinet Minister Tota Singh and seconded by former SGPC president Bibi Jagir Kaur and Navtej Singh Kaoni. There was some opposition with a few members proposing Surjit Singh Kalabula's (SAD-Amritsar) name. The matter was resolved after the latter withdrew his candidature. Kalabula was later included on the 11-member SGPC executive committee.

members²⁵⁰ - BS Vainpuin , Bibi Joginder Kaur Rathore and junior vice-president Buta Singh Gurthari belong to the Scheduled Caste category. Amarjit Singh Chawla, the general secretary is a Khatri Sikh , while Baldev Singh, Jaipal Singh Mundian, Nirmal Singh and Satpal Singh are Jatt Sikhs. The present SGPC vice-president from Haryana is a Rajput Jat.²⁵¹ It is pertinent to mention here that the newly elected President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Gobind Singh Longowal, also belongs to Jatt Sikh community.²⁵²

As per the caste backgrounds of the SGPC executive members and its chiefs, it clearly reflects that caste factor is given due consideration while their appointments to the highest offices of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). It was also found that in SGPC managed Gurdwaras, **large number of Granthis (priests), Ragis, Kathawachaks (preachers) and sewadars (as employees) come from the lower castes, including a noticeable number from the scheduled caste categories.**²⁵³ **Jatt Sikhs, the economically and politically dominant Sikh community, were more dominant in administration and management aspects of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).**²⁵⁴

The analysis of caste based representation in premier religious body of the Sikhs reveals the political dynamics wherein Shiromai Akali Dal (SAD) is the clear beneficiary. As SGPC in recent years has been under strong influence of Akali Dal, the major reason to give representation to different castes in the SGPC executive committee is to consolidate the Shiromani Akali Dal's (SAD) decreasing *Panthic* vote bank.²⁵⁵

250 Apart from the election of Kirpal Singh Badungar, Baldev Singh Kiamपुरi was elected as senior vice-president, Baba Buta Singh as junior vice-president and Amarjit Singh Chawla as the new general secretary of SGPC.

251 Information about the caste background of the SGPC executive members was obtained during discussions with SGPC leaders/members and administrative officials.

252 A senior Akali leader Gobind Singh Longowal, four time MLA and former Minister in Akali Dal Government was elected as new SGPC President on November 29, 2017, at a SGPC meeting at Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar. See, "From driver to foster son to SGPC head, Gobind goes a long way as Longowal", *Hindustan Times*, November 30, 2017. Also see, "Former Dhuri MLA Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC president", *The Tribune*, November 30, 2017.

253 Information based on field survey to various Sikh historical Gurdwaras located in Punjab, and observations made from therein.

254 Information based on basis of my field survey and observations made at various caste based Gurdwaras.

255 Jagrup Singh Sekhon (2012), "Punjab Assembly Elections 2012, *Lokniti*, available at <http://www.lokniti.org/editorial-april.php>, accessed on 02/11/2017. "The race for SGPC chief's post hots up", *The Tribune*, September 20, 2011, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20110920/main4.htm>, accessed on 02/11/2017. 03/11/2017. Also see, "SAD considering Tota Singh, Ghunas for SGPC chief's post", *Hindustan Times*, November 24, 2017.

In contemporary times, the Sikh community living in Punjab and abroad is so much divided and fragmented on caste lines that there are organizations and groups based on 'caste' operating at various levels. There are both *Jatt* and Dalit organizations within the Sikh community in Punjab. For example, there is 'Dhaliwal Sabha' bodies of 'Sidhu-Brar Jatts', 'Grewal Jatts', there are 'Lobana Bhawans' etc. In fact, most of the castes within the Sikh community have established their organizations.²⁵⁶ Organizations and groups based and functioning on 'caste' factor within the Sikh community is totally opposite to the teachings of Sikh Gurus and basic principles of Sikhism. One cannot justify such caste based groupings in Sikh community when the Sikh Gurus fully condemned and rejected the institution of caste. It is an established and known historical fact that the formation of Khalsa Panth by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, is based entirely on the principle and objective to achieve social equality by rejecting any discrimination on the basis of caste.²⁵⁷

In a content analysis study of the caste endogamy among the Sikhs, it is found that marriage alliances are generally sought from the same caste communities. It is found that mostly the matrimonial advertisements in the column of "Jatt Sikh" and "non-Jatt Sikh" category look for marriage alliances from within their own respective caste communities.²⁵⁸ This is predominantly the reason that Sikh scholar Sewa Singh Kalsi argues: "*Inter-caste marriages are strongly disapproved by the Sikhs.*"²⁵⁹ Sikh matrimonial advertisements (both in press and electronic media) reveal the fact that very small ratio of Sikhs do not mention caste or consider 'caste' as a factor for the marriage purpose. Large number of Sikhs retain

256 Information based on field observations in context to caste based groups and organizations within the Sikh Community.

257 Dalip Singh (1992), *Guru Gobind Singh and Khalsa Discipline*, published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar, pp.128-131, 209-214. Also see, Shiv Kumar Gupta (1999), "Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak's Mission" , in Shiv Kumar Gupta (ed.), *Creation of the Khalsa: Fulfilment of Guru Nanak's Mission : Khalsa Tercentenary Commemorative Volume*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 41-46

258 The content analysis study done under this research work found that more nearly 90 percent matrimonial advertisements in the column of 'jatt Sikh' and "non-jat Sikh" category (Khtari Sikhs, Ramgharia Sikhs, Saini Sikhs) sought marriage alliances from within their own respective caste communities. For this survey, the matrimonial advertisement that appeared in English Newspaper –*The Tribune*, Punjabi Newspapers –*Ajit* and *JagBani* were studied. Nearly 50 matrimonial advertisements were studied from each newspaper across the period of one month. Only those advertisements were studied where the boy/girl belonged to Sikh religion. A famous matrimony website – www.sikhmatrimony.com was also consulted to draw conclusions.

259 Sewa Singh Kalsi (1999), "The Sikhs and Caste: The Development of Ramgarhia Identity in Britain" in Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, p. 260.

their surnames, in spite of being ‘Singhs’ and ‘Kaur’s’, and from the surname one can make a good guess as to who is a *Jatt, Khatri, Ramgharia* , etc.²⁶⁰

The trend and practice of forming groups and organizations on caste lines, and common practise of using surnames has further fragmented and divided the Sikh community in terms of caste identities. **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the pivotal institution of the Sikhs, has been a silent spectator in this context. Although the Sikh philosophy and the teachings of the Sikh Gurus out rightly reject and condemn the caste based social hierarchy and discrimination, yet the largest representative institution of the Sikhs, the SGPC, has not done much to curb down the common trend of making marriage alliances with the strong consideration of the caste factor.** SGPC has not devoted much attention to educate and motivate the Sikh masses to marry on the basis of real Sikh values and principles, and not on the basis of caste factor.

To propagate the teachings of Sikh Gurus and represent the Sikh community on the basic cornerstones of Sikhism was the primary objective behind the establishment of SGPC. As such, to reject, condemn and discourage the caste based groupings and bodies was one of the key objectives behind the formation of premier governing body of the Sikhs, the SGPC. But in recent years, not once has SGPC leadership spoken against caste based groups and organizations within the Sikh community worldwide. No strong action has been taken by SGPC to condemn and discourage the practice of formation of caste based bodies within the Sikh community.²⁶¹

It can be concluded that caste considerations have crept up in the management of Sikh religious affairs and influencing the role of premier Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). It is quite common that caste adherence is taken as an important element in electing and appointing the members of Sikh religious institutions, particularly the SGPC. The rapid increase in construction of caste-based Gurdwaras which have become one of the main instruments for perpetuating caste

260 Information based on content analysis study of matrimonial advertisements (related to Sikh community) that appear in English and Punjabi Newspapers (*The Tribune, Ajit, Jag Bani*). Sikh matrimony webiste like sikhmatrimmony.com was also consulted.

261 Gurnam Kaur (2013) , *Studies in Sikhism Its Institutions and Its Scripture in Global Context*, published by Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 56-63. Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions: Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 123-124.

consciousness and solidarity is significant development, both in India and in the Diaspora. Although Sikh Gurus and their teachings out-rightly rejected the notion of caste, it remains a vital factor in the daily lives of the Sikhs.²⁶² Instead of denouncing the institution of caste and diluting the ‘caste factor’ in Sikh society, SGPC has further contributed in the evolution of Sikh caste hierarchy parallel to that of the Hindu caste system.

The chapter was dwelled on two issues - (i) Sehajdhari Sikh identity and their voting rights in SGPC (ii) Role of Sikh institutions (Akali Takht Sahib and SGPC) in context to caste factor. Both these issues, although distinct from each other, have created divisions and segregation within the Sikh community. There is no doubt in the fact that divisions and fragmentation based on caste factor are much more deep rooted with harsh outcomes and various socio-political and economic implications. The chapter documents that pioneer Sikh religious institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which condemns and rejects the institution of caste as per Sikh philosophy, has itself established ‘caste’ as a significant factor in its own administrative and politico-religious aspects. The chapter explains the role and response and SGPC in context to issue of Sehajdhari identity and voting rights of Sehajdharis which involves complex political dynamics. However, the issue has been pushed and justified by mainstream Sikh institutions on religious basis. To explore and explain the role of apex Sikh institutions, the Akali Takht Sahib and SGPC, in context to concerned issues, was the primary objective of the chapter.

262 Arvinder Singh (2014), “Deravad-An Offshoot of Discontentment Among Dalit Sikhs in Punjab”, *International Journal of Research*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, February 2014, pp. 87-91 available a <http://internationaljournalofresearch.org/>, accessed on 21/07/2017. “Caste-based gurdwaras are mushrooming in Punjab”, *The Times of India*, December 11, 2002, accessed on 17/03/2016. S.S Jodhka has examined and analysed the issue of caste in contemporary Sikh society, its impact and related socio-religious and political dynamics. See, Surinder S. Jodhka (2004), “Sikhism and the Caste Question: Dalits and their Politics in Contemporary Punjab”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Volume: 38 Issue, February 2004, pp. 165-192.

Chapter 4

Threats to Sikh Identity (Dera-Cult and RSS Agenda)

Role and Response of Akal Takht and SGPC

The issue of Sikh identity has always been a matter of serious concern for Sikh politico-religious institutions and scholars of Sikh studies. The identity issue has been coming to fore in Sikh affairs since the emergence of Singh Sabha Movement in 19th century. The need for examination and evaluation of the issue has arisen mainly due to the challenges and threats that Sikh identity is facing both from within and outside the Sikh community in the present socio-political and religious scenario. The study in this chapter dwells upon two such highly contentious issues - (i) Dera cult among Sikhs, and (ii) RSS agenda and strategy towards Sikh identity. These issues which possess both religious and political dimensions have emerged as serious contemporary challenges and threats to separateness and distinctiveness of Sikh religion and identity. Massive following of Deras by Sikhs, and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's policy and approach towards Sikh minority, both involve complex political dynamics, and are posing multi-dimensional challenges and threats before Sikh institutions and identity. The chapter is divided in two separate sections with section (I) explaining the concerns and challenges posed by *Derawaad* (Dera culture) before mainstream Sikh religion, and section (II) dwelling upon RSS ideology and tactics towards Sikh religious minority. The role and response of premier Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, in context to undertaken issues, forms the core part of the chapter.

I

Dera Cult among Sikhs

Babas, Sants, Gurus and their Deras have been significant part of the religious landscape of Punjab since long time. Outside more organized religious structures like Gurdwaras, temples or mosques, these institutions of popular or folk religion represented the enchanted universe of pre-modern religiosity.¹ Deras are not new either to Punjab or Sikh religion, in-fact the history of Deras in Punjab is older than the Sikh Panth.² With the emergence of Sikh Panth, few prominent Sikh and non-Sikh deras came into existence such

1 Surinder Singh Jodhka (2008), "Of Babas and Deras", *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, pp. 54-57. Madan Lal, "Gurudom: The Political Dimension of Religious sects in Punjab", *South Asia Research*, Vol. 29(3): 223-234, 2009, available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.866.4492&repep1&typepdf>, accessed on 12/09/2016.

2 R. Singh, (1994) *Baba Sri Chand and the Persian Chronicles. Seminar Papers on Baba Sri Chand ji*, published by Gobind Sadan Institute of Advanced Studies in Comparative Religions, New Delhi, pp. 6- 15 Dalwinder Singh Grewal, 'Sikh Deras: From Grace to Disgrace', *The Sikh Review*, 55(7), 2007, pp.. 64-66.

as Udasi Deras, Dera Baba Ram Thaman, Namdhari, Minas, Dhirmalias, Ramraiya and that of Massandis.³ All such earlier Deras were primarily the outcome of the disgruntled and unsuccessful attempts of the “fake” claimants to the title of “Guru”. Apart from the above mentioned Deras, there were many more Deras that came up at different intervals during the consolidation of the Sikh religion. However, the Deras that emerged in twentieth century became highly popular among people in Punjab.⁴

The religious geography of Punjab has witnessed some vital changes over the last century. The land of Punjab has seen the evolution of new institutions of religious authority, and crystallization and construction of new boundaries across communities. The tragic partition of Punjab in 1947 and later its reorganization into a Sikh majority State in 1966 further sharpened the sense of identity and communal consciousness, difference, and even hostility across communities. However, notwithstanding this construction and sharpening of religious and political identities, the Deras have continued to develop and flourish in Punjab. The trend of emergence and evolution of new Deras, *sants* and *babas* have been on sharp increase in contemporary Sikh society.⁵

The ever increasing number of Deras all over the Doaba, Majha and Malwa regions of Punjab is widely attributed to the denial of a respectable place to the dalits and backward sections of society in religious places and institutions of the Sikh *Panth*.⁶ The dalits and backward classes in Punjab, to some extent, also feel excluded from making the political and economic choices for the State.⁷ The Deras situated in Punjab with their inclusive and

3 S. Singh, (1981), The Udasis in the Early Nineteenth Century, *Journal of Regional History*, Vol .2, pp. 38-42. Also see, Pramod Kumar, “Decoding politics of ‘Messengers of God’: Deras in Punjab”, *Times of India*, August 28, 2017.

4 Parashuram Chaturvedi (1951), *Uttari Bharat Ki Sant-parampara (Saint-tradition of Northern India)*, Leader Press, Prayag, pp. 362-69, Ethne K. Marengo (1976), *The Transformation of Sikh Society*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 28-30. Also see, J.S. Grewal (1996), *Sikh Ideology: Polity and Social Order*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, pp. 40-46

5 Neeru Verma (2014), “Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism”, *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86. Niranjana Singh (1988), *Sikh Jagat vich Futt ate es de Karan (ਸਿੱਖ ਜਗਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਫੁੱਟ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਦੇ ਕਾਰਨ)*, Lokgeet Publication, Sirhind, pp. 48-56. Also see, M Rajashekhar (2017), “Why is Punjab increasingly turning to new gurus for comfort?”, March 28, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/804145/why-is-punjab-increasingly-turning-towards-new-gurus-for-comfort>, accessed on 21/06/2017.

6 Sher Singh Mahadpur (2007), “Akaash Vel Vaang Qyon Vadh Riha Derawaad”, *Ajit Magazine*, August 19, 2007.

7 Though Dalits constitute about 32 percent of Punjab’s population, that happens to be the largest proportion in the country, but they occupy the lowest share in land (only 2.5 percent). On the other hand, the Jatt Sikhs that constitute nearly 21 percent of Punjab population own about 80 percent of land, and control the politics and economy of the state. See, Paramjit Singh Judge (2002), “Religion, Caste, and Communalism in Punjab”, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 51, No. 2, September 2002, pp. 89-190. Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.42, No.40, October 6-12, 2007, pp. 4066 -67. Relevant

egalitarian approach have played a crucial and historical role in the formation of dalit consciousness in the State.⁸ There is no exact statistical figure on number of Deras that exactly exist in present Punjab. But as per rough estimate figure provided by concerned scholars and newspaper reports,⁹ there are more than 9,000 Sikh¹⁰ as well as non- Sikh Deras in 12,000 villages of Punjab. However, there are nearly 300 major Deras across Punjab and the neighbouring State of Haryana, and they are popular in both the States. Out of these, almost a dozen of the prominent Deras have over one lakh devotees each. There are hundreds of Deras which are restricted to few villages each.¹¹

The emergence of large numbers of Deras in Punjab is predominantly attributed to prevailing inequality in social and economic order and the marginal position of the dalits in the society. The rise of the Deras to position of power and influence is primarily due to the facts that Sikh religion and its institutions, in its modern form, did not accept the Sikhs belonging to lower castes in totality.¹² The Deras which have large Sikh following are: Radha Soami (Beas)¹³, Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa),¹⁴ Nirankari, Namdhari, Divya Jyoti Jagran

information available at - "Dalit votes to decide ruling party of Punjab, *India Today*, January 16, 2012, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/dalit-votes-to-decide-ruling-party-of-punjab-89788-2012-01-16>, accessed on 18/06/2016.

- 8 Dera Sach Khand Ballan, Dera Sant Swaran Dass and Ad- Dharm movement led by Babu Mango Ram have been playing an important role in raising dalit consciousness and also acting as agencies for providing health and education facilities to the dalits. See, Ronki Ram (2008), "Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab (India)", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 67, No. 4, pp.1341-1353. Also see, Surinder Singh (2009), "Deras, Caste Conflicts and Recent Violence in Punjab", *Mainstream*, Vol XLVII, No 26, June 13, 2009, available at <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article1425.html>, accessed on 23/07/2016.
- 9 A study conducted by the Punjabi newspaper, *Desh Sewak*, in 2007 estimated that there were more than 9,000 deras in the State, though only a few such as Dera Radha Soami, Dera Sacha Sauda, Dera Nurmahal, Dera Nirankari, Dera Sachkhand Ballan and Dera Namdhari have a large following. For information see "Punjab elections 2017: Of deras, dynasties, and drugs", *The Hindu*, March 20, 2017.
10. Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political weekly*, October 6, 2007, pp. 4066-68, available at http://www.academia.edu/1366855/Social_Exclusion_Res_istance_and_Deras_Exploring_the_Myth_of_Casteless_Sikh_Society_in_Punjab, accessed on 15/09/2016. See also, Amrita Chaudhary, "Over 9,000 Deras in Punjab some as old as Sikh religions itself", *Indian Express*, January 28, 2012, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/over-9-000-deras-in-punjab-some-as-old-as-sikh-religion-itself/>, accessed on 15/09/2016.
- 11 "Dera support to count in Punjab", *The Hindu*, October 18, 2016, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/Dera-support-to-count-Punjab/article13370941.ece>, accessed on 27/05/2017. Ronki Ram, "Beyond Conversion and Sanskritisation: Articulating an Alternative Dalit Agenda in East Punjab", *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.46 , Issue 3, 12 May 2011, available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/modern-asian-studies/article/div-classtitlebeyond-conversion-and-sanskritisation-articulating-an-alternative-dalit-agenda-in-east-punjaba-hrefn01-ref-typefnadiv/4C3C9738FA9164BC045988E3F50F8FAE> accessed on 17/09/2016.
- 12 Vandana Singh (2014), "Splinters of Discontent", *The Millenium Post*, December 22, 2014, available at <http://www.millenniumpost.in/splinters-of-discontent-49033>, accessed on 27/05/2017.
- 13 Commonly known as Dera Beas, this Dera holds a sway in Daoba and Majha areas. The dera came into existence in 1891, with its first Guru, Baba Jaimal Singh. At present, it has a worldwide following. Though it drew its teachings from Gurbani and remained attached to Sikh principles, but it claimed an independent identity. As it did nothing against the value system of the Sikh community and paid due

Sansthan (Nurmahal), Dera Sant Bhaniarwala (Ropar)¹⁵ and Dera Sach Khand (Ballan).¹⁶ Almost all of these Deras have branches in every district of Punjab as well as other parts of the country. Some of them are very popular among the Punjabi Diaspora and have overseas branches in almost all the continents of the world. Though all of these Deras have followers among every caste, yet majority of their followers come from Dalits or socially backward section of people, who are generally economically weaker also. For an example, Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) composes of around 70% of scheduled caste followers, and thus operates as a space for the political assertion of dalit identity whose members constitute approximately 31.9 percent of Punjab's total population.¹⁷ Thus, the composition of these deras gets reflected along caste lines.¹⁸

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- respect to Sikh Gurus and scriptures , it was not interfered with, even though it weaned away the Sikhs from Sikhism. Now, its preachings are taken from various religions. While the Dera Beas claims that it has no political affiliation, the 2012 Punjab assembly elections seem to have changed this claim to quiet an extent. While Beas Radhasoami Dera too has large following, it has been more or less silent and least controversial in Sikh religious establishment.
- 14 Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) was established in 1948. At the beginning it was a branch of Dera Radhasoami (Beas). Majority of its come from lower castes, while its main leaders belong to upper castes, starting from Baba Gurmeet Ram Rahim who himself is a Jatt.
- 15 Dera Bhaniarawala founded in 1990's is based in Dhamiana village in Ropar district. It is headed Baba Piara Singh Bhaniarwala – a leader of a breakaway Sikh sect. Piara Singh Bhaniarwala has been on the hit list of radical Sikh groups since 2001 after he was said to have asked his followers to stop praying from Guru Granth Sahib. He was arrested in 2001 for hurting religious sentiments of Sikhs after he published a book titled as 'Bhavsagar Granth', which was then banned by the Government. An agitation was called for by several radical Sikh youth organizations including the Dal Khalsa, after which a building and a center of the Baba were demolished. The followers of this dera are not likely to vote for the Akali candidates whom they consider as Panthic candidates. See , Kulbir Singh Kaura (2003), *Beimaan Sikh Rajneet Ch Fasya Akal Takht* (Punjabi), Panth Khalsa Publications, Jalandhar, pp. 187. Also see, "Punjab guru, 7 others jailed for burning Granth Sahib ", *The Times of India*, March 14, 2013, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Punjab-guru-7-others-jailed-for-burning-Granth-Sahib/articleshow/20039995.cms>, accessed on 24/06/2016. Meet and Rajivlochan (2007), "Caste and Religion in Punjab: Case of the Bhaniarawala Phenomenon", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 21 (May 26 - Jun. 1, 2007), pp. 1909-1913.
- 16 Dera Sachkhand Ballan is village dera in Ballan in Jalandhar district with primarily following of Scheduled Caste population. Dera Sachkhand is a sect devoted to the teachings of Guru Ravidas. This Dera shot to limelight in 2009 after its head Sant Niranjana Das was attacked by some Sikh hardliners in Vienna. Angered by this, the Dera followers returned the Sikh sacred scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib to the SGPC as a mark of protest. In year 2010, it broke away from Sikhism and began calling themselves Ravidassia Dharam. The Dera Sachkhand, a Ravidassia Dera, has been at the forefront of articulating the Ravidassia identity, particularly so since 2009. While the Dera has been in existence for close to a century now, it is only in the last couple of decades that it has clearly taken off and emerged as the most visible sign and site of the Ravidassia identity. See, Santosh K Singh (2017), "The Caste Question and Songs of Protest in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.52, Issue No. 4, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2017/34/perspectives/ caste-question-and-songs-protest-punjab.html>, accessed on 12/11/2017. Dev Kumar (2017) , "Dera Sachkhand Ballan and Dalit, *International Journal of Buisness Management and Scientific Resaerch*, VOL : 32, August 2017, available at <http://www.eminencejournal.com/images/pdf/AGB.pdf>, accessed on 23/11/2017.
- 17 Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 2007, pp. 4066-74.
- 18 Though majority of the followings in every case comes from dalits, backward castes and poor jatt Sikh peasantry, their command is still in the hands of the upper castes. Among them the chief of the Nirankari deras belonged to the Khatri caste, and that of the Sacha Sauda and Radha Soamis come from

The appeal of the Deras in Punjab lies in their inclusive approach. The caste system has been rearing its head in Punjab in recent years, the manifestation of which is quite visible in form of separate Gurdwaras for dalit population and other lower-caste Sikhs. The Deras attract this segment with their egalitarian outlook and inclusive approach. Thus, it's not surprising that most major deras draw majority of members from socially and economically backward castes, the illiterate and the gullible. In Punjab with about 31.9 percent Dalit population¹⁹, the Deras enjoy a large following of dalit masses who feel socially and politically alienated by the political and religious system.²⁰ In social justice terms, the Deras play a role abandoned by the State. The Deras have evolved as veritable governments, running hospitals, schools, and colleges to which devotees have easy access at relatively much lesser costs.²¹

Gradually, the Dalit community in Punjab and especially in Doaba region²² started to acquire non- agricultural occupation and settled on foreign lands in large numbers. The increased mobility and the increased incomes especially among the Dalit segments of Doaba region of Punjab reduced their economic dependence on landed groups and also made them more socially and politically assertive. This, in turn, was met with a backlash from upper castes which was also expressed in socio-cultural terms as heightened discrimination. Active participation and involvement in deras that provided more substantive social equality became a way for Dalit communities to deal with this.²³

the jatt Sikhs of the Sidhu and Dhillon sub-castes respectively. In the case of Sikh Deras, a large majority of their following comes from jatt Sikh community and they are invariably run by jatt Sikhs. It is rare that the head of a Sikh dera would be a non-Jatt Sikh.

- 19 As per Government of India Census-2011, Punjab has the highest percentage of Scheduled Caste population amongst all the States of the Country. The Scheduled Caste population in Punjab is about 88.60 lakh which is 31.94% of the total population (277.43 lakh) of the State. Information taken from Department of Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, Punjab. See official website of the concerned department -<http://welfarepunjab.gov.in/Static/SCPopulation.html>.
- 20 Neeru Verma, "Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism", *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86. See also Pragya Singh, "The Dera Sultanates", *The Outlook*, September 11, 2017, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-dera-sultanates/299270>, accessed on 18/10/2017.
- 21 Vinod Sharam (2017), "How Deras and politicians fed off each other"September 1, 2017, *Hindustan Times*, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/how-deras-and-politicians-fed-off-each-other/story-SpDvL8AXYeoriNMJACNXFL.html>, accessed on 09/11/2017.
- 22 The state of Punjab in India is divided into three main regions, namely Doaba, Majha and Malwa. The Doaba literally means "land of two rivers" as it is surrounded by the two rivers, Beas and Sutlej, and considered to be one of the most prosperous regions. The river Sutlej separates Doaba from the Malwa region to its south and the river Beas separates Doaba from the Majha region to its north. Scheduled castes form more than 15% of the population in Doaba. . This area is also called the NRI Hub of Punjab as a consequence of the migration of a significant percentage of Doabias.
- 23 Ronki Ram (2016), "Structures of Social Exclusion, Dera Culture and Dalit Social Mobility in Contemporary East Punjab", *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, October 2016, Volume- 8, Issue- 2, pp: 186-193, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2455328X16661084>, accessed on 14/03/2017. "Deras and evangelicals", *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at

The Dalit Sikh sections of Punjab began to strive for an independent identity by way of isolating themselves from mainstream Sikhism and Panthic institutions, especially the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). At various times, this has even led to series of violent caste conflicts between the Dalit segments and Jatt Sikhs, and created a communal posture and tension in the State of Punjab.²⁴ As such, these Deras pose a serious challenge to mainstream Sikhism and functioning of apex Sikh religious institutions – the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC.²⁵

Dera Cult: A Perceived Threat to Sikh Identity

The increasing prominence of caste hierarchy within the Sikh society has disillusioned the dalit Sikhs, who at one point of time embraced the Sikh faith in the hope of escaping social exclusion imposed on them by the Hindu social order. Practise of caste barriers and discrimination in contemporary Sikh society parallel to Hindu caste order seems to push dalit sections of Sikh community towards the Deras that mobilise the masses with promise of dignity and social equality.²⁶ Thus, the majority of the followers of present day Deras come from the dalit or socio-economically backward families. The near-exodus of dalits from mainstream Sikhism and their strong inclination towards the alternative socio-spiritual space provided by the Dera network has resulted in the hostility of clerics of the Sikh religious order, who see this trend as a serious challenge to the Khalsa Sikh identity. The main difference between Sikhism and the ritualistic system of beliefs promoted by these Deras lie in the following of the *living guru, sant or baba*. This practice of following a living entity is deviation in itself to the Sikh philosophy, since in Sikh religion Guru Granth

https://www.frontline.in/columns/Jayati_Ghosh/deras-and-evangelicals/article9855518.ece, accessed on 28/12/2017. Divya Trivedi (2017), “Deras & Dalit identity”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at <https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/deras-amp-dalit-identity/article9855385.ece>, accessed on 13/11/2017.

24 See, Ashutosh Kumar (2017), “Deras and the Caste Question”, *The Indian Express*, August 28, 2017, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2017/aug/28/deras-and-the-caste-question-1648950--1.html>, accessed on 08/09/2017. Also see, Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta (2017), “Dalit Issues Take Centre Stage in Punjab, But Jat Sikhs Continue to Dominate Political Dialogue”, *The Wire*, January 31, 2017, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/dalit-issues-take-centre-stage-in-punjab-but-jat-sikhs-continue-to-dominate-political-dialogue>, accessed on 09/02/2017.

25 Surinder Singh Jodhka (2008), “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, pp. 54-57. Amandeep Sandu (2017), “Dera through the Punjab lens”, *The Hindu*, August 30, 2017, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/dera-through-the-punjab-lens/article19582459.ece>, accessed on 19/09/2017. Also see, Neeru Sharma (2014), “Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism”, *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86

26 Ronki Ram (2007), “Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 2007, pp. 4066-74. Geetanjali Atri (2017), “Decoding Dera: A Perspective on its Historicity and Guru Phenomena” *Mainstream*, Vol LV, No. 46, November 4, 2017, available at <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article7572.html>, accessed on 23/08/2017.

Sahib (recognized and respected as ‘eternal living Guru’) is the ultimate holder of the divine knowledge.²⁷

Technically, a Dera is the head-quarter of a group of devotees who follow the teachings of a particular spiritual *Guru, baba or sant*, and generally have a living representative of the ‘Guru’ who is equally respected and admired. The representatives of the *guru/baba/sant* who hold the ‘Gaddi’ (seat of the head of dera) are generally appointed by their predecessors.²⁸ There are considerable differences of form and substance among the different Deras. A large majority of Deras are simply Sikh Gurdwaras being run by an individual *baba or sant* or have been built in memory of particular *baba /sant* and run by his descendants or followers. Many of these Deras in Punjab adhere to the conventions of Sikh preaching as they have evolved over the years. According to an eminent sociologist Surinder Singh Jodhka, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) recognizes such Deras as Gurdwaras without any hesitation.²⁹ Some of the prominent Sikh personalities in the recent past who have been influential members of SGPC over the years have come from these ‘Sikh Deras’. It is pertinent to mention here that former SGPC chief Bibi Jagir Kaur, herself heads a Dera named as Sant Baba Prem Singh Murarerwala Dera, Begowal.³⁰

In the second category would be those deras that continue to practice Sikhism but do not follow the Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of Conduct) as evolved by the SGPC in its entirety. They are closer to what has been called Sanatan Sikhism by historians of Sikh religion. In the third category, lie those deras where the practice of a ‘living Guru’ is still practiced.³¹ Though invariably locating their origin in Sikh history, they can be described as having evolved into separate sects. These include the Deras of the Namdhari Sikhs and Nirankaris. Some dalit

27 Neeru Sharma (2014), “Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism”, *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86. Geetanjali Atri (2017), “Decoding Dera: A Perspective on its Historicity and Guru Phenomena” *Mainstream*, Vol . LV, No. 46 , November 4, 2017, available at <http://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article7572.html>, accessed on 23/08/2017.

28 Vipin Pubby (2010), “Deciphering Deras”, *The Indian Express*, April 29, 2010, available at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/deciphering-deras/465965/>, accessed on 20/08/2017.

29 Surinder Singh Jodhka (2008) “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, pp. 54-57.

30 Sant Baba Prem Singh (1882 - 1950) was a social, political religious leader who was also a visionary and a social reformer. Sant Prem Singh proudly preached Sikhism, promoted *Amrit Sanchar*. He also played an important role in revitalizing the Lobana community. He always stressed the importance of education and opened many educational institutes for this purpose. He also became a member of its executive committee in 1948. He also got constructed two bungas at Nankana Sahib and Baba Bakala. He was nominated as a member of Parchar Sub Committee of the Chief Khalsa Diwan on 30th April 1922. Sant Baba Prem Singh remained the member of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandak Committee from 1926 to 1950.

31 Amrita Chaudhary, “Over 9,000 Deras in Punjab some as old as Sikh religions itself”, *Indian Express*, January 28, 2012, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/over-9-000-deras-in-punjab-some-as-old-as-sikh-religion-itself/>, accessed on accessed on 15/09/2016. Also see, Surinder Singh Jodhka (2008) “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, pp. 54-57.

Sikhs also have separate Deras of their own where centrality is given to Guru Granth Sahib. Finally, there are also Deras which have nothing to do with Sikhism. These include Sufi shrines, many of which are managed by local Sikhs and/or Hindus. Similarly, some of the Deras closely resemble Hindu temples and have Hindu managers running them.³²

Generally, Deras are non-sectarian in nature. The main attraction of the most of the Deras is that they are inclusionary sects outside the organised control of mainstream Hindu and Sikh religions. Even if they acquire the status of a particular sect, they usually do not assert for being a part of exclusive and standardized system for the followers.³³ In this context, a renowned sociologist Surinder Singh Jodhka says:

“Dera identity has traditionally been more like an ‘add-on’ identity. One continues to be a Sikh or a Hindu or a Muslim and still gets blessings or naam from the guru or the pir at the dera. Not only would a typical devotee of a dera continue to visit the more ‘mainstream’ shrines of their respective faith systems, he/she would invariably visit more than one dera and could in fact have multiple gurus.”³⁴

Notwithstanding the spiritual self-image and identity of the ‘babas’ and their ‘deras’, they are not free from more worldly and materialistic concerns, such as luxury accommodations and vehicles, land, money and power. Some of the famous deras like Dera Radha Soami, Beas and Dera Sacha Sauda, Sirsa, own huge amounts of land and property. Even comparatively much smaller deras like Dera Sant Baba Bhag Singh Bhorewala, Sukhanand (Moga), Dera Baba Bawa Lal, Dhianpur (Gurdaspur) and Ratwara Sahib, Mullanpur Garibdass (Mohali) - owe substantial amount of property and land.³⁵

32 Based on informations, observations and discussions held at different Deras during the field study. For example the ideology, structure and functioning of Dera Baba Bawa Lal, Dhianpur (Gurdasur) is entirely different from Sikh Deras like Dera Sant Baba Bhag Singh Bhorewala, Sukhanand (Moga) and Ratwara Sahib (Mullanur Garibdass, Mohali). The philosophy and way of functioning of non-Sikh deras like Dera Radhasoami, Dera Sacha Sauda, Dera Sach Khand (Ballan) and Sufi Deras like Dera Baba Muraad Shah (Nakodar) is also different from Sikh Deras. In Sikh Deras supreme importance is given Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh code of conduct is followed strictly. For information see, Pragaya Singh (2017), “The Dera Sultanates”, *The Outlook*, September 11, 2017, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-dera-sultanates/299270>. Surinder Singh Jodhka (2008), “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, available at http://www.indiaseminar.com/2008/581/581_surinder_jodhka.htm, accessed on 21/11/2017.

33 Surinder S. Jodhka (2008), “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, available at http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/581/581_surinder_jodhka.htm, accessed on 21/03/2017. Surinder S. Jodhka (2017), “Why Do People Go to the Dera?”, *The Wire*, August 27, 2017, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-dera-community-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh>, accessed on 21/09/2017. Also see, “Deras and evangelicals”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at https://www.frontline.in/columns/Jayati_Ghosh/deras-and-evangelicals/article9855518.ece, accessed on 28/12/2017.

34 Surinder S. Jodhka (2008), “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, available at http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/581/581_surinder_jodhka.htm, accessed on 21/03/2017.

35 Information based on field visits made at these Deras. Discussions held with followers and administrators at these Deras provided useful insights required for the study. Sikh Deras like Sant Baba Bhag Singh Bhorewala, Sukhanand (Moga) and Ratwara Sahib, Mullanpur Garibdass (Mohali) follow

According to Harjinder Singh Dilgeer, a known Sikh historian formerly with the SGPC, there are 10 prominent Deras in Punjab region with following of more than one lakh.³⁶ Dera Sacha Sauda of Sirsa in Haryana would perhaps be the largest. Flush with cash and helped by a captive vote bank, these Deras wield enormous clout when polls gather near.³⁷ Noted historian H.S. Dilgeer estimates that there are around 30 odd secondary Deras with a following of around nearly 30,000 devotees.³⁸ The bottom of the pyramid would consist of 5,000 units, mostly headed by a single person in a village with 1,000 to 5,000 followers. According to few estimates, Deras across Punjab lord over around 50,000 acres compared to 10,000 acres which the Gurdwaras possess.³⁹

Deras and politicians both thrive on each other in Punjab. While deras use political class patronage to attract devotees, the politicians woo dera organizations to get votes of their large number of followers.⁴⁰ Given their material resources and persuasive power, deras are strongly influencing the political process in the State as well. It has become almost mandatory for the political class of the state to visit prominent deras at regular intervals and seek blessings from so called *sants or babas*. This obviously gives the Dera management a

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- Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh code of conduct) and give supreme importance to Guru Granth sahib. However, in these deras, the practice of 'dehdhari' Guru/Baba/Sant is also practiced side by side.
- 36 Parveen S Thampi (2008) , "Simmering Discontent: Sikhs in Punjab are fighting Many Wars ", *The Economic Times*, March 8, 2008, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/the-big-story/simmering-discontent-sikhs-in-punjab-are-fighting-many-wars/articleshow/2846479.cms>, accessed on 21/09/2017.
- 37 See, "Dera Sacha Sauda: Here's what gave Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh so much political power", *The Economic Times*, August 26, 2017, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/dera-sacha-sauda-heres-what-gives-deras-so-much-political-power/articleshow/60233977.cms>, accessed on 13/10/2017. Also see, "Mix of religion, welfare and politics that is Ram Rahim Singh's Dera", *Business Standard*, August 31, 2017, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/mix-of-religion-welfare-and-politics-that-is-ram-rahim-singh-s-dera-117083100144_1.html, accessed on 13/10/2017.
- 38 Parveen S Thampi (2008) , "Simmering Discontent: Sikhs in Punjab are fighting Many Wars ", *The Economic Times*, March 8, 2008, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/the-big-story/simmering-discontent-sikhs-in-punjab-are-fighting-many-wars/articleshow/2846479.cms>, accessed on 21/09/2017.
- 39 *ibid.*
- 40 The Dera churning in Punjab has definite electoral implications. Followers of the Dera Sacha Sauda have major presence in 27 segments, especially in the Malwa region that accounts for 69 of the 117 seats of Punjab Assembly. In 2012, Punjab assembly elections, the Dera had thrown its weight behind the Congress, and the SAD-BJP was thus routed in its Malwa stronghold, even as the alliance got a simple majority. In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls and the Haryana assembly polls after that, the Dera Sacha Sauda backed the BJP. In 2017 Punjab assembly elections, Dera Sacha Sauda supported the Akali-BJP combine at the last moment and was believed to have swung the votes away from Aam Aadmi Party in Malwa. Apart from Deras Sacha Suda both the SAD and the Congress party leaders has also been making efforts to reach out other Deras situated in Punjab like Namdharis, Radhaswami, Bhaniarwala, Dera Baba Jaure etc. to win over their followers. For information see, "Sacha Sauda's political forays help it flourish", *The Tribune*, August 22, 2017. Also see, "Its official: Dera Sacha Sauda with SAD-BJP in Punjab elections", *Hindustan Times*, February 1, 2017. Relevant information also available at: "The Dera Vote Bank, *The Outlook*, March 27, 2009, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-dera-vote->, accessed 15/10/2017.

sense of power and influence.⁴¹ In this context, Kiranjot Kaur, former SGPC General Secretary and executive committee member (SGPC), says:

“Politicians of all types patronise the Deras. It's a complex and vicious circle. Due to large following of Deras, politicians seek the support of Deras for votes. The presence and involvement of political leaders in functioning of Dera grants the Dera- the legitimacy, and thus adds to its following.”⁴²

However, these spiritual Deras of various sects have also been playing active role in Punjab Politics. The Deras situated in Punjab had exercised the influence on followers to vote for a particular political party or individual candidate. As a result the political parties like Shiromani Akali Dal and the Congress remained attached and affiliated with different Deras to get support of their followers. While Sikh religion does not approve of these Deras especially worship of ‘Gurus’ in physical form yet all the Sikh leaders in Punjab are affiliating themselves to Deras to get a large number of committed votes of the Dera’s followers. Deras have not only become the centre of religious but also the venue of social and political thinking of its followers. In fact, these Deras have been playing a decisive role in rising of the social and political consciousness of the dalit sections of society, which further enhanced the sharpening contradictions between them and *Jatt* Sikhs of Punjab.⁴³

The contemporary Deras operating in Punjab are congregation of followers transcending religious, caste and class divisions and reverence for the ‘living Guru’. These Deras represent not only the marginalized sections but have also put into question the monolithic articulations of Sikh religious institutions leading to discrimination against the

41 Vinod Sharma (2017), “How Deras and politicians fed off each other”, *Hindustan Times*, September 1, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/how-deras-and-politicians-fed-off-each-other/story-SpDvL8AXYeoriNMJACNXFL.html>, 14/10/2017. Rajendra Khattry (2017), “Punjab Assembly election 2017: Parties locked in electoral battle to woo Deras”, *FirstPost*, January 30, 2017, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/punjab-assembly-election-2017-parites-locked-in-electoral-battle-to-woo-deras-3226522.html>, accessed on 15/09/2017. Also see, “Dera support to count in Punjab”, *The Hindu*, October 18, 2016, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/Dera-support-to-count-Punjab/article13370941.ece>, accessed on 27/05/2017.

42 Statement made by former SGPC General Secretary and senior SGPC member, Bibi Kiranjot Kaur. The statement was recorded during my discussion with Bibi Kiranjot Kaur on the issue of increasing following of Deras within the Sikh community. The role of SGPC in this context was also discussed.

43 Ashutosh Kumar (2014), “Deras as sites of electoral mobilisation in Indian Punjab: Examining the reasons that political parties flock to the deras”, *Asian Ethnicity*, June 2, 2014, 15:3, pp. 339-345, available at https://www.academia.edu/13552341/Dera_Politics_in_Punjab?, accessed on 27/07/2016. Ashutosh Sharma (2017). “Why do political parties patronise godmen”, *National Herald*, August 26, 2017, available at <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/why-do-political-parties-patronise-godmen>, 12/10/2017. Also see, Parbhash K Dutta (2017), “Ministers gave money, others sought blessings: How BJP, Congress dabbled with Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim”, *India Today*, August 28, 2017, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/gurmeet-ram-rahim-dera-sacha-sauda-politics-bjp-congress-1031762-2017-08-26>, accessed on 12/10/2017.

lower castes. It has led to the conflict with the institutionalized religion, the Sikhism.⁴⁴ Baba Kashmira Singh,⁴⁵ head of the Jan Sewa Trust, Jalandhar, says: "*Sikhs are breaking away from Gurudwaras and coming to deras like mine for spiritual guidance because of their disillusionment with Sikhism. I am not against Sikhs cutting their hair. I believe a religion should be flexible and change with the times.*"⁴⁶ Eminent scholar Ronki Ram who has done extensive study on Deras and Dalit sections of Punjab, says: "*Sikhism on the whole embraced all walks of life. However, on the social domain, not all get equal treatment. You find some exclusion too. Deras offer space to such people across religions. Different identities gather at deras to create a blurred kind of syncretism.*"⁴⁷ Ronki Ram further adds: "*People go to the new deras because they are rational. There is more to gain by going there. It is a strategic choice. But when Sikh Gurdwaras see this, they get desperate, thinking people are leaving us.*"⁴⁸

Sikhism was an offshoot of Hinduism; the *Jatt* Sikhs and others had broken off from mainstream Hinduism over caste discrimination and created for themselves a rational religion that was more of a manifesto for social transformation, one that spoke about gender and caste equality. However, over time, little of the Sikh ideals converted into practice. Gradually, the Deras largely filled up the spiritual and religious vacuum and Sikh masses started moving out of the ambit of mainstream Sikhism into the orbit of these self-proclaimed God Men. Apart from the mythic value and the personal charismatic appeal of the *sants* or *babas*, the Deras also offer a sense of security to their followers, a personal touch, something completely missing in the mainstream Gurdwaras. The fact that there do not exist an institutionalized clergy in Sikh community to neutralize the all pervasive trend has further abetted this

44 See, S.S. Dhawan (2017) , "The danger of 'Deras' to mainstream Sikhism", *The Free Press Journal*, January 17, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/news-spot-analysis/the-danger-of-deras-to-mainstream-sikhism/520924>, accessed on 21/03/2017. Also see, "Sikh religion vs Deras" *Deccan Herald*, May 31, 2009, available at <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/5452/sikh-religion-vs-deras.html>, accessed on 17/04.2016.

45 Baba Kashmira Singh preaches unity of all religions and has set up little shrines representative of Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam on his dera's rooftop. In 1999, the baba, himself a Sikh, was summoned to the Akal Takht, the supreme religious and temporal body of the Sikhs, to explain why he should not be excommunicated from the faith for his 'heretical' activities. Baba Kashmira Singh is head of the Sidhant Sant Samaj , an organization in Jalandhar. He is known for his charitable works like: formation of Eye Bank, Anti drug Addiction Campaign, Cancer eradication, old age home, anti-dowry drives, etc.

46 Chandar Suta Dogra (2007) "The Morphed Gene Their more inclusive, less conservative aspect roils Sikhism", *The Outlook*, May 28, 2007, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-morphed-gene/234750>, accessed on 17/06/2015.

47 Pragma Singh, "The Dera Sultanates", *The Outlook*, September 11, 2017, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-dera-sultanates/299270>, accessed on 18/10/2017.

48 For statement made by Prof. Ronki Ram, see, M Rajashekhar (2017), "Why is Punjab increasingly turning to new gurus for comfort?", March 28, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/804145/why-is-punjab-increasingly-turning-towards-new-gurus-for-comfort>, accessed on 21/06/2017.

sentiment.⁴⁹ Today, as a new set of socially and economically marginalised people are following the different Deras, and looking beyond Sikhism, the perception that Sikhism could be under threat, is again gaining ground.⁵⁰

Deras represent religious congregations which are organized around a ‘living guru’ which are commonly called ‘baba’ or ‘sant’. Those who follow the Sikh code of conduct (Rehat Maryada) are known as Sikh Deras, while those who follow other traditions and composite traditions as well including Sikh rituals are considered as non-Sikh Deras. In the non-Sikh deras, different ritual practices are followed which vary from Dera to Dera. In the Sikh Deras, only *Gurubani* from Guru Granth Sahib is recited, but in the non-Sikh Deras along with the recitation of Gurubani from Guru Granth Sahib other sacred or religious texts related with different faiths are also referred to. Idol worship and devotion towards a ‘human guru’ is also quite common in these non-Sikh Deras.⁵¹

In Punjab, *Derawaad* (increasing number of Deras and their following) has been encouraging more people to follow the so called ‘human gurus’. They are not leading people to follow and adopt the fundamental ideas and tenets of Sikhism and thus the people have been losing touch with mainstream Sikh religion. The flow of people towards *deras* and *babas*, which now has become a trend – is in turn giving rise to questions about the future direction of Sikhism. In a sense, it is the continuation of an age-old process.⁵²

49 Divya Trivedi (2017), “Deras & Dalit identity”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at <https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/deras-amp-dalit-identity/article9855385.ece>, accessed on 13/11/2017. Ronki Ram, “Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab”, *Economic and Political weekly*, October 6, 2007, pp. 4066-68, available http://www.academia.edu/1366855/Social_Exclusion_Res... accessed on 15/09/2016. Also see, Nandini Rathi (2017), “Why deras and sects find Punjab fertile for growth”, *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2017, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/why-deras-and-sects-find-punjab-fertile-for-growth-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-rape-case-conviction-dera-sacha-sauda-4815609/>, accessed on 09/09/2017.

50 Ronki Ram (2016), “Structures of Social Exclusion, Dera Culture and Dalit Social Mobility in Contemporary East Punjab”, *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, October 2016, Volume- 8, Issue- 2, pp: 186-193, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2455328X16661084>, accessed on 14/03/2017. Raj Kumar Hans (2008), “Dalits and the Emancipatory Sikh Religion”, *A Paper presented at University of Pennsylvania*, December 3-5, 2008 Conference, available at <https://theprg.files.wordpress.com/2009/01/dalits-and-the-emancipatory-sikhism-rajkumarhans-2008.pdf>, accessed on 21/09/2106.

51 Various Sikh and non- Sikh Deras were visited during the field study. Information is based on observations, discussions and conversations held at few Deras located in Punjab. Few of the prominent Deras visited were : Dera Radhasoami Beas, Dera Baba Muraad Shah Nakodar, Dera Baba Jagtaar Singh, Tarn Taran, Dera Baba Ajit Singh Hansali Wale, Fatehgarh Sahib, Dera Baba Garibdass Mashrala wale (Tehsil Dera Baba Nanak, District Gurdaspur), Dera Bawa Laal Ji, Dhianpur (Gurdaspur), etc. All these Deras are being headed by ‘Dehdhari Gurus’ or ‘Babas’.

52 Parmod Kumar (2017), “Decoding politics of ‘Messengers of God’: Deras in Punjab”, *The Times of India*, August 28, 2017. Relevant information also available at- “Controversial ‘deras’ add fuel to Punjab fire”, *The Hindu*, March 10, 2010, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/Controversial-deras-add-fuel-to-Punjab-fire/article16572714.ece>, accessed on 09/07/2017. Also see, M Rajashekhar (2017), “Why is Punjab increasingly turning to new

Punjab is not just one of the India's 29 states; it is also the cradle of the youngest monotheistic religion, the Sikhism. The Sikh faith condemns and prohibits human worship. For the faithful, the sacred words of the Sikh Gurus and other saintly figures, as collectively compiled in Guru Granth Sahib are commanded to be the spiritual guide. But while travelling across Punjab, one can notice that landscape of the state is dotted with Deras or camps run by living humans with sublime titles of *sant, babas or gurus*.⁵³ They make special effort to woo socially and economically backward lower-caste and illiterate Sikhs, projecting an inclusive image. Deras within the contemporary Sikh society now pose a major threat and challenge to the Sikh religious establishment, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromai Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁵⁴

Conceptually, the institution of Dera is considered blasphemous by the radical Sikh Panthic bodies because of the presence of a living human Guru. Sikh religious tradition and faith put a closure to the idea of a 'living Guru' after Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, bestowed 'Guruship' in Guru Granth Sahib in 1708. Guru Gobind Singh decreed that the Sikhs were to regard the Guru Granth Sahib as their next and everlasting 'Guru'. It is perhaps the tendency to tamper with the Sikh Panthic traditions that causes the non-Sikh Deras to be viewed as potentially threatening by the mainstream Sikhism and radical Sikh organizations.⁵⁵ In the context, a renowned Sikh scholar Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia⁵⁶ says:

"In Sikhism, it is 'shabad' or the Word of the God (Gurbani enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib) the real 'Guru'. Thus sacred 'Guru Granth Sahib', is considered as the living Guru of the Sikhs. There is no place for a living guru, baba or sant in Sikh religion. The concept and practise of living Guru is against the basic principles of the Sikh faith and contrary to the teachings of Sikh Gurus. Sikhism is being steadily eroded by mushrooming growth of Deras in the last decade or so."⁵⁷

gurus for comfort?", March 28, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/804145/why-is-punjab-increasingly-turning-towards-new-gurus-for-comfort>, accessed on 21/06/2017.

- 54 Parmod Kumar (2017), "Decoding politics of 'Messengers of God': Deras in Punjab", *The Times of India*, August 28, 2017. Nandini Rathi (2017), "Why deras and sects find Punjab fertile for growth", *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2017, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/why-deras-and-sects-find-punjab-fertile-for-growth-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-rape-case-conviction-dera-sacha-sauda-4815609/>, accessed on 09/09/2017.
- 55 Neeru Sharma (2014), "Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism", *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86. Dipankar Gupta (2007), "The threat from within", *Hindustan Times*, July 26, 2007, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/the-threat-from-within/storye>, accessed on 21/10/2017. Also see, See, Santosh K Singh (2017), "The Caste Question and Songs of Protest in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.52, Issue No. 4, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2017/34/perspectives/caste-question-and-songs-protest-punjab.html>, accessed on 12/11/2017.
- 56 Dr. Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia is former Vice Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala, founder Vice-Chancellor of SGPC run Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University (Fatehgarh Sahib) and Director of Guru Gobind Singh Foundation .Chandigarh.
- 57 Statement made by renowned Sikh scholar and writer of Sikh philosophy and history Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia. The statement was recorded during my discussion with Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia on issue of

Many Deras in Punjab sprang up in the aftermath of militancy, and their spiritual heads amassed enormous wealth. Despite the rise of Sikhism which in normative terms rejects the caste hierarchy opposes caste based discriminations, Punjab has been witness to the emergence and evolution of large number of Deras. The scheduled castes including the Mazhabi Sikhs, originally had renounced Hinduism to convert to Sikhism for its all-embracing egalitarian appeal, that's now on the wane. The tactical distancing of Dalit sections from the apex Sikh body, the SGPC, despite their firm belief in Guru Granth Sahib, is serious concern for Sikh religious institutions and Sikh clergy. Continued social exclusion and prevailing inequality in the social and economic order of the Sikh society and within Sikh religious institutions is one of the main reasons responsible for the rapid increase in the following of Deras.⁵⁸

Frequent clashes between the members of Dalit and Jatt community have lime lighted the challenge which mainstream Sikhism faces from these Deras. Some of the prominent conflicts between the Dera followers and sections of Sikhs include: Dera Nirankari in 1978, Dera Bhaniarwala in 2001, Dera Nurmahal in 2002, Talhan crisis of 2003, Dera Sacha Sauda⁵⁹ in 2008-09 and the crises of the Dera sach Khand (ballan) 2009.⁶⁰ These clashes can be described more about identity politics between the Jatt Sikhs and the Dalits than a row over religion.⁶¹ In Punjab and Haryana, the States where the deras have been flourishing, the tensions have arisen particularly between the dominant Jatt caste and Dalit sections who have become major followers of Deras. The socio-religious

mushrooming Deras and their large following by the Sikh community. The discussion took place to know the factors responsible behind this trend and role of SGPC in regard to rapid increase in number of Deras and their following within the Sikh community.

58 "Deras and evangelicals", *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at https://www.frontline.in/columns/Jayati_Ghosh/deras-and-evangelicals/article9855518.ece, accessed on 28/12/2017. Surinder S. Jodhka (2017), "Why Do People Go to the Dera?", *The Wire*, August 27, 2017, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-dera-communty-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh>, accessed on 21/09/2017.

59 Sirsa based Dera Sacha Sauda claims to have some four crore followers (called 'premis') spread across Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. In Punjab, it holds a sway in the Malwa region and specially among the Dalit Sections . The Dera is headed by self-styled godman Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who was sentenced to 20 years in prison for raping two women, after his was found guilty and convicted by the CBI Court. His conviction led to widespread violence on August 25, 2017 when lakhs of Dera supporters gathered at Panchkula. In May 2007, he erupted a massive controversy in Sikh community and religious establishment when he was alleged for replicating Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Sikh Guru. He has been on hit list of radical Sikh organizations. His publicizing this blasphemous act widely has been greatly resented by the Sikhs

60 Pramod Kumar, (2017), "Decoding politics of 'Messengers of God': Deras in Punjab", *Times of India*, August 28, 2017.

61 Surinder Singh, "Deras, Caste conflicts and Recent violence in Punjab", *Mainstream*, Vol. II, No.26, June 13, 2009.

practices of different caste groups within Sikhs tend in practice to be deeply exclusionary, with separate caste based Gurdwaras and cremation grounds, and many other forms of daily discrimination.⁶²

For an observer from outside, the changing religious landscape of Punjab is bewildering. The State has old, historic Gurudwaras run by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the apex Sikh institution and largest representative body of the Sikhs. Then there are the new Gurdwaras which are not under SGPC, but follow its norms and preach from Guru Granth Sahib. And then there are the offshoots and breakaways from Sikhism known as Deras. What is more worrying for the Sikh religious establishment, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, is the distortion of the Sikh faith, the growing apostasy and the huge following that Deras are commanding.⁶³ The mainstream Sikh religious institutions consider ‘Deradom’ as infiltration into Sikh religious affairs, a trend which has resulted in dilution of the core values and principles of the Sikh faith.⁶⁴

SGPC and Dera following among Sikhs

The rise of the Singh Sabha movement during late nineteenth century and the Gurdwara Reform Movement in the 1920’s marked an important turning point in the religious history of Sikhs and contemporary Punjab. The formation of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) not only brought historic Gurdwaras of the region under the control of one Sikh institution, it also codified what it meant to be a ‘Sikh’.⁶⁵ The Sikh

62 Deras and evangelicals”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at https://www.frontline.in/columns/Jayati_Ghosh/deras-and-evangelicals/article9855518.ece, accessed on 28/12/2017. Ronki Ram, “Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab”, *Economic and Political weekly*, October 6, 2007, pp. 4066-68, available at http://www.academia.edu/1366855/Social_Exclusion_Res, accessed on 15/06/2017. Also see, Trivedi, Divya (2017), “Deras & Dalit identity”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at <https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/deras-amp-dalit-identity/article9855385.ece>, accessed on 13/11/2017.

63 Divya Trivedi (2017), “Deras & Dalit identity”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at <https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/deras-amp-dalit-identity/article9855385.ece>, accessed on 13/11/2017. M Rajashekhar (2017), “Why is Punjab increasingly turning to new gurus for comfort?”, March 28, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/804145/why-is-punjab-increasingly-turning-towards-new-gurus-for-comfort>, accessed on 21/06/2017. Also see, S.S. Dhawan (2017), “The danger of ‘Deras’ to mainstream Sikhism”, *The Free Press Journal*, January 17, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/news-spot-analysis/the-danger-of-deras-to-mainstream-sikhism/520924>, accessed on 21/03/2017

64 S.S. Dhawan (2017), “The danger of ‘Deras’ to mainstream Sikhism”, *The Free Press Journal*, January 17, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/news-spot-analysis/the-danger-of-deras-to-mainstream-sikhism/520924>, accessed on 21/03/2017. Also see, “Sikh religion vs Deras” *Deccan Herald*, May 31, 2009, available at <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/5452/sikh-religion-vs-deras.html>, accessed on 17/04.2016. Also see, Neeru Sharma (2014), “Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism”, *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86.

65 Gurinder Singh Mann (2005), *Sikhism -Religions of the World*, published by Prentice Hall, New Jersey, pp. 65-66. W.H. McLeod (1999), *Sikhs and Sikhism*, published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi,

religious and political elite that emerged under colonial rule transformed a rather loose faith tradition into a well-structured and codified religious system. The common people in Punjab who practised an inherently contaminated and plural way of life was undermined and a new identity evolved where the Sikhs began to see themselves as distinct and separate religious community endowed with the specific history, ideology, tradition and sacred scripture. Through different sets of activities, these politico-religious Sikh elites succeeded in injecting a new definition into everyday life of the Sikhs.⁶⁶

Sikh scholars attribute the mushrooming of Deras to dysfunctional Gurdwaras that fail to meet the expectations of the devotees on spiritual fulfilment. At a later stage, political parties jump in to cash in on the followers and that grants the Dera - the legitimacy, further adding to its following. As majority of *Granthis* (priests) of Gurdwaras are themselves not well read, they have been unable to explain the basic elements of Sikh faith, ideology and identity, and satisfy the moral and spiritual aspirations of the followers. A known Sikh scholar Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia highlights the working pattern of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) as a vital factor responsible for flourishing of the Deras. In the context, he explains:

"Derawaad became a racket as many Kar-Seva Babas sprung up to take on contract works from the SGPC. These Kar-Seva Babas collected huge funds from the public and spent just a fraction of it on the concerned project. This way these babas collected huge amounts of money and established their own Deras. Many of the Deras are now being run by these very same kar -Seva babas who have assumed cult status as godmen of sorts. These Godmen or babas are very much the product of defective SGPC structure and functioning."⁶⁷

The followers of the Deras find their counsel much easier to grasp than from the sermons of the largely not-so-well-read or tightly-regulated preachers in both local and

pp. 95-96. Also see, Harjinder Singh, Sukha Singh and Jaskeerat Singh (2015), *Sikh Code of Conduct*, published by Akaal Publishers, United Kingdom, pp. 7-9, 24-30.

66 Surinder S. Jodhka (2017), "Why Do People Go to the Dera?", *The Wire*, August 27, 2017, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-dera-community-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh>, accessed on 21/09/2017. N. Gerald Barrier (2004), "Authority, Politics, and Contemporary Sikhism", in Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier & W. H. McLeod (eds.) *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 197-199. Also see, Harjot Oberoi (1994), *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University, New Delhi, pp. 23-37.

67 Statement made by renowned Sikh scholar Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia. The statement was recorded during my in-depth discussion with Dr. Ahluwalia on issue of mushrooming of Deras in Punjab and role of SGPC in this regard.

historical Gurdwaras.⁶⁸ This has presented a momentous challenges for the organised Sikh religious institutions. Political scientist Santokh Singh says:

“The rise of these deras to the seat of power is primarily due to the fact that Sikh religion in its modern form did not accept the Sikhs of lower castes. This, despite the fact that the Sikh Gurus spoke against untouchability and propagated equality when they said: “Ek Noor te Sab Jag Upjeya” (the entire world is born out of one light). So, where the Sikh religion and its leaders failed, these deras rose to fill up the vacuum where all were invited with open arms.”⁶⁹

According to Balkar Singh, a Sikh scholar:

“Flourishing of the Derawaad happened in Punjab because the SGPC and Akal Takht became mere administrative institutions. These two Sikh institutions were supposed to give spiritual and religious guidance to the Sikhs. But unfortunately, both Akal Takht and SGPC were highly politicized and the people of Punjab turned to Deras for solace.”⁷⁰

In the rising din against Deras, the Sikh clergy, represented by the five Sikh Head Priests (Jathedars of five Takhts) as well as the SGPC, is being squarely blamed for letting down the Sikh masses. Darshan Singh, a noted Sikh scholar and former Professor at Department of Comparative Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala, says:

“Our religious leadership has submitted to politicians, and devotes more time to politicking than propagating the religion. Their grip over the people has loosened, and deras and babas have just stepped in to fill the gap.”⁷¹

He further adds:

“Deras like Nirmalas, Ravidasiyas and even Taksals are as old as the Sikh religion. The Taksals came up during the time of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. While at present, commercial deras like Dera Sacha Sauda are in the limelight, such deras came into the limelight in late 60s and early

68 The language and message delivered in Deras by *Babas* or *Sants* is quite simple and easy for everyone to understand. The *babas* play the role as great communicators. All kind of people, rich or poor, feeling the sense of togetherness also develop a feeling of belongingness towards the Dera. The inclusive approach and very simple way of preaching has made the Deras develop massive following among the Sikhs. On the other side, SGPC has not been able to produce and flourish a system where the egalitarian principles and values of Sikhism have reached the people in simple and easy form. Information based on filed observations and discussions held at various deras and Gurdwaras in Punjab. Also see, Harmeet Singh Shah (2016), “Why Deras are Thriving in Punjab, 23 July, 2016, available at <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/punjab-sikhism-deras-sacha-sauda-parkash-singh-badal-sad-sgpc-godmen-babas/story/1/11953.html>, accessed on 27/09/2016.

69 Amrita Chaudhary, “Over 9,000 Deras in Punjab some as old as Sikh religions itself”, *IndianExpress*, January 28, 2012, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/over-9-000-deras-in-punjab-some-as-old-as-sikh-religion-itself/>, accessed on 15/09/2016

70 For statement of Dr. Balkar Singh, see, “Over 9,000 deras in Punjab, some as old as Sikh religion itself”, *The Indian Express*, January 28, 2012, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/over-9-000-deras-in-punjab-some-as-old-as-sikh-religion-itself/>, accessed on 23/07/2015.

71 “Over 9,000 deras in Punjab, some as old as Sikh religion itself”, *The Indian Express*, January 28, 2012, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/over-9-000-deras-in-punjab-some-as-old-as-sikh-religion-itself/>, accessed on 23/07/2015.

70s when Sikh institutions like SGPC failed to address the issues being faced by the people, especially those belonging to Sikh castes and people living on the fringes.”⁷²

Due to widespread criticism about increasing Dera culture within the Sikh community, the Sikh clergy, in the recent past, has taken very defensive stand on the issue. In 2005, around 100 Sikh organisations gathered at Akal Takht Sahib to find ways to check the rising Dera cult in Punjab. But due to lack of unanimity over the Deras against which action was being contemplated, the campaign fizzled out. A few years ago, some prominent Dera heads organised themselves into the Sant Samaj, an outfit comprising some 350 major Deras.⁷³ Akal Takht Sahib, the highest seat of temporal authority, has recognized and acknowledged the Dera cult as “serious threat to Sikhism”. There evolved conspiracy theories which held that Deras have been deliberately thrust upon Punjabis to dilute Sikhism. But former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, honestly admitted that widespread following of Deras is the clear failure of Sikh institutions. He felt that it's unfair to ***"blame anyone else for what is our own failing"***.⁷⁴ Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, explains the increasing following of Deras by the members of Sikh community in the following words:

“It is very easy to follow a ‘baba’. Neither, there is need to understand the ‘baani’ of Gurus nor one has to study and understand the scared religious scriptures. One just has to hand over all his worries and problems to the concerned baba of the Dera, and then the ‘baba’ claims to take care of everything. But this is not Sikhism. Unfortunately, Sikh community is not understanding that there is no place for miracle cures, rituals or godmen in Sikh religion. The teachings of Sikh Gurus oppose and condemn all such things. Due to Deras and their babas (heads of Deras), large number of Sikhs have drifted away from real values and principles of Sikhism.”⁷⁵

72 “Over 9,000 deras in Punjab, some as old as Sikh religion itself”, *The Indian Express*, January 28, 2012, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/over-9-000-deras-in-punjab-some-as-old-as-sikh-religion-itself/>, accessed on 23/07/2015.

73 Chander Suta Dogra (2007) “The Morphed Gene Their more inclusive, less conservative aspect roils Sikhism”, *The Outlook*, May 28, 2007, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-morphed-gene/234750>, accessed on 17/06/2015.

74 Chander Suta Dogra (2007) “The Morphed Gene Their more inclusive, less conservative aspect roils Sikhism”, *The Outlook*, May 28, 2007, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-morphed-gene/234750>, accessed on 17/06/2015.

75 Statement made by Former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti. Views and perspectives of the former Jathedar were recorded during my meeting with him at Amritsar. The matter of discussion was the issue of increasing Deras in Punjab and reasons behind large Sikh following of Deras.

In this context, the President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Avtar Singh Makkar said:

"We are trying to bring such babas into our fold. But many are misusing the Gurbani for their own commercial motives and we are directly in confrontation with them."⁷⁶

Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, a known Sikh leader who has served as SGPC General Secretary for sixteen terms, informed about his efforts to bring the followers of various Deras back to mainstream Sikhism. He said:

"I made one plan and presented it to SGPC president Mr. Makkar and also gave it to Mr. Badal (Parkash Singh Badal). The plan was that: SGPC need about 650 preachers of Sikh faith, each preacher to be allotted 20 viallges each. These SGPC appointed preachers are to collect all the information and statistics regarding economic, social and religious aspect of Sikhs. They should collect the data regarding the number of who are taking drugs, and who have drifted away from mainstream Sikhism and moved towards Deras. On the basis of the information collected, the SGPC should deal with the issues and problems of the Sikh community. The committee should fulfil the concerned needs of the community so that Sikhs could be woven in one thread. "⁷⁷

*(Translated in English)*⁷⁸

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) also claims to have held "Amrit Chakho" camps (camps to encourage baptism among Sikhs) in the last few years in which over a lakh Sikhs have been baptised.⁷⁹ Though all the radical Sikh organizations and followers of mainstream Sikhism agree that the Deras be curbed but the political patronage given to the Deras by the political party leaders is a great cause of concern for the mainstream Sikhism.⁸⁰

76 Chander Suta Dogra (2007) "The Morphed Gene Their more inclusive, less conservative aspect roils Sikhism", *The Outlook*, May 28, 2007, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-morphed-gene/234750>, accessed on 17/06/2015

77 Based on extended conversation with Sukhdev Singh Bhaur - 16 times SGPC General Secretary an influential Sikh leader. The views, perspectives and statements of Sukhdev Singh Bhaur were noted during the discussion with him on concerned issues.

78 Information/ Statement/Explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur : "ਮੈਂ ਇੱਕ Plan ਬਣਾ ਕੇ ਮੱਕੜ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਦਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਵਿੱਚ 650 ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰਕ ਚਾਹੀਦੇ ਹਨ। 650 ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ 20-20 ਪਿੰਡ ਅਲਾਟ ਕਰ ਦਿਉ। ਜੇ ਉਹ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰਕ ਇੱਕ ਸਾਲ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਰੇ Statistics ਇਕੱਠੇ ਕਰਕੇ ਦੇਣ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦਾ ਆਰਥਿਕ, ਸਮਾਜਿਕ, ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਪੱਧਰ ਕੀ ਹੈ ਕਿੰਨੇ ਡੇਰਿਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਜੁੜ ਗਏ, ਕਿੰਨੇ ਨਸ਼ੇ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਆਦਿ। ਉਸ ਸਾਰੀ report ਨਾਲ SGPC ਨਿਜੱਠੇ, ਜਿੱਥੇ-ਜਿੱਥੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਲੋੜਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪੂਰਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਕੌਮ ਨੂੰ ਇਕ ਸੂਤਰ ਵਿਚ ਪਰੋਇਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਤੇ ਜੇ ਸਿਰਫ ਅਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ Leader ਦੇ ਆਉਣ ਤੇ ਕੋਈ ਵੱਡਾ ਸਾਰਾ ਦੀਵਾਨ ਲਗਾ ਕੇ ਭਾਸ਼ਣ ਦਿੰਦੇ ਹਾਂ ਇਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਕੋਈ ਖਾਸ ਗੱਲ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ।" The views, perspectives and statements of Sukhdev Singh Bhaur were noted during the discussion with him on concerned issues.

79 Based on information collected from concerned SGPC officials (members of Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC).

80 See, Vinod Sharam (2017), "How Deras and politicians fed off each other" September 1, 2017, *Hindustan Times*, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/how-deras-and-politicians-fed-off-each-other>

The social and political significance of Deras in Punjab and their resistance to the authority of the Sikhs has acquired vital importance in contemporary political history of Punjab. The mushrooming of Deras within the mainstream Sikh society, not only in Punjab but also abroad, is indicative of the assertion of the Dalits trying to re-discover and consolidate their distinct identity to attain self-respect in the social, economic and political life of the State. This situation poses a serious challenge to main stream Sikhism and Sikh religious institutions, especially the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁸¹

Nevertheless, the presence of the Deras is tolerated by the mainstream Sikhs and radical religious institutions until they show respect to Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh Panthic traditions. Until they come into direct clash with Sikhism, like they hold a ceremony that goes against the Sikh religious traditions and rituals, or they make such a statement that is an insult to the Sikh Gurus, sacred scriptures and the mainstream Sikh religious institutions, there will be no conflict or clash. It was in the year 2007 that a massive conflict occurred between the pioneer Sikh institutions (Akali Takht Sahib and SGPC), Sikh radical organizations and Dera Sacha Sauda.⁸²

Sikhs in conflict with Dera Sacha Sauda: Role of Akali Takht and SGPC

In May 2007, Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim allegedly mimicked the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, at a religious congregation at Salabatpura village of Bathinda district. It is alleged that in this ceremony⁸³, the Dera Sacha Sauda chief dressed in clothing much like the type adorned by Guru Gobind Singh and mimicked historical accounts of the formation of Khalsa Panth. Dera Sacha Sauda Chief, Gurmit Ram Rahim was also

off-each-other/story-SpDvL8AXYeorinNMJACNXFL.html, accessed on 09/11/2017. Also see, Harpreet Bajwa (2017), "Deras: Where religion and power coincide, *The Indian Express*, April 28, 2017, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/apr/28/deras-where-religion-and-power-coincide-1598834--1.html>, accessed on 09/11/2017.

81 Neeru Verma, "Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism", *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86. Also see, S.S. Dhawan (2017), "The danger of 'Deras' to mainstream Sikhism", *The Free Press Journal*, January 17, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/news-spot-analysis/the-danger-of-deras-to-mainstream-sikhism/520924>, accessed on 21/03/2017

82 Lionel Baixas and Charlene Simon (2008), "From Protesters to Martyrs: How to Become a 'True' Sikh", available at <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/1532>, accessed on 3/07/2016.

83 About Dera Sacha Sauda ceremony that led to huge controversy: To inaugurate the ceremony, Ram Rahim first administered the drink to seven men and announced the forty-seven golden rules of the so-called 'InsaPanth', which all members of the congregation must abide by. Later, Ram Rahim appeared in front of the seven men, who were titled as 'Sat Sitare' (Seven Stars), satirizing the 'Panj Pyare' (beloved five) of the Sikh faith and tradition. Then Dera Chief asked them to carry out a ceremony to initiate him in this newly formed religious order.

alleged to have insulted the sacred 'Amrit-Sanchar' Ceremony ((Khalsa baptizing ceremony) carried out by the Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh on Vaisakhi Day of 1699.⁸⁴

Later after this event of alleged blasphemy by Dera Sirsa head Gurmet Ram Rahim, tensions broke out between the mainstream Sikh organizations and Dera Sacha Sauda followers. Panthic organizations in Punjab and around the globe took strong notice of the controversial and blasphemous acts of Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim. The mainstream Sikh community and radical organizations reacted with outrage⁸⁵ because in the Sikh imagination, no one can or should pretend to look like any one of the Ten revered Sikh Gurus. Any attempt by anyone to do so is viewed by the Sikhs as an insult to their 'Guru' and religious tradition. Due to the disturbances and tensions within the Sikh community after the alleged blasphemous act of Dera Sirsa chief Gurmet Ram Rahim, normal life in Punjab was crippled. It was followed with a shutdown call given by the Akal Takht Sahib – the highest temporal seat of Sikhism.⁸⁶

Akal Takht Boycotts Dera Sacha Sauda

After remaining silent for few days, Akal Takht Sahib, the supreme institution of the Sikhs intervened in the highly controversial matter. Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, the then Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, convened a *Sarbat Khalsa* (assembly of the whole Sikh community) on May 17, 2007 at Takht Sri Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) that lies in the heart of the Malwa region, where the presence of 'Premis' (followers of Dera Sacha Sauda sect) and the protest by the mainstream Sikhs were the strongest. Eventually, Akal Takht Sahib issued a 'Hukamnama' (edict) on May 27, 2007 after a meeting of various Sikh organizations at Takht Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo.⁸⁷ **The Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts issued a 'hukamnama'**

84 In the alleged mockery of the historic *Amrit Sanchar* (Khalsa initiation ceremony in Sikh Panth), Gurmit Ram Rahim prepared a *Ruhafza Sharbat* (flavored milk) drink, labeled it as the 'Jam-e-Insa' (drink of humanity), administered it to the SachaSauda followers and announced the formation of the 'Insa Panth'. In the picture published by the press, Gurmeet Singh was dressed in a pink (the colour of Dera Sacha Sauda) dress. See, "Sirsa Cult leader makes mockery of Guru Sahib", May 6, 2007, available at <http://panthic.org/articles/3288>, accessed on 09/08/2016. Also see,

85 The Sikh outrage resulted in some violent clashes between them and the followers of DeraSachaSauda and led to some loss of lives on both sides. As SachaSauda followers also came out to oppose the protesting Sikhs activists, the situation became intense and violent, when at one person was killed and least twenty-five persons were badly injured. Once the fight began to even out, the police finally decided to intervene and the tense situation was brought under control. Tension mounted in Punjab after Sikh high priests called for a social boycott of the controversial religious group for his alleged blasphemous acts.

86 The epicentre of the conflict was the Malwa, especially Bathinda city, where the *premis* (term used for Dera Sacha Sauda followers) are particularly numerous. Some demonstrations also took place, though to a lesser extent, in Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi and abroad among the Sikh Diaspora. See, "Moderate Vedanti turns a radical leaf", *The Indian Express*, July 20, 2007. Also see, "SGPC, Dera men clash : 12 injured", *The Tribune*, May 15, 2007.

87 "Sikh clergy boycotts DeraSacha Sauda, seeks ban", May 17, 2007, available at <https://www.oneindia.com/2007/05/17/sikh-clergy-boycotts-dera-sacha-sauda-seeks-ban-1179405932.html>, accessed on 24/04/2017. Also see, Kavaljit Singh (2008), "Dera Controversy in Punjab: A Grim Reminder of the Past", *Mainstream Weekly*, Vol XLVI, No. 13, March 16, 2008, available at <https://mainstreamweekly.net/article578.html>, accessed on 23/10/2016.

calling for social boycott of the Dera Sacha Sauda, arrest of its head Gurmit Ram Rahim, and ban on the Dera organization. This 'Hukamnama' of Akal Takht was the outcome of huge outrage by Sikh radical organizations and activists against the alleged blasphemous act of Dera Chief of dressing up like Guru Gobind Singh and hurting Sikh religious sentiments.⁸⁸

The 'Hukamnama'(edict) which was read by the then Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, also demanded filing of cases against Dera chief and its followers who indulged in the violence. The 'Hukamnama' of Akal Takht Sahib warned the Union Government and the State Governments of Punjab and Haryana to impose a ban on the Dera Sacha Sauda sect, failing which it threatened of dire consequences. The concerned 'Hukamnama' also directed the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to pressurize the Akali Dal Government in Punjab to take stringent action against the Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) head and its followers.⁸⁹

The Sikh community in Punjab took to the streets demanding the arrest of Dera Sacha Sauda sect chief Gurmeett Ram Rahim for blaspheming their religious ritual and tradition by attiring himself like of tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. At the end of the three-day deadline set for Dera chief's apology for alleged religious blasphemy, the five high priests met at the Golden Temple complex. At the end of the two- hour long meeting of the Sikh clergy (five Takht Jathedars), the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti issued another the 'Hukumnama' giving an ultimatum to Dera Sacha Sauda sect to close down the all its campuses operating in Punjab.⁹⁰

88 See, "Sikh priests call for social boycott of Dera, parts of Punjab tense", May 17, 2007, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sikh-priests-call-for-social-boycott-of-dera-parts-of-punjab-tense-1097409>, accessed on 17/10/2016. Also see, "Soft edict' against Dera provokes Sikh groups", *The Hindu*, May 18, 2007, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/%60Soft-edict-against-Dera-provokes-Sikh-groups/article14765106.ece>, accessed on 17/10/2016.

89 Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Joginder Singh Vedanti gave an ultimatum to the Government to take action in this regard till May 27. However, the 'sangat' (congregation) on the occasion expressed dissatisfaction over the decisions of the head priests and demanded more stern view of the matter. They raised slogans in the name of 'Khalistan' and late Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale. To pacify the 'sangat,' Takht Damdama Sahib Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh intervened and advanced the ultimatum given to the Government to May 20. See, "Sikh priests call for social boycott of Dera, parts of Punjab tense", May 17, 2007, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sikh-priests-call-for-social-boycott-of-dera-parts-of-punjab-tense-1097409>, accessed on 21/10/2016. Also see, Kavaljit Singh (2008), "Dera Controversy in Punjab: A Grim Reminder of the Past", *Mainstream Weekly*, Vol XLVI, No. 13, March 16, 2008, available at <https://mainstreamweekly.net/article578.html>, accessed on 23/10/2016.

90 As per the 'Hukamnama', Akal Takht Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti gave an ultimatum to Sirsa headquartered DeraSachaSauda to close all its Dera campuses located in Punjab by May 27, 2007. This led to further confrontation between radical Sikhs and DeraSachaSauda followers. The biggest campus of DeraSirsa sect in Punjab is in Slatatpura Village, spread in 150 acres , about 30 km from Bathinda. See, "Akal Takht edict could lead to constitutional crisis", May 21, 2017, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-akal-takht-edict-could-lead-to-constitutional-crisis-1098191>, accessed on 11/10/2017. Also see, "Dera row: Sikh priests issue another edict", May 21, 2007, available at <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/21dera.htm>, accessed on 11/10/2017.

After the directives from Akal Takht Sahib to Dera Sacha Sauda to vacate Punjab, Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) also hardened its stand on Deras by seeking removal of Dera sect campuses from Punjab.⁹¹ SGPC remained firm on the May 27, 2007, deadline given by the Akal Takht Sahib to evict the deras from Punjab. When queried about the legality of the Akal Takht Sahib's 'Hukumnama' (edict), seeking closure of all Dera campuses, the then SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar said he was "ignorant" of laws of the constitution.⁹² Giving supreme importance to the institution of Akal Takht Sahib, Mr. Makkar affirmed:

"For us the Akal Takht Sahib is supreme and its Hukumnama will be implemented. I have not read the law or the constitution and do not bother. We will ensure that the Dera (Dera Sacha Sauda) activities are completely shunned in Punjab."⁹³

Despite the collapse of the Sikh diplomacy, the protest by mainstream Sikhs and radical Sikh organizations slowed down. Neither the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) nor the Punjab Government (though it was led by the Sikh political party, the Shiromani Akali Dal) tried to implement the edicts of Akal Takht Sahib, the Sikh institution with highest religious authority. Thus, the 'Hukamnamas' (edicts) issued by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib against Dera Sacha Sauda cult and his Chief (Gurmeet Ram Rahim) soon became a part of history.⁹⁴

Akal Takht Pardons Dera Sacha Sauda Chief – Erupts Controversy

The Akal Takht Sahib, the highest seat of the Sikh community, made a historical exemption by exempting an 'offender of Sikhs' from appearing before the supreme institution of Sikhs in person, pardoning the Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who had been accused of hurting Sikh religious sentiments after wearing an attire allegedly similar

91 DeraSachaSauda filed a petition in the apex court seeking protection to the properties of the Dera and its followers across the country in view of an ultimatum issued by the Akal Takht. The petition said there were 160 branches of Deras spread over 13 states, having a following of about three crore. For information see, "Akal Takht is supreme for Sikhs: Jathedar Vidanti", May 25, 2007, available at <https://www.oneindia.com/2007/05/25/akal-takht-is-supreme-for-sikhs-jathedar-vidanti-1180102072.html>, accessed on 11/01/2016.

92 See, "Akal Takht is supreme for Sikhs: Jathedar Vidanti", May 25, 2007 available at <https://www.oneindia.com/2007/05/25/akal-takht-is-supreme-for-sikhs-jathedar-vidanti-1180102072.html> See also, "A Political Minefield", *The Outlook*, July 26, 2007, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/a-political-minefield/234698>, accessed on 21/08/2016.

93 "SGPC insists on closure of SachaSaudaderas", May 23, 2007, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sgpc-insists-on-closure-of-sacha-sauda-deras-1098757>, accessed on 02/03/2016.

94 Lionel Baixas and Charlene Simon (2008), "From Protesters to Martyrs: How to Become a 'True' Sikh", available at <http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/1532>, accessed on 3/07/2016. Also see, Kavaljit Singh (2008), "Dera Controversy in Punjab: A Grim Reminder of the Past", *Mainstream Weekly*, Vol XLVI, No. 13, March 16, 2008, available at <https://mainstreamweekly.net/article578.html>, accessed on 23/10/2016.

to that of Guru Gobind Singh.⁹⁵ The Sikh clergy, consisting five Sikh High Priests (Jathedars of five Takhts) headed by the present Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, pardoned Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh following a written apology from him.⁹⁶ Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh confirmed that Akal Takht had received and accepted a written “apology” from Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh for the events dating back to May 11, 2007,⁹⁷ when Dera Sacha Sauda head attended a congregation at Salabtpura village in Bathinda and dressed in an attire similar to the one associated with Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru.⁹⁸

Current Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh informed that a written apology from the Chief of the Dera Sirsa sect states that he (Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh) has deep respect and regard for Guru Gobind Singh as well as Sikh religion and Sikh community. The decision of pardoning the Dera chief was announced after a marathon meeting of the Akal Takht.⁹⁹ The Press note of Akal Takht regarding the pardon given to Dera Sacha Sauda chief is reproduced as under:

“All five Sikh high priests had accepted the “written apology”. A few days ago, the Akal Takht received a letter from representatives of the Dera Sacha Sauda head. Giving clarification, while using humble words over the 2007 episode, the Dera head has apologized and said he could not even imagine copying Guru Gobind Singh. Following customs and tradition of the Panth, all five high priests of Sikhs

95 See, “8 years on, Akal Takht pardons DeraSachaSauda chief”, *The Indian Express*, September 25, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/punjab-and-haryana/8-yrs-on-akal-takht-pardons-dera-sacha-sauda-chief/>, accessed on 13/10/2017.

96 The DeraSachaSauda chief was cleared by the highest Sikh temporal authority, the Akal Takt Sahib, in the case which was registered on September 24, 2007. See “Akal Takht pardons Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim”, September 24, 2015, *Asian Journal*, available at <http://www.asianjournal.ca/akal-takht-pardons-dera-chief-gurmeet-ram-rahim/>, accessed on 13/09/2016.

97 The Akal Takht Jathedar said it had received and accepted a written “apology” from Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh for the events dating back to May 13, 2007, when the Dera chief attended a congregation at Salabtpura village (Bathinda), dressed in an attire similar to the one associated with Guru Gobind Singh. On 13 May, 2007, several major English and Punjabi newspapers published pictures of the Gurmeet Ram Rahim performing the ceremony along with a short description of the rituals practiced there.

98 The controversy led to violent clashes between Sikhs and the sect followers. The sect chief, who has millions of followers in Punjab and Haryana, was booked by Punjab Police under various criminal sections. See, Lionel Baixas (2007), “The Dera Sacha Sauda Controversy and Beyond”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, Issue No. 40, 06 Oct, 2007, pp. 4059-4065. Amardeep Singh (2007), “Dera Sacha Sauda and the Sikhs of Punjab”, May 24, 2017, available at <https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2007/05/dera-sacha-sauda-and-sikhs-of-punjab.html>, accessed on 16/10/2016.

99 Jathedar Akal Takht further said that Dera chief’s letter of apology to the Akal Takht also states that he had no intention to show disrespect to the Sikh Gurus or hurt the religious sentiments of the Sikh community. Dera Sacha Sauda head said that he could never compare himself with any spiritual master or religious saint and therefore he cannot even think of copying the personality of any great saint. This intention of Gurmeet Ram Rahim was informed by Jathedar Akal Takht, Giani Gurbachan Singh on reading the ‘letter of apology’ from the Dera Sirsa chief. Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also informed that Dera chief, besides writing a letter to the Akal Takht, has also sent a recorded CD wherein he expressed his apology with regard to the incident of 2007 which had put the Dera head and its followers at loggerheads with mainstream Sikhs.

have accepted this apology letter and clarification that he will not do any such act in the future, which can hurt sentiments of Sikhs and other religions.”¹⁰⁰

(Press Note by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, as published in Indian Express)

Surprisingly, the Takht Jathedars (Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts) who jointly form the Sikh clergy issued the ‘Hukamnama’ of Akal Takht Sahib boycotting the Dera Sacha Sauda and its head, later accepted his apology and pardoned him for his blasphemous act.¹⁰¹ However, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh warned Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) against repeating such act in future by stating that *"the Sikh community would never tolerate repetition of such act."*¹⁰²

Reactions of Sikh organizations on Akal Takht’s ‘Pardon’ Verdict

The highest Sikh seat of temporal authority, the Akal Takht Sahib, took everyone by surprise when it accepted an apology from Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim and pardoned him. The decision to pardon the Dera Chief, taken in a meeting of five Sikh high priests held at Akal Takht Secretariat, did not go down well with many Sikh organizations who then announced to launch an agitation to restore the Sarbat Khalsa¹⁰³ and remove the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib from his seat.¹⁰⁴

Although the Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts confirmed that they received the apology letter a few days ago, some Sikh organizations and activists alleged that it was an old letter that the Akal Takht authorities had resurrected. Former president of Shiromani Akali Dal (Delhi) Paramjit Singh Sarna argued that five Sikh high priests had no right to take decision without consulting Sikh Panth. He asked: ***“The apology letter was sent in 2007. Why did the Sikh clergy suddenly take a decision on it now?”***¹⁰⁵ The All India Sikh Students Federation gave a call for Sarbat Khalsa to remove the Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Gurbachan Singh.

100 See, “8 yrs on, Akal Takht pardons DeraSachaSauda chief”, September 25, 2015, *The Indian Express*, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/punjab-and-haryana/8-yrs-on-akal-takht-pardons-dera-sacha-sauda-chief/>.

101 On May 30, 2007, the then Akal Takht Jatheda Joginder Singh Vedanti had outrightly rejected the apology of the DeraSachaSauda chief and said Sikhs will continue to politically and socially boycott him in a peaceful manner.

102 See, “Akal Takht pardons DeraSachaSauda chief”, *The Tribune*, September 24, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/akal-takht-pardons-dera-sacha-sauda-chief/137341.html>, accessed on 15/08/2016.

103 The Sarbat Khalsa stands for the 'entire Sikh nation'. It is literally the voice of the people, a representative body of all Sikh groups and organizations across the globe. Sarbat Khalsa is called when key decisions related to the Sikh Panth have to be taken.

104 Akal Takht pardons Sirsa dera chief, sparks row, *The Times of India*, September 25, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Akal-Takht-pardons-Sirsa-dera-chief-sparks-row/articleshow/49103636.cms>, accessed on 18/10/2016. Also see, “Akal Takht under fire for pardoning Dera chief”, September 30, 2015, available at <https://www.asian-voice.com/News/India/North/Akal-Takht-under-fire-for-pardoning-Dera-chief>, accessed on 18/10/2016.

105 See, “Paramjit Singh Sarna’s Shocking Revelations”, September 2015, available at <http://dailysikhupdates.com/paramjit-sarnas-shocking-revelations/>, accessed on 21/07/2016.

While alleging that the clergy's decision was taken under political influence, he said- "***This is a black day in the history of Sikhs. A person who tried to project himself as Guru Gobind Singh can never be pardoned.***"¹⁰⁶ Insisting that the act of pardon was done under political pressure of Badals dominated Shiromani Akali Dal, the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) requested the Sarbat Khalsa to confiscate the Jathedar.¹⁰⁷

Balwant Singh Nandgarh, former Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo), claimed that he was sacked from his position because he had opposed the pardon of the Dera head and the Akal Takht had taken the step under political pressure of Akali Dal leadership. In this context, Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh stated:

"I was sacked in January after the Shiromani Akali Dal Government and RSS found that I was the biggest hurdle in pardoning Ram Rahim. Earlier when the letter had reached the Akal Takht Secretariat during the tenure of Akal Takht Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti in 2008, I along with Vedanti had strongly opposed it (pardon)."¹⁰⁸

The Sikh leaders and activists also raised their voice by saying that the letter of apology given by Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh should have been made public before taking any decision with regard to pardoning the Dera Sacha Sauda chief based in Sirsa district of Haryana. Jaswinder Singh, the president of Sikh organization, Akal Purakh ki Fauj, said - "*The decision had raised a question mark on the very process of religious decision-making, and therefore, Sarbat Khalsa is the answer to this.*"¹⁰⁹ Former General Secretary of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Bibi Kiranjot Kaur also criticized the decision to exonerate Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. She said: "***It is the first time in Sikh history that a man without presenting himself at Akal Takht and who has not sought an apology, has been pardoned. He (Dera head) has only given his clarification.***"¹¹⁰ Terming the decision of Sikh Clergy (Jathedars of five Takhts headed by Akal Takht Jathedar) to

106 Statement available at "Akal Takht pardons Gurmeet Ram Rahim, sparks row", *The Times of India*, September 25, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Akal-Takht-pardons-Gurmeet-Ram-Rahim-sparks-row/articleshow/49098225.cms>, accessed on 22/08/2016.

107 ibid

108 See, "I was sacked to pave way for dera head's pardon: Nandgarh", *The Times of India*, September 26, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/I-was-sacked-to-pave-way-for-dera-heads-pardon-Nandgarh.rh/articleshow/49111598.cms>, accessed on 28/07/2016. Also see, "SGPC all set to sack Nandgarh", *The Tribune*, January 16, 2015, accessed on 28/07/2015.

109 See, "Akal Takht pardons Gurmeet Ram Rahim, sparks row", *The Times of India*, September 25, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Akal-Takht-pardons-Gurmeet-Ram-Rahim-sparks-row/articleshow/49098225.cms>, accessed on 10/10/2016.

110 Statement by Bibi Kiranjit Kaur, former SGPC General Secretary and senior member of the apex body. . The statements and views of Bibi Kiranjot Kaur were noted during conversation with Bibi Kiranjot Kaur. Her observations and views were immensely helpful to know the inner dynamics within the Sikh institutions.

pardon the Dera Sacha Sauda Chief, as against Sikh Code of Conduct (Rehat Maryada), Bibi Kiranjot Kaur firmly asserted:

“A new precedent (with this decision) has been set which is highly objectionable and not in accordance with the Sikh maryada (Sikh traditions),”¹¹¹. Bibi Kiranjot Kaur also also stated that: “A Hukamnama issued could not be cancelled or amended. Sikhs are shocked with this move and it will have crucial ramifications.”¹¹²

Karnail Singh Panjoli (senior SGPC member) severely criticized and condemned the decision of ‘Singh Sahibs’ (Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts) to pardon Gurmeet Ram Rahim, Dera Sirsa head, for his blasphemous acts. Karnail Singh Panjoli stated :

“The five Singh Sahibs (Jathedars of five Takhts), by pardoning the Dera Sirsa head, has made very cheap attempt to disgrace the unique concept and the glorious history of the supreme seat of the Sikh Panth, Sri Akal Takht Sahib. By accepting the ‘clarification’ given by Gurmeet Ram Rahim (Dera Sirsa cheif), the present Jathedars have accepted that the wrong was done by them (including Jathedar Akal Takht) when in 2007- they issued the hukamnama (edict) to boycott Dera Sacha Sauda sect headed by Gurmeet Ram Rahim who immensely hurt the religious sentiments of the Sikh community by imitating the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh.”¹¹³

Clarifying his stand, SGPC core committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli further added:

“The 2007 Hukamnama (to boycott Dera Sacha Sauda sect) was the united decision of the representative gathering of Khalsa Panth (at Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo), and the ‘Singh Sahib’ (Jathedar Akal Takht) had only issued it. Therefore this Hukamnama cannot be taken back without knowing the will of the Khalsa Panth.”¹¹⁴

In order to solve the issue, senior member of SGPC, Karnail Singh Panjoli said:

“Jathedar Akal Takht should immediately withdraw the ‘pardon’ given to Dera Sirsa head and then call the gathering of Khalsa Panth to discuss the issue. If Jathedar Akal Takht does not call such gathering, then the Sikh organizations should themselves call the united gathering at Akal Takht Sahib and take the decision on the issue.”¹¹⁵

111 See, “Pardoning Dera head betrayal with Sikh community: Sikh leaders”, *The Free Press Journal*, September 25, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/india/pardoning-dera-head-betrayal-with-sikh-community-sikh-leaders/672330>. Also see, “Sikh community angry about pardon for Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh”, September 25, 2015, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sikh-community-angry-about-pardon-for-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-2128645>, accessed on 21/07/2016.

112 See, “DERA-LD Sikhs 2 Last”, *India Today*, Setember 25, 2015, <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/dera-ld-sikhs-2-last-472140-2015-09-25>. Also see, “Pardoning Dera Head Betrayal of Community: Sikh Leaders” *Outlook*, September 25, 2015, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/pardoning-dera-head-betrayal-of-community-sikh-leaders/914513> accessed on 26/07/2016.

113 The statement as made by senior SGPC leader and SGPC executive committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli. His statements, views and opinions were recorded during discussion with him on the concerned issues. Him being at helm of affairs in SGPC, his views and opinions were very beneficial for the study.

114 ibid

115 ibid

Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, SGPC member and a prominent Sikh leader expressed his grief by saying:

“This decision (pardon to Gurmeet Ram Rahim by Takht Jathedars) has given big shock to Sikh sentiments. Akal Takht is supreme and will remain supreme. But the decision taken by Jathedars of Takht Sahibs in haste has put a big question mark over the trust on the supreme seat of Akal Takht Sahib.”¹¹⁶

Former Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti publicly condemned the verdict of Takht Jathedars to pardon the Dera chief. He expressed his grief by saying- ***“This decision has hurt the principles of Akal Takht and it is betrayal with the Sikh community.”***¹¹⁷ It was former Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti who had issued the 'hukamnama' (in 2007) against the Dera chief for attiring himself as the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. Former Akal Takht Jathedar very convincingly stated:

“Many letters of such clarifications were brought to the notice of the Panth while I was the Akal Takht Jathedar. But all these letters were rejected for two reasons: the Dera Sacha Sauda Chief never directly apologized and in fact justified what he did. And second, he never appeared in person at Akal Takht.”¹¹⁸

Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, former Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar, claimed that 'Hukamnama' issued in the year 2007 cannot be cancelled, stating that the present Akal Takht Jathedar (Giani Gurbachan Singh) was also part of that decision making body as Head Granthi of Drabar Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) in 2007.¹¹⁹ Making a case for representatives of all Sikh organizations, scholars and intellectuals to be consulted before taking the decision, just like it was done in 2007, former Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti said:

“Representatives of Sikh organizations should have been called at Akal Takht Sahib and taken into confidence before announcing the decision. The letter of apology should be made public to let people know about its contents.”¹²⁰

116 Statement by known Sikh leader, senior SGPC member and former SGPC General Secretary, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur. The statement was noted during my conversation with him. As Sukhdev Singh Bhaur has served in SGPC for very long duration (he has been 16 times General Secretary of SGPC), experiences and perspectives shared by him were extremely beneficial.

117 ibid

118 See, “8yrs on, Akal Takht pardons DeraSachaSauda chief”, September 25, 2015, *The Indian Express*, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/punjab-and-haryana/8-yrs-on-akal-takht-pardons-dera-sacha-sauda-chief/>. Information also available at “Akal takht pardons Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh following written apology”, *First Post*, September 25, 2015, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/akal-takht-pardons-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-following-written-apology-2445122.html>, accessed on 30/09/2017.

119 “A day after decision, Akal Takht jathedar does disappearing act” *Hindustan Times*, September 26, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/a-day-after-controversial-decision-akal-takht-jathedar-does-disappearing-act/story-xM8ME5fcsJmDhIKH2zyLxM.html>, accessed on 29/10/2016.

120 For the statement by the former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, see, “Takht decision angers Sikh leaders”, *The Hindu*, September 26, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/takht-decision-angers-sikh->

Sikh Clergy (Five Takht Jathedar) led by former Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti had issued the 'Hukamnama' (edict) in 2007 against Dera Sach Sauda chief by socially boycotting the Dera sect. Earlier (in 2007), the then Jathedars of five Takhts (seats of religious authority) had also rejected the "apology" by Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim, accused of blasphemy, on the basis that it neither accepted his sin nor promised to refrain from repeating such an act.¹²¹ At that time, the then Jathedar Akal takht Sahib had clarified that the "apology" was actually a press note from the head of Dera Sacha Sauda which was neither signed by the Dera chief, nor was there any mention about the "mistake" that hurt the Sikh sentiments. The 'Singh Sahibs' (Takht Jathedars) representing the five temporal seats of the Sikh faith, had found the "apology" from Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh "unacceptable." Thus, the then Jethadar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, by rationally rejecting the Dera chief's "apology", affirmed that social boycott of Dera Sacha Sauda sect and its chief by the Sikh community would continue as per the previous 'hukamnama' (social boycott of Dera and its followers) issued by the Akal Takht Sahib on May 27, 2007.¹²²

SGPC General Secretary Sukhdev Singh Bhaur also expressed his displeasure over the Akal Takht decision, saying it has hurt the sentiments of the Sikh community. In this context, he stated:

"I do not know what they (Sikh clergy) were thinking while taking the decision to pardon (Dera head). Several lives were lost and several people went to jail to implement the Hukamnama (edict) issued in 2007."¹²³

leaders/article7690521.ece, accessed on 03/10/2017/. Also see at, "Pardoning Dera Head Betrayal of Community: Sikh Leaders", *The Outlook*, September 25, 2015, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/pardoning-dera-head-betrayal-of-community-sikh-leaders/914513>, accessed on 03/10/2017.

¹²¹ See, "Akal Takht rejects Dera chief's fresh apology", June 27, 2007, available at <http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/jun/27dera.htm>, accessed on 12/10/2016. Also see, "Akal Takht rejects apology by Dera Chief", June 27, 2007, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-akal-takht-reject-apology-by-dera-chief-1106430>, accessed on 12/10/2016.

¹²² "Dera chief's apology "unacceptable" *The Hindu*, June 28, 2007, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/Dera-chief-apo-ldquounacceptablerrdquo/article14784441.ece>, accessed on 15/09/2016. Also see, "Akal Takht rejects apology by Dera Chief", June 27, 2007, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-akal-takht-reject-apology-by-dera-chief-1106430>, accessed on 12/10/2016.

¹²³ For the statement made by SGPC General Secretary Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, see, "SGPC urges Sikhs to accept Akal Takht decision", *The Hindu*, September 27, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/sgpc-urges-sikhs-to-accept-akal-takht-decision/article7693326.ece>. Also see at, "Dera chief pardon: SGPC urges Sikhs to accept Akal Takht move", *India Today*, September 26, 2015, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/dera-chief-pardon-sgpc-urges-sikhs-to-accept-akal-takht-move-472620-2015-09-26>, accessed on 05/10/2017.

Bhai Ranjit Singh, former Jathedar Akal Takht, in an open letter addressed to present Jathedar, Giani Gurbachan Singh, described the pardon given to Dera Sirsa Chief as a “*grave sin*” for which all Jathedars (Jathedars of five Takhts)¹²⁴ will never be forgiven by the *Sikh Panth*. He also stated that: “*this politically motivated action (pardon to Dera Chief) has denigrated the status of Akal Takht, and for this reason the concerned ‘pardon’ to Dera Chief will never be recognized by any self-respecting Sikh.*”¹²⁵ Bhai Ranjit Singh was of the firm view that representatives of Sikh organizations, scholars and intellectuals should have been consulted before taking the decision to pardon the Dera Sacha Sauda Chief.¹²⁶

Prominent Sikh organizations like: the All India Sikh Students Federation, United Akali Dal and Dal Khalsa also criticized the decision. They openly claimed that the concerned decision of Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh was “politically motivated”.¹²⁷ Bhai Mohkam Singh’s United Akali Dal and Dal Khalsa, registered their protest against the decision by stating that the ‘pardon decision’ as most unfortunate decision that Sikh clergy has taken as it was totally against the wishes of Sikh community.¹²⁸ The spokesperson of radical Sikh organization Dal Khalsa Kanwarpal Singh condemned the decision in the following words:

“The decision taken by Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Gurbachan Singh to pardon the Dera Sirsa chief has lowered the dignity and tradition of Akal Takht Sahib as it has happened for the first time in the history of Sikh community that a person was pardoned who didn’t even bother to appear before the Akal Takht.”¹²⁹

124 The five Jathedarikh Takhts were : Giani Gurbachan Singh (Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib), Bhai Iqbal Singh (Jathedar Patna Sahib), , Bhai Mal Singh (Jathedar Takht Keshgarh Sahib, Anandpur Sahib) , Bhai Gurmukh Singh (Takht Dandama Sahib, Talwandi Sabo) and Bhai Ram Singh (Hazoor Sahib, Nanded).

125 For the statement made by former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Bhai Ranjit Singh, see, “Sikh Leaders Reject Teacherous ‘Pardon’ of Sirsa Cultist – Jathedar Bhai ranjit Singh warns Gurbachan Singh”, September 26, 2015, available at <http://panthic.org/articles/5577>, accessed on 04/10/2017.

126 ibid

127 “Pardoning Dera Head Betrayal of Community: Sikh Leaders”, *The Outlook*, September 25, 2015, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/pardoning-dera-head-betrayal-of-community-sikh-leaders/914513>, accessed on 19/11/2016. Also see, “Pardoning Dera head betrayal with Sikh community: Sikh leaders, Free Press Journal, September 25, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/india/pardoning-dera-head-betrayal-with-sikh-community-sikh-leaders/672330>, accessed on 19/11/2016.

128 ibid

129 For the concerned statement made by Dal Khalsa spokesperson, Kanwaral Singh, see, “Takht decision angers Sikh leaders”, *The Hindu*, September 26, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/takht-decision-angers-sikh-leaders/article7690521.ece>., accessed on 03/10/2017.

Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala,¹³⁰ a prominent Sikh preacher, openly criticized the controversial act of Jathedar Akal Takht to ‘pardon’ Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim. In the context, Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala said:

“To save their positions, for their political interests and ego, people are using even the seat and authority of Akal Takht. A Hukamnama has come from Akal Takht as per which Dera Sauda Chief has been granted pardon. I think I do not need to tell that this Hukamnama is not the Hukamnama from Akal Takht, but is the decision that has been taken at Chandigarh or Delhi. It has only been announced from the seat of Akal Takht. This is the real truth.”¹³¹

Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala openly spoke against the manner in which the Jathedar Akal Takht acted against the “Panthic Maryada” (Sikh religious tradition) and granted ‘pardon’ to Gurmeet Ram Rahim, the head of Dera Sacha Sauda sect.

“But in the case of Dera Sirsa Chief (Gurmeet Ram Rahim), no one has come to Akal Takht Sahib and no request or plea has been made for apology. This ‘apology’ (on basis of “letter of apology”) is not apology, but it is his (Dera Sirsa Chief) clarification on the issue. If Dera Sirsa Chief has not realized his mistake and asked for apology, how this can be called a ‘maafinama’ (letter of apology).”¹³²

(English Translation of statements/ comments made in Punjabi)¹³³

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- 130 Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala (37 years) and his group is based at very well-designed Gurdwara building named 'Parmeshar Dwar' which is built on Patiala-Sangur highway. Above 1 lakh people gather on monthly samagam that is held on first Saturday of every month. *Amrit-Sanchar* ceremony (Khalsa baptism) is organized during this samagam. His message is simple, clear and delivered in the simple and basic manner. He has strong following, especially in the Malwa belt, due to the fact that his message is kept simple and delivered in Punjabi which the average person living in rural areas of Punjab can easily understand and relate to.
- 131 Statements and views of Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala in context to ‘pardon’ given to Dera Sacha Sauda Chief by Takht Jathedars. In one of his *Kirtan Sammagam* (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA, on September 27, 2015. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>, accessed on 06/07/2016.
- 132 Statement as made by famous Sikh preacher Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale. In one of his *Kirtan Sammagam* (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA, on September 27, 2015. Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale strongly reacted against the pardon given to Dera Sacha Sauda chief (Gurmeet Ram Rahim) and openly criticized the Jathedars for their pardon act. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?>, accessed on 06/07/2016.
- 133 Original Statement (in Punjabi) as made by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala in context to ‘pardon’ given to Dera Sacha Sauda Chief by Takt Jatledars (Sikh Clergy): “ਪਰਸੋਂ, ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਆਇਆ ਹੈ, ਕਿ ਸੌਦਾ ਸਾਧ (ਗੁਰਮੀਤ ਰਾਮ ਰਹੀਮ) ਨੂੰ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ ਦੇ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਗਈ ਹੈ, ਤੇ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਦੱਸਣ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਨਹੀਂ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਬੈਠੇ ਹੋ ਸਾਰਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਪਤਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦਾ ਨਹੀਂ, ਸਗੋਂ ਚੰਡੀਗੜ੍ਹ ਜਾਂ ਦਿੱਲੀ ਤੋਂ ਆਇਆ ਹੈ। ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਬੋਲ ਕੇ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਨੇ ਸੁਣਾਇਆ ਹੈ, ਇਹ ਸੱਚ ਹੈ। ਸਾਡੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੇ ਘਰ ਦਾ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਹੈ ਕਿ, ‘ਜੋ ਸਰਣ ਆਵੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਕੰਠ ਲਾਵੈ’, ਜਿਹੜਾ ਸ਼ਰਣ ਚੋ ਆ ਜਾਵੇ, ਗਲ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੱਲਾ ਪਾ ਕੇ ਆਖੇ ਕਿ ਲਉ ਜੀ ਮੈਂ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਰਣ ਚ ਆਇਆ ਹਾਂ, ਕਿ ਮੇਰੇ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਆਹ ਗਲਤੀ ਹੋ ਗਈ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਮੈਂ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ ਮੰਗਣ ਆਇਆ ਹਾਂ। ਕੌਮ ਨਾਲ ਸਲਾਹ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾਵੇ ਕਿ ਕੀ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ, ਤੇ ਕੌਮ ਕਹਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਜੇ ਕੋਈ ਨਿਮਾਣਾ ਬਣ ਕੇ, ਗਰੀਬ ਬਣ ਕੇ ਝੁਕਣ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਆਇਆ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕਰ ਦਿਓ। ਇਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਮਰਿਯਾਦਾ ਹੈ ਸਾਡੀ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਇਹ ਕਹਿੰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਇਸ ਵਾਰ ਕੀ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸੌਦਾ ਸਾਧ ਨੇ ਜੋ ਚਿੱਠੀ ਭੇਜੀ ਹੈ ਉਹ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀਨਾਮਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਬਲਕਿ ਉਸਦਾ ਸਪੱਸ਼ਟੀਕਰਨ ਹੈ। ਕੋਈ ਆਇਆ ਨਹੀਂ, ਕੋਈ ਤਰਲਾ ਜਾ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤੀ।

Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala¹³⁴ firmly criticized and denounced the Sikh Clergy's (Jathedars of five Takhts) concerned edict to 'pardon' Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) Chief for his blasphemous act. He stated:

I am fully devoted to Akal Takht Sahib and abide by it. But this 'Hukamnama' (padon to Gurmeet Ram Rahim, Dera Sirsa Chief) issued by Jathedars cannot be accepted, neither it should be accepted. Even if someone threatens to kill me with sword on my neck, I will not accept this edict form Jathedar Akal Takht. This is totally unacceptable.¹³⁵

(English Translation of statements/ comments made in Punjabi)¹³⁶

Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala further added:

We, the preachers of Sikh religion have been trying hard to reach Dera Sacha Sauda followers and inspire them for coming back to mainstream Sikhism. We have been baptizing (Amrit Sanchar) them into Khalsa Order. But by granting pardon to Dera head, our own leaders (Jathedars of Takhts) have taken his side.¹³⁷

(English Translation of statements/ comments and explanation provided in Punjabi)¹³⁸

- ਕੋਈ ਮੁਆਫ਼ਾ ਨਹੀ ਮੰਗੀ ਤੇ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਜੀ ਮੁਆਫ਼ਾ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ।' Statements made by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale during one of his Kirtan Sammagam (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA on September 27, 2015. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xml1o73ZWXQ>, accessed on 06/07/2016.
- 134 Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale's chief aspiration has been to baptize the Sikhs into of the Khalsa order. His group is known as Nirvair Khalsa Dal. Amrit-Sanchar has been his primary mission and accomplished it by participating in many kirtan and Sikhi Prachaar events throughout India and abroad. As per the records given by his group, they have baptized more than 6,50, 000 Sikhs in *Amrit-Sanchar* ceremonies. He has been preaching with focus on how religious code (Sikh Rehat Maryada) can improve a Sikhs social, moral and spiritual life. He often uses stories from Sikh-history as examples to inspire the Sikhs. Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwala is known to have spats with other Sikh preachers, Dera heads and even Punjabi singers, via his videos posted on Facebook and other social media sites.
- 135 Statements and comments were made by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale during one of his Kirtan Sammagam (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA on September 27, 2015. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xml1o73ZWXQ>. Original statement and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale: “
- 136 Original statement and comments (in Punjabi) as made by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale: “ਅੱਜ ਅਮਰੀਕਾ ਚ ਜਿੱਥੇ ਬੈਠਾ ਮੈਂ ਇਹ ਦੀਵਾਨ ਲਗਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹਾਂ ਇਹ SGPC ਦੀ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਹੋਈ ਜਗ੍ਹਾ ਹੈ। ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਰਪਿਤ ਹਾਂ, ਅਕਾਲ ਨੂੰ ਮੰਨਦੇ ਹਾਂ, ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾ ਮੰਨਦੇ ਰਹਾਂਗਾ, ਪਰ ਆਹ ਜੋ ਸੌਦਾ ਸਾਧ ਨੂੰ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਆਇਆ ਹੈ, ਚਾਹੇ ਮੇਰੀ ਧੌਣ ਤੇ ਤਲਵਾਰ ਰੱਖ ਦੇਵੋ- ਨਾ ਮੰਨਾਗੇ, ਨਾ ਹੀ ਇਹ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਮੰਨਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਗੱਲ ਨਹੀਂ, ਇਹ ਮੰਨ ਨਹੀਂ ਸਕਦੇ। Statements and comments were made by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale during one of his Kirtan Sammagam (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA on September 27, 2015. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xml1o73ZWXQ>.
- 137 Statements, comments and explanation give by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale during one of his Kirtan Sammagam (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA on September 27, 2015. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xml1o73ZWXQ>.
- 138 Original statement and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale: “ਪਰਸੋਂ ਦੀ ਜਦੋਂ ਦੀ ਇਹ ਗੱਲ ਸੁਣੀ ਹੈ, ਅਖਬਾਰਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਪੜ੍ਹੀ ਹੈ, ਸ਼ਰਮ ਨਾਲ ਦਿਲ ਰੋਂਦਾ ਹੈ। ਅਸੀਂ 8-10 ਸਾਲ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕਰਕੇ ਪ੍ਰੇਮੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ (ਡੇਰੇ ਦੇ ਮੰਨਣ ਵਾਲੇ) ਸਿੱਖੀ ਵੱਲ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਆਉਂਦੇ ਰਹੇ ਹਾਂ, ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸੰਚਾਰ ਕਰਵਾਉਂਦੇ ਰਹੇ ਹਾਂ, ਪਰ ਅੱਜ ਸਾਡੇ ਆਗੂ ਹੀ (ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ) ਉਸ ਦੇ ਹੱਕ ਵਿਚ ਖੜ੍ਹ ਗਏ ਹਨ। ਪਹਿਲਾ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਇਸ (ਸੌਦਾ ਸਾਧ) ਡੇਰੇ ਨਾਲ ਕੋਈ ਸਾਂਝ ਨਾ ਰੱਖੀ ਜਾਵੇ। ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਗੁਰੂ ਘਰ ਦੀ, ਮਰਿਆਦਾ ਦੀ, ਸਾਡੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸੰਚਾਰ ਦੀ ਅਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਦੀ ਬੇਅਦਬੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ। ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਨੇ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਵਰਗੇ ਖੁਲ ਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕਰਦੇ ਸੀ, ਅਸੀਂ ਖੁਲ ਕੇ, ਡਟ ਕੇ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਬਹੁਤ ਵੱਡੀ

Various Sikh religious and political leaders further claimed that the Akal Takht Sahib 'Hukamnama' issued in 2007 (to boycott Dera Sirsa and its Chief) cannot be cancelled or amended. The Global Sikh Council issued a statement whereby the organization condemned the 'pardon decision' of the Jathedars. The Council stated that: "***The Jathedars have no authority to dictate to, or act on behalf of the wider Sikh community.***"¹³⁹ The Global Sikh Council also urged the Sikh community worldwide to condemn the arbitrary decision of the "***politically appointed jathedars.***"¹⁴⁰ A meeting of Nihang Singh organisations led by Shiromani Panth Akali Budha Dal Jathedar Baba Balveer Singh was held where the Nihang Singh organizations appealed the Sikh High Priests (Takht Jathedars) to review their decision that granted 'pardon' to Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmit Ram Rahim. As mainstream Sikhs reacted angrily to the 'pardon' given by the Sikh Clergy (Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts), the decision was seen as dictated entirely by the Akali Dal leadership, eyeing votes of Dera Sacha Sauda followers.¹⁴¹

While Shiromani Akali Dal leadership termed the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib's controversial decision as "pro-Sikh", the radical Sikh organizations strongly criticized the decision as "anti-Panthic." On the other side, welcoming the Akal Takht decision to pardon Dera head, the President of Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (DSGPC) Manjit Singh G.K. said that the exoneration was in the interest of Sikh community as the decision would bring the two sections (mainstream Sikhs and Dera followers) together and ease the tensions. Manjit Singh GK stated: "***The Dera chief in his explanation has sought apology. We welcome the Akal Takht decision to exonerate him as the decision will not only ease***

ਗਲਤੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ। ਪੰਜਾਬ ਵਿਚ ਇਸ ਦਾ ਆਉਣਾ ਹੀ ਬੰਦ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ। ਅਸੀਂ ਡਟ ਕੇ ਬੋਲਦੇ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੈ, ਸਾਡੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਹਨ, ਪਰ ਹੁਣ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ। ਕਿਸੇ ਦੀ ਸਲਾਹ ਨਹੀਂ ਲਈ ਗਈ, ਕਿਸੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰਕ ਦੀ ਸਲਾਹ ਨਹੀਂ, ਜੋ ਗੁਰੂ ਚਰਨਾਂ ਚ ਆਵੇ, ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ ਮੰਗੇ, ਉਸਨੂੰ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਜਿਸ ਨੇ ਮੁਆਫ਼ੀ ਮੰਗੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਉਸਨੂੰ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ, ਇਕ ਨਾਦਰਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਹੁਕਮ ਪਾਸ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ।" Statements, comments and explanation made by Baba Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale during one of his Kirtan Sammagam (Sikhi preaching event) held at Yuba City, USA ON September 27, 2015. The live recording of this event is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xml1o73ZWXQ>.

139 See, "Makkar meets Akal Takht Jathedar, promises support", *The Tribune*, October 1, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/makkar-meets-akal-takht-jathedar-promises-support/140098.html>. See also, "Global Sikh Council Statement on Jathedar's Pardon of Dera Chief", October 1, 2015, available at <http://nsouk.co.uk/global-sikh-council-statement-on-jathedars-pardon-of-dera-chief/>, accessed on 04/10/2017.

140 *ibid.*

141 "Sikhs and Dera followers clash in Punjab over annual scripture reading", *Mail Online India*, March 16, 2015, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2996135/Sikhs-Dera-followers-clash-Punjab-annual-scripture-reading.html>, accessed on 08/05/2016. "Takht decision angers Sikh leaders", *The Hindu*, September 26, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/takht-decision-angers-sikh-leaders/article7690521.ece>, accessed on 03/10/2017.

tensions among the two communities, but will also bring them close."¹⁴² Manjit Singh GK, justifying Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib's decision to 'pardon' Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) Chief, appreciated Dera head (Gurmeet Ram Rahim) on the basis that he wrote a letter to the Akal Takht to seek an apology despite being a non-Sikh. The President of Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (DSGPC) slammed the radical Sikhs for trying to divide the Sikh community on the concerned issue.¹⁴³

Amidst strong objection by Sikh leaders to the 'pardon' granted to Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim by Akal Takht, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) urged the Sikh community to accept the decision on the basis that Akal Takht's supremacy cannot be challenged. As such, the then President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Avtar Singh Makkar said:

"As Sikhs, we cannot challenge the supremacy of Akal Takht. When five Sikh priests at Akal Takht take any decision, every Sikh has to abide by it. I urge the Sikh community that we should accept the Akal Takht decision (to pardon Dera head)."¹⁴⁴

However, in contrast to Avtar Singh Makkar's (then President SGPC) stand, senior member and former General Secretary of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) - Bibi Kiranjot Kaur described the decision to exonerate Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim as "a highly objectionable" act. Bibi Kiranjot Kaur categorically stated:

"It is the first time in history of Sikh community that a man without presenting himself at Akal Takht Sahib has been pardoned by the Jathedars, even when he has not sought an apology. The Dera Sirsa Chief had only given his clarification."¹⁴⁵

142 For statement made by DSGPC President Manjit Singh G.K., see, "SAD clashes with radical Sikh groups as Ram Rahim is cleared in blasphemy case", *The Mail Online India*, September 27, 2015, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-3251222/SAD-radical-Sikh-organisations-clash-Ram-Rahim-s-exoneration-blasphemy-case.html>. Also see, "Shiromani Akali Dal, Sikh bodies lock horns over Ram Rahim's release", *India Today*, September 28, 2015, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/shiromani-akali-dal-sikh-bodies-lock-horns-over-ram-rahims-release-265098-2015-09-28>, accessed on 05/10/2017.

143 ibid

144 For the concerned statement of SGC president Avtar Singh Makkar, see, "SGPC urges Sikhs to accept Akal Takht decision", *The Hindu*, September 27, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/sgpc-urges-sikhs-to-accept-akal-takht-decision/article7693327.ece>. Also see, "Don't defy Akal Takht's supremacy", *The Times of India*, September 27, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Dont-defy-Akal-Takhts-supremacy/articleshow/49123189.cms>, accessed on 06/10/2017.

145 For the statement made by senior SGPC member and former General Secretary of SGPC Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, see, "Sikh Leaders Reject Teacherous 'Pardon' of Sirsa Cultist – Jathedar Bhai ranjit Singh warns Gurbachan Singh", September 26, 2015, available at <http://panthic.org/articles/5577>, accessed on 04/10/2017.

Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (SGPC member and former General Secretary of SGPC) was very critical about the decision of the five Jathedars to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda head. Bibi Kiranjot firmly stated:

“The way Jathedars (Jathedars of five Takhts) decided to apologize Dera Sirsa Chief merely on the basis of ‘letter of apology’ is very much against Panthic Maryada. I have already taken a firm stand on this publicly through media.”¹⁴⁶

(Translated excerpts of Bibi Kiranjot Kaur’s statements made in Punjabi) ¹⁴⁷

In the context to highly controversial edict issued by Sikh Clergy, Bibi Kiranjot Kaur further added:

“A new precedent (with this decision) has been set which is highly objectionable and not in accordance with the Sikh Maryada (Sikh traditions). Hukamnama once issued by Akal Takht Sahib cannot be cancelled or amended. Sikhs are shocked with this move (to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda chief) of the Jathedars and the decision will have crucial ramifications.”¹⁴⁸

Prominent Sikh organizations that strongly protested against the Sikh Clergy’s (Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts) controversial decision to ‘pardon’ Dera Sacha Sauda (Sirsa) head were: Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), United Akali Dal, Shiromani Akali Dal (Panch Pardhani), Shiromani Akali Dal (Delhi), Dal Khalsa, Damdami Taksal (Ajnala), Akhand Kirtani Jatha, Sant Samaj, Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Committee, Ek Noor Khalsa Fauj and Akhand Kirtani Jatha.¹⁴⁹

Akal Takht Reverts ‘Pardon Decision’

On October 17, 2015, an emergency meeting at Akal Takht Sahib was convened by Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, and the decision was taken to retract the earlier

146 Opinions, views and statements of Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (senior member and former SGPC General Secretary) made during discussion held with her on the issue of ‘pardon’ granted to Dera Sirsa head by Sikh Takht Jathedars.

147 Senior SGPC member and former General Secretary Bibi Kiranjot Kaur’s statement on the decision of the five Jathedars to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda head:
“ਸਿਰਸੇ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਾਧ ਨੂੰ ਕੇਵਲ ਇੱਕ ਪੱਤਰ ਉੱਤੇ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਜਥੇਦਾਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਮੁਆਫ਼ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਕੀਤਾ। ਉਹ ਪੰਥਕ ਮਰਿਯਾਦਾ ਦੇ ਬਿਲਕੁਲ ਵਿਰੁੱਧ ਸੀ। ਮੈਂ Publicly Media ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਗੱਲ ਤੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਹੀ Stand ਲੈ ਚੁੱਕੀ ਹੈ।” - The opinions, views and statements of Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (senior member and former SGPC General Secretary) made during discussion held with her on concerned issues.

148 For the statement made by known SGPC member and former General Secretary of SGPC Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, see, “Sikh Leaders Reject Teacherous ‘Pardon’ of Sirsa Cultist – Jathedar Bhai ranjit Singh warns Gurbachan Singh”, September 26, 2015, available at <http://panthic.org/articles/5577>, accessed on 04/10/2017.

149 Some influential radical Sikh bodies wanted to convene ‘SarbatKhalsa’ at Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, in 2015. However, they were not given the permission to do so by the SGPC. The move was initiated by Sikh organizations led by the Mohkam Singh’s United Akali Dal and SAD (A), focusing primarily on the controversial issue of exonerating the Dera Sacha Sauda head. Information collected from Bhai Mohkam Singh, the chief of radical Sikh party United Akali Dal (UAD). Information collected through discussion on concerned issue with leaders and members of prominent Sikh organizations

edict of Akal Takht Sahib which ‘pardoned’ the Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim.¹⁵⁰ As Sikh outfits and religious activists widely protested against the Sikh Clergy’s decision to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda head, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib revoked the ‘pardon’ granted to Gurmeet Ram Rahim in 2007 blasphemy case.¹⁵¹ Sikh radical organizations were unhappy with the decision to pardon Dera Sirsa Chief because Sikh traditions, rituals and norms demand any guilty person to physically appear before the Akal Takht Sahib. They argued that Dera Chief got away with the offence without apologizing in person.¹⁵²

As pressure mounted on the Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, he convened a marathon meeting (October 17, 2015) of five Sikh High Priests (Five Takht Jathedars) in Amritsar, and decided to annul Akal Takht’s verdict to exonerate Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim.¹⁵³ Besides the Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, those who took part in the emergency meeting included: Takht Keshgarh Sahib Jathedar Giani Mal Singh, Takht Damdama Sahib acting Jathedar Giani Gurmukh Singh, Takht Patna Sahib Jathedar Giani Iqbal Singh and Giani Raghbir Singh, a *Granthi* (priest) of Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar).¹⁵⁴

150 “Akal Takht revokes pardon granted to DeraSacha head”, *The Times of India*, October 16, 2015, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Akal-Takht-revokes-pardon-granted-to-Dera-Sacha-head/articleshow/49414799.cms> Also see, “Akal Takht revokes pardon granted to DeraSacha head Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh”, *The Economic Times*, October 16, 2015, available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/akal-takht-revokes-pardon-granted-to-dera-sacha-head-gurmit-ram-rahim-singh/articleshow/49411945.cms>., accessed on 14/06/2016.

151 See, “Three weeks later, Akal Takht revokes pardon to dera chief”, *The Tribune*, October 17, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/three-weeks-later-akal-takht-revokes-pardon-to-dera-chief/147067.html>. Important Information also available at “Akal Takht revokes pardon granted to DeraSacha head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh”, *First Post*, October 16, 2015, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/akal-takht-revokes-pardon-granted-to-dera-sacha-head-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-2471746.html>, accessed on 14/06/2016.

152 “Akal Takht revokes pardon to dera head Gurmeet Ram Rahim”, *Hindustan Times*, October 17, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/akal-takht-revokes-pardon-to-dera-head-gurmeet-ram-rahim/story-pUd4GpRu9tDkO9VBwbzKsK.html>. Also See “Akal Takht revokes pardon granted to DeraSacha head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh”, *First Post*, October 16, 2015, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/akal-takht-revokes-pardon-granted-to-dera-sacha-head-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-2471746.html>, accessed on 16/06/2016.

153 As per September 24, 2015 verdict of the Jathedar Akal Takht -- the highest temporal seat of the Sikh religion, Akal Takht Sahib, pardoned DeraSachaSauda sect chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh following a written apology from him. The Dera head found himself in the midst of a major controversy in May 2007, when he was accused of hurting the religious sentiments of Sikhs. See “Akal Takht pardons Gurmeet Ram Rahim, sparks row”, *The Times of India*, September 25, 2015, available at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Akal-Takht-pardons-Gurmeet-Ram-Rahim-sparks-row/articleshow/49102565.cms>. Relevant information also available at - “Akal Takht pardons Dera chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim”, Akal Takht pardons DeraSachaSauda chief”, *The Tribune*, September 24, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/akal-takht-pardons-dera-sacha-sauda-chief/137341.html>, accessed on 03/07/2016.

154 Giani Gurbachan Singh claimed that the Jathedar of Takht Hazoor Sahib (Nanded, Maharashtra), Giani Kulwant Singh, had given his consent to the decision on the phone. In his place, Giani Raghbir Singh

There were sharp reactions coming forth and criticism had been mounting against Giani Gurbachan Singh (Akhal Takht Jathedar) for pardoning Dera Sacha Sauda Chief¹⁵⁵, and Sikhs had hit the streets in the State. Commenting on the need to retract the earlier edict of Akhal Takht Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh stated that to restore peace was the most important concern which led them (Sikh Clergy - five Jathedars of Takhts) to take this decision. The new edict from Akhal Takht Sahib stated that there is to be ‘no pardon’ for the Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim, who has been socially boycotted by the Sikhs since 2008.¹⁵⁶

The Sikh clergy (Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts) was under fire for its decision to pardon Dera Sach Sauda head not only from radical Sikh organizations but also from a large section of moderate Sikhs. Some radical Sikh groups even talked of convening a Sarbat Khalsa (congregation of Sikhs) on the issue, and numerous protests were staged in the State.¹⁵⁷ The attacks were witnessed on the Takht Jathedars at various places and the condemnations were pouring in. This forced the Sikh High Priests (Takht Jathedars) to revert the concerned decision taken from the highest Sikh religious seat, the Akhal Takht Sahib.¹⁵⁸ When asked whether a decision taken by the Akhal Takht could be withdrawn, Jathedar Akhal Takht Giani Gurbachan Singh replied:

“We had issued a ‘Gurmata’ (religious decree), not a ‘Hukamnama’ (edict). The former can be withdrawn or changed, while the latter cannot be.”¹⁵⁹

attended the meeting to complete the quorum of ‘Panj Piaras’ (five beloved ones of the Guru). Information based on field observations and information gathered from Akhal Takht Secretariat, dated October 17, 2015.

155 The controversial DeraSachaSauda chief of the had angered Sikh radical groups in particular and Sikh community in general in 2007, when he appeared in an initiation ceremony wearing clothes usually associated with Guru Gobind Singh. This had led to widespread violence in both Punjab and Haryana. violent clashes had broken out between Dera followers and Sikhs in parts of Punjab at that time. The incident had triggered clashes between Sikhs and Dera followers while the Takht ordered the sect leader’s social boycott besides a ban on its congregations.

156 See, “Akhal Takht revokes pardon to Sacha Sauda head”, *The Hindu*, October 17, 2015, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/akhal-takht-revokes-pardon-to-sacha-sauda-head/article7771955.ece>, accessed on 18/12/2016. Also see, “23 days on, Akhal Takht revokes pardon to dera chief”, *The Indian Express*, October 17, 2015, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/23-days-on-akhal-takht-revokes-pardon-to-dera-chief/>, accessed on 18/12/2016.

157 See, “Anti-Badal Sikh bodies call for no pardon to Sirsadera head”, *Hindustan Times*, September 28, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/anti-badal-sikh-bodies-call-for-no-pardon-to-sirs-dera-head/story-IK94BOliqCE57fSB9J4hnI.html>. Also see, “Radical Sikhs keen to drag Dera chief Gurmit Ram Rahim to Akhal takht”, *Mail Today*, October 3, 2015, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/radical-sikhs-keen-to-drag-dera-chief-gurmit-ram-rahim-to-akhal-takht/1/489291.html>, accessed on 10/10/2016.

158 “Sikh clergy retracts earlier edict on pardoning Dera chief”, *Millenium Post*, October 18, 2015, available at <http://www.millenniumpost.in/sikh-clergy-retracts-earlier-edict-on-pardoning-dera-chief-109170?NID162893>, accessed on 10/10/2016.

159 “Akhal Takht revokes pardon to dera head Gurmeet Ram Rahim”, *Hindustan Times*, October 17, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/akhal-takht-revokes-pardon-to-dera-head-gurmeet-ram-rahim/story-.html>, accessed on 14/10/2016.

It is important to mention here that the Sikh “Rehat Maryada” (Sikh religious code of conduct) published by SGPC makes a clear mention of the word ‘Gurmata’, which means “a decision taken in the name of the Guru”, but there is no reference to ‘Hukamnama’ (edict).¹⁶⁰ The revocation of decision to exonerate Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmeet Ram Rahim in the 2007 blasphemy case by Akal Takht Sahib was an unprecedented move influenced by persistent pressure from radicals and other sections of the Sikh community. After presiding over the emergency meeting of Sikh high priests held at Akal Takht Secretariat (Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar), Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh said:

“As a consensus within the Panth on the pardon granted to the Dera head could not be reached, the ‘gurmata’ (religious decree) stands withdrawn.”¹⁶¹

Calling for the Akal Takht Jathedars social boycott and demanding his resignation, radical Sikhs alleged that ‘pardon’ was granted at the behest of the Shiromai Akali Dal (SAD) which was eyeing Dera Sacha Sauda votes in 2017 Punjab Assembly polls. It is a fact that Sirsa (Haryana) based Dera Sacha Sauda has considerable following in the Malwa region of Punjab, and the Akali leadership was keen to mend fences with the Dera Sacha Sauda Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh.¹⁶² The Takht Jathedars about-turn was seen as a vital move aimed at pacifying Sikh radicals in particular and the Sikh community in general. Huge pressure mounted on the Akal Takht Jathedar after the desecration incidence of Guru Granth Sahib at Bargari village in Faridkot district.¹⁶³ However, it was back to square one for Dera Chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim as the May 2007 decision of the Akal Takht calling for his social boycott came into force again.¹⁶⁴

160 On basis of discussion with SGPC Member, Advocate Jaswinder Singh on concepts of *Gurmatta* and *Hukamnama*. According to him all Akal Takht’s decisions are taken in the Guru’s name. We can refer to these as ‘Gurmata’ or ‘hukamctonama’, both mean the same.

161 As said by Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Gurbachan Singh after presiding over an emergency meeting of the five Sikh high priests at the Akal Takht secretariat in the Golden Temple complex. See, “Akal Takht revokes pardon to dera head Gurmeet Ram Rahim”, *Hindustan Times*, October 17, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/akal-takht-revokes-pardon-to-dera-head-gurmeet-ram-rahim/story-.html>, accessed on 22/10/2016.

162 Based in Sirsa in Haryana, Dera Sacha Sauda has a massive following in Punjab’s Malwa region. Despite courting several controversies, Dera head Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh wielded influence in India and beyond among lakhs of followers across the US, UK, Canada, Australia and the UAE. DeraSachaSauda’s huge following has been attracting political parties in Punjab over the past decade, be it the SAD, BJP, or the Congress. Politicians keep making a beeline to the Dera to the strong vote bank. For Information see, “Why DeraSachaSauda attracts such huge following”, *The Tribune*, August 24, 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/why-dera-sacha-sauda-attracts-such-huge-following/456843.html>. Also See “Dera chiefs play gurus to tallest of politicians”, *The Economic Times*, December 2, 2016, available at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/dera-chiefs-play-gurus-to-tallest-of-politicians/articleshow/55736977.cms>, accessed on 23/09/2017.

163 Highly intense tension gripped Bargari and Kotkapura towns after more than 110 pages (*Angs*) of the Guru Granth Sahib were found strewn near a gurdwara in Bargari. Punjab Police opened fire at Sikh Sangat in Behbal Kalan Village, District Faridkot, in which two persons were killed. The sacrilege led to large-scale protests which took a violent turn. See, “Tension in Faridkot town after pages of holy book found torn”, *The Tribune*, October 13, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/tension-in-faridkot-town-after-pages-of-holy-book-found-torn/145307.html>. See also

Akal Takht urges Dera followers back to Sikhism

A special CBI Court (on August 28, 2017) sentenced Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh to 20-year jail in-prison in two rape cases and sexual exploitation of two female disciples. Soon after this jail sentence to Dera Sacha Sauda cheif, the Akal Takht Sahib opened doors of “homecoming” to Sikhs who were devotees of Dera Sacha Sauda sect. Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh welcomed the Dera Sacha Sauda followers (also called as *premis*) to return back to Sikhism in the following words:

“I want to make an appeal to all those dera followers with Sikh background to admit their mistake and take corrective steps and return to the faith of Guru Nanak. We will welcome such followers with open arms.”¹⁶⁵

Welocming the Dera Sacha Sauda devotees, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Gurbachan Singh further added:

“They will be welcomed with siropas (robes of honour) and the Panth (religion) will be there to help them in every condition.”¹⁶⁶

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also directed the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to emphasize on ‘Sikhi Parchar’ (Sikh religious preachings) with motive to encourage the Dera followers to make a come-back to mainstream Sikh religion. In the context, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib informed:

“I have also asked the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Chief, Kirpal Singh Badungar, to intensify the Dharam Parchar (religious propagation) drive and organise congregations everywhere in Malwa region, where the Dera has considerable sway.”¹⁶⁷

“Bargari village sacrilege: 2 brothers arrested” India Today, October 20, 2015, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/bargari-village-sacrilege-2-brothers-arrested/1/503835.html>, accessed on 11/09/2016.

164 Hukamnama (edict) of May 2007 issued by the then Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, had called for ‘social boycott’ of the dera head by the entire Sikh ‘Panth’ till the time he doesn’t apologise and accept the supremacy of the Akal Takht. See “Akal Takht exonerates Sirsadera head Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh”, *Hindustan Times*, September 24, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/akal-takht-exonerates-sirsa-dera-head-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh/story-.html>. See also “Dera chief’s apology “unacceptable”, *The Hindu*, June 28, 2007, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/Dera-chiefsquos-apology-ldquounacceptablerrdquo/article14784441.ece>, accessed on 25/07/2016.

165 “Doors open for dera followers to return to Sikh fold: Akal Takht”, *Indian Express*, August 30, 2017. Relevant information also available at “Welcome of Dera Sacha Sauda ‘premis’ into Sikh fold an act in haste”, *The Hindustan Times*, September 01, 2017.

166 “Ghar wapsi? Akal Takht urges Sikhs to correct ‘mistake’ of joining dera, says doors open”, *Hindustan Times*, August 29, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ghar-wapsi-akal-takht-urges-sikhs-to-correct-mistake-of-joining-dera-says-doors-open/story-.html>, accessed on 12/09/2017.

167 “Ghar wapsi? Akal Takht urges Sikhs to correct ‘mistake’ of joining dera, says doors open”, *Hindustan Times*, August 29, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ghar-wapsi-akal-takht-urges-sikhs-to-correct-mistake-of-joining-dera-says-doors-open/story>, accessed on 12/09/2017. Also see, “Ghar Wapsi? Akal Takht Urges Sikhs To Correct ‘Mistake’ Of Joining Dera, Dera Hits Back”, *Darpan*, August 31, 2017, available at <https://www.darpanmagazine.com/news/interesting/ghar-wapsi-akal-takht-urges-sikhs-to-correct-mistake-of-joining-dera-dera-hits-back/>, accessed on 12/09/2017.

Welcoming the followers of Dera Sacha Sauda sect back into the Sikh fold, Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh termed this step as “*Ghar Waps*”¹⁶⁸ (“homecoming”) for them. This call of “homecoming” by Akal Takht came on the day after Dera Sirsa chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim was sent to jail for 20 years imprisonment after his conviction by the special CBI Court. When the Dera chief had been jailed, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh also stated that Dera Sacha Sauda followers (also called *premis*) were target of ridicule, in panic, and needed a handholding.¹⁶⁹ However, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib’s move to welcome the Dera Sacha Sauda devotees back to mainstream Sikhism was opposed by a section of Sikhs. A Sikh scholar Prithipal Singh Kapur¹⁷⁰ said: “*The call to the Dera Sacha Sauda followers by Akal Takht Jathedar comes in haste, and is absolutely wrong. We are welcoming those who are ‘Patit’ (apostate) and had intentionally renounced the Sikhism.*”¹⁷¹ This decision by Akal Takht Jathedar raised serious questions in the minds of Sikhs about the timing of the Jathedar to welcome the Dera followers. Also, this decision again put the question mark on Akal Takht Sahib’s ‘Hukamnama’ (edict) of 2007 to completely boycott the Dera Sacha Sauda sect.

However, Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib, fully defended his decision to welcome the Dera Sacha Sauda followers back to mainstream Sikh religion.¹⁷² The Jathedar justified his decision by saying:

“They (premis- Dera followers) may accept my call or not, but I feel it very appropriate to give a strong message that those who have gone to the unscrupulous Deras can come back into the Sikh fold. I think there’s no haste in welcoming the Dera followers as they are in panic and worried.”¹⁷³

168 “Welcome of DeraSachaSauda ‘premis’ into Sikh fold an act in haste”, *Hindustan Times*, September 01, 2017. Also see, “GharWapsi? Akal Takht Urges Sikhs to Correct 'Mistake' Of Joining Dera, Dera Hits Back”, *Darpan*, August 31, 2017, available at <http://www.darpanmagazine.com/news/interesting/ghar-wapsi-akal-takht-urges-sikhs-to-correct-mistake-of-joining-dera-dera-hits-back/>, accessed on 11/10/2017.

169 “Welcome of DeraSachaSauda ‘premis’ into Sikh fold an act in haste”, *Hindustan Times*, September 01, 2017. See also, “Doors open for dera followers to return to Sikh fold: Akal Takht”, *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2017.

170 Prithipal Singh Kapur is a known historian and educationist. He has been the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and Director, Punjab State University Text Book Board. He also served as Editor-in-Chief of the Encyclopedia of Sikhism at Punjabi University, Patiala. He has written/edited more than a dozen books on Sikh history and philosophy.

171 *ibid*

172 Reacting to the Akal Takht Jathedar’s call to join the Sikh fold, Jora Singh, head of DeraSachaSauda’s Punjab headquarters at Salabatpura (in Bathinda), said the current situation will expose those dera followers who have double standards. He said : “We are still with the Dera. Some people are mistaken that our faith has shaken. That will not happen. Whole 'sangat' (devotees) are standing with the DeraChief . We need to have trust in him. We have faced tough times earlier too. The activities of dera will go on as usual.” For information see, “Welcome of DeraSachaSauda ‘premis’ into Sikh fold an act in haste”, *Hindustan Times*, September 30, 2017.

173 See, “Welcome of DeraSachaSauda ‘premis’ into Sikh fold an act in haste”, *Hindustan Times*, September 01, 2017. See also, “Doors open for dera followers to return to Sikh fold: Akal Takht”, *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2017.

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh clarified that the 2007 ‘hukamnama’¹⁷⁴ (edict) cannot be withdrawn because “*to withdraw a Hukamnama, forgiveness had to be sought and in case of Dera (Sacha Sauda), there’s no scope now.*”¹⁷⁵ Jathedar Akal Takht explained that cancelling the ‘hukamnama’ (edict) of 2007 and welcoming Dera Sacha Sauda followers are two different things. In light of this statement by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, it is pertinent to mention here that Dera Sacha Sauda followers come from different religions, regions and castes. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) also supported this decision of Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar Akal Takht, to welcome the Dera Sirsa followers back to Sikh fold.¹⁷⁶

Kirpal Singh Badungar, who replaced Avtar Singh Makkar as 41st President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC)¹⁷⁷ in November 2016, announced to intensify the SGPC “Dharam Parchar Lehar’ (SGPC drive to preach Sikhism) to ensure “homecoming” for “mised Sikhs”, and initiate a dialogue to contact Dera Sacha Sauda followers.¹⁷⁸ The move to get the Dera followers back to Sikh fold also got the support of radical Sikh organizations like Damdami Taksaal and Eknoor Khalsa Fauj. The Sikh organizations also appealed to the section of the community (Dera followers) disappointed with Sikh religious establishment, who had gone off track to Dera operators, to return back mainstream Sikh religion.¹⁷⁹ Sarbat Khalsa appointed Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib, Baljit Singh Daduwal, also supported the “homecoming” of Dera Sacha Sauda followers back to Sikh faith.¹⁸⁰

174 In 2007, the then Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti had issued ‘hukamnama’ (edict) for a social boycott of Dera Sirsa followers after Ram Rahim allegedly imitated Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of Sikhs.

175 “U-turn: Reopen 2007 ‘blasphemy’ case against dera chief, demands Akal Takht head”, *Hindustan Times*, September 4, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/dera-chief-should-be-punished-for-hurting-religious-sentiments-of-sikhs-says-akal-takht-jathedar/story-.html>, accessed on 19/10/2017. Also see, “ HT Analysis: Welcome of Dera Sacha Sauda ‘premis’ into Sikh fold an act in haste”, *Hindustan Times*, September 1, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ht-analysis-welcome-of-dera-sacha-sauda-premis-into-sikh-fold-an-act-in-haste/story-c4Uva36pktpBn5apbusWPL.html>, 19/10/2017.

176 *ibid*

177 Prof. Kirpal Singh Badungar was elected as president of the SGPC for the second time. He had earlier served as the SGPC chief in 2001. Previous SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar’s term ended on November 5, 2016.

178 *ibid*.

179 See, “Doors are open for Dera Sikh Premis in Khalsa Panth, says Eknoor Khalsa Fouj”, August 30, 2017, available at <http://www.babushahi.com/view-news.php?id=62986&headline-Doors-are-open-for-Dera-Sikh-Premis-in-Khalsa-Panth,-says-Eknoor-Khalsa-Fouj>, accessed on 09/10/2017.

180 The Sarbat Khalsa-appointed Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib, Baljit Singh Daduwal, asked the Sikhs, who had become followers of Dera Sacha Sauda to return back to mainstream Sikhism. Daduwal also demanded that all cases of hurting religious feelings registered against Sikh masses in the clashes with the dera followers be withdrawn forthwith. He also claimed that the Governments of Punjab and Haryana fully supported the Dera Chief, Gurmeet Ram Rahim for looking for political gains. For information see,

The highest seat of Sikh religious authority, the Akal Takht Sahib, also awarded religious punishment (*Tankhah*) to as many as 39 Sikh political leaders from the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) for seeking votes from Dera Sacha Sauda during the Punjab Assembly elections of 2017.¹⁸¹ The concerned Sikh leaders were given the religious punishment for violating the 2007 directive of Akal Takht Sahib (as per which Akal Takht Sahib had directed the Sikhs to socially boycott the Dera Sacha Sauda sect). Religious punishment awarded to these leaders by Akal Takht Sahib included: cleaning of streets leading to the Golden Temple, cleaning of whole *parikrama* of the shrine, cleaning of shoes of devotees and cleaning of utensils at Golden Temple, Amritsar.¹⁸² These leaders were called on the basis of report submitted by a three-member panel of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee (SGPC).

It can be concluded that while Deras have a long history, the recent rise in number of Deras in Punjab has been a noticeable trend.¹⁸³ Some prominent Deras in Punjab have become really substantial in size with following of large number of Sikhs. Current popularity of the Deras reflects the resurgence of popular religiosity in contemporary Sikh society where they have become attractive and fashionable. As *Derawaad* has been encouraging more and more people to follow so called ‘human Gurus’, this goes totally against the fundamental

“Daduwal also wants dera followers to be brought back to Sikh fold”, September 01, 2017, available at <http://www.sikhnewsexpress.com/daduwal-also-wants-dera-followers-to-be-brought-back-to-sikh-fold-sne/>, accessed on 09/10/2017.

181 “Dera support: ‘Tankhah’ to 39 Sikh leaders”, *The Tribune*, April 18, 2017, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/dera-support-tankhah-to-39-sikh-leaders/393620.html>, accessed on 23/05/2017. Also see, “Punjab: 39 politicians appear before Akal Takht, accept sentence”, *The Indian Express*, April 18, 2017, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/punjab-39-politicians-appear-before-akal-takht-accept-sentence-4617473/>, accessed on 23/05/2017.

182 Among the leading leaders who were given ‘tankhah’ (religious punishment) by Akal Takht were : All India Youth Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring and Punjab cabinet minister Sadhu Singh Dharamsot. Others leaders namely Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, Arjan Singh (son of Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal), Ajay Singh Bhatti — all from Congress and SAD leader Janmeja Singh Sekhon, did not present themselves before the Takht. For information see, “Akal Takht awards religious punishment to 40 Punjab politicians for taking support of DeraSachaSauda”, *The Indian Express*, April 18, 2017, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/apr/18/akal-takht-awards-religious-punishment-to-40-punjab-politicians-for-taking-support-of-dera-sacha-sau-1594689--1.html>, accessed on 21/10/2017. Also see, “Takht asks 39 Sikh leaders to atone for seeking dera help”, *The Times of India*, April 18, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/takht-asks-39-sikh-leaders-to-atone-for-seeking-dera-help/articleshow/58231188.cms>, accessed on 21/10/2017.

183 Divya Trivedi (2017), “Deras & Dalit identity”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at <https://www.frontline.in/the-nation/deras-amp-dalit-identity/article9855385.ece>, accessed on 17/12/2017. Also see, Ronki Ram (2016), “Structures of Social Exclusion, Dera Culture and Dalit Social Mobility in Contemporary East Punjab”, *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, October 2016, Volume- 8, Issue- 2, pp: 186-193, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2455328X16661084>, accessed on 14/03/2017.

ideas and tenets of Sikhism. The flow of people towards Deras which now has become a trend – is in turn giving rise to questions about the future direction of Sikhism.¹⁸⁴

Derawaad has emerged as an offshoot of Dalit assertion in Punjab in general and within the Sikh community in particular. It is an empirical reality that there exists huge vacuum in the original Sikh philosophy and contemporary role of Sikh religious institutions. This vacuum has been well filled by Deras that may also be looked as organizations where socially and economically marginalized sections of society experience a sense of security and relief, away from the hostile realities of caste hierarchy and dominance of politically empowered class.¹⁸⁵

Dera cult has been flourishing in Punjab with large number of Sikhs following the *Dehdhari* (embodied) *gurus/sants/babas*. There is no doubt in the fact that ‘Derwaad’ has evolved as a major threat to the Sikh religion and its distinct identity. It is the tendency to tamper with the Sikh *Panthic* traditions that causes the Deras to be viewed as potentially threatening by the mainstream Sikhism and radical Sikh organizations. Following of *Deras, babas, sants* and living ‘gurus’ by Sikhs in large numbers raises big question mark over the role of mainstream Sikh religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC. This trend reflects vital institutional and functional defects in the working of the premier Sikh institutions.¹⁸⁶

II

Keshav Baliram Hedgewar¹⁸⁷ formed Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 to spread Hindu culture, ideology of ‘Hidutva’ and the creation of ‘Hindu Nation’.¹⁸⁸ The

184 Also see, Surinder Singh Jodhka (2008), “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, pp. 54-57

185 Ronki Ram (2007), "Social Exclusion, Resistance and Deras: Exploring the Myth of Casteless Sikh Society in Punjab", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.42, No.40, October 6-12, 2007, pp. 4066 -67. Also see, Surinder S. Jodhka (2017), “Why Do People Go to the Dera?”, *The Wire*, August 27, 2017, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-dera-community-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh>, accessed on 21/09/2017. Also see, “Deras and evangelicals”, *The Frontline*, September 29, 2017, available at https://www.frontline.in/columns/Jayati_Ghosh/deras-and-evangelicals/article9855518.ece, accessed on 28/12/2017.

186 Neeru Verma, “Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism”, *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86. S.S. Dhawan (2017) , “The danger of ‘Deras’ to mainstream Sikhism”, *The Free Press Journal*, January 17, 2015, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/news-spot-analysis/the-danger-of-deras-to-mainstream-sikhism/520924>, accessed on 21/03/2017.

187 Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889 - 1940) was the founding chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Hedgewar actively participated in Indian National Congress in the 1920s. The outbreak of the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1923 made him disillusioned and ponder over an alternative model of nation building. Working under the deep influences of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, he considered that the cultural and religious heritage of Hindus as the basis of Indian nationhood and the core philosophy of RSS.

mission of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is to unite and rejuvenate the ‘Bharat’ nation on the sound foundation of ‘Hindu Dharma’. RSS thinkers maintain that Hindu culture is the only indigenous culture of India, and it is essential that all Indians share this culture and recognize it as the basis of their collective national identity. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is striving for a strong and united Hindu society under the vision of ‘Hindutva’ (Hindu Rule).¹⁸⁹

RSS’s anti Minority Approach and Agenda

The RSS argue that ‘Hindutva’ alone can be the basis of India's unity and integrity. The true nature of their campaign has been revealed by the theoretical and intellectual exercises of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leaders and the practical slogans given to their followers. The RSS which is a hierarchical and militaristic organization that actively practices regimentation,¹⁹⁰ has a "Sarsanghchalak" (Supreme Leader) whose commands are obeyed without question.¹⁹¹ The fifth *Sarsanghchalak* (supreme chief) of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) K.S. Surdarshan spoke of "**many flowers, one garland, many rivers, one ocean**" in his definition of nationalism and “Hindu Rashtra”.¹⁹² This propaganda is seen as irksome to the minorities, especially for the religious minorities of India. M.S. Golwakar, the chief ideologue of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in his book titled “We or Our Nationhood Defined”, wrote:

188 Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the RSS in Nagpur in 1925, with the intention of promoting the concept of a united India deeply rooted in indigenous ideology. The RSS presents itself as a cultural, not a political organization that nevertheless advocates a Hindu nationalistic agenda under the banner of ‘hindutva’. The Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation is widely regarded as the parent organization of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The organisation promotes the ideals of upholding Indian culture and the values of a civil society and propagates the ideology of ‘Hindutva’, to unite and strengthen the majority Hindu community. See, “A Brief Outline of the Hindutva Movement”, *The Outlook*, November 20, 2002, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/a-brief-outline-of-the-hindutva-movement/217966>. Also see, “RSS strategy: To spread Hindu-first ideology to all corners of India”, *Hindustan Times*, October 13, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/rss-s-strategy-to-spread-hindu-first-ideology-to-all-corners-of-india/story-bVZiYrp9gPWbT62hRbIp4K.html>, accessed on 21/03/2016.

189 “What Hindu nationalism means”, *The Economist*, May 19, 2014, available at <https://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/05/economist-explains-8>, See also G. Sampath, “Nationalism then and now”, *The Hindu*, April 17, 2017, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/nationalism-then-and-now/article18072121.ece>, accessed on 18/07/2017.

190 Abdul Gafoor Abdul Majeed Noorani (2000), *The RSS and the BJP: A Division of Labour*, published by Left Word Books, Delhi, pp. 57-66.

191 RSS *Sarsanghchalak* (Supreme Leader) is never elected (for that matter, no other leaders are elected-there is no system of internal elections in the organization). Dr. Keshavrao Baliramrao Hedgewar, the founder of the Sangh and Madhavrao Sadasivrao Golwalkar, the second and most well-known supreme leader of RSS, are remembered in Sangh circles with a sense of divinity and admiration. See, Partha Banerjee, “RSS –The Sangh: What is it, and what is it not?”, available at <http://www.sacw.net/DC/CommunalismCollection/ArticlesArchive/OnRSS.html>, accessed on 19/09/2017.

192 Tapan Basu (1993) , *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, published by Orient Longman, Hyderabad, p.7

“The non-Hindu people of Hindustan must either adopt Hindu culture and languages, must learn and respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but of those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture Or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment - not even citizen’s rights.”¹⁹³

The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), whose founders idealised the protection of Hindu culture and encouraging of the formation of a Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu Nation), is seen as the primary force behind BJP's brand of politics. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been using the ‘Hindu Card’ in an attempt to gain political ground in almost every state. Mr. Narendra Modi (the current Prime Minister) is a lifetime member of radical Hindu organization - Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Indian Prime Minister Narenara Modi spent his formative years as a full-time volunteer in the RSS, which he credits for his work ethics, discipline and success. The National President of Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) Amit Shah and several members of Modi’s cabinet also joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) RSS in their youth.¹⁹⁴

In recent years, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) nexus has brought about a radical shift in the country's socio-political and religious agenda. Under Prime Mnister Narnedarea Modi, a much organised mechanism has been put in place to manage the RSS’s ties with the Government. There exists a is a top level co-ordination committee that consist prominent leaders both from RSS and BJP The leaders include- Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi, Suresh Soni, Dattatreya Hosbale and Krishna Gopal from the Sangh, and Home Minister Rajnath Singh, Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and BJP National President Amit Shah- representing the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). At the same time, different panles of experts, ‘pracharaks’ and other functionaries from RSS have been regularly meeting Union Government Ministers dealing with key decisions and policies on sectors, such as : education, culture, finance, commerce and labour.¹⁹⁵

193 A.G. Noorani (2017), “Indian or Hindu?”, *The Dawn*, December 16, 2017, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1376803> accessed on 28/12/2017. Also see, Murzban Jal (2013), “Why We are not Hindus: A Reply to the Indian Fascists”, *Mainstream*, Vol L II No. 1, December 28, 2013, available at <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article4663.html>, accessed on 28/12/2017.

194 Snigdha Jain (2018) “BJP and its Hindutva politics—the slow saffronisation of India, *The Wire*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2018/04/25/bjp-and-its-hindutva-politics-the-slow-saffronisation-of-india.html>, accessed on 28/07/2018. Also see, “RSS and the government: Tracing the history down the years”, *The Indian Express*, September 9, 2015, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/rss-and-the-government-the-equation-how-it-works/>, accessed on 13/11/2017.

195 “RSS and the government: Tracing the history down the years”, *The Indian Express*, September 9, 2015, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/rss-and-the-government-the-equation-how-it-works/>, accessed on 13/11/2017.

Until a few years ago, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) predominantly focussed primarily on achieving its vision of a “Hindu Nation” from outside the electoral realm. The volunteers of RSS would regularly meet at thousands of ‘shakhas’ (branches) established all over the country to talk about Hinduism, Hindu Culture and civic duty, and practice martial exercises and discipline. Those interested in electoral politics gradually migrated to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which shares much of the RSS ideology.¹⁹⁶ As a hardliner paramilitary Hindu group, RSS pushes Hinduism and Hindu culture as an ideology, superior over all competing faiths and beliefs.¹⁹⁷ It is a known fact that BJP is associated with right-wing Hindu extremist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and took resort to Hindu religious or communal agenda that significantly contributed to its landslide electoral victory in 2014 general elections.¹⁹⁸ By appealing to the religious sentiments of the majority community, the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) has been successful in increasing its influence in electoral politics and has managed to emerge at the helm of affairs.¹⁹⁹ The BJP’s promotion of Hindu nationalism is not only exclusionary towards India’s religious minorities, but has also contributed to an overall climate of fear and intolerance in India.²⁰⁰

Founded in 1925, the RSS boasts about six million active members. During last few years, the radical Hindu organization, the RSS, has become more influential and managed to place its ardent followers in the highest ranks of the Government. RSS leaders claim that the

196 “RSS strategy: To spread Hindu-first ideology to all corners of India”, *Hindustan Times*, October 13, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/rss-s-strategy-to-spread-hindu-first-ideology-to-all-corners-of-india/story-bVZIYrp9gPWbT62hRbIp4K.html>, accessed on 20/07/2017 Also see, “Are RSS, BJP Trying To Turn India Into Hindustan?”, *Huffpost*, October 13, 2015, available at https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/10/13/hinduism-rss-india-bjp_n_8282982.html, accessed on 20/07/2017.

197 Uttam Niraula (2016), “India Turning into Nightmare for Minorities”, *International Humanist and Ethical Union*, available at <http://iheu.org/india-turning-into-nightmare-for-minorities/>, accessed on 17/12, 2017 .

198 See, “The real reasons behind Narendra Modi's victory”, *The Guardian*, May 21, 2014, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/21/real-reasons-behind-narendra-modi-victory>, accessed on 14/06/2015. Also see, “BJP’s 2014 win wasn’t one-man show, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat Says, *Times of India*, August 11, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/BJPs-2014-win-wasnt-one-man-show-RSS-chief-Mohan-Bhagwat-says/articleshow/40029715.cms>, accessed on 14/06/2015.

199 See “BJP, RSS resorting to encounter politics”, *The Hindu*, September 27, 2017, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/kozhikode/bjp-rss-resorting-to-encounter-politics/article19764444.ece>, accessed on 02/10/2017. Also see “RSS strategy: To spread Hindu-first ideology to all corners of India”, *Hindustan Times*, October 30, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/rss-s-strategy-to-spread-hindu-first-ideology-to-all-corners-ofindia/story-.html>, accessed on 21/09/2017

200 “A Narrowing Space: Violence and discrimination against India's religious minorities”, *A Report published by Minority Rights Group International and the Center for Study of Society and Secularism*, June 2017, available at <http://minorityrights.org/publications/narrowing-space-violence-discrimination-indias-religious-minorities/>, accessed on 18/12/2017. Also see, Sidharth Bhatia (2018), “This Will Be the Year of Peak Hindutva”, *The Wire*, January 4, 2018, available at <https://thewire.in/communalism/hindutva-india-2018-bjp-rss-sangh>, accessed on 11/01/2018

organization has recently seen a spike in its membership indicating its growing popularity among various sections of the Indian populace. No doubt, due to its close proximity with ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is in a position to influence the highest decision-making in the country and has its people in key positions in both Government and outside.²⁰¹ In the months after Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) secured landslide victory in 2014 general elections, the leaders of RSS launched a drive to have India officially declared - a “Nation of Hindus.”²⁰² Regular interviews and statements of RSS leaders in print and electronic media reveal that RSS wants all Indians to acknowledge and accept the “Hindu identity” as theirs. In the context of RSS ideology and vision, the RSS General Secretary Suresh Joshi says:

“Hindustan means land of Hindu, so anyone living here is automatically a Hindu first.”²⁰³

RSS strategists also stepped up a campaign against what they called "Love Jihad" – a term used to describe what they (RSS) allege was an Islamist strategy to convert Hindu women to Islam through seduction, marriage and money.²⁰⁴ Recating strongly, the RSS, also began a push to convert Muslims, Christians and Sikhs to Hinduism, through a ritual called “Ghar Wapsi”, or “Homecoming”, a concept central to the RSS since its founding.²⁰⁵ After Bhartiya Janata Party’s victory in 2014, the strategy of RSS has been to spread its Hindu-first ideology to all corners of India by propelling the BJP to power in as many states as possible. The mechanism suited the RSS which has preferred to operate through multiple affiliates

201 “RSS - India's Hindu nationalists spread their wings far and wide”, 26/0/208, available at <https://www.dw.com/en/rss-indias-hindu-nationalists-spread-their-wings-far-and-wide/a-44588126>, accessed on 12/07/2018. Also see, “The Hindu hardline RSS who see Modi as their own”, October 22, 2014, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29593336>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

202 “PM Narendra Modi has been the best RSS success story in independent India”, *The Economic Times*, September 8, 2015, available at <https://blogs.economictimes.indiatimes.com/et-commentary/pm-narendra-modi-has-been-the-best-rss-success-story-in-independent-india/>, accessed on 11, 07/2017.

203 “RSS strategy: To spread Hindu-first ideology to all corners of India”, *Hindustan Times*, October 13, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/rss-s-strategy-to-spread-hindu-first-ideology-to-all-corners-of-india/story-.html>, accessed on 20/07/2017. Also see, “Are RSS, BJP Trying To Turn India Into Hindustan?”, *Huffpost*, October 13, 2015, available at https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2015/10/13/hinduism-rss-india-bjp_n_8282982.html, accessed on 20/07/2017.

204 “RSS wing to revive ‘love jihad’ campaign”, *The Indian Express*, May 29, 2016, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/rss-love-jihad-campaign-ajju-chauhan-2823995/>, accessed on 08/03/2018. Also see, “‘Love Jihad’ hurts dignity of women: RSS”, *The Hindu*, October 20, 2014, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/%E2%80%98Love-Jihad%E2%80%99-hurts-dignity-of-women-RSS/article11077954.ece>, accessed on 09/03/2018.

205 See, “RSS pens down state-by-state approach to win India”, October 13, 2015, available at <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/M/RSS-pens-down-statebystate-approach-to-win-India.html>, accessed on 21/ 07/2017. See also , “RSS Body Plans to Tackle ‘Love Jihad’- With ‘Beti Bachao, Bahu Lao’”, December 1, 2017, available <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/rss-group-to-help-muslim-women-marry-hindu-men>, accessed on 10/03/2018.

working in various walks of life. The Sangh remains in the background, the affiliates are at the forefront.²⁰⁶

RSS Agenda - A Threat to Sikh Identity and Institutions

Due to its strong communal agenda carried out through RSS, the religious minorities have been forced to think about their social and political place and their future in India.²⁰⁷ The roots of the recent debate on Sikh identity go back to the early 19th century when the Arya Samaj led by Swami Dayanand launched an aggressive campaign against Sikh Gurus, the Sikh scriptures and the Punjabi language. This created a wedge between the two communities, the Hindus and Sikhs, which ultimately culminated in strong assertion of Sikh identity by Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha in his booklet - "Hum Hindu Nahin" ("We are not Hindus").²⁰⁸ The Singh Sabha reformers responded to Arya Samaj attacks by emphasizing their distinctive religious doctrine and identity, and removal of Brahmnical practices from their lives.²⁰⁹ The confrontation with Arya Samaj and their propaganda helped and motivated the Sikh religious organizations to clarify, refine and delimit their own religious identity. This brought about not only consciousness of their distinct identity, but also transformed the attitudes of the Sikhs towards other religious communities bringing communitarian consciousness into the play.²¹⁰

The Akali Dal - Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition in Punjab is now not operating in a simplistic way. As the BJP is trying to impose its aggressive agenda on Punjab, a feeling is growing in the Sikh community that the Akali Dal is being manipulated by the BJP to

206 See, "Narendra Modi's BJP and Mohan Bhagwat's RSS Are Rubbing Off on Each Other", March 1, 2018, available at <https://www.news18.com/news/politics/narendra-modis-bjp-and-mohan-bhagwats-rss-are-rubbing-off-on-each-other-1675609.html>, accessed on 12/03/2018.

207 Zoya Hassan, "Politics without the minorities, *The Hindu*, September 5, 2014. See, "On his last day in office, BJP attacks Hamid Ansari for 'minorities insecure' remark, *Hindustan Times*, August 11, 2017, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/on-his-last-day-in-office-bjp-attacks-ansari-for-minorities-insecure-remark/storyJ.html>, accessed on 18/08/2017. Also see, "RSS agenda is not 2020, its agenda is for next 50 years", *The Sunday Guardian*, January 21, 2018, available at <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/12478-rss-agenda-not-2020-its-agenda-next-50-years>, accessed on 28/01/2018.

208 Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition), *Gurshabad Ratnakar: Mahan Kosh*, published by Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930). J.S. Grewal (1999), "Nabha's Ham Hindu Nahin : A Declaration of Sikh Ethnicity", in Pashaura Singh & N. Gerald Barrier (eds.), *Sikh Identity: Continuity and Change*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi.

209 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1987), *Sikhism Today- The Crisis Within and Without*, published by Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh, pp. 38-39.

210 Santokh Singh Dharam (1986), *Internal and External Threats to Sikhism*, Gurmat Publishers, IL, pp. 142-146. J.S. Grewal (1990), *The Sikhs of Punjab*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK) , pp.145-149.

dilute or destroy the socio-political and religious identity of the Sikhs.²¹¹ Five times Chief Minister of Punjab and patron of Akali Dal, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, have often been accused of playing second fiddle to the BJP. It is constantly pointed out that Mr. Badal lead Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has not bothered to restrain the onslaught of the ‘Hindutva’ forces to subvert and dilute the Sikh identity. Radical Sikh organizations argue that by raising the slogans of *Punjab, Punjabi’ and Punjabiyyat*, Parkash Singh Badal gave a severe jolt to the Shiromani Akali Dal’s Panthic agenda which represented the aspirations of the Sikh community ever since its inception in 1920.²¹² Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s drive to broaden and deepen its presence in Punjab speaks of the continuing tension between Hindutva and Sikhism. Despite long years of the BJP’s alliance with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), whose politics revolves around the Sikh religion, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been able to establish its ground in Punjab.²¹³

The ideology and agenda of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) towards religious minorities is firmly expressed in the statement of senior RSS leader and General Secretary, Dattatreya Hosabale:

“There are no minorities in India. We don’t consider anybody to be a minority. There should be no minority concept in the country because there is no minority. In India, all people are culturally, nationally and DNA-wise Hindus.”²¹⁴

The separate and independent standing of the Sikh community is sought to be compromised through a consistent propaganda by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) that the Sikhs are part of Hindus. The three main essential elements of the Sikh identity, namely- language, history and culture are under constant assault of RSS agenda and propaganda. **The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has even set up Rashtriya Sikh Sangat with the**

211 “Punjab Election 2017: Disaffection against Badals will see BJP-SAD combine decimated”, *First Post*, October 6, 2017. See also, ChanderSutaDogra, “BJP flexes its muscles, alliance with Akalis under strain in Punjab”, *The Hindu*, May 27, 2014, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/bjp-flexes-its-muscles-alliance-with-akalis-under-strain-in-punjab/article6050752.ece>, accessed on 10/10/2017.

212 Surjit Singh Narang (2001), “Ethnic Conflict in a Minoritarian Mould – Case of Sikhs in Punjab”, in Harchand Singh Bedi (ed.), *The Sikhs in the New Century*, published by Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp. 94-96. Also see, Bhupinder Singh (2010), *Punjab Politics – Retrospect and Prospect*, Read-worthy Publications, New Delhi, pp. 113-127

213 Chander Suta Dogra (2017), “RSS’s Renewed Drive to Expand its Presence Has Revived Old Fears for Sikhs in Punjab”, *The Wire*, November 2, 2107, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-rsss-renewed-drive-expand-presence-revived-old-fears-sikhs>, accessed on 17/11/2017.

214 Statement made by Mr. Hosabale, RSS General Secretary, at a three-day conclave of the Akhil Bhartiya Pratinidhi Sabha, the top decision-making body of the RSS. See, “To RSS, all minorities are ‘DNA-wise Hindus’”, *The Hindu*, March 13, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/to-rss-all-minorities-are-dnawise-hindus/article6990168.ece>. Also see, “Minorities are culturally, nationally and DNA-wise Hindus: RSS leader”, *Hindustan Times*, March 13, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/minorities-are-culturally-nationally-and-dna-wise-hindus-rss-leader/story-0fY5IaZCHFAXftYcmMwPGO.html>, accessed on 20/09/2017.

purpose to project the Khalsa Sikh order as a sect of Hinduism.²¹⁵ In this context, a renowned Sikh historian Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon says:

“RSS has an agenda to dilute the identity of Sikhs. They are pursuing a policy under which they want that Sikhs should forget their distinct identity and consider themselves as part of the Hindu religion. To implement this policy more intensely, now RSS also have India’s political power in their hand.”²¹⁶

*(Translated from explanations/statements made in Punjabi)*²¹⁷

Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon further adds:

In Hinduism, the caste is a defined and recognized institution. But, there is complete opposition and rejection of the principles and institute of Caste in Sikhism. This worries the RSS, and therefore, they are attempting to drift the Sikhs away from teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. That is why they also want the Sikh community to remain aloof from the Sikhism’s concept of Miri – Piri.²¹⁸

*(Translated from statements/explanation made in Punjabi)*²¹⁹

The RSS leaders have openly claimed that Sikhs are part of the larger Hindu community, and that the Sikh Gurus are a continuation of the greater pantheon of *Hindu Avatars*. The RSS has consistently argued that tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, was a national hero who could be compared with other heroes and warriors like Rana Pratap and Shivaji.²²⁰ Their photographs

215 “Sikhs part of Hinduism, says RSS chief”, *The Hindu*, May 1, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/05/01/stories/0201000d.htm>, accessed on 19/07/2015. Also see NonicaDatta, “Are the Sikhs Hindus?”, *The Hindu*, March 4, 2003, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2003/03/04/stories/2003030400951000.htm>, accessed on 28/07/2015.

216 For explanation, views and statements of Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

217 Original explanation/ statements (in Punjabi) of Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon: “RSS ਦਾ ਏਜੰਡਾ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਨੂੰ ਮਲੀਆਮੇਟ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ। ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਬੜੀ ਦੇਰ ਤੋਂ ਇਹ ਰੁਜ਼ਫ਼ ਚੱਲ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਆਪਣੀ ਵੱਖਰੀ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਭੁੱਲ ਜਾਣ ਅਤੇ ਖੁਦ ਨੂੰ ਹਿੰਦੂਆਂ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹੀ ਸਮਝਣ। ਇਸ Policy ਨੂੰ Implement ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਅੱਜ RSS ਕੋਲ Hindustan ਦੀ Political Power ਹੈ। RSS ਵਾਲੇ ਯਤਨਗੀਲ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਭਿਆਚਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਵੱਖਰੀ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ, ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਭੁੱਲਾ ਦੇਣ। ਅੱਜ ਜੇ Hinduism ਨੂੰ ਖਤਰਾ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਇਹ Sikhism ਤੋਂ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ। For original statements and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

218 For explanation and statements of Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 19/10/2015.

219 Original explanation/statements as given (in Punjabi) by renowned Sikh scholar and historian, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon: “Hinduism ਦਾ ਇੱਕ defined ਆਧਾਰ ਹੈ- Castism ਇੱਕ Institute ਹੈ। Sikhism ਵਿੱਚ ਇਸ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਦਾ ਬਹੁਤ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਦੋ ਤਾਕਤਾਂ ਇੱਕ-ਦੂਜੇ ਦੇ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਹਨ.....” For original statements and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 19/10/2015.

220 Parveen Swami, “RSS forays into Punjab”, *Frontline*, Volume 17 - issue 11, May 27 – June 9, 2000, available at <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1711/17110410.htm>, accessed on 10/07/2017.

are displayed together in the RSS *Shakhas* or branches.²²¹ This move is viewed by the Sikh community in general and religious institutions in particular as a deliberate plan to compromise the Sikh Guru's status as a prophet. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) have also been propagating that *Khalsa* order was created with the sole purpose to protect the Hindu religion and culture.²²² This perspective of RSS is firmly criticized and denounced by the Sikh scholars and Sikh religious leaders. Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala,²²³ the leader of Sikh Sadbhawna Dal (SSD)²²⁴ condemns this RSS perspective in the following words:

“Sikh world has the universal concepts of “Na Koi Hindu, Na Musalman” , “Manas Ki Zaat Sbe Eko Pehchanbo” and “Kudrat Ke Sab Bande”, the concepts which have been given by the Sikh Guru Sahibs. The RSS is presenting Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj, the saviour of humanity, merely as a patriot and national hero who fought for the protection of Hindus. The Ten Sikh Gurus have given an international identity to the Sikhs, not a national one.”²²⁵

*(English Translation of statements made in Punjabi)*²²⁶

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- 221‘ ‘Shakha’ refers to the daily meetings of RSS and Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh. The shakha is the backbone of the RSS and HSS. The daily Shakha of RSS is undoubtedly the most visible symbol and soul of the organisation. It’s a daily assembling of boys and men for an hour under ‘Saffron Flag’ and doing Yoga, playing games, singing songs, shlokas and Prarthana. For information see “RSS to open shakhas in every village”, *The Hindu*, February 16, 2015. Also see, “Highest growth ever: RSS adds 5,000 new shakhas in last 12 months”, *The Indian Express*, March 16, 2016, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/elections-2016/india/india-news-india/rss-uniform-over-5000-new-shakhas-claims-rss/>, accessed on 19/07/2016.
- 222 Nonica Datta (2003), “Are the Sikhs Hindus?”, *The Hindu*, March 3, 2003, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2003/03/04/stories/2003030400951000.htm>. Also see, “Rural Sikhs apprehensive of RSS attitude to Christians”, *The Hindu*, June 16, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/06/16/stories/0216000e.htm>, accessed on 21/07/2016.
- 223 Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala is the former Hazoori Raagi of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar). In the year 2015, noted Sikh Kirtani Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala was removed as Hazoori Raagi of Sri Darbar Sahib by SGPC and was shifted to Gurdwara Patshahi Nauvi Jeend (Haryana). Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala was removed for revolting against the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). He came into limelight when he opposed the appointment of SGPC chief secretary Harcharan Singh in 2015. It is noteworthy that Bhai Wadala is very popular amongst Sikh masses due to his unique way of singing Gurbani Kirtan. Sikh Sangat enjoys his sweet voice while his jatha is performing kirtan. He is also considered as a young Sikh brave activist with Panthik spirit. He has also formed an organization named ‘Sikh Sadbhawna Dal’ with aim to reform the present day Sikh Gurdwara Management .
- 224 Sikh Sadbhawna Dal was formed by Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala in year 2016 to fight against the misdeeds of SGPC and make it corruption free, end the dominance of Badal family over SGPC, and neutralize the political influence over it. The ultimate aim of the organization is to reform the Gurdwara management in contemporary times. The organization also aims to fight against anti-Sikh forces (RSS) operating within and outside the Sikh religious circles. Since the formation of Sikh Sadbhawna Dal under the leadership of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala, the organization has been publicly criticizing and condemning the Badal family for controlling the SGPC to fulfill their economic and political interests. Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala has been openly equating the present regime controlling the SGPC as *Narainu Mahant*. Sikh Sadbhawna Dal raised a political battle against Shiromani Akali Dal when the organization stepped in the Delhi Gurdwara elections to fight against SAD unit headed by Manjit Singh Singh G.K.
- 225 Explanation and views expressed by Sikh religious leader Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala. The statements, views and explanation given by Bhai Wadala were noted during in depth discussion with him on the concerned issues.
- 226 Original Statement (in Punjabi) as made by Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala : “ਨਾ ਕੋਈ ਹਿੰਦੂ, ਨਾ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ”, “ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤ ਸਭੈ ਏਕੋ ਪਹਿਚਾਨਬੋ, ਕੁਦਰਤ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ”, ਦਾ ਜੋ Concept ਹੈ ਉਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਗਤ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰ ਹੈ। RSS ਵੱਲੋਂ

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has constituted an organization named as *Rashtrya Sikh Sangat*,²²⁷ with a purpose to promote its ‘Hindutva’ agenda among Sikhs. Surprisingly, RSS claims that establishment of *Rashtrya Sikh Sangat* is in line with the objectives of tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. This stand of RSS further displeases and angers the Sikh community and Sikh religious organizations. An expert on Sikh issues, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, explains the intention and strategy of RSS behind the formation of *Rashtriya Sikh Sangat* in the following words:

“To deviate the Sikhs away from Sikh ideology and principles, RSS has employed many ‘babas’ and ‘sants’ who are Sikhs as per their looks (on basis of physical identity), but they are pure ‘hindus’ from their inner self (on basis of ideology and principles). Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, Sikh wing of RSS is working on similar lines. The aim of such organizations is to make the Sikhs forget their past and basic principles of Sikhism, so that they become the part of Hindu culture and faith.”²²⁸

*(English Translation of statement/explanation made in Punjabi)*²²⁹

Highlighting the on- going strategy of RSS in Punjab, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, further adds:

“RSS is engaged in distributing their literature at large scale among Sikhs living in different parts of the country. The literature being distributed by RSS in schools and other educational institutes present the Sikhs as integral

ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਨਵਤਾ ਦੇ ਰਹਿਬਰ ਤੋਂ ਹਟਾਂ ਕੇ, ਕੇਵਲ ਹਿੰਦੂਆਂ ਦੀ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਲਈ ਅਤੇ ਕੇਵਲ ਇੱਕ ਦੇਸ਼ ਭਗਤ Show ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਦਸ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੂੰ ਐਤਰਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਬਣਾਇਆ ਹੈ, ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ।”

The views and perspectives of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala were recorded during my discussion with him on RSS agenda in context to Sikh religion and identity. The concerned matters like : RSS strategies to interfere in Sikh religious affairs, and role of SGPC & SAD, etc, were also discussed. During this study, I had three meetings with Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala, among which one of the meetings took place at my village Dharowali (near Dera Baba Nanak, Gurdaspur), where he had come for Gurbani Kirtan to commemorate the he martyrdom of Shaheed Lachaman Singh Dharowali. As he has served as ‘Hazoori Raagi’ under the management of SGPC at Golden Temple, the insights provided by Bhai Wadala very beneficial for this study.

227 “RSS offshoot plans to take over leadership of Sikh affairs”, *The Tribune*, November 6, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/rss-offshoot-plans-to-take-over-leadership-of-sikh-affairs/155152.html>. For important information on *Rashtriya Sikh Sangat*, see - “Ex-militants to riot package: RSS reaches out to Punjab via Sikh arm”, *The Indian Express*, December 17, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/ex-militants-to-riot-package-rss-reaches-out-to-punjab-via-sikh-arm/>, accessed on 25/07/2014.

228 For original statements and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

229 Original statement (in Punjabi) made by eminent Sikh scholar and historian Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon: “ਇਸ ਕੰਮ ਲਈ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਬੜੇ ਸਾਧੂ-ਸੰਤ ਛੱਡੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ ਜੋ ਵੇਖਣ ਵਿੱਚ ਤਾਂ ਪੂਰੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਹਨ ਪਰ ਅੰਦਰੋਂ ਪੂਰੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਹਨ। ਅਜਿਹੀਆਂ orgnaization ਦਾ ਮਕਸਦ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਪਿਛੋਕੜ ਅਤੇ Basic Fundamentals ਤੋਂ ਦੂਰ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਵੇ ਤਾਂ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਕਲਾਵੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਆ ਜਾਣ.”. For original statements and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

part of Hindu religion and culture. The purpose of such activities is to make the children believe and understand the Sikhs' as part of Hindus.²³⁰

*(English Translation of statements made in Punjabi)*²³¹

Karnail Singh Panjoli, the SGPC executive committee member, condemns the formation of the Sikh wing of RSS- the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, in the following words:

“Nation does not have any ‘sangar’, it is made up of people. ‘Sangar’ belongs only to ‘Satguru’ (Guru Sahib). RSS has an organization called ‘Rashtriya Sikh Sangat’, but why they have not formed - ‘Hindu Sangat’, Budh Sangat, Muslim Sangat or Jaini Sangat. Why they have only established ‘Sikh Sangat’? This is easy and covert type of RSS agenda which is extremely dangerous. Sikhs should remain vigilant of this RSS agenda and need to keep far away from RSS organization- Rashtriya Sikh Sangat.”²³²

*(English translation of statements/explanation made in Punjabi)*²³³

Radical Sikh organization Dal Khalsa hit out most vociferously describing the formation of Rashtriya Sikh Sangat as a grand nefarious design of the RSS to penetrate into Sikh rank and religious affairs in Punjab. Strongly refuting and criticizing the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat and its work, the chief of Dal Khalsa Harpal Singh Cheema said :

"RSS has no locus standi to interfere in the affairs of Sikhs. As per Sikh concept, there's only one Sikh ‘Sangar’²³⁴ that is fully wedded to the ten

230 For original statements and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

231 Original statement and explanations (in Punjabi) made by Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon: “**RSS ਦਾ ਬਹੁਤ Literature ਵੰਡਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਜਿਸ ਦਾ Preface Modi ਲਿਖ ਰਹਾ ਹੈ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕਿਤਾਬਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮੋਦੀ ਨੇ ਗੁਜਰਾਤ ਦੇ ਸਕੂਲਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਲਗਾਇਆ ਹੈ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਹਿੰਦੂਆਂ ਦਾ Part ਦੱਸਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿ ਬੱਚੇ ਬਚਪਨ ਤੋਂ ਹੀ ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਨੂੰ ਹਿੰਦੂਆਂ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਸਮਝਣ ਲੱਗ ਜਾਣ.**” For original statements and explanation (in Punjabi) as given by Prof. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, see, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

232 Explanation and views expressed by senior SGPC leader and SGPC executive committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli. . The statements, views and explanation given by Mr. Panjoli were noted during discussion with him on the concerned issues

233 Original statement (in Punjabi) as made by senior SGPC leader and SGPC executive committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli:
“ਸੰਗਤ ਤਾਂ ਕੇਵਲ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ। ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰ ਦੇ ਤਾਂ ਕੇਵਲ ਲੋਕ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਜੇ ਆਰ.ਐਸ.ਐਸ ਨੇ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਬਣਾਈ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਫਿਰ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਕਿਉਂ ਨਾ ਬਣਾਈ, ਫਿਰ ਮੁਸਲਿਮ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਕਿਉਂ ਨਾ ਬਣਾਈ, ਫਿਰ ਬੋਧੀ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਕਿਉਂ ਨਾ ਬਣਾਈ ਅਤੇ ਫਿਰ ਜੈਨੀ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸੰਗਤ ਕਿਉਂ ਨਾ ਬਣਾਈ। ਕੇਵਲ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਹੀ ਕਿਉਂ ਬਣਾਈ। ਇਹ ਆਰ.ਐਸ.ਐਸ ਦਾ ਲੁਕਮਾ ਅਤੇ ਸੁਖਮ ਕਿਸਮ ਦਾ ਬਹੁਤ ਹੀ ਖਤਰਨਾਕ ਏਜੰਡਾ ਹੈ। ਜਿਸ ਤੋਂ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਚੇਤ ਰਹਿਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਆਰ.ਐਸ.ਐਸ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਾਖਾ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਤੋਂ ਦੂਰੀ ਬਣਾਕੇ ਰੱਖਣੀ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ।” The statement was noted during my conversation and discussion with Karnail Singh Panjoli on concerned issues.

234 The Sikh Gurus took practical steps to integrate the society, otherwise divided into water-tight compartments of castes and creed. These measures were *Sangar*, *Pangar* and *Langar*. ‘Sangar’ recognized no distinctions of castes and creeds. It were these *Sangars* where all, irrespective of caste and creed sat together to hear the sermons of the Guru and sing His hymns. It came to be an organized fellowship of the Sikhs. The *Sangar* was used by the Sikh Gurus to guide and help the society come out of the false practices and develop social harmony among the people of all walks of life.

Guru's and their philosophy and it had nothing to do with any nation nor any boundary.²³⁵

Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala, former *Hazoori Ragi* (Darbar Sahib, Amritsar) and chief of Sikh Sadbhawana Dal, also opposed and condemned the formation of RSS wing - Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, in the following words:

“The formation of Rashtriya Sikh Sangat is a cheap conspiracy of RSS to dilute the separate and independent identity of the Sikhs, and absorb it within the Hindu Culture. The use of the word ‘Sikh’ in the name of this organization (Rashtriya Sikh Sangat) should have been opposed right from the time when this RSS wing was formed. If the Hindu word ‘Rashtriya’ (meaning ‘national’) is not being used for Muslims, Christians, Buddhists or Jains, then why it is being used for the Sikhs and along with the ‘Sikh’ word - ‘Sangat’. This needs to be fully opposed and condemned.²³⁶

*(English Translation of statement made in Punjabi)*²³⁷

Firmly opposing the RSS interpretation of Sikh identity, Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala said:

“A Sikh has international identity as Sikhism is rooted in the concept of ‘Nanak Naam Chardi Kla, Tere Bhane Sarbat Da Bhala’. By labelling the Sikhs with ‘national’ identity’, RSS is trying to infiltrate into the Sikh world and religious affairs.”²³⁸

Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala explains the RSS strategy to step in Sikh religious affairs through Rashtiya Sikh Sangat in the following words:

“RSS has been working hard under its saffronisation policy to transform Hindustan into ‘Hindu Rashtra’. When they (RSS) realised that Sikhs will

235 “RSS, hardliner Sikh groups at loggerheads on multi-faith Delhi conclave”, *India Today*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/rss-sikh-community-conclave-guru-gobind-singh-punjab/1/1074040.html>, accessed on 03/11/2017. See also, “Sikh extremist groups lash out at RSS for holding Sikh congregation in Delhi”, October 24, 2017, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sikh-extremist-groups-lash-out-at-rss-for-holding-sikh-congregation-in-delhi-2554868>, accessed on 04/11/2017.

236 The statements, views and perspectives of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala were noted during discussion with him on RSS agenda in context to Sikh religion and identity. Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala is former Hazoori Ragi Darbar Sahib (Amritsar) and present head of Sikh politico-religious organization Sikh Sadbhawana Dal. Bhai Wadala has been vigorously protesting against the RSS infiltration into Sikh religious affairs.

237 Original statement/explanation (in Punjabi) as made by Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala, opposing the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat :

“ਜੇ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਹੀਂ, ਬੋਧੀ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਹੀਂ, ਈਸਾਈ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਹੀਂ? ਜੈਨੀ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨਹੀਂ, ਫਿਰ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਨਾਲ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਜੁੜਿਆ। ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਇੱਕ ਭਗਵਾਂਕਰਨ ਨੇ ਉਹਨੂੰ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਆਪਣੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਲੀਆਮੇਟ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਕੋਝੀ ਸਾਜਿਸ਼ ਦੇ ਅਧੀਨ, ਇਸਨੂੰ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਦਾ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਸੀ, ਕਿਉਂ ਇਸ ਦਾ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋਇਆ ਪਿਛਲਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਕੀ ਮਿਲੀ ਭੁਗਤ ਸੀ, ਇਹ ਇਤਿਹਾਸ ਦ ਪੰਨੇ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਸਾਹਮਣੇ ਹਨ।” The views and perspectives of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala were recorded during my discussion with him on RSS agenda in context to Sikh religion and identity. The concerned matters like - RSS strategies to interfere in Sikh religious affairs, and the concerned role of SGPC & Akali Dal leaders, etc., were also discussed. During the study, three meetings were held with Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala at Amritsar.

238 The statements, views and perspectives of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala were noted during discussion with him on RSS agenda in context to Sikh religion and identity. Bhai Wada has been vigorously protesting against the RSS infiltration into Sikh religious affairs.

*not accept themselves as ‘Hindus’, they then planned to make incursions into the Gurdwara issues and administration by changing their appearance as Sikhs. They (RSS) have even decided to contest Gurdwara management elections.*²³⁹

(English Translation of statement /explanation made in Punjabi)²⁴⁰

The RSS wing- Rashtriya Sikh Sangat works in Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab to consolidate the RSS ideology. The organization has also has been working alongside the RSS in its “Ghar Wapsi” or “Homecoming” programmes to re-convert Christians to Hinduism or Sikhism. RSS’s “Ghar Wapsi” programmes in Punjab do not see much difference between Sikhism and Hinduism when it comes to welcoming Christian converts.²⁴¹ The Rashtriya Sikh Sangat formed in 1986 has always been viewed with suspicion by radical and mainstream Sikh groups because in RSS’s larger scheme of a ‘Hindu Rashtra’, Sikhism is seen as just another sect of Hinduism.²⁴² An eminent Sikh scholar Jaspal Singh explains the strategy of RSS as following:

“RSS has decided to completely destroy the distinct identity of the Sikhs. The core agenda of RSS ideology is the “Hiduization of India”. To fulfill this objective, the RSS has established an organization named as ‘Rashtriya Sikh Sangat’ and its branches are being opened everywhere, within and outside India. In the view of RSS, it is easier to absorb the distinct identity of Sikhs through Rashtriya Sikh Sangat than using other forceful or violent means. By doing so, there will be no direct allegations on Hindu majority, neither there will be any violation of human rights nor would any excess be

239 The statements, views and perspectives of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala were noted during discussion with him on concerned issues.

240 Original Statemnet/explanation (in Punjabi) made by Bhai Baldev Singh Wadal: “RSS ਦਾ ਜ਼ੋਰ ਲਗਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ। ‘ਭਗਵਾਕਰਨ’ ਦਾ ਕਿ ਅਸੀਂ ਹਿੰਦੁਸਤਾਨ ਨੂੰ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰ ਬਣਾਉਣਾ ਹੈ। ਜਦੋਂ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਲੱਗਾ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਖੁਦ ਨੂੰ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਮੰਨਣ ਲਈ ਤਿਆਰ ਨਹੀਂ, ਅਸੀਂ ‘ਭਗਵਾਕਰਨ’ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਦਾ ਰੂਪ ਧਾਰਨ ਕੇ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਿਆ ਚ ਵੜ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਹਾਂ। ਪਿਛਲੇ ਦਿਨੀਂ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਇਹ ਵੀ ਆਖਿਆ ਕਿ ਅਸੀਂ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਿਆ ਦੀ Election ਵੀ ਲੜਾਂਗੇ। ਇਸ ਸਭ ਦਾ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰ ਕੌਣ.... (ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲ, ਬਾਦਲ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲ ਬਾਦਲ ਦੇ ਕਰਿੰਦੇ ਮਨਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ G.K. ਅਤੇ ਪਰਮਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਰਨਾ, ਜੋ ਖੁਦ RSS ਦੇ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ ਇਹ RSS ਦੇ ਸਮਾਗਮ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੂੰ ਅੰਤਰਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਤੋਂ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਦੀ, ਜਾਂ ਉਹਦਾ ‘ਭਗਵਾਕਰਨ’ ਦੀ ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੁਕਸਾਨ ਹੋ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ, ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਦਾ ਇਸ ਦਾ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰ ਬਾਦਲ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ, ਮਨਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਅਤੇ ਪਰਮਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਵਰਗੇ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰ ਹਨ।” The views and perspectives of Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala were recorded during my discussion with him on concerned issues. .

241 Hindu radical group RSS have been able to operate assertive *Ghar Wapsi* campaigns targeting religious minorities for conversion with apparent impunity. These so-called ‘homecomings’ (Ghar Wapsi) are justified by the RSS as ‘reconversions’ on the basis that their predecessors were themselves supposedly converted from Hinduism through proselytization or force by other ‘foreign’ religions, including Islam. See, “A Narrowing Space: Violence and discrimination against India’s religious minorities”, *A Report published by Minority Rights Group International and the Center for Study of Society and Secularism*, June 2017, available at <http://minorityrights.org/publications/narrowing-space-violence-discrimination-indias-religious-minorities/>, accessed on 18/12/2017.

242 Based on discussions held with Sikh leaders from active Sikh organizations like Sikh Sadbhawana Dal, Dal Khalsa and All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF). Also see, “Chander Suta Dogra (2017), “RSS’s Renewed Drive to Expand its Presence Has Revived Old Fears for Sikhs in Punjab”, *The Wire*, November 2, 2107, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-rsss-renewed-drive-expand-presence-revived-old-fears-sikhs>, accessed on 17/11/2017.

*complained. It is also clear that Sikh organizations are not in position to counter such attacks by RSS. They neither have ability nor do they spare time for this.*²⁴³

(Translation of Excerpt in Punjabi)²⁴⁴

Akal Takht Sahib's 'Hukamnama' against RSS

In 2004, the then Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti issued a 'Hukamnama' (edict) to boycott the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its offshoot, the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, for their continuous activities that seek to undermine and subsume distinct Sikh identity, ideology and history. The edict of Akal Takht Sahib, the highest Sikh seat of temporal and religious authority, termed the RSS and the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat as "anti-panthic forces" and directed the Sikh community to stay away from their activities. The then Jathedar (2004) Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, released a memorandum of boycott against the RSS and Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, highlighting that all Sikh organizations, groups, societies and Gurdwaras should not support them in any way.²⁴⁵ After a string of serious anti-Sikh activities that came to light in the wider Sikh community, **Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib called for the boycott, which meant no Sikh was to interact or support the RSS or any organization affiliated to it, in any manner.**²⁴⁶ The Akal Takht Sahib Hukamnama (edict in 2004) delivered by Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti called for complete boycott of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its Sikh wing- Rashtriya Sikh Sangat. The Akal Takht Sahib's landmark 'Hukamnama' (edict) read as following:

“ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਆਰ.ਐੱਸ.ਐੱਸ./ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪਿਛਲੇ ਲੰਬੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਸਰਗਰਮੀਆਂ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਜਾ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਇਸ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਇਸ ਕੋਝੀ ਹਰਕਤ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਲੀ ਜਾਮਾ ਪਹਿਨਾਉਣ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਹਾਸਲ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ

243 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (in Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, p.78.

244 As quoted by Jaspal Singh in his book titled "Sikh Dharm Te Rajneeti". The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here : "ਆਰ.ਐੱਸ.ਐੱਸ ਸਮਰਥਾਵਾਨ ਬੌਧਿਕ ਤਾਕਤ ਨੇ ਸਥਿਤੀ ਦਾ ਨਾਜਾਇਜ਼ ਫਾਇਦਾ ਉਠਾ ਕੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਲੱਖਣ ਹੋਂਦ ਨੂੰ ਪੂਰੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਖਤਮ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਫੈਸਲਾ ਲੈ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਸਾਧਨਾਂ ਤੇ ਵਸੀਲਿਆਂ ਵਾਲੀ ਤਾਕਤ ਹੈ, ਜਿਸ ਦੀ ਸਮੁੱਚੀ ਸੋਚ ਦਾ ਧੁਰਾ ਹੈ- ਪੂਰੇ ਭਾਰਤ ਦਾ 'ਹਿੰਦੁਕਰਣ'। ਆਪਣੇ ਕੋਝੇ ਮਕਸਦ ਨੂੰ ਪੂਰਾ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਉਸ ਨੇ 'ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ' ਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਕਾਇਮ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਹੁਣ ਦੇਸ਼-ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ ਵਿਚ ਉਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਬ੍ਰਾਂਚਾਂ ਖੋਲੀਆਂ ਜਾ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਆਰ.ਐੱਸ.ਐੱਸ ਦੀ ਨਿਗਾਹ ਵਿਚ ਮਾਰ-ਧਾੜ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਇਸ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਵਰਗੀ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਲੱਖਣ ਹੋਂਦ ਨੂੰ ਜ਼ਜ਼ਬ ਕਰ ਲੈਣਾ ਜ਼ਿਆਦਾ ਆਸਾਨ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਬਹੁਗਿਣਤੀ ਉਪਰ ਕੋਝੀ ਸਿੱਧਾ ਦੋਸ਼ ਵੀ ਆਇਦ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋ ਸਕੇਗਾ ਨਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਮਨੁੱਖੀ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਦਾ ਹਨਲ ਹੋਵੇਗੀ ਅਤੇ ਨਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਵਧੀਕੀ ਦੀ ਸ਼ਿਕਾਇਤ। ਫੇਰ ਇਹ ਵੀ ਸਪੱਸ਼ਟ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਇਸ ਹਮਲੇ ਦਾ ਜੁਆਬ ਦੇਣ ਦੀ ਸਥਿਤੀ ਵਿਚ ਵੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਹਨ। ਉਹਨਾਂ ਪਾਸ ਨਾ ਸਮਰੱਥਾ ਹੈ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਫੁਰਸਤ ਹੈ।" See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (in Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, p.78.

245 "Decree against RSS-affiliate still prevails: Akal Takht", *Hindustan Times*, October 23, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/decree-against-rss-affiliate-still-prevails-akal-takht/story-LsFag0EmjmFa8NbxMhVRmJ.html>, accessed on 28/11/2017.

246 See, "Akal Takhat Humanama Regarding RSS (2004)", *Sant Siphai*, January 4, 2017, available at <http://santsipahi.org/akal-takhat-humanama-regarding-rss-2004/>, accessed on 28/11/2017. Also see, "Rss Up To Their Old Tricks Again", January 6, 2006, available at <https://www.sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/16361-rss-up-to-their-old-tricks-again/>, accessed on 28/11/2017.

ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਹਿਯੋਗਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਗੁੰਮਰਾਹਕੁੰਨ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਆਨ ਸ਼ਾਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਦਾਚਿਤ ਵੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਕਿਸਮ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

ਸਮੂਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ, ਸਿੰਘ ਭਰਾਵਾਂ, ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ, ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸਭਾ ਸੁਸਾਇਟੀਆਂ ਤੇ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਚੇਤ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਅਖੌਤੀ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਜਥੇਬੰਦ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਤੋਂ ਸੁਚੇਤ ਰਹਿਣ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਕਿਸਮ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਨਾ ਦੇਣ।”

(*Hukamnama Akal Takht Sahib*)²⁴⁷

In clear violation to the above mentioned edict (*Hukamnama*) of Akal Takht Sahib, Jathedar Takht Sri Patna Sahib Giani Iqbal Singh²⁴⁸ attended an event of the RSS in Mumbai (August 2014) and shared the stage with the Chief of RSS, Mohan Bhagwat. By actively participating in the highly disputed RSS event, Jathedar Patna Sahib Giani Iqbal Singh violated the 2004 ruling of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, and thus betrayed the Sikh Panth²⁴⁹. This act of Jathedar Giani Iqbal Singh (Takht Patna Sahib) angered the Sikh community in genera, and the situation outburst into a deep rooted controversy within the Sikh religious circles.

Majority of the Sikh ‘Panthic’ organizations and groups expressed anger over Jathedar Giani Iqbal Singh (Jathedar Takht Sahib) sharing stage with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, and also called for his religious and social boycott.²⁵⁰ It was in the same event when RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat came up with his most controversial speech that threatened the separate and independent existence and identity of the religious minorities (which includes Sikhs) of India. Int was in the concerned RSS event were RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat categorically stated: **“Hindutva is the identity of India and it has the capacity to swallow other identities.”** **“We just need to restore those capacities.”**²⁵¹ RSS Chief Mohan

247 Hukamnama issued from Akal Takht Sahib, dated July 23, 2004. The Hukamnama was issued by Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, the then Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, after the matter was discussed and passed by Jathedars (Sikh clergy) of five Takhts. For the concerned Hukamnama see, Roop (2012) *Hukamname-Aadesh Sandesh Sri Akal Takht Sahib (1606 A.D. – December 2011 A.D.)*, (in Punjabi), Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar.

248 Giani Iqbal Singh (Jathedar Takht Sri Patna Sahib since year 2000) has been a highly controversial figure in Sikh religious circles. He is openly criticized and condemned for his various controversial and disturbing acts, like (i) links with RSS (ii) for undermining Sik Rehat Maryada (iv) charged with Polygamy (v) undermining supremacy of Akal Takht Sahib (vi) One of the Jathedars who pardoned Dera Scah Sauda chief. Giani Iqbal Singh is alleged of hurting the Sikh sentiments by misusing the authority of Takht Jathedar. Information based on discussions held with spokespersons/ members of Panthic organizations like United Akali Dal (UAD), Sikh Sadhbhawana Dal, Dal Khalsa, Panthic Talmel Committee, Sikh Students Federation, etc

249 See, “Op/Ed: Anti-Panthik Elements Welcome Disputable ‘Hukamnama’ Issued at Patna Sahib”, January 10, 2017, available at <https://www.sikh24.com/2017/01/10/oped-anti-panthik-elements-welcome-disputable-hukamnama-issued-at-patna-sahib/#.W3czTyQzbIU>, accessed on 21/11/2017.

250 Based on information collected from spokespersons/ members of Panthic organizations like United Akali Dal (UAD), Dal Khalsa, Panthic Talmel Committee, Sikh Students Federation, Sikh Sadhbhawana Dal, etc.

251 These controversial remarks were delivered by RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat while addressing a gathering at the golden jubilee celebrations of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) at Mumbai. . Information available at - “Hindutva is India’s identity, says Bhagwat”, *The Hindu*, August 18, 2014, available at

Bhagwat created another massive controversy when at one of the RSS events at Indore; he said everyone born in India is Hindu by identity. Mr Bhagwat categorically stated:

“Whose country is Germany? It is a country of Germans, Britain is a country of Britishers, America is a country of Americans, and in the same way Hindustan is a country of Hindus. It does not mean that Hindustan is not the country of other people.”²⁵²

Mohan Bhagwat further added:

“The term ‘Hindu’ covers all those who are the sons of Bharat Mata [Mother India], descendants of Indian ancestors and who live in accordance with the Indian culture.”²⁵³

RSS officials and workers have also been taunting Sikh groups and the pioneer Sikh institution, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), for not doing enough to preserve and protect the Sikh faith, claiming that they are doing more by enabling “Ghar Wapsi” drive. For highly-politicised Sikh clergy and SGPC, such charges have been deeply unsettling. Since 2014, when BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi formed the Government at Centre, the RSS and Rashtriya Sikh Sangat have been trying hard to strengthen its organisation and influence in Punjab by raising the Sikh issues and concerns, but have been thwarted each time.²⁵⁴

Brij Bhushan Bedi, the head of RSS organization in Punjab, when asked about the objections of Sikh religious bodies against the agenda and objective of RSS towards Sikhs, stated: *“This is because their understanding of ‘dharm’ is limited to religion, whereas the Sangh uses it in a wider context. We say Sikhs are part of a larger Hindu Culture.”*²⁵⁵

The RSS has reactivated the hitherto dormant institutions of the traditional religious order like the *Deras*, *Ashrams*, the temples and a whole host of other religious establishments. Persons who head these establishments like the *sadhus*, *sants* and *mahants* have been mobilized and sent into every nook and corner of rural areas of Punjab. Here it is

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/hindutva-is-indias-identity-says-bhagwat/article6326416.ece>, accessed on 17/08/2017.

252 Excerpts from the speech of RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, while addressing a gathering of college-going RSS volunteers in Indore on October, 27, 2017. For relevant information see, “Hindustan is a country of Hindus but it belongs to others too: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat”, *The Hindu*, October 28, 2017, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/hindustan-is-a-country-of-hindus-but-doesnt-exclude-others-bhagwat/article19938031.ece>, accessed on 11/09/2017.

253 *ibid.*

254 Chander Suta Dogra (2017), “RSS's Renewed Drive to Expand Its Presence Has Revived Old Fears for Sikhs in Punjab”, *The Wire*, November 2, 2107, [axcvbn](https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-rsss-renewed-drive-expand-presence-revived-old-fears-sikhs)available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-rsss-renewed-drive-expand-presence-revived-old-fears-sikhs>, accessed on 17/11/2017. Parveen Swami, “RSS forays into Punjab”, *Frontline*, Volume 17 - issue 11, May 27 – June 9, 2000, available at <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1711/17110410.htm>, accessed on 10/07/2017. Information also based on insights provided by Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon in context to RSS activities in Punjab. See, “On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.

255 See, “What you see in Punjab is part of a continuous effort: RSS”, *The Indian Express* (online edition) , December 18, 2014, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/what-you-see-in-punjab-is-part-of-a-continuous-effort-rss/>, accessed on 16/11/2016.

pertinent to mention that a section of the *Sant Samaj* has also projected and mobilized by the 'Hindutva' forces, who through their pronouncements and activities,²⁵⁶ were trying to assume a kind of papal authority, contrary to the established Sikh religious identity and tradition.²⁵⁷

Realizing the fact that Sikh religious shrines have historically been the source of Sikh political power and inspiration, the RSS has been making attempts²⁵⁸ not only to lure the Sikh youth to the RSS *shakhas* but also to rope some of the Akali Dal leaders, SGPC members and Sikh clergy into their 'Hindutva' agenda.²⁵⁹ RSS activists and workers are regularly organizing their 'shakhas' in the villages of Punjab, especially in the Malwa belt. Their publicity material written in Punjabi in the Devnagri script includes posters, banners, pamphlets and calendars.²⁶⁰ These are widely distributed in the villages for firmly propagating the ideas, ideals and vision of Guru Gobind Singh as interpreted by extremist Hindu organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In implementing their *Hindutva* agenda, the RSS activists are trying to emphasize the point that the formation of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh was nothing more than a sect of the Hindus. However, the dominant opinion in the Sikh community is that *Guru Sahib's* opposition to Mughals was a crusade against oppression and tyranny, not a battle against Islam.²⁶¹

The campaign of misrepresentation of Sikh ideology, identity and distortion of its history²⁶² is not only confined to Punjab. It is being carried to other countries as well,

256 The RSS organization made plans of holding Akhand Paths of Guru Granth Sahib Ji in various Hindu temples throughout India but directives from Akal Takht Sahib banning their participation helped preserve the reverence of Guru Granth Sahib at that time.

257 See, "Gurpreet Singh: When Punjab became India's laboratory for Hindutva", *Georgia Straight*, May 27, 2017, available at <https://www.straight.com/news/915861/gurpreet-singh-when-punjab-became-indias-laboratory-hindutva>, accessed on 09/10/2017. Also see, "RSS interfering into Sikh affairs: All India Sikh Students Federation", *Hindustan Times*, April 12, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/rss-interfering-into-sikh-affairs-all-india-sikh-students-federation/story-mmD6jYFYArvuHnGsaaMcRK.html>, accessed on 26/07/2017.

258. RSS launched yet another move to hold a fortnight-long programme of paath from the Guru Granth from January 5 to 21, 2001, in temples all over Punjab to celebrate the birth anniversary of the 10th master. The move was viewed as an RSS conspiracy to penetrate into Sikhism and, as a result, the programme has been postponed for the time being

259 See, "Former SAD-A MP who represented Badal shoe hurler joins RSS offshoot", *Hindustan Times*, July 6, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/former-sad-a-mp-who-represented-badal-shoe-hurler-joins-rss-offshoot/story-wZwDe2yJfJO8nA5WwnkMrYP.html>, accessed on 23/07/2017. See also, Parveen Swami, "Fundamentalist designs in Punjab", *Frontline*, Volume 18 - Issue 03, Feb. 03 - 16, 2001, available at <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1803/18030360.htm>, accessed on 24/07/2017.

260 Jagdish Gagneja, the Architect of RSS's Punjab plan", *The Indian Express*, August 8, 2016, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/jagdish-gagneja-the-architect-of-rss-punjab-plan-2960520/>, accessed on 21/08/2017. Also see, "RSS to develop social harmony in region", *Free Press Journal*, March 16, 2016, available at <http://www.freepressjournal.in/indore/rss-to-develop-social-harmony-in-region/804808>, accessed on 21/08/2017.

261 "SGPC reacts on RSS statement on sikh religion", *Hindustan Times*, May 3, 2007, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi-news/sgpc-reacts-on-rss-statement-on-sikh-religion/story-.html>. Also see, "RSS chief's words rattle Sikhs, again", *Daily news and Analysis*, October 13, 2015, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-rss-chief-s-words-rattle-sikhs-again-4396>, accessed on 25/08/2017.

262 For example, in July 2001, RSS distributed a magazine called "Pathe-ya-kan" in which gross historical distortions were made regarding Sikh Gurus and other Sikh figures. In response, several Sikh groups

especially where the Sikhs are living in considerable number. This is being done through politically manipulated appointments to Chairs of Sikh Studies which have been established with contributions from trusted Sikhs with purpose to promote better understanding of Sikhism.²⁶³ Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, former chief of the Rashtriya Swaymsevaka Sangh (RSS) in his constant attempts to assert that Sikhism is a sect of Hinduism, often quoted various scriptures and historical events to argue that Sikhs were created to defend Hinduism from the tyranny of Mughal rulers.²⁶⁴ Over last few years, especially after Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power (in 2014), the RSS has intensified its attention on Sikh religious and political affairs. At every given opportunity, it has tried to build inroads into Sikh institutions and attacked the basic Sikh philosophy and the Sikh way of life. By any means possible, Rashtriya Swaymsevaka Sangh (RSS) is constantly trying to undermine the history, the beliefs, identity and the institutions of the Sikh faith.²⁶⁵ By constantly attempting to solidify this link between Hindu and Sikh identities, the RSS has devised a strategy to decay the foundations of the Sikh faith and erode the distinctiveness of Sikh identity and history.²⁶⁶

RSS Event on Guru Gobind Singh's 350th Birth Anniversary: The Response of Akal Takht Sahib

Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, a RSS affiliate organization, organized a function in New Delhi on October 25, 2017 to celebrate 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru.²⁶⁷ The conclave was inaugurated by Moahn Bhagwat, the chief of Rashtriya

based in Indore organized protests where copies of this magazine were burnt in front of Gurdwara Imli Sahib, Indore.

- 263 "RSS interfering into Sikh affairs: All India Sikh Students Federation", *Hindustan Times*, April 12, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/rss-interfering-into-sikh-affairs-all-india-sikh-students-federation/story-mmD6jYFYArvuHnGsaMcRK.html>, accessed on 28/08/2017.
- 264 Nonica Datta, "Are the Sikhs Hindus?" *The Hindu*, March 4, 2003, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2003/03/04/stories/2003030400951000.htm>, accessed on 13/04/2016.
- 265 See, Dharendra K Jha (2014), "Radical Sikh groups see red as RSS gets aggressive in Punjab", November 26, 2014, available at <https://scroll.in/article/691447/radical-sikh-groups-see-red-as-rss-gets-aggressive-in-punjab>, accessed on 15/12/2016. Information also based on insights provided by renowned Sikh scholar Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon about the RSS strategies to absorb Sikh identity into Hindu culture. See, "On Increased Hindutva RSS activities in Punjab (Sikh Historian Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon)", available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARPG1vpz-CQ>, accessed on 17/10/2015.
- 266 In recent times, there have been several examples that RSS is in the process of changing the school textbooks have been inserting dogmatic and pseudo-scientific religious content. The same Hindu fundamentalists are also campaigning for banning films, books, festivals of minorities etc. See, Uttam Niraula (2016), "India Turning into Nightmare for Minorities", International Humanist and Ethical Union, available at <http://iheu.org/india-turning-into-nightmare-for-minorities/>, accessed on 17/12, 2017. Also see, Bilja Singh. "Refuting Rashtriya Sikh Sangat (RSS)", available at <http://www.searchsikhism.com/refuting-rashtriya-sikh-sangat>, accessed on 17/12/2017.
- 267 The controversial RSS event took place at Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi on October 25, 2017. For information see, "RSS move to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh anniversary invokes boycott call to Sikhs by Akal Takht", *Punjab News Express*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/national/news/rss-move-to-celebrate-guru-gobind-singh-anniversary-invokes-boycott-call-to-sikhs-by-akal-takht--68820.aspx>. Also see, "Bhagwat to inaugurate conclave on 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh", *Indian Express*, October 23, 2017, available at

Swaymsevak Sangh (RSS), and was attended by numerous BJP and RSS leaders.²⁶⁸ While addressing the gathering arranged by Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, the RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat recounted numerous attempts of brutal invasion by external forces and said that Guru Gobind Singh protected the Indian civilization. He stated that ‘Bharat’ would achieve the goal of “Vaibhav and Pratistha” by emulating the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh. Mohan Bhagwat also stated that the leadership displayed by Sikh Gurus is still quite relevant in the 21st century.²⁶⁹ Mohan Bhagwat categorically said that Guru Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, has been among those who took the country forward. RSS Chief Mr. Bhagwat projected the spiritual Guru of the Sikhs (Guru Gobind Singh) as a “national hero” and as a person who sacrificed all that belonged to him, even his children, for the country.²⁷⁰ Invoking the contribution of Guru Gobind Singh, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Chief Mohan Bhagwat underscored that every individual who wishes to contribute for the betterment of country should adhere to the persistent spirit envisioned by the great Guru. **RSS interpretation of the life of Guru Gobind Singh as life devoted to the cause of country, and the Guru’s projection merely as a “warrior” and “national hero”, goes very much against the sentiments and faith of the Sikh Community that worships the ‘Guru’ as the prophet and spiritual master.**²⁷¹

Union Home Minister Raj Nath Singh also addressed the convention organised by Rashtriya Sikh Sangat to mark the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh. BJP leader Rajnath Singh, in his very controversial address,²⁷² said that Indian culture was one of the most ancient cultures in the world and that the Sikh Panth set up by Guru Gobind Singh has been engaged in the protection of that culture. Rajnath Singh also stated that Guru Gobind Singh would always be among the leading lights of the country. BJP stalwart and India’s

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/pti-news/2017/oct/23/bhagwat-to-inaugurate-conclave-on-350th-birth-anniversary-of-1680966.html>, accessed on 02/11/2017.

268 “Bhagwat to inaugurate conclave on 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh”, *Outlook India*, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/bhagwat-to-inaugurate-conclave-on-350th-birth-anniversary-of-guru-gobind-singh/1172906>, accessed on 02/11/2017.

269 *ibid.*

270 See, “Guru Gobind Singh Ji is our torchbearer – Dr. Mohan Bhagwat Ji”, October 26, 2017, available at <http://vskbharat.com/guru-gobind-singh-ji-is-our-torchbearer-dr-mohan-bhagwat-ji/?lang=en>, accessed on 01/11/2017.

271 “Expose: Hindu Infiltration of Sikh Institutions at Highest Level”, December 26, 2007, available at <http://www.panthic.org/news/126/ARTICLE/3768/2007-12-26.html>, accessed on 11/11/2016. Also see, “Guru Gobind Singh’s teachings can help country: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat”, *The Indian Express*, October 26, 2017, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/guru-gobind-singhs-teachings-can-help-country-rss-chief-mohan-bhagwat-4906942/>, accessed on 23/11/2017.

272 There existed strong resentment in the Sikh community against the program organized by the Sikh wing of the BJP’s parent body Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), held to celebrate the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh. Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Rajnath Singh even failed to say ‘*Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal*’ properly. Union minister (and Punjab State BJP chief) Vijay Sampla termed Guru Gobind Singh as ‘*Hind ki Chadar*’, whereas this title is for Guru Teg Bahadur, the ninth Guru of the Sikhs.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh categorically said: "*Guru Gobind Singh and the entire Sikh religion have acted as a shield for our ancient 'santanadharam' and culture against attacks from foreign forces.*"²⁷³

Parteek Singh, the Rashtriya Swaymsevak Sangh (RSS) leader, took the stand that Sikhs should welcome RSS move to celebrate anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh which is in recognition of Guru Gobind Singh's contribution for 'Hindustan'.²⁷⁴ **However, Sikh religious institutions have not accepted this explanation and interpretation of RSS leaders about Sikhism and the life and status of Guru Gobind Singh, the spiritual Guru of the Sikhs.**²⁷⁵ The Rashtriya Sikh Sangat Sangat (RSS affiliate organization)²⁷⁶ is working in this direction and is trying to increase its outreach among the Sikh community through a series of programmes, the latest of which was the 350th birth anniversary celebration of Guru Gobind Singh (at New Delhi in October 2017). The controversial event being attended by senior BJP leaders, Union Ministers including Home Minister Rajnath Singh and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat was a clear attempt to raise the profile of the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat Sangat which is an offshoot body of RSS. .²⁷⁷

273 See, "Patna Sahib Jathedar skips RSS event", *The Times of India*, October 26, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/patna-sahib-jathedar-skips-rss-event/articleshow/61231698.cms>, accessed on 02/11/2017.

274 See, "Boycott Rashtriya Sikh Sangat event: Akal Takht to Sikh", *The Indian Express*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/boycott-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-guru-gobind-singh-birth-anniversary-event-akal-takht-to-sikhs-jathedar-giani-gurbachan-singh/>, accessed on 02/11/2017. See also, "RSS move to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh anniversary invokes boycott call to Sikhs by Akal Takht", *Punjab News Express*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/oped/news/rss-move-to-celebrate-guru-gobind-singh-anniversary-invokes-boycott-call-to-sikhs-by-akal-takht--68820.aspx>, accessed on 03/11/2017.

275 Based on discussion with known Sikh leaders, SGPC members, Sikh scholars and members of Panthic organizations . Discussion was held on the RSS interpretation of Sikh religion and identity with Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (seniors SGPC member and former SGPC General Secretary) , Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (known Sikh leader and 16 times SGPC General Secretary) , Karnail Singh Panjoli (SGPC executive committee member), Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala (former Hazoori Raagi and President of Sikh Sadbhawna Dal) , Bhai Mohkam Singh (President United Akali Dal) , Kanwarpal Singh (Spokesperson of Dal Khalsa), Karnail Singh Peer Mohammad (AISSF),Dr Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (Professor in History), etc. Jathedars of Akal Takht Sahib (former Jathedar Gaini Joginder Singh Vedanti and present Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh) time and again, through their messages, statements and explanations have condemned RSS interpretation of Sikh religion and have very convincingly claimed the distinctiveness and separateness of Sikh faith and identity.

276 The Rashtriya Sikh Sangat works in Punjab, Haryana and parts of Rajasthan to consolidate the RSS ideology. It shares the RSS concerns over "forced conversions" being carried out by missionaries in far-flung areas of Punjab and Rajasthan. It runs about 500 branches similar to RSS 'shakhas' across the country. Information available at, "Bhagwat, Rajnath address Rashtriya Sikh Sangat's Delhi meet on Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary", *Hindustan Times*, October 25, 2017, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/bhagwat-rajnath-to-address-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-s-delhi-meet-on-guru-gobind-singh-s-birth-anniversary/story-EhpTC0oPdGpjk07HOvzRK.html>, accessed on 02/11/2017.

277 "Bhagwat, Rajnath address Rashtriya Sikh Sangat's Delhi meet on Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary", *Hindustan Times*, October 25, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/bhagwat-rajnath-to-address-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-s-delhi-meet-on-guru-gobind-singh-s-birth-anniversary/story-.html>, accessed on 29/11/2017.

Akal Takht Boycotts RSS Event

Sensing mood of the Sikh community, the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, announced a boycott of this event organised by the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh's 350th birth anniversary.²⁷⁸ Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh directed the Sikh community to abide by the 2004 'Hukumnama' (edict)²⁷⁹, which had termed RSS activities as a "*deep-rooted conspiracy against the Sikhs*". In 2004, following complaints about the RSS's participation in commemorating the 400th 'Parkash Utsav' of Guru Granth Sahib, the supreme religious institution of Sikhs, the Akal Takht Sahib, had pronounced a 'Hukumnama' on July 23 that year, directing the Sikh community to shun RSS activities.²⁸⁰ Quoting its earlier directive issued in 2004, the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh said:

"We cannot allow assimilation of Sikh history into other religion. It cannot be tolerated. Sikhs are a separate community, with separate identity, we have our own unique history. Sikhs never interfere in the religious beliefs, traditions and history of other faiths and they cannot tolerate interference into Sikh religion."²⁸¹

The Akal Takht Sahib which is the highest temporal authority of the Sikhs, also boycotted the congregation of different faiths organized by RSS affiliate Rashtriya Sikh Sangat in Delhi on 25 October, 2017 to mark the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh.²⁸² While boycotting the RSS event in New Delhi, Jathedar Akal Takht, Giani Gurbachan Singh said that the RSS is organising the event "*with a motive to create mess and*

278 "Akal Takht boycotts RSS affiliate's event", *The Tribune*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/akal-takht-boycotts-rss-affiliate-s-event/486198.html>. Also see, "Bhagwat to inaugurate conclave on 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh", October 24, 2017, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/bhagwat-to-inaugurate-conclave-on-350th-birth-anniversary-of-guru-gobind-singh/1172906>, accessed on 28/10/2017.

279 Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib referred to a 'Hukumnama' (edict) of the Akal Takht in 2004 in which Sikhs were asked to boycott a march (Gurbani Yatra) taken out by the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat on the completion of 400 years of the *Khalsa Panth*, stating RSS as "anti-panthic". For concerned information, see "Patna Sahib jathedar skips RSS event", *The Times of India*, October 26, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/patna-sahib-jathedar-skips-rss-event/articleshow/61231698.cms>, accessed on 02/11/2017.

280 See, "Rajnath promises to remove more names from the Sikh Black list", October 26, 2017, available at <http://www.babushahi.com/full-news.php?id=64644&headline=Rajnath-Singh,-Mohan-Bhagwat-address-Rashtriya-Sikh-Sangat-convention>, accessed on 01/11/2017.

281 See, "Boycott Rashtriya Sikh Sangat event: Akal Takht to Sikhs", *The Indian Express*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/boycott-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-guru-gobind-singh-birth-anniversary-event-akal-takht-to-sikhs-jathedar-giani-gurbachan-singh/>. Also See, "Khaki Invasion' of Punjab? Sikhs cry foul about Rashtriya Sikh Sangat's event on Guru Gobind Singh", October 24, 2017, available at <http://www.catchnews.com/india-news/khaki-invasion-of-punjab-sikhs-cry-foul-about-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-s-event-on-guru-gobind-singh-86745.html>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

282 See, "Boycott Rashtriya Sikh Sangat event: Akal Takht to Sikhs", *The Indian Express*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/boycott-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-guru-gobind-singh-birth-anniversary-event-akal-takht-to-sikhs-jathedar-giani-gurbachan-singh/>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

nothing else.”²⁸³ In his statement, he further stated the Sikh community had a separate identity and it has “*never interfered in any religion and would never allow any religion or outfit to meddle in its religious matters*”.²⁸⁴ The Jathedar further added that - *The Akal Takht had never announced to extend support to RSS events and would never do so in the future.*²⁸⁵

RSS Event - Opposition by Sikh Organizations

Most Sikh religious organisations raised strong voice to oppose the RSS move to celebrate 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, for which the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, a frontal organization of RSS held a function in Delhi on October 25, 2017. The RSS conclave was not even attended by the leaders of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) that has always protected its relationship with the Sangh's political arm- the Bharatiya Janata Party. In this context, Akali Dal followed the Akal Takht Sahib's *Hukamnama* (edict) that directed all the Sikhs and Sikh organizations to boycott the controversial event organized by RSS, the radical Hindu organization.²⁸⁶ The Sikh organizations opposed the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's (RSS) move to celebrate the Sikh festivals on the ground that RSS did not recognize Sikhs as a separate and distinct community, and consider them as a branch of Hindu religion and culture. **According to majority of Sikh organizations, the RSS has a basic policy of decimating the minority communities and establishing 'Hindu Rashtra' in India.**²⁸⁷ It is a fact that the Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Jains consider RSS as major threat to their religious identity due to its anti-minority stance. The controversy erupted as the hardliner Sikh outfits objected to the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat's programme, alleging that it

283 See, “Sikh body to boycott RSS Sammelan”, *The Hindu*, October 25, 2017, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/sikh-body-to-boycott-rss-sammelan/article19914720.ece>. Also see, “Sikh Community asked to keep distance from RSS event”, *The Pioneer*, October 25, 2017, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/chandigarh/sikh-community-asked-to-keep-distance-from-rss-event.html>, accessed on 03/11/2017.

284 See, “Sikh body to boycott RSS Sammelan”, *The Hindu*, October 25, 2017, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/sikh-body-to-boycott-rss-sammelan/article19914720.ece>. Also see, “Sikh Community asked to keep distance from RSS event”, *The Pioneer*, October 25, 2017, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/chandigarh/sikh-community-asked-to-keep-distance-from-rss-event.html>, accessed on 03/11/2017.

285 Jathedar of Takht Patna Sahib, Giani Iqbal Singh stayed away from RSS function. He initially agreed to preside over the function, but later expressed his inability to attend it, citing bad health. For concerned informations see, “Decree against RSS-affiliate still prevails: Akal Takht”, *Hindustan Times*, October 23, 2017. Also see, “Patna jathedar to abide by Akal Takht edict, will not attend RSS convention”, *Hindustan Times*, October 25, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/patna-jathedar-to-abide-by-akal-takht-edict-will-not-attend-rss-convention/story-37ZnaN3kqYpOfkUj7EyWN.html>, accessed on 17/11/2017.

286 “RSS affiliate's event brings out dichotomy in SAD-BJP relationship”, *The Times of India*, October 29, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/rss-affiliates-event-brings-out-dichotomy-in-sad-bjp-relationship/articleshow/61312983.cms>, accessed on 03/11/2017.

287 Based on discussion with various Sikh religious leaders, Sikh scholars and members of Panthic organizations. Also see, “RSS move to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh anniversary triggers major controversy and Sikh protests”, *Punjab News Online*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://www.punjabnewsline.com/religion/rss-move-to-celebrate-guru-gobind-singh-anniversary-triggers-major-controversy-and-sikh-protests-186>, accessed on 19/11/2017.

was part of a larger agenda to subsume Sikhism into Hinduism.²⁸⁸ In this context, the President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Kirpal Singh Badungar, said:

“RSS has wrong intentions and hidden agenda. The intent of RSS can be observed through the fact that they celebrated Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Parkash Parv (birth anniversary) on the Guru’s Jyoti Jot Diwas (the Day Guru Gobind Singh left for heavenly abode). This RSS event is poitically motivated and has no religious objective attached to it.”²⁸⁹

(Translated from comments/ statement given in Punjabi)

The then (2017) President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Kirpal Singh Badungar criticized Rashtriya Swaymsevaka Sangh (RSS) agenda towards Sikhism and condemned the Hindu nationalist organization’s strategies to interfere into Sikh religious affairs. He stated:

“Its (RSS) leaders are eyeing to contest polls of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. They (RSS) want to establish their control over the Sikh institutions.”²⁹⁰

(Translated from comments/ statement given in Punjabi)

Karnail Singh Panjoli, SGPC executive committee member, also criticized and condemned the RSS strategy under which they organized the concerned event (350th birth anniversary celebration of Guru Gobind). Mr Panjoli targeted RSS intentions and strategy in the following words:

“No doubt, anyone can celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib. But the intention of RSS is not to celebrate the ‘avtar purab’ (birth anniversary) of Guru Gobind Singh Ji , infact they want to prove that Sikhs are part of Hindus. If they (RSS) have so much love for Sikh Gurus , then why they don’t participate in ‘Avtaar Purabs’(birth anniversaries), ‘Jyoti Jot Diwas’, ‘Shaheedi Diwas of Sahibzade’ (martyrdom days of Sahibzade) and such other Sikh religious events which are organized and celebrated by the Sikh community. Gradually, RSS is testing the patience of the Sikhs.”²⁹¹

*(English Translation of explanation/ statement made in Punjabi)*²⁹²

288 “BJP dares Akalis after RSS function boycott: ‘Contest alone to test popularity’, *Hindustan Times*, October 27, 2017, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/bjp-rift-with-akalis-out-in-open-after-rss-function-boycott-contest-alone-to-test-popularity/story-.html>, accessed on 02/11/2017.

289 For the concerned statements of then (2017) SGPC President Kirpal Singh Badungar, see – “RSS के सम्मेलन पर SGPC का सुनें बड़ा बयान!”, *Punjab Kesri*, October 25, 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4xTIOKkb5g>, accessed on November 21, 2017.

290 “BJP dares Akalis after RSS function boycott: ‘Contest alone to test , popularity’, *Hindustan Times*, October 27, 2017, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/bjp-rift-with-akalis-out-in-open-after-rss-function-boycott-contest-alone-to-test-popularity/story-.html>, accessed on 02/11/2017. For comment made by former president of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Kirpal Singh Badungar, see - “Will R.S.S now contest for SGPC elections?”, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGsCMcEK1yI>, accessed on November 21, 2017.

291 The statements, explanation and insights provided by Karnail Singh Panjoli (SGPC executive committee member) were noted during discussion with him on the concerned issues.

292 Original statement (in Punjabi) as made by senior SGPC leader and SGPC executive committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli :

The Sikh wing of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) - Rashtriya Sikh Sangat and hardliner Sikh groups like Dal Khalsa came to loggerheads²⁹³ on the issue of multi-faith conclave being organised by RSS at New Delhi to mark the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh. Radical Sikh organization Dal Khalsa blamed RSS for systematically sabotaging Sikh doctrine and identity. The spokesperson of Dal Khalsa Kanwarpal Singh alleged that RSS is an anti-Sikh organisation that has been hitting at the roots and basis of Sikhism and Sikh identity.²⁹⁴ He said: “*Ironically, it has spread its tentacles in Punjab since tercentenary celebrations of Khalsa Panth in 1999 when Atal Behari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister and Parkash Singh Badal was the Chief Minister of Punjab.*”²⁹⁵ Dal Khalsa leader Harpal Singh Cheema cautioned the Sikh community to wake up timely to the communal designs of the RSS, which is hell bent to subsume Sikh religion, ideology and identity into Hinduism. The hardliner Sikh outfit Dal Khalsa dubbed the RSS event to celebrate the 350th anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh as “anti-Sikh” and as “interference into the Sikh affairs.”²⁹⁶

Sikh scholars and representatives of Sikh organizations such as Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, Khalsa Panchayat and Voice of Khalsa strongly opposed the RSS event²⁹⁷ and its designs to distort Sikh history and identity. In a combined statement, they said: “*In response to the strong disapproval of the event expressed by many well-meaning Sikhs, the RSS has now decided to call*

“ਗਰ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਪਰਬ ਕੋਈ ਵੀ ਮਨਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਭੋਲੇ ਪੰਛੀ ਗਰੇਵਾਲ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੂੰ ਕੀ ਪਤਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਆਰ.ਐਸ.ਐਸ ਵਾਲੇ ਗਰ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਪਰਬ ਨਹੀਂ ਮਨਾਉਂਦੇ ਬਲਕਿ ਇਹ ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਬਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਹਿੰਦੂਆਂ ਦਾ ਹੀ ਇੱਕ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹਨ। ਜੇ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨਾਲ ਇਤਨਾ ਹੀ ਪਿਆਰ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਨਾਏ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਪਰਬ, ਜੋਤੀ-ਜੋਤਿ ਦਿਹਾੜੇ, ਸਾਹਿਜ਼ਾਦਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਹੀਦੀ ਦਿਹਾੜੇ ਜਾਂ ਹੋਰ ਪੰਥ ਸਮਾਗਮਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਿੰਨੇ ਕੁ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਵੀਰ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਆਰ.ਐਸ.ਐਸ ਅਹਿਸਤਾ-ਅਹਿਸਤਾ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦਾ ਸਿਦਕ ਪਰਬ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ।” The statements, explanation and insights provided by Karnail Singh Panjoli (SGPC executive committee member) were noted during discussion with him on the concerned issues.

293 There are strong ideological differences between the two right wing organisation, Dal Khalsa and RSS. While RSS believes that Sikhism is a branch of Hindu religion, hardliner Sikhs believe Sikhism was an independent religion and has nothing to do with Hinduism.

294 See, “RSS, hardliner Sikh groups at loggerheads on multi-faith Delhi conclave”, *India Today*, October 24, 2017, available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/rss-sikh-community-conclave-guru-gobind-singh-punjab/1/1074040.html>, accessed on 03/11/2017. See also, “Sikh extremist groups lash out at RSS for holding Sikh congregation in Delhi”, October 24, 2017, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-sikh-extremist-groups-lash-out-at-rss-for-holding-sikh-congregation-in-delhi-2554868>, accessed on 04/11/2017.

295 It is being alleged that the Atal Behari Vajpayee led NDA Government had released Rs 100 crore for the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa Panth in 1999 of which the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat also got some funds with the help of which it tried to boost up its activities in rural Punjab through distribution of literature, calendars and organising meetings etc. Reports that appeared in the media at that time suggest that the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat had approached the DamdamiTaksal to get their men trained in Sikh religion and philosophy. For the information and quoted statement see, “‘Khaki invasion’ of Punjab? Sikhs cry foul about Rashtriya Sikh Sangat’s event on Guru Gobind Singh”, October 24, 2017, available at <http://www.catchnews.com/india-news/khaki-invasion-of-punjab-sikhs-cry-foul-about-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-s-event-on-guru-gobind-singh-86745.html>. See also, “Dal Khalsa asks Sikhs to oppose RSS Conclave in Delhi”, *Daily Hunt*, October 24, 2017, available at <https://m.dailyhunt.in/news/india/english/daily+post-epaperdpost/dal+khalsa+asks+sikhs+to+oppose+rss+conclave+in+delhi-newsid-75206983>, accessed on 03/11/2017.

296 Based on discussion with Dal Khalsa leader and spokesperson Kanwarpal Singh. Dal Kahlssa has been strongly protesting against the RSS agenda against Sikh minority community, and its interference into Sikh religious affairs.

297 The RSS event comes days after a RSS leader, Ravinder Gosain, was shot dead outside his house in Ludhiana. In wake of the targeted killing of RSS leaders in the state, Punjab Government led by Captain Amarinder Singh announced to transfer the case to National Investigation Agency (NIA) citing international ramifications of the case.

it a “*Sarv Dharma Sammelan*” (a meeting of different religions).”²⁹⁸ President of All India Sikh Student Federation Karnail Singh Peer Mohammed affirmed that RSS has sinister designs of weakening Sikh Panth and they are working on hidden agenda.²⁹⁹ The boycott of this RSS event to mark the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh by Akal Takht and most Sikh religious groups was seen as the direct Sikh opposition to the ‘Khaki’ invasion of Sikh identity and history. The common perception among the Sikh religious institutions is that RSS treats the Khalsa as a sect of the Hindus created by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Sikh Guru, to confront Islam as apparent from the literature. While Sikhs and their religious institutions are not opposed to anyone celebrating birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh, the opposition is on using the occasion to further the RSS anti-Sikh agenda and also to the usurping Sikh religious identity, symbols and ideals to attain its objectives. The RSS event to celebrate Guru Gobind Singh’s 350th birth anniversary did not gain much attraction among Sikhs predominantly because of Sikh suspicion over RSS’s agenda and strategy to subvert the distinct Sikh identity into Hindu fabric.³⁰⁰

Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, a right-wing Hindu nationalist organization, intensified its efforts in Punjab after the defeat of the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party coalition in Punjab Assembly elections of 2017. It is believed that the RSS is working towards carving out a base for BJP in Punjab that is independent of the Shiromani Akali Dal.³⁰¹ Indeed, the Shiromani Akali Dal - Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance has always been spoken of as one which is the best combination of Hindu and Sikh interests in the State making it hard for either to win without the other. But when it comes to the RSS or its Sikh affiliate the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, even the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) draws a line. The radical Hindu organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) by forming its Sikh arm -

298 Bhagwat, Rajnath address Rashtriya Sikh Sangat’s Delhi meet on Guru Gobind Singh’s birth anniversary”, *Hindustan Times*, October 25, 2017, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/bhagwat-rajnath-to-address-rashtriya-sikh-sangat-s-delhi-meet-on-guru-gobind-singh-s-birth-anniversary/story-EhpTC0oPdGpjvk07HOvzRK.html>, accessed on 03/11/2017.

299 President of All India Sikh Students Federation Karnail Singh Peer Mohammed also alleged that though the blame of massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 is entirely labled on Congress but RSS activists were also involved in violence against Sikhs and their role is never probed. He said that BJP Government at center has not given justice to Sikhs and SIT formed for the purpose has not made any progress. Information available at - “RSS interfering into Sikh affairs: All India Sikh Students Federation”, *Hindustan Times*, April 12, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/rss-interfering-into-sikh-affairs-all-india-sikh-students-federation/story-.html>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

300 “BJP dares Akalis after RSS function boycott: Contest alone to test popularity”, *Hindustan Times* (online edition), October 27, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/bjp-rift-with-akalis-out-in-open-after-rss-function-boycott-contest-alone-to-test-popularity/story-BsZalXLqPk4M2xmkggXQb1.html>, accessed on 21/11/2017. Also see, “SAD-BJP alliance takes a hit as Akalis boycott RSS’s Guru Gobind Singh celebration”, *The Print*, October 27, 2017, available at <https://theprint.in/2017/10/27/pragya-akali-rss/>, accessed on 2/11/2017.

301 “What you see in Punjab is part of a continuous effort: RSS”, *The Indian Express* (online edition) , December 18, 2014, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/what-you-see-in-punjab-is-part-of-a-continuous-effort-rss/>, accessed on 16/11/2016. Also see, Dharendra K Jha (2014), “Radical Sikh groups see red as RSS gets aggressive in Punjab”, Novemebr 26, 2014, available at <https://scroll.in/article/691447/radical-sikh-groups-see-red-as-rss-gets-aggressive-in-punjab>, accessed on 15/12/2016.

Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, has been trying hard to expand its base in Punjab.³⁰² However, the move has not gone well with the Sikh radical organizations which are against RSS expansion in Punjab and interference in Sikh religious affairs.³⁰³

To sum up, it can be said that Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh's intentions and strategy to subjugate the religious minorities (especially Sikhism) into wider Hindu culture is no more a secret agenda. The right wing Hindu organization, the RSS, has inherited the Arya Samaj's objective of bringing Sikhs back into the Hindu fold. The RSS's agenda and tactics seek to undermine Sikhism as a distinct and sovereign religious tradition. Although the leading Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), claims to be the sole guardian of the Sikh interests and their distinct identity, still RSS has been allowed to infiltrate into Sikh religious affairs and management of Gurdwaras. The formation of Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, a wing of RSS, and its constant working in Punjab under RSS agenda, reflects double standards of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The non-panthic alliance of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and control of Shiromani Akali Dal's current leadership over SGPC, has made the effective interference of RSS into Sikh religious affairs an existing reality. Anti-minority and anti-Sikh agenda of RSS, and the use of SGPC's religious authority by Akali Dal leadership for vested political interests, together poses a grave threat and challenge to distinct and separate identity of the Sikhs.

The chapter has studied two contemporary issues (Dera cult and RSS agenda) which have evolved as serious threats to distinctiveness and separateness of Sikh religion and identity. The focus of the chapter was to study the role of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, in regard to the threats posed by Dera culture and working of RSS. The attempt has been made to explain and highlight the concerns and challenges that mainstream Sikhism and Sikh institutions are facing under the politico-religious functioning of Deras and radical Hindu organization, the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS). The explanation and analysis of the role and response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, in context to the concerned issues, was the central part of the study.

302 RSS influx in Punjab, border areas in particular, has often led to tensions and violent clashes between RSS and Sikh hardliner groups. As per newspaper reports, there were nearly 700 RSS shakhas in the state till 2014 which has now increased to about 900. See, "RSS looks to expand base in Punjab as Bhagwat pays discreet visit to Region", *The Times of India*, September 30, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/RSS-looks-to-expand-base-in-Punjab-as-Bhagwat-pays-discreet-visit-to-region/articleshow/49163397.cms>, accessed on 15/11/2017. Relevant information also available at – "Punjab Government enhances security of RSS Shakhas in the State", April 4, 2018, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2018/04/04/punjab-govt-enhances-security-of-rss-shakhas-in-the-state/>, accessed on 12/05/2018. Also see, "Chander Suta Dogra (2017), "RSS's Renewed Drive to Expand its Presence Has Revived Old Fears for Sikhs in Punjab", *The Wire*, November 2, 2017, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-rsss-renewed-drive-expand-presence-revived-old-fears-sikhs>, accessed on 17/11/2017.

303 The US-based Sikh co-ordination committee issued a statement asking the Sikh community to boycott the RSS organized Gurburab programme at New Delhi. Committee members Himmat Singh, Kewal Singh, Harjinder Singh and Veer Singh Mangat said that the participation of the Sikhs in the October 25, 2017 programme was a danger to independent existence of the community. They said the objective of the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat was dubious at its inception as its founders did not consider Sikhism as a separate religion.

Chapter 5

Conflicts within the Sikh Institutions

(Nanakshahi Calendar and Haryana Gurdwara Committee)

Role of Akal Takht and SGPC

In recent times, Sikh community has been facing some intense controversies and conflicts which have its connections both within and outside the community circles. It is the mainstream Sikh institutions and organizations that have been engaged in such conflicts/controversies over crucial issues of Panthic importance. In this chapter, the study examines the two most heated issues within the Sikh community that have been the talk of the town among Sikh religious and political circles. The two very controversial and debatable issues are: (i) Conflict over Nanakshahi Calendar, and (ii) Conflict over the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). These two issues have been centred by vigorous debate, discussion and discourse within the Sikh scholars, Sikh institutions and organizations.

The study has taken up above mentioned two issues as both of them are directly related to the contemporary role of pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Also, these conflicts and controversies are directly related with the identity of Sikhs and their politico-religious interests, and thus have vital implications for the Sikhs across the globe. The discussion in this chapter predominantly focuses on the dynamics of Sikh politico-religious affairs, and the contemporary role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in context to concerned ongoing conflicts and controversies. Both the undertaken issues in this chapter are of different nature and are outcomes of distinct religious and political backgrounds. As such, in order to study each issue separately, the chapter has been divided into two parts. Part I of the Chapter studies the issue of (i) Nanakshahi Calendar, and Part II of the chapter deals with (ii) Conflict over the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC).

I

Nanakshahi Calendar: An Introduction

Nanakshahi Calendar takes its name from Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith and the first Sikh Guru. The name 'Nanakshahi' is not obsolete and has been in use earlier too. In 1947, the Sikh History Society Amritsar published a *jantri* (almanac) titled as

“Mukhtasir Nanakshahi Jantri”¹, while earlier Maharaja Ranjit Singh during the Khalsa rule, issued a coin called “Nanakshahi Mohar”.² Even in some of the ‘Hukamnamas’ (edicts) of Akal Takht Sahib, the correspondence date used to be given in Nanakshahi *Samvat*. The Original Nanakshahi Calendar was developed by a Canadian Sikh Pal Singh Purewal - a retired computer engineer. Nanakshahi Calendar has been at the centre of controversy causing huge row in the Sikh religious and political circles across the globe.³

The epoch of the Nanakshahi Calendar is the *Prakash* (birth) of the first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev, in 1469. As such, year ‘one’ in Nanakshahi Calendar is the year of Guru Nanak Dev’s birth (1469 CE or AD). For an example, as per Nanakshahi Calendar, June 2017 is Nanakshahi 549.⁴ The Nanakshahi Calendar which is a tropical solar calendar uses most of the mechanics of the western calendar. The Calendar is scientifically designed and keeps in precise tune with the sun's position; seasons do not slip from year to year, and the dates are fixed for start of each month when compared to Common Era Calendar. In Nanakshahi Calendar, the year length is very much the same as Western Calendar (365 days 5 hours 48 minutes 45 seconds) and the Calendar contains 5 months of 31 days followed by 7 months of 30 days. It has leap year after every 4 years in which the last month (*Phagun*) has an extra day⁵. As per Nanakshahi Calendar, the first day of each month is known as “Sangrand”⁶, and correlates to dates on Gregorian Calendar now commonly known as Common Era Calendar.

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- 1 See, “Nanakshahi Calendar - Reply to Mr. Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba’s criticism of Nanakshahi Calendar first implemented in 1999 CE, by Pal Singh Purewal”, available at <http://www.purewal.biz/RepLamba.pdf>, accessed on 14/10/2016.
 - 2 *ibid*
 - 3 See, Parveen Swami (2000) , “The clergy vs the SGPC”, *Frontline*, Volume 17 - Issue 03, Feb. 05 - 08, 2000, available at <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1703/17030310.htm>, accessed on 11/04/2016. “Nanakshahi Calendar controversy mars celebration of first installation of GGS”, *Times of India*, August 23, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/nanakshahi-calendar-controversy-mars-celebration-of-first-installation-of-ggs/articleshow/60195513.cms>, accessed on 28/09/2017. Relevant information also available at, “HT Explainer: Know about the controversial Nanakshahi calendar”, *Hindustan Times*, March 6, 2018, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ht-explainer-know-about-the-controversial-nanakshahi-calendar/story-UeKm0yTcDtat1FCRIel86K.html>, accessed on 14/05/2018.
 - 4 “Amritsar: Sikh calendar released as Nanakshahi Samat 549” *Hindustan Times*, March 14, 2015, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/amritsar-sikh-calendar-released-as-nanakshahi-samat-547/story-ML2FYpLNKLeM0C053mxnHL.html>. Also see, “Nanakshahi calendar released”, *The Tribune*, March 9, 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/nanakshahi-calendar-released/374766.html>, accessed on 10/10/2017.
 - 5 The month of *Phagun* has 30 days in ordinary year, and 31 days in a year in which the month of February has 29 days. As a result, during a leap year, the corresponding dates of *Phagun* from March 1 to March 13 will differ by 1 day from those of the same month in non-leap years.
 - 6 Term *Sangrand* originates from the Sanskrit word *Sans-kranti* (literally: sun-dependent change or sun-related actions). The sun and moon has both been a regular feature of Indian spirituality from the Vedic times. By operational definition, *sangrand* is the first day of the 12 months that make up the Indian solar

As Pal Singh Purewal designed the Nanakshahi Calendar to replace the Bikrami Calendar, the rejection of the Bikrami Calendar and creation of new calendar exclusively for the Sikh community has been an important step in defining and sharpening the boundaries of Sikh identity.⁷ Pal Singh Purewal argues that Nanakshahi Calendar is essential for exclusiveness of Sikh identity. In this context, he claims: ***“The Sikhs had their own distinct identity even before Nanakshahi Calendar (NC), but it was incomplete. Calendar is a necessary and an important part of the identity.”***⁸ Pal Singh Purewal has constantly argued that Nanakshahi Calendar would be a central component of Sikh identity mirroring the Muslim *Hijri*⁹ and the Hindu *Bikrami*¹⁰ regimes.¹¹ Mr. Purewal, the creator of Nanakshahi Calendar, asserts that: ***“The Nanakshahi Calendar is the symbol of the distinct Sikh identity. All communities have their calendars. Sikhs can decide which calendar they want to follow. We do not interfere with Hindu calendar. They should not interfere in***

calendar. The full moon day on this calendar is called *puranmashi*, and the moonless night is called *masia*.

7 Pal Singh Purewal had been studying calendar for several years and has written ‘jantri 500 years’ that was published by Punjab School Education Board. It is after he had made a presentation about calendars and floated the idea of a separate calendar for Sikhs, a committee of experts was then constituted and work on the calendar was done. For information see, Pal Singh Purewal (1999), *New Nanakshahi Calendar, Understanding Sikhism -The Research Journal*, available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.599.6542&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. Also see, “Amendments in Nanakshahi calendar behind date controversy : Purewal”, January 2, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/punjab/news/amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-behind-date-controversy-purewal--37209.aspx>, accessed on 16/201/2017.

8 Statement as given by Pal Singh Purewal. See, “From the community: Sikh Community of the Midwest, USA hosts honorary dinner for Sardar Pal Singh Purewal”, *Chicago Tribune*, March 14, 2017, available at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/naperville-sun/community/chi-ugc-article-sikh-community-of-the-midwest-usa-hosts-hono-2017-03-14-story.html>. Also see, , “Re-implement original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal”, *The Times of India*, March 13, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Re-implement-original-Nanakshahi-Calendar-Purewal/articleshow/46548847.cms>, accessed on 28/06/2017.

9 The Islamic, Muslim, or Hijri calendar is a lunar calendar consisting of 354 or 355 days. It is based on a year of 12 months, each month beginning approximately at the time of the new moon. It is used (often alongside the Gregorian calendar) to date events in many Muslim countries. It is also used by Muslims to determine the proper days of Islamic holidays and rituals, such as the annual period of fasting and the proper time for the pilgrimage to Mecca.

10 Vikram Samvat also called the Bikrami Calenadar or just Hindu Calendar (abbreviated as V.S. or B.S.) is the historical Hindu calendar of India and Nepal. It uses lunar months and solar sidereal years. The Vikram Samvat is named after king Vikramaditya, and starts in 58 BC. The Bikrami or Vikrami era is an ancient calendar and has been historically used by Hindus and Sikhs. It is one of the several regional Hindu calendars that have been in use on the Indian subcontinent, and it is based on twelve synodical lunar months and 365 solar days. The Hindu calendars have been in use in the Indian subcontinent since ancient times, and remains in use by the Hindus in India particularly to set the Hindu festival dates such as Holi, Maha Shivaratri, Raksha Bandhan, Pongal, Onam, Krishna Janmashtami, Durga Puja, Ramlila, Diwali, etc.

11 See, “Re-implement original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal”, *The Times of India*, March 13,2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Re-implement-original-Nanakshahi-Calendar-Purewal/articleshow/46548847.cms>. For important information also see, “Restore Original Nanakshahi Calendar, demand Sikh bodies”,*The Tribune*, March 15,2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/restore-original-nanakshahi-calendar-demand-sikh-bodies/377184.html>.,accessed on 16/06/2017.

ours.”¹² Emphasizing on need of separate calendar for asserting separate and distinct identity of Sikhs, Pal Singh Purewal further adds: **“Even if the Sikhs do not have their country, the Nanakshahi Calendar reaffirms the distinct identity of the Sikh people and the Sikh nation.”**¹³ The desire to demarcate Sikh identity rigidly has been a central component of Sikh politics, one driven at least in part by Hindu revivalism which sought to subsume the Sikh faith. Pal Singh Purewal believes that having a unique calendar is vital for the integrity of the Sikh religion. In this context, he argues:

“All communities and faiths have their own Calendar as a mark of their distinct cultural identity. Just as the Islamic world has the Hijri calendar and Hindus have Bikrami calendar, the Sikhs will have a Nanakshahi calendar along with the common era (CE) calendar which is in use throughout the world.”¹⁴

Pal Singh Purewal, a Sikh scholar who created Nanakshahi Calendar, felt that existing calendar was confusing for the Sikh community with the dates of religious festivals and the birth anniversaries of Sikh Gurus shifting from year to year making them lose their relevance.¹⁵ Thus, Purewal using scientific methods has produced this unique Nanakshahi Calendar to celebrate all *Gurpurabs* (birth days of Sikh Gurus) and other important festivals on fixed dates.¹⁶ The Nanakshahi Calendar which is based on solar principles instead of lunar principles; new year's day in it falls annually on what is March 14 in the Gregorian western Calendar.¹⁷ However, the new Calendar did not fix the dates of all the Sikh festivals; those

12 As quoted in an interview to The Indian Express. See, “Amendments in Nanakshahi Calendar behind date controversy: Purewal”, *The Indian Express*, January 2, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/kids-hot-spot/news/amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-behind-date-controversy-purewal--37209.aspx>, accessed on 17/06/2016.

13 Pal Singh Purewal (2009), “Nanakshahi Calendar is Immortal”, December 2, 2009, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/nanakshahi-calendar-is-immortal/>, accessed on 11/09/2016.

14 “The Sikh Calendar”, September 9, 2009, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/customs/nanakshahi.shtml>, accessed on 28/08/2016.

15 In Nanakshahi Calendar, the dates of Gurpurabs have been fixed and does not change from year to year as is the case in Bikrami Calendar. For example in 1998, the Prakash Purab (birth anniversary) of Guru Gobind Singh Sahib occurred twice according to Bikrami Calendar, and did not occur in 1999 at all. The same situation was repeated in 2003 and 2004. In Nanakshahi Calendar there is no such anomaly. Guru Gobind Singh Sahib’s Prakash Gurpurab always occurs on 23 Poh (Nanakshahi) / 5 January. Surinder Singh Bakshi (2008), *Sikhs in the Diaspora - A Modern Guide to the Practice of Sikh Faith*, Sikh Publishing House, Birmingham, UK, pp. 24-26.

16 Pal Singh Purewal, who took premature retirement from his job in Edmonton (Canada) to complete the difficult task, reveals that he had pursued the calendar project with the highest Sikh authorities in Amritsar since 1992. In November 1994, he sent a detailed write-up on the subject to the then acting Jathedar of the Akal Takht, Prof. Manjit Singh, as requested by the SGPC. He started work on the calendar in the 1960’s. Information available at “Sikh scholar defends 'Nanakshahi' calendar he created”, *The Times of India*, February 8, 2000, available at <http://fateh.sikhnet.com//Sikhnet/discussion.nsf/SearchView/!OpenDocument>, accessed on 16/10/2017

17 The lunar portion of the calendar, according to which most of the religious festivals are fixed, has its share of peculiarities. Since it is based on 12 months of the lunar cycle (full moon to full moon or new moon to new moon), its year length is about 11 days shorter than that of the solar year. Therefore, its year

Sikh festivals that are celebrated at the same time as similar to Hindu religious events, such as *Diwali* and *Hola Mohalla*, still have their dates set by the Bikrami Calendar.¹⁸

Canada-based Sikh Pal Singh Purewal affirms that Nanakshahi Calendar is based on scientific principles and is fully attuned to the *Gurbani*, the Sikh principles, and the universally accepted Common Era Calendar.¹⁹ Some sections and groups within the Sikh community alleged that New Calendar was formulated overnight to embroil the Sikh political and religious leadership in a fresh controversy. However, Pal Singh Purewal has produced records to show that Nanakshahi Calendar was debated at length by various Sikh scholars and experts over years before being adopted in March 1998 by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which was then headed by known Sikh leader Gurcharan Singh Tohra. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee made announcement in October 1997 that the Sikh body (SGPC) would adopt the Nanakshahi Calendar and implement it in the historic year of 1999, when the Sikh community celebrated the tercentenary of the formation of Khalsa Panth.²⁰

begins 11 days earlier in the following year in relation to the solar year. This is why the Gurbani dates shift by about 11 days from one year to the other. This is quite a complicated set up, and is also contrary to the philosophy of *Gurbani* according to which no month in itself is good or bad. Pal Singh Purewal (1999), “New Nanakshahi Calendar”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.599.6542&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. Also see, “Amendments in Nanakshahi calendar behind date controversy : Purewal”, January 2, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/punjab/news/amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-behind-date-controversy-purewal--37209.aspx>, accessed on 16/20/2017. Relevant information also available at: “Sikh Calendar”, 29/09/2009, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/customs/nanakshahi.shtml>, accessed on 22/09/2017.

18. Bikrami calendar represents one of the few elements of Punjab's composite culture to have survived the processes of communal polarisation set in place by the Akali and the Hindu-revivalist Arya Samaj movements. Important Sikh and Hindu festivals often coincide. *Deepavali*, for example, is celebrated by Sikhs as ‘Bandi Chhor Diwas’, marking the day when the sixth Guru, Hargobind Singh, secured the release of people incarcerated in the Gwalior jail. The festival of *Hola Mohalla* always follows the festival of *Holi*, and *Baisakhi*, which represents the coming of spring, is celebrated by both Hindus and Sikhs.
19. Pal Singh Purewal explains that Nanakshahi Calendar year is based on the length of tropical year and was shorter by about 20 minutes from that of Bikrami Calendar. Purewal affirms that calendar months in original Nanakshahi Calendar will always have the same relationship with seasons as mentioned in ‘*Gurbani*’. He clarified that months of traditional Bikrami Calendar have already shifted by about eight days since the time of Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh faith. See, “Re-implement original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal”, *The Times of India*, March 13, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Re-implement-original-Nanakshahi-Calendar-Purewal/articleshow/46548847.cms>, accessed on 28/06/2017. Also see, “This is why Nanakshahi Calendar is important”, January 1, 2015, available at <http://dailysikhupdates.com/original-nanakshahi-calendar-important/>, accessed on 23/09/2016.
20. Pal Singh Purewal, “New Nanakshahi Calendar”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, pp.16-20, available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.599.6542&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, accessed on 11/03/2016. Also see, Birendra Kaur (2014), “Nanakshahi Calendar – A Boon, Not Bane (A Rejoinder to Nanakshahi Calendar – Boon or Bane)”, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, July – September, available at https://sikhinstitute.org/july_2014/5-birendra%20Kaur.pdf, accessed on 17/07/2016.

Sant Samaj, a highly orthodox organization and a coalition of powerful religious leaders, protested against the decision of SGPC to introduce the new Calendar.²¹ Sant Samaj²² argued that proposals recommended by the SGPC for a new Calendar would subvert well-established traditions, and will divide the Sikhs and Hindus.²³ Some others were, however, less than enthused by this proposed break with tradition. People who sympathized with Sant Samaj's position argued that most religions based their calendars on the movements of the moon, and not that of the sun. The Secretary General of the World Sikh Intellectual Council, S.S.Nishan, who had more than 30 years of experience working with the Survey of India, opposed the Nanakshahi Calendar on the basis of argument that a solar calendar has never been accepted by any religion.²⁴ He rejected Purewal's Nanakshahi Calendar on the basis of mathematical calculations and also objected to the names of certain months in Nanakshahi Calendar which according to him are not in accordance with "Bara Maha" concept of Sikh religion. Due to vigorous opposition from Sant Samaj and their supporters, the then Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh evidently agreed and SGPC's plan to implement the Nanakshahi Calendar was put on hold. However, vigorous debate on the issue continued both inside and outside the Sikh theocratic establishment.²⁵

SGPC adopt Nanakshahi Calendar under aegis of Akal Takht Sahib

The original Nanakshahi Calendar is a tropical solar calendar that was adopted by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee (SGPC) to determine the dates for important Sikh events. The *Dharam Parchar Committee* (DPC) of SGPC passed a resolution on June 5,

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- 21 See, "Sant Samaj firm on Bikrami calendar, hands over memo to Takht Jathedar", *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2014, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sant-samaj-firm-on-bikrami-calendar-hands-over-memo-to-takht-jathedar/story-ARaIa9d9Krs77ou9GnqGIO.html>. See also, "SGPC in eye of storm over calendar controversy", *The Guardian*, December 20, 2014, available at <http://www.sunday-guardian.com/news/sgpc-in-eye-of-storm-over-calendar-controversy>, accessed on 19/08/2016.
- 22 The Sant Samaj, also known as "Gurmit Sidhant Pracharak Sant Samaj" is literally a union of sants, babas, and deras modeled after a Hindu organization with a similar name. Although some of the representatives of the Samaj are practicing Amritdharis, a great portion of them ascribe to the Sanatanist beliefs of the Udasis and Nirmalas. Despite their differences on other matters, the RSS, which also opposed the Nanakshahi Calendar, saw the Sant Samaj as a natural ally and has kept close contact with its leadership over the last several years. At present Sant Samaj is being headed by chief of the Damdami Taksal Harnam Singh Dhumma.
- 23 Kiranjot Kaur (2003), "Why the Nanakshahi Calendar? It's the best possible", *The Tribune*, April 14, 2003, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030414/edit.htm#6>, accessed on 21/07/2016. Also see, Neena Chaudhary (2000), "New calendar divides Khalsa panth, January 31, 2000, available at <https://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jan/31punjab.htm>, accessed on 15/06/2016.
- 24 Neena Chaudhary (2000), "New calendar divides Khalsa panth", *January 31, 2000*, available at <https://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jan/31punjab.htm>, accessed on 15/06/2016.
- 25 "Vested interests led to Punjab religious crisis", *The Hindu*, February 6, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/02/06/stories/0406220k.htm>. Also see, "Calendar conflict continues", *The Tribune*, January 6, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000106/main7.htm>, accessed on 12/08/2016.

2000, urging the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib to resolve the differences related to Nanakshahi Calendar. The adoption and implementation of Nanakshahi Calendar took place in 2003 with endorsement by the SGPC under the seal of Akal Takht Sahib – the highest seat of temporal authority in Sikh tradition.²⁶ After numerous meetings, twists and turns, the Nanakshahi Calendar²⁷ was approved and adopted on March 28, 2003, under the auspices of Akal Takht Sahib.²⁸ Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, a senior SGPC member who has served as SGPC General Secretary for sixteen terms, explains the background behind the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar as follows²⁹:

“I was the member of the committee that passed the Nanakshahi Calendar. The Nanakshahi Calendar was ready in the year 1998 and Bhai Ranjit Singh was the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib at that time. As few doubts and objections regarding the Nanakshahi Calendar came to the notice of Bhai Ranjit Singh (the then Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib), he consulted them with Mr. Tohra, who was the then SGPC president and I was acting president at that time. To remove the weaknesses of the Calendar, an expert committee was constituted that kept on working on the Calendar and gave its recommendations. Ultimately, the Nanakshahi Calendar was passed in the year 2003.”³⁰

*(Translated from statements and explanation provided in Punjabi)*³¹

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- 26 This original Nanakshahi Calendar was adopted by the General House meeting of SGPC on March 29, 2003 and was implemented in practice after a month in June, 2003
- 27 Purewal's calendar begins with year 1469, the year of Guru Nanak Dev ji's birth. According to Purewal, the Bikrami calendar lacked accuracy when compared to the Common Era (CE). While the CE has an error margin of only 26 seconds, it is 20 minutes in the case of the Bikrami calendar. Purewal has also attempted to base his calendar on the traditional *Baramaha* concept mentioned in the holy Guru Granth Sahib, and has named the months accordingly. The calendar begins in the month of *Chet*, which means that March 14 would be its first day. See, “This is Why New Nankshahi Calendar is Important”, January 1, 2015 available at <http://dailysikhupdates.com/original-nanakshahi-calendar-important/>, 23. 10. 2017. Important Information at - “Sikh new year starts March 14”, *Hindustan Times*, March 11, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sikh-new-year-starts-march-14/story-.html>, accessed on 23/20/2017.
- 28 The Nanakshahi Calendar has been adopted in the SGPC meeting of 28 March 2003. After this letter was presented before the General House of the SGPC on March 29, 2003 by Prof. Kirpal Singh Bandugar, amidst chants of Jaikaras, the Nanakshahi Calendar was unanimously adopted. See, “Makkar-Badal let down Sikhs, Nanakshahi calendar goes Bikrami”, *World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/makkar-badal-let-down-sikhs-nanakshahi-calendar-goes-bikrami/>, accessed on 18/11/2017.
- 29 The statements, views and perspectives of senior SGPC leader Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (SGPC General Secretary for 16 terms) were noted during my detailed discussion with him. Information provided by him was extremely helpful in getting acquainted with role of SGPC in context to concerned issues and controversies.
- 30 Statement and explanation as provided by the senior SGPC member Sukhdev Singh Bhaur. His statements were noted during my discussion with him on the concerned issue of Nanakshahi Calendar.
- 31 As told by known Sikh leader Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (16 times SGPC General Secretary). Here is the original statement (in Punjabi) as given by Sukhdev Sing Bhaur: “ਜਦੋਂ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਪਾਸ ਹੋਇਆ ਸੀ, ਮੈਂ ਉਸ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦਾ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਸੀ। ਇਹ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ 1998 ਵਿੱਚ ਤਿਆਰ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ। ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਭਾਈ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਨ। ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕੋਲ ਕੁਝ ਗੱਲਾਂ ਆਈਆਂ ਅਤੇ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਟੋਹੜਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲ ਕੀਤੀ ਜੋ ਕਿ ਉਸ ਸਮੇਂ SGPC ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸਨ ਅਤੇ ਮੈਂ acting ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸੀ। ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੇ ਦੱਸਿਆ ਸੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਕੁਝ ਖਾਮੀਆਂ ਹਨ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ

The Nanakshahi Calendar was implemented during the SGPC Presidency of Kirpal Singh Badungar at Takhat Sri Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda) in the presence of Sikh religious and political leadership.³² As its implementation was ordered by the Akal Takht, it became a part of the daily personal, religious and professional affairs of majority of the Sikhs across the globe.³³ The Calendar was accepted in large number of Gurdwaras throughout the world. However, there is some controversy about the acceptance of the Calendar among certain orthodox sections of the Sikh community. Some orthodox Sikh organizations and factions united under the name of Sant Samaj (including Damdami Taksal and Buddha Dal Nihangs) have not accepted it.³⁴ The conception and creation of the Nanakshahi Calendar presented a flawless almanac to the Sikh community in search of its unique status.³⁵

The supporters of Nanakshahi Calendar argue that this calendar will make life much easier for Sikh community as their holy days will no longer move about the Calendar from year to year. Pal Singh Purewal, the creator of Nanakshahi Calendar, argues that it is most essential that Sikh community must have its own independent Sikh Calendar. Mr. Purewal and supporters of this view point hold that Nanakshahi Calendar is the symbol of the sovereignty of Sikhs, from which they will keep on getting inspiration to march towards their destiny.³⁶ For his unique contribution (creation of Nanakshahi Calendar) to the Sikh world, Pal Singh Purewal was honoured by SGPC President Bibi Jagir Kaur in Amritsar on June 30,

ਗੱਲਾਂ ਨੋਟ ਕਰਕ, ਫਿਰ ਵਿਦਵਾਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਬੈਠੀ। 1998 ਤੋਂ 2003 ਤੱਕ ਉਹ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਆਪਣੇ (ਨਿਰਣੇ ਸੁਝਾਅ) ਦਿੰਦੀ ਰਹੀ।
ਫਿਰ 2003 ਵਿੱਚ ਆ ਕੇ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਪਾਸ ਹੋ ਗਿਆ।”

- 32 As per information gathered from SGPC Headquarters – Teja Singh Samundri Hall (Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar) . For relevant information, also see “Sikh outfits release Nanakshahi calendar”, *The Tribune*, March 17, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/sikh-outfits-release-nanakshahi-calendar/54609.html>, accessed on 08/08/2016
- 33 “Akal Takhtjathedar releases Nanakshahi calendar, says majority Sikhs support it”, *The Times of India*, March 9, 2017, available on <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/akal-takht-jathedar-releases-nanakshahi-calendar-says-majority-sikhs-support-it/articleshow/57545342.cms>, accessed on 22/08/2016.
- 34 “Sant Samaj, Taksal reject calendar”, *The Tribune*, September 21, 2015, available at <https://www.sikhphilosophy.net/threads/sant-samaj-taksal-reject-calendar.5594/>. Also see, “Ajnala faction of DamdamiTaksal rejects both Sikh calendars”, *The Times of India*, January 1, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Ajnala-faction-of-Damdami-Taksal-rejects-both-Sikh-calendars/articleshow/45715013.cms>, accessed on 18/08/2016.
- 35 Birendra Kaur (2014), “Nanakshahi Calendar – A Boon, Not Bane (A Rejoinder to Nanakshahi Calendar–Boon or Bane)”, *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, July –September, available at https://sikhinstitute.org/july_2014/5-birendra%20Kaur.pdf, accessed on 17/07/2016.
- 36 “Global Sikh Council wants Nanakshahi calendar”, *The Tribune*, December 20, 2014, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/global-sikh-council-wants-nanakshahi-calendar/20358.html>, accessed on 16/10/2016. Also see, Speech and statement of Pal Singh Purewal made at Sikh Chicago Conference available at - “Adopt Mool (original) Nanakshahi Calendar, stop confusion, says Sikh Chicago meet”, *The World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/adopt-mool-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-chicago-meet/>, accessed on 21/12/2017.

1999. Earlier on February 22, 1999, the SGPC sub-committee that included several Sikh saints, unanimously recognized his contribution in the form of the new calendar and passed a resolution calling for honouring him.³⁷

Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC at loggerheads on Nanakshahi Calendar

The debate and controversy over Nanakshahi Calendar brought the two pioneer Sikh religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdawara Parbandhak Committee, at loggerheads with both taking the opposite stands. The Shiromani Gurdawara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) adopted and implemented Nanakshahi Calendar in December 1999 despite the clear directives from Akal Takht Sahib that the calendar should not be implemented until a general consensus emerged on the issue within the Sikh community. The controversy became more intense when Shiromani Gurdawara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) ignored the directions of Akal Takht Sahib and decided that an important festival should be celebrated on January 5 (2000), the date given by the new Calendar (Nanakshahi Calendar), while the Akal Takht Sahib insisted that it should be on January 14 (2000) as per the date in the traditional calendar.³⁸

In response to opposite and contradictory stand of Shiromani Gurdawara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the then Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Puran Singh excommunicated Bibi Jagir Kaur, (in January 2000) from the Sikh Panth.³⁹ Bibi Jagir Kaur was the then President of the leadin Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurdawara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). The 'Hukumnama' (edict) by Jathedar Giani Puran Singh on the letter head of Akal Takht Sahib was faxed to various newspapers in Punjab from Guna (Madhya Pradesh) where he had gone to attend a religious function.⁴⁰ The excommunication order signed by the

37 See, "Sikh scholar defends 'Nanakshahi' calendar he created", *The Times of India*, February 8, 2000, available at <http://fateh.sikhnet.com/Sikhnet/discussion.nsf/SearchView/29C049011AB2B9978725697A006D371F!OpenDocument>, accessed on 14/05/2016. Also see, Neena Chaudhary (2000), "New calendar divides Khalsa panth, January 31, 2000, available at <https://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jan/31punjab.htm>, accessed on 15/06/2016.

38 Neena Chaudhary (2000), "New calendar divides Khalsa panth, January 31, 2000, available at <https://www.rediff.com/news/2000/jan/31punjab.htm>, accessed on 15/06/2016.

39 See, "A clash of egos", *The Hindu*, April 03, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/04/03/stories/05032512.htm> For relevant information, also see, "Three Sikh Jathedars excommunicated", *The Hindu*, March 13, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/03/13/stories/01130003.htm>, accessed on 20/04/2016.

40 Through a decision which has no parallels in Sikh history, the Jathedar Akal Takht, Giani Puran Singh, (on January 25, 2000) issued a *Hukumnama* (religious directive) decreeing the excommunication of Bibi Jagir Kaur. The edict was issued from Guna in Madhya Pradesh while the Jathedar was on his way to Takht Hazur Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra. See, "In ferment again", *The Hindu*, February 6, 2000, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/2000/02/06/stories/05061344.htm>, accessed on 12/06/2016. Also see, "Excommunications - so fast only second time in history", *The Times of India*, July 20, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Excommunications-so-fast-only-second-time-in-history/articleshow/38747438.cms>, accessed on 12/06/2016. .

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Puran Singh, stated that Bibi Jagir Kaur was "*excommunicated from the Sikh Panth for repeatedly and brazenly violating the orders of the Akal Takht.*"⁴¹ The 'Hukamnama' (edict) further read: "*Though the undersigned (Giani Puran Singh) had opposed the Nanakshahi Calendar in a committee room of SGPC, yet Bibi Jagir Kaur presented 'Siropa' (robe of honour) to Pal Singh Purewal - a Canada-based Sikh who authored the 'jantri' (calendar) and implemented the same.*"⁴² Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Puran Singh also excommunicated three High Priests (Jathedars of other Takhts) – Prof. Manjit Singh, Jathedar Keshgarh Sahib, Giani Kewal Singh, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib and Giani Bhagwan Singh, head *Granthi* Akal Takht Sahib, by issuing another 'Hukamnama' on March 12, 2000. Jathedar Giani Puran Singh held them guilty of aligning with Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) chief Bibi Jagir Kaur.⁴³

The 'Hukamnama' (edict) from Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib excommunicating SGPC president Bibi Jagir Kaur stated that although the Akal Takht Sahib had withheld the adoption and implementation of the controversial Nanakshahi Calendar, yet Bibi Jagir Kaur (then President SGPC) marked the *Parkash Parv* (the birth anniversary) of Guru Gobind Singh on the basis of Nanakshahi Calendar.⁴⁴ The 'Hukumnama' issued by Jathedar Giani Puran Singh also appealed to the *Sikh Sangat* (Sikh masses) to sever all social and religious relations with Bibi Jagir Kaur and that she not be allowed to speak from any religious stage or Gurdwara, till she presented herself before the Akal Takht Sahib.⁴⁵ Jathedar Giani Puran Singh's note

41 "SGPC chief 'excommunicated' Can't go against Takht: Bibi Jagir Kaur", *The Tribune*, January 26, 200, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>. Also see, "A clash of egos", *The Hindu*, April 3, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/04/03/stories/05032512.htm>, accessed on 16/06/2016.

42 "SGPC chief 'excommunicated' Can't go against Takht: Bibi Jagir Kaur", *The Tribune*, January 26, 200, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>. See also, "A clash of egos", *The Hindu*, April 3, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/04/03/stories/05032512.htm>, accessed on 16/06/2016.

43 "Three Sikh Jathedars excommunicated", *The Hindu*, March 13, 2000, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/2000/03/13/stories/01130003.htm>, accessed on 12/03/2016. Also see, "Excommunications - so fast only second time in history", *The Times of India*, July 20, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Excommunications-so-fast-only-second-time-in-history/articleshow/38747438.cms>, accessed on 12/06/2016.

44 Sikh politico-religious circles were also surprised at the drastic step as no Jathedar excommunicated any Sikh from the *Panth* without following the set procedure. In this case Giani Puran Singh has not only taken the other Sikh high priests into confidence nor declared Bibi Jagir Kaur 'tankhaiya' as a prelude to ex-communication. For information See, "SGPC chief excommunicated Can't go against Takht : Bibi Jagir Kaur", *The Tribune*, January 26, 2007, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>, accessed on 17/06/2016.

45 In the wake of the excommunication of Bibi Jagir Kaur by the Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Puran Singh, an emergency meeting of the general house of the SGPC, the Dharm Parchar Committee and five Sikh High Priests was convened on . The meeting was attended by Bibi Jagir Kaur, Parkash Singh Badal, Chief Minister and other functionaries of the SGPC and the SAD. See, "SGPC chief 'excommunicated'

sharply attacked and condemned the then SGPC President for repeatedly ignoring and attempting to supersede the Akal Takht's position on the new Nanakshahi Calendar. This according to Jathedar Giani Puran Singh was also evident in Bibi Jagir Kaur's decision to honour Pal Singh Purewal, the architect of the Nanakshahi Calendar, with a ceremonial 'siropa'. Such intention and act of SGPC President was very much against the directions of Akal Takht Sahib, the highest seat of religious authority for the Sikhs where every Sikh bows with respect and dignity.⁴⁶

Baba Kashmira Singh, the head of Gurbani (*Gurmati*) Sidhant Pracharak Sant Samaj⁴⁷, justified the action of Giani Puran Singh, the then Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. In this context, he was firm to state: ***“Though the Sant Samaj wanted to solve the Nanakshahi calendar issue amicably, it was wrong on the part of Bibi Jagir Kaur to challenge the supremacy of Akal Takht time and again.”***⁴⁸ Baba Kashmira Singh asserted that Bibi Jagir Kaur had committed a blunder by challenging the directives of Akal Takht Sahib regarding the Calendar issue. On the other side, Gurbachan Singh Bachan, the then secretary SGPC, termed the directives by Jathedar Giani Puran Singh to excommunicate Bibi Jagir Kaur as ***“unacceptable” and “unprecedented in the history of Sikhs”***⁴⁹, on the basis that Jathedar did not follow the set procedure required to excommunicate a 'Sikh' from the Sikh *Panth* (Sikh community). Reacting to the situation of internal confrontation between two pioneer Sikh institutions, Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), Manjit Singh Calcutta, former Akali Dal leader and SGPC secretary categorically stated that: the concerned 'Hukumnama' (edict) was the direct outcome of the wrong policies adopted by the Badal dominated SGPC, which had challenged the supremacy of Akal Takht. Mr. Calcutta also pointed out that Bhai Ranjit Singh, the former Akal Takht Jathedar was sacked

Can't go against Takht: Bibi Jagir Kaur', *The Tribune*, January 26, 200, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main.htm>. See also, "A clash of egos", *The Hindu*, April 3, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/04/03/stories/05032512.htm>, accessed 16/06/2016.

46 Parveen Swami (2000), "The clergy vs the SGPC", *Frontline*, Volume 17 - Issue 03, Feb. 05 - 08, 2000, available at <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1703/17030310.htm>, accessed on 11/04/2016. Also see, "SGPC chief 'excommunicated' Can't go against Takht: Bibi Jagir Kaur", *The Tribune*, January 26, 200, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>, accessed on 28/09/2016.

47 Baba Kashmira Singh is head of the *Sidhant Sant Samaj or Gurbani (Gurmati) Sidhant Pracharak Sant Samaj*, a pro-Gurmat organization based in Jalandhar, Baba Kashmira Singh is the founder of SGL Charitable Hospital in Jalandhar which is part of Jan Sewa Trust he runs. He is known personality for formation of eye bank, anti drug addiction campaign, cancer eradication, old age home, anti-dowry drive, etc.

48 See, "SGPC meeting today", *The Tribune*, January 26, 2000, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>, accessed on 08/08/2016.

49 *ibid*

by the SGPC without following any rule.⁵⁰ The contradictory and opposite stands of premier Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, resulted in intense conflict and crisis within the Sikh politico-religious circles.⁵¹

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Sacked

On being excommunicated from the Sikh community by the ‘Hukamnama’ (edict) issued by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Bibi Jagir Kaur (the then SGPC chief) argued that the *Hukumnama* delivered by Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Puran Singh could have been the outcome of Jathedar being poorly advised by religious renegades. In the context, Bibi Jagir Kaur, said: “*I have never taken a single step against the glory of Akal Takht. I do not know what has prompted such an action from the Jathedar.*”⁵² Claiming the authority of SGPC over the appointment and removal of Jathedar Akal Takht, SGPC president Bibi Jagir Kaur pointedly referred to the fact that “*the SGPC is entirely competent to dismiss the Jathedar*”.⁵³ A campaign was launched against Jathedar Giani Puran Singh on the issue of *maryada* (the Sikh tradition) and many Sikh scholars alleged that Giani Puran Singh had violated the *maryada* by issuing an edict from a place other than Akal Takht Sahib. Ultimately, in sharp and very unprecedented reaction to the ‘Hukamnama’ of Akal Takht Sahib that ordered the excommunication of Bibi Jagir Kaur, Jathedar Giani Puran Singh was sacked from the esteemed position of the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib (March 28, 2000) by pro-Bibi Jagir Kaur SGPC executive committee members.⁵⁴ Giani Puran Singh was also suspended from the post of the *Granthi* (priest) of Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar). Jathedar Akal Takht, Giani Puran Singh was unprecedentedly sacked by SGPC executive without even being given the time to explain his position.⁵⁵

50 “SGPC chief ‘excommunicated’ Can’t go against Takht: Bibi Jagir Kaur”, *The Tribune*, January 26, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>, accessed on 16/10/2106.

51 Giani Puran Singh was appointed acting Jathedar Akal Takht on February 10, 1999 after placing Bhai Ranjit Singh (former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib) under suspension. Former Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh was given 30 days time by SGPC to explain his position. After he failed to send his explanation to the SGPC he was sacked as Jathedar and Giani Puran Singh was appointed as the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. Information based on records of SGPC regarding the appointment of Jathedar Akal Takht, Giani Puran Singh.

52 “SGPC chief ‘excommunicated’ Can’t go against Takht: Bibi Jagir Kaur”, *The Tribune*, January 26, 200, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000126/main4.htm>, accessed on 16/06/2016.

53 Parveen Swami (2000), “The clergy vs the SGPC”, *Frontline*, Volume 17 - Issue 03, Feb. 05 - 08, 2000, available at <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1703/17030310.htm>, accessed on 11/04/2016.

54 “Akal Takht Jathedar sacked”, *The Hindu*, March 29, 2000, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/thehindu/2000/03/29/stories/01290007.htm> Also see “Giani Puran Singh sacked 4 SGPC members excommunicated”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000329/main1.htm> accessed on 17/10/2016.

55 Sacked Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Puran Singh was posted to a historic Gurdwara in Muktsar Sahib. Information collected from SGPC Headquarters, Amritsar.

The then President of SGPC, Bibi Jagir Kaur, when asked by media-persons that whether she could have held the SGPC meeting after being excommunicated (as per the orders of Jathedar Akal Takht, Giani Puran Singh), she argued that the ‘Hukamnama’ (edict) was not accepted by the Sikh *Sangat* as Giani Puran Singh had issued the ‘Hukamnama’ in total violation of Sikh *maryada* (Sikh religious code) and ethics. Bibi Jagir Kaur firmly asserted that neither she nor other SGPC executive members could be treated as excommunicated.⁵⁶ However, Giani Puran Singh, challenged the validity of the decision of the SGPC executive which sacked him from the office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. He argued that executive members who were excommunicated from the Sikh *Panth* cannot take any such decision. On being asked by media-persons that if ex-communication would not cause legal obstacles to his taking such decisions (as per the provisions of Sikh Gurdwara Act 1925), Giani Puran Singh stated that as per *maryada* (Sikh tradition), no individual from Sikh community could have any social relations with excommunicated persons.⁵⁷

The history of appointing and sacking the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib was repeated after a gap of 13 months, when the same SGPC executive which had appointed Giani Puran Singh as Jathedar, also removed him unceremoniously.⁵⁸ On March 28, 2000, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti was appointed as the next Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib.⁵⁹ Immediately after taking charge as Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti along with high priests of other Takhts (on March 29, 2000), revoked all ‘Hukmnamas’ (edicts) issued from

56 “Giani Puran Singh sacked 4 SGPC members excommunicated”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000329/main1.htm> accessed on 17/10/2016.

57 Giani Puran Singh claimed that he had excommunicated four executive members of the SGPC at 2 p.m. while the decision of the SGPC executive to sack him as Jathedar was announced at 5 p.m. on March 28, 2000. As per this logic, his point was that excommunicated members had no right to take any action regarding the removal of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. See, “Giani Puran Singh sacked - 4 SGPC members excommunicated”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000329/main1.htm> accessed on 17/10/2016.

58 The decision to sack Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar, Giani Puran Singh was taken at a meeting of the SGPC's executive body chaired by the then SGPC president Bibi Jagir Kaur. Only eight members were present at the SGPC executive meeting which sacked Giani Puran Singh. Interestingly, even of the eight members present in the meeting : two Tohra loyalists — Mr Harbans Singh Manjpur and Mr Gurbax Singh Purain, and Mr Jagdhir Singh Katron SAD (Mann) member staged a walk out from the meeting on the plea that they could not participate in a meeting presided over by Bibi Jagir Kaur who had been excommunicated from the Sikh Panth. Information gathered from SGPC members and SGPC officials at SGPC Headquarter, Amritsar.

59 It need to be mentioned here that Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti was one of the five Sikh high priests who had challenged both the ‘hukmnamas’ of Giani Puran Singh issued on January 25, 2000 from Guna (Madhya Pradesh) and another issued on March 12, 2000 by which Bibi Jagir Kaur, Prof Manjit Singh, Giani Kewal Singh, Giani Bhagwan Singh and two SGPC members were excommunicated. For information see, “Giani Puran Singh sacked”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000329/main1.htm>, accessed on 19/10/2016.

January 25 to March 28, 2000, by previous Jathedar Giani Puran Singh.⁶⁰ The excommunication of SGPC President Bibi Jagir Kaur, three Sikh High Priests⁶¹: Prof Manjit Singh Sahib, Giani Kewal Singh and Giani Bhagwan Singh, and five executive members⁶² of the SGPC was revoked by Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti just few hours after his installation as Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib.⁶³ The joint directive issued by the Sikh High Priests (Takht Jathedars) described the ‘Hukamnama’ (edict) issued by sacked Jathedar Giani Puran Singh as “declarations” which were the product of his “narrow-mindedness”, which caused colossal damage to the Sikh *Panth*”.⁶⁴ This was the first time in the history of Akal Takht Sahib that the ‘Hukamnama’ (edict) issued by the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib was subsequently rejected by another set of Sikh High Priests (Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts).

The internal confrontation and conflict between the supreme seat of Sikh religious authority- the Akal Takht Sahib, and the largest representative body of Sikhs - Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), established few new precedents in the Sikh history. As Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Puran Singh excommunicated Bibi Jagir Kaur (SGPC chief) from the Sikh Panth, this was the first time in the Sikh institution's history that the head of the powerful SGPC was subjected to such severe punishment. **On the other hand, much more dangerous precedent was set when SGPC executive sacked the Jathedar Akal**

60 See, “Puran Singh not called to meeting- Sikh clergy may discuss RSS issue”, *The Tribune*, December 20, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20001220/main5.htm>. Also see, “Vedanti installed Acting Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000330/main2.htm>, accessed on 19/10/2016

61 While Bibi Jagir Kaur, SGPC President was ex-communicated by a controversial *Hukamnama* issued on January 25, 2000 from Guna (Madhya Pradesh), the three Sikh high priests (Takht Jathedars) and two SGPC members were ex-communicated by another *Hukamnama* issued from Akal Takht on March 12, 2000. Information gathered from SGPC members and SGPC officials at SGPC Headquarter, Amritsar.

62 Earlier, sacked Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Puran Singh had excommunicated three SGPC executive members including Mr Raghujit Singh Virk, Mr Satnam Singh Bhai Rupa, Mr Gural Singh while the fourth member Pritam Singh Bhatia who was awarded ‘tankhah’ was again ‘excommunicated’ from the Panth. Information gathered from SGPC members and SGPC officials at SGPC Headquarter, Amritsar.

63 Apart from Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, Giani Mohan Singh, head Granthi of Harmandir Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh and Giani Charan Singh — both Granthis of the Harmandir Sahb and Giani Rawel Singh - Granthi of Akal Takht were signatory to the joint resolution of the designated Jathedars of Takhts, which rejected all the ‘hukamnamas’ (edicts) issued by the sacked Jathedar Giani Puran Singh between January 25 and March 28, 2000. For relevant information see, “Hukamnamas revoked by new Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, March 30, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000330/main2.htm>. Also see, “Vedanti installed Acting Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000330/main2.htm>, accessed on 18/10/2016.

64 The three-page letter of the five Sikh designated priests on the letter head of Akal Takht says “the decision of revocation of ‘ex-communications’ was taken unanimously” as Giani Puran Singh had taken ‘anti-panthic’ and ‘anti-maryada’ decisions due to vested interests. See, “Hukamnamas revoked by new Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, March 30, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000330/main2.htm>. Also see, “Giani Puran Singh sacked”, *The Tribune*, March 29, 2000, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2000/20000329/main1.htm>, accessed on 18/10/2016.

Takht Sahib. This directly challenged the authority and jurisdiction of the most revered and sanctified institution of the Sikh community.⁶⁵

The issue of Nanakshahi Calendar led to intense debate and vigorous reactions in the Sikh religious and political circles.⁶⁶ The central characters in this have been the pioneer Sikh religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). Earlier battles have seen the several Akali factions wage war through their proxies in the Sikh theocratic establishment. On the issue of Nanakshahi Calendar, however, the rules of engagement have been altogether different. Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts (Head Priests) and Sikh politicians stand divided, with almost all the Akali factions backing the SGPC, and the entire religious establishment supporting Akal Takht Jathedar's authority.⁶⁷

Nanakshahi Calendar Amended

The controversy surrounding Nanakshahi Calendar took a new turn with the influential Sant Samaj urging Akal Takht Sahib to revert to the Bikrami Calendar in wake of the confusion created ever since the new version came into being in the year 2003. Some prominent Sikh organizations outside Punjab, and the Jathedars of Takht Patna Sahib (Bihar) and Takht Hazoor Sahib, Nanded (Maharashtra) continued to celebrate festivals and events related to Sikh Gurus as per the Bikrami Calendar.⁶⁸ Ultimately, owing to sharp criticism and reservations expressed by few influential religious groups and organizations, especially the

65 Parveen Swami (2000) , "The clergy vs the SGPC", *Frontline*, Volume 17 - Issue 03, Feb. 05 - 08, 2000, available at <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1703/17030310.htm>, accessed on 11/04/2016. Also see, "A clash of egos", *The Hindu*, April 3, 2000, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/2000/04/03/stories/05032512.htm>, accessed on 16/06/2016.

66 Creator of the Original 'Nanakshahi Calendar', Pal Singh Purewal informs that concerned committee of SGPC was asked not to fix dates for three festivals including Holla Mohalla, Diwali and Guru Nanak Dev Ji's *Prakash Parv* (birth anniversary). It was felt that there are customs and historical traditions involved with these festivals. Purewal explained: "*The committee did calculate dates up to the year 2020 while submitting the calendar. We hoped that by then the panth would fix the dates. However, this did not happen. One of the arguments against the Nanakshahi is that it goes against the dates given in Gurbani. If the Bikrami calendar is followed, then the dates of the events would keep changing and eventually go against what has been written in Gurbani. In the last 1500 years, the dates of Baisakhi have shifted from March 18 to April 14. This change would keep taking place if the Bikrami calendar is followed.*" As quoted Pal Singh Purewal an interview to *The Indian Express*'. See, "Amendments in Nanakshahi calendar behind date controversy: Purewal", *The Indian Express*, January 2, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/kids-hot-spot/news/amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-behind-date-controversy-purewal--37209.aspx>, accessed on 17/06/2016. Also see, Gurcharanjit Singh Lamba (2003), "A compromise calendar", *The Tribune*, April 14, 2003, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20030414/edit.htm#6>, accessed on 21/07/2016.

67 See, Parveen Swami (2000) , "The clergy vs the SGPC", *Frontline*, Volume 17 - Issue 03, Feb. 05 - 08, 2000, available at <https://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1703/17030310.htm>, accessed on 11/04/2016. Also see, "Akal Takht decides to form committee to resolve Nanakshahi calendar row", *Hindustan Times*, March 10, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/chandigarh/akal-takht-decides-to-form-committee-to-resolve-nanakshahi-calendar-row/story-OCJd0s8DOIIFhmCG2HxIhM.html>, accessed on 13/11/2016.

68 Information as gathered from officials of Takht Patna Sahib Management Committee, Patna (Bihar) and Takht Sri Hazur Sahib Management Board, Nanded (Maharashtra)

Sant Samaj, the original Nanakshahi Calendar which was introduced in 2003 was amended by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in the year 2010.⁶⁹ As per the amendments made in 2010, some important days like “sangrands” (beginning of every month) and four important Sikh religious occasions — *Gurta Gaddi Diwas* of Guru Granth Sahib, Martyrdom Day of Guru Arjan Dev and birth (*Parkash Parv*) and death anniversaries (*Jyoti Jot Smaun diwas*) of Guru Gobind Singh were to be observed as per the old traditional Bikrami Calendar.⁷⁰ Amidst chaos, the executive members of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) gave approval to bring new amendments in Nanakshahi Calendar.⁷¹ **The amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar is a fusion of original Nanakshahi Calendar and Bikrami Calendar.**⁷²

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh gave the nod to the amended calendar after Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), approved the changes in its executive meeting.⁷³ Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh directed the Sikh community to

69 Information based on discussion on amendments made in Nanakshahi Calendar in 2010 with some key members of SGPC and Sikh organizations like Dal Khalsa and United Akhali Dal. Also see, “Changes to Nanakshahi calendar now official”, January 5, 2010, available at <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/changes-nanakshahi-calendar-now-official>, accessed on 03/11/2016. Also see, “Amid row, SGPC releases Nanakshahi calendar” *Hindustan Times*, March 6, 2018.

70 The 2003 Original Nanakshahi Calendar followed the traditional Bikrami Calendar while incorporating certain events like the ‘Gurpurab’ (Parkash Parv) of Guru Nanak Dev, Diwali and few other festivals. However, the dates of the ‘Parkash Parv’ (birth day) and death anniversaries (*Jyoti Jot Smaun diwas*) of Guru Gobind Singh and certain other events related to Sikh Gurus did not coincide with the Bikrami Calendar. This created confusion among Sikhs regarding which calendar to follow. In order to remove this confusion and to have a more acceptable calendar, Akal Takht Sahib called for carrying out certain amendments and formed an 11-member committee which submitted its report. The report was thereafter, referred to the SGPC which gave its consent. Akal Takht Sahib announced that the calendar be revised. Information gathered through discussions and conversations held with SGPC members and officials, and official sources at Teja Singh Samundri Hall (SGPC Headquarters) and Akal Takht Secretariat, Amritsar.

71 The then SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar said that as per new amendments, now in future all the religious occasion like birth and death anniversaries of Sikh Gurus would be as per the existing calendars which was being followed by the Sikh community before the formation of Nanakshahi Calendar. Earlier the dates of the religious occasions as per the ‘Nanakshahi’ Calendar, followed by the community since 2003, were not matching with the general calendar. For relevant information see, “SGPC executive approves amendment in Nanakshahi calendar”, January 03, 2010, available at http://zeenews.india.com/news/punjab/sgpc-executive-approves-amendment-in-nanakshahi-calendar_592421.html, accessed on 18/10/2016. Also see, “Modified version of Nanakshahi calendar again sparks controversy, *Hindustan Times*, May 5, 2018.

72 The then SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar said that as per new amendments, now in future all the religious occasion like birth and death anniversaries of Sikh Gurus would be as per the existing calendars which was being followed by the Sikh community before the formation of Nanakshahi Calendar. Earlier the dates of the religious occasions as per the ‘Nanakshahi’ Calendar, followed by the community since 2003, were not matching with the general calendar. For relevant information see, “SGPC executive approves amendment in Nanakshahi calendar”, January 03, 2010, available at http://zeenews.india.com/news/punjab/sgpc-executive-approves-amendment-in-nanakshahi-calendar_592421.html, accessed on 18/10/2016. Also see, “Modified version of Nanakshahi calendar again sparks controversy, *Hindustan Times*, May 5, 2018.

73 Three out of 15 executive members— Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, Karnail Singh Panjoli and Bibi Ravinder Kaur -- boycotted the meeting held as they were opposed to the amendment. The amendments were

observe and follow all the Sikh religious occasions including birth and death anniversaries of Sikh Gurus as per new amendments approved by the SGPC. Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib claimed that final nod to the Calendar was given on the basis of approval sanctioned by high powered executive members of SGPC which was empowered to bring such amendments at any time in larger interest of the Sikh community.⁷⁴

On the occasion of the first day of the 542nd *Nanakshahi Samvat* (March 14, 2010), Jathedar Giani Gurbachan released the amended Nanakshahi Calendar from Akal Takht Sahib.⁷⁵ At the release of the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar on March 14, 2010,⁷⁶ Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh said - ***“The Calendar has been issued for every Sikh in India and abroad. I hope that every Sikh will accept this calendar and will pray for the progress of Sikh religion.”***⁷⁷ As the amended Nanakshahi Calendar was released under the auspices of Akal Takht Sahib, Avtar Singh Makkar (SGPC Chief) said: ***“The Calendar has been approved by the Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib. I request the entire Sikh community to keep the pride of the Akal Takht Sahib intact. It is the responsibility of every Sikh.”***⁷⁸ The amended Nanakshahi Calendar was released amid huge controversies as the changes made by SGPC executive body in the revised calendar had been vehemently opposed by a large section of Sikhs and numerous Sikh bodies, which had favoured the original Nanakshahi Calendar released in 2003.⁷⁹

approved in the meeting held at Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Amritsar on January 3, 2010. Information based on SGPC record (at SGPC Headquarters, Amritsar) regarding the Nanakshahi Calendar. Few SGPC officials were also consulted for getting the relevant information.

74 After giving nod to amended calendar, Jathedar Akal Takht informed that Nanakshahi Calendar with amendments would come into force from March, 2010. See also, “Akal Takht nod to calendar amendments”, January 4, 2010, available at <https://www.ndtv.com/cities/akal-takht-nod-to-calendar-amendments-408205>, accessed on 17/10/2016.

75 The calendar for year 2010-11 was dedicated to the first Sikh general Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. His portrait was published on the front page of the amended Nanakshahi calendar.

76 The amended Nanakshahi calendar was released on March 14, 2010 by Akal Takht Sahib by Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh from the balcony of the Akal Takht Sahib building inside the Golden Temple. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) chief Avtar Singh Makkar was also present on the occasion. See, “Akal Takht releases revised Nanakshahi Calendar of Sikhs”, March 14, 2010, available at <https://news.webindia123.com/news/articles/India/20100314/1464451.html>, accessed on 16/10/2016.

77 See, “Akal Takht nod to calendar amendments”, January 4, 2010, available at <https://www.ndtv.com/cities/akal-takht-nod-to-calendar-amendments-408205>. See also, “SGPC unveils Nanakshahi calendar in Amritsar”, March 14, 2010, available at <http://www.sify.com/news/sgpc-unveils-nanakshahi-calendar-in-amritsar-news-national-kdovudjddahsi.html>, accessed on 17/10/2016.

78 The SGPC chief, Avtar Singh Makkar said the calendar for the year 2010-11 was dedicated to Baba Banda Singh Bahadur as third centenary of his victory over Sirhind was being celebrated that year as ‘Sarhind Fateh Diwas’. See, “Amended Nanakshahi Calendar Released”, *The Tribune*, March 15, 2010. See also “SGPC unveils Nanakshahi calendar in Amritsar”, March 14, 2010, available at <http://www.sify.com/news/sgpc-unveils-nanakshahi-calendar-in-amritsar-news-national-kdovudjddahsi.html>, accessed on 18/10/2016.

79 See, “Nanakshahi Calendar controversy mars celebration of first installation of GGS”, *Times of India*, August 23, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/nanakshahi-calendar->

Amended Nanakshahi Calendar – Discord within the Sikh Bodies

The amendments made in the original Nanakshahi Calendar under the pressure of Sant Samaj were criticized and opposed by various Sikh organizations and groups across the globe. Numerous Sikh bodies and groups appealed to the Akal Takht Sahib to suspend the implementation of the SGPC-amended Nanakshahi Calendar on the basis that it would widen the divisions within the Sikh community. They opposed the amendments made by the SGPC's executive committee and demanded that these be withdrawn.⁸⁰ Prominent Sikh religious leaders like Giani Kewal Singh, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, senior SGPC member and sixteen times SGPC General Secretary (one of the very few SGPC functionaries who favour the original version Nanakshahi Calendar), and Sikh organizations like Dal Khalsa, All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF), Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Committee, American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (AGPC), Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC), etc. firmly opposed the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar and have been strongly pressing for the adoption of original version (2003) Nanakshahi Calendar.⁸¹

The members of largest representative body of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), were divided on the Calendar issue as many favoured the 2003 original version of Nanakshahi Calendar. Former SGPC secretary Manjeet Singh Calcutta felt that controversy could have been avoided had the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar stood by the Original Nanakshahi Calendar. In this context, Mr. Calcutta argued: "**Originality is lost by making amendments. We cannot call the 2010 version as our Calendar.**"⁸² When Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003 was amended in 2010 and the mandate of the executive was

controversy-mars-celebration-of-first-installation-of-ggs/articleshow/60195513.cms, accessed on 28/09/2017. Also see, "Know about the controversial Nanakshahi calendar", *Hindustan Times*, March 06, 2018, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ht-explainer-know-about-the-controversial-nanakshahi-calendar/story-UeKm0yTcDtat1FCRIel86K.html>, accessed on 21/03/2018.

80 "Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments to Nanakshahi Calendar", *The Dawn*, March 17, 2015, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1170098>, Accessed on 13/10/2017. Also see, "Restore Original Nanakshahi Calendar, demand Sikh bodies", *The Tribune*, March 15, 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/restore-original-nanakshahi-calendar-demand-sikh-bodies/377184.html>, accessed on 16/06/2017.

81 "Adopt Mool (original) Nanakshahi Calendar, stop confusion, says Sikh Chicago meet", *The World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/adopt-mool-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-chicago-meet/>, accessed on 21/12/2017. See, "Restore Original Nanakshahi Calendar, demand Sikh bodies", *The Tribune*, March 15, 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/restore-original-nanakshahi-calendar-demand-sikh-bodies/377184.html>. Also see, "Nanakshahi calendar author accuses Sant Samaj of vested interests", *The Times of India*, December 14, 2013, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Nanakshahi-calendar-author-accuses-Sant-Samaj-of-vested-interests/articleshow/27318519.cms>, accessed on 17/03/2017.

82 See, "Fresh controversy may hit Nanakshahi calendar", *Hindustan Times*, December 17, 2014, available at http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/fresh-controversy-may-hit-nanakshahi-calendar/story_y68HFEJ8rLXM2LJrn45vfM.html, accessed on 18/10/2016.

sought, SGPC executive committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli and SGPC General Secretary Sukhdev Singh Bhaur raised strong objections over the amendments. They both have been firm supporters of Pal Singh Purewal's original version of Nanakshahi Calendar.⁸³ Senior member (SGPC) and sixteen times General Secretary of SGPC, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, explained the withdrawal of 2003 original Nanakshahi Calendar and adoption of its amended version by the SGPC in the following words⁸⁴:

“The Nanakshahi Calendar was accepted and recognized by the Government of India. It was also accepted and adopted by Governments of foreign Nations. Even the public holidays were being observed as per the Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003. Then suddenly, under the influence of vote bank politics and other factors, the original Nanakshahi Calendar was withdrawn.”⁸⁵

*(English Translation of statement and explanation provided in Punjabi)*⁸⁶

Sukhdev Singh Bhaur further added:

“The original Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003 was withdrawn under the pressure of those who began to say that 2010 version Calendar was issued by Akal Takht Sahib, therefore, the Sikh community must accept and recognize the Calendar. At that stage, I pointed out that original Nanakshahi Calendar, was also issued from Akal Takht Sahib.”⁸⁷

*(English translation of statements made in Punjabi)*⁸⁸

Radical Sikh organization Dal Khalsa⁸⁹ also rejected the amended version of the Calendar on the basis that the changes were in sync with Hindu Bikrami Calendar, and

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- 83 Information based on discussion with some key members of SGPC on the issue of Nanakshahi Calendar.
- 84 Discussions with senior Sikh leader and former SGPC General Secretary, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, were highly beneficial. As he has been in thick of things in SGPC for so long, his insights, observations and perspectives in context to concerned issues were extremely valuable.
- 85 Statement and explanation as provided by the senior SGPC member Sukhdev Singh Bhaur. His statements were noted during my discussion with him on the concerned issue of Nanakshahi Calendar.
- 86 Original Statement (in Punjabi) made by senior SGPC leader and former General Secretary, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur: ‘ਹਿੰਦੁਸਤਾਨ ਦੀ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਮਨ ਲਿਆ, ਵਿਦੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਰਕਾਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਮਨ ਲਿਆ, ਸੂਬਾ ਸਰਕਾਰਾਂ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਮਨ ਲਿਆ ਅਤੇ ਛੁੱਟੀਆਂ ਵੀ 2003 ਵਾਲੇ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਮੁਤਾਬਿਕ ਹੀ ਹੋਣ ਲੱਗੀਆਂ। ਪਰ ਫਿਰ ਵੋਟਾਂ ਦੇ ਲਾਲਚ ਵਿਚ ਆ ਕੇ ਅਤੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਵ ਬੱਲੇ ਆ ਕੇ 2010 ਵਿੱਚ ਉਸ ਦਾ ਭੋਗ ਪਾ ਦਿੱਤਾ।’ The statements and explanations provided by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur in context to the Calendar issue were noted during my discussion with him.
- 87 Statement, information and explanation as provided by the senior SGPC member Sukhdev Singh Bhaur. His statements were noted during my discussion with him on the concerned issue of Nanakshahi Calendar.
- 88 Statement (in Punjabi) made by SGPC former General Secretary, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur: ‘ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਬੰਦ ਵੀ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਕਹਿਣ ਤੇ ਕੀਤਾ ਜੋ 2010 ਵਾਲੇ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਬਾਰੇ ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਕਹਿਣ ਲੱਗ ਪਏ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਹੁਕਮ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਹੀ ਜਾਰੀ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਮੰਨ ਲਵੇ ਜਾਂ ਸਵੀਕਾਰ ਕਰ ਲਵੇ ਤੇ ਮੈਂ ਸਵਾਲ ਕੀਤਾ ਸੀ ਕਿ ਜੇ 2003 ਵਾਲਾ Original ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਵੀ ਤਾਂ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਹੀ ਜਾਰੀ ਹੋਇਆ ਸੀ, ਉਹ ਕੋਈ ਮੁਸਲਿਮ ਲੀਗ ਨ ਜਾਰੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤਾ ਸੀ।’ The statements, insights and explanations provided by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur in context to the Calendar issue were noted during my discussion with him.
- 89 The Dal Khalsa, an influential Sikh organization also supports reverting back to the 2003 Original Nanakshahi Calendar. Dal Khalsa alleged that Damdami Taksal Chief Harnam Singh Dhuma is the main man behind the 2010 amendments in the Calendar. The organization claimed that Dhuma's move was aimed at pleasing the ‘hindutva’ forces. In December, 2013, Harnam Singh Dhuma, Chief of the

alleged that amendments were made by SGPC under pressure from Akali Dal leadership to appease the Sant Samaj. Dal Khalsa also slammed the SGPC and Akali Dal for killing the letter and spirit of the Nanakshahi Calendar and re-implementing Bikrami Calendar in the guise of ‘Nanakshahi’.⁹⁰ Kanwarpal Singh, the General Secretary of Dal Khalsa, argued that it was the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh’s (RSS) interference into the functioning of SGPC as the main factor responsible behind these amendments.⁹¹ Kanwarpal Singh said: **“It did not make sense to revert to the Bikrami Calendar at a time when Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) President Sukhbir Singh Badal and Giani Gurbachan Singh have demanded amending Article 25 (b) of the constitution which clubs Sikhs with Hindus.”**⁹² The Sikh hardliner party Dal Khalsa launched the Original 2003 version of Nanakshahi Calendar (as designed and prepared by Pal Singh Purewal and approved by the SGPC General House) for the year 2011-12 from Akal Takht Sahib. The original Nanakshahi Calendar was ratified by the Akal Takht Sahib in March-April 2003, but debunked by the SGPC in 2010.⁹³ On the release of ‘original’ Nanakshahi Calendar (for the year 2011-12), Dal Khalsa chief Harchranjit Singh Dhama alleged:

“The SGPC has killed the letter and spirit of the Nanakshahi calendar by mixing it with Bikrami calendar, which had its roots in Hinduism. We believe the amended version has an imprint of RSS ideology.”⁹⁴

Damdami Taksal moved an application before Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh to revert to the traditional Bikrami Calendar which the Sikhs followed before the Nanakshahi calendar came into effect. But, the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar continues to maintain silence over the issue. Information based on in depth-discussion with members of Dal Khalsa at Amritsar.

- 90 The President of Sikh Youth of Punjab (SYP), the youth wing of Dal Khalsa, Paramjit Singh, said, “We believe the amended version has an imprint of RSS ideology, hence we vowed to stick to original version and observe all gurburab and festivals according to it”. See, “Nanakshahi calendar discord: SYP to stick to original version” *The Times of India*, August 28, 2016, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ludhiana/Nanakshahi-calendar-discord-SYP-to-stick-to-original-version/articleshow/53901311.cms>, accessed on 17/03/2017. Also see, “Nanakshahi calendar author accuses Sant Samaj of vested interests”, *The Times of India*, December 14, 2013, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Nanakshahi-calendar-author-accuses-Sant-Samaj-of-vested-interests/articleshow/27318519.cms>, accessed on 17/03/2017.
- 91 See, “Purewal flays changes in Nanakshahi calendar Says it is due to vote-bank politics”, *The Tribune*, February 18, 2011, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20110218/main7.htm>, accessed on 17/10/2016
- 92 “Fresh controversy may hit Nanakshahi calendar”, *Hindustan Times*, December 17, 2014, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/fresh-controversy-may-hit-nanakshahi-calendar/story-y68HFEJ8rLXM2LJrn45vfM.html>, accessed on 11/10/2017.
- 93 Dal Khalsa members gathered at the Akal Takht Sahib on (March 13, 2011) on the eve of Sikh New Year as per Nanakshahi Calendar (March 14) and released it after performing *Ardaas* (Sikh Prayer). The Dal Khalsa members dropped a copy of the original Nanakshahi Calendar (for the year 2011-12) along with a petition addressed to Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh at his official residence at Amritsar. For information see, “Nanakshahi Calendar: Dal Khalsa releases ‘original’ version”, *The Indian Express*, March 14, 2011, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/nanakshahi-calendar-dal-khalsa-releases-original-version/>, accessed on 19/10/2016.
- 94 “Dal Khalsa releases original version of Nanakshahi Calendar”, *The American Punjabi News*, March 13, 2011, available at <http://dal-khalsa-releases-original-version-of-nanakshahi-calendar&catid=24&Itemid=54>, accessed on 19/10/2016.

Dal Khalsa, the radical Sikh group, views the amendments in the original Nanakshahi Calendar as “*object surrender in the face of the expansionist designs of Hindu leaders aiming to subsume the Sikh religion and identity.*”⁹⁵ The Sikh organization alleged that Akali Dal leadership under the influence of a section of the Sant Samaj tactfully reverted to Bikrami Calendar but deceitfully retained “Nanakshahi” name.⁹⁶ The leaders of Dal Kahlsa claimed that changes made in the Calendar have diluted the uniqueness of the Sikh almanac. While asserting that Sikh community is facing serious identity crisis, Dal Khalsa chief Harchranjit Singh Dhama said, “*We will redouble our efforts to deal effectively and credibly with the challenges dogging the identity and rightful political aspirations of the Sikh Nation.*”⁹⁷ Dal Khalsa leader and spokesperson Kanwar Pal Singh argued that joint efforts being made by Akali Dal and SGPC to revert to the traditional Hindu Bikrami Calendar was a part of the larger conspiracy hatched by anti-panthic elements to cause severe setback to the distinct and separate identity of the Sikhs.⁹⁸

Sikh hardliner organization Dal Khalsa in a concerted attempt to step up its campaign to restore the original 2003 Nanakshahi Calenda, launched the original version of Nanakshahi Calendar for the year 2017-2018 (*Nanakshahi 549 Samvat*).⁹⁹ Similarly Dal Khalsa, earlier in March 2011, had opposed and rejected the 2010 amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar, and then released the original Nanakshahi Calendar (for the year 2011-12) from Akal Takht Sahib. On the occasion of the launch of original Nanakshahi Calendar (for the year 2017-18), the Dal Khalsa party President Harnam Singh Cheema said: “*We are determined to restore the Nanakshahi calendar to its pristine glory. The Bikrami khichdi will not work for long.*”¹⁰⁰ Dal Khalsa spokesperson, Kanwarpal Singh asserted: “*Nanakshahi Calendar is no ordinary*

95 ibid

96 See, “Dal Khalsa releases Original Nnakshahi Calendar (*Samvat 549*) from Shri Akal Takht Sahib”, March 14, 2017, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2017/03/14/dal-khalsa-releases-original-nanakshahi-calender-samvat-549-shri-akal-takhat-sahib/>, accessed on 12/11/2017.

97 ibid

98 Sant Samaj firm on Bikrami calendar, hands over memo to Takht Jathedar”, *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sant-samaj-firm-on-bikrami-calendar-hands-over-memo-to-takht-jathedar/story-.html>, accessed on 17/08/2016. Also see, “Implementation of the original Nnanakshahi Calendar is vital for the unity of the Sikhs : SYP”, December 21, 2014, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2014/12/21/implementation-of-the-original-nanakshahi-calendar-is-vital-for-the-unity-of-the-sikhs-syp/>, accessed on 21/09/2016.

99 Dal Khalsa leadership gathered at Akal Takht Sahib and after performing ‘Ardas’ in a simple ceremony, they released the original 2003 version Nanakshai Calendar of current year (2017-18) and distributed to the Sikh Sangat gathered on the occasion. . Information as gathered from the concerned event at Akal Takht Sahib, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar. The discussion with an important member of Dal Khalsa is also the source of the information.

100 “Dal Khalsa releases Nanakshahi Calendar”, *United News of India*, March 14, 2017, available at <http://www.uniindia.com/dal-khalsa-releases-nanakshahi-calendar/states/news/810567.html>, accessed on 10/11/2017.

*matter. It is a manifestation of distinct identity and winning that back is a step towards regaining Sikh sovereignty. The Calendar is a clear symbol of the Sikhs as a separate people set up and nurtured by the Gurus.”*¹⁰¹

The leaders of various Sikh bodies voiced their concern against the mixing of Nanakshahi Calendar (solar calendar) with Bikrami Calendar (lunar calendar). The resolution to this effect was passed at a convention attended by numerous Sikh organizations that included: Dal Khalsa, SAD (Panch Pardani), Shiromani Khalsa Panchayat, Shiromani Panthic Council, Akal Federation, Sikh Students Federation, etc.¹⁰² These Sikh bodies and group, in consultation with Gurdwara Management bodies and Singh Sabha's within the country and Sikh Diaspora, also resolved to convene the Sikh conclave on March 14 (2010) to mark the first day of the Sikh New Year¹⁰³ as per the original Nanakshahi Calendar.¹⁰⁴ In March 2015 (at Jalandhar), a group of around 60 Sikh organisations from Punjab as well as countries such as US and UK got together and jointly released the “original” Nanakshahi Calendar *Samwat 547* (for the year 2015-16).¹⁰⁵ The state president of Sikh Sewak Society (International), Parminderpal Singh Khalsa, alleged that the calendar published by SGPC and released by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib was ‘Nanakshahi’ in name but ‘Bikrami’ in character. The Sikh Sewak Society argued that there is only one Nanakshahi Calendar that came into force in 2003, whose architect was Pal Singh Purewal.¹⁰⁶ The Sikh organization alleged those at the helm of the Sikh affairs were working under the pressure of the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS) and non- Sikh Deras that wanted the Sikh community to revert to the Bikrami Calendar. The Sikh organization opposing the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar dubbed this SGPC move as “vote-bank politics” and openly blamed the Akali Dal for having abolished the original Calendar for their political gains.¹⁰⁷

Numerous Sikh groups and organizations including: Dal Khalsa, the Akali Dal (Delhi) led by Paramjit Singh Sarna, Akal Purkh ki Fauj, Panthic Taal Mel Sangthan, All India Sikh

101 *ibid.*

102 See, “Withdraw amendments in Nanakshahi calendar: Sikh bodies”, January 17, 2010, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-withdraw-amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-bodies-1335904>, accessed on 19/10/2016

103 According to the Nanakshahi Calendar, Sikh New Year begins with Chet 1. This corresponds to March 14 in Gregorian or Common Era Calendar.

104 “Withdraw amendments in Nanakshahi calendar: Sikh bodies”, January 17, 2010, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-withdraw-amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-bodies-1335904>, accessed on 19/10/2016

105 See, “Sikh outfits release Nanakshahi calendar”, *The Tribune*, March 17, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/sikh-outfits-release-nanakshahi-calendar/54609.html>, accessed on 21/10/2017.

106 *ibid.*

107 *ibid.*

Students Federation (AISSF), and a number of others have lent their support to the Nanakshahi Calendar.¹⁰⁸ For releasing the amended Nanakshahi Calendar, SGPC was also criticized by Panthak Talmel Sangathan, an umbrella organization of Sikh outfits, for "*misleading community by terming Bikrami Calendar as Nanakshahi*".¹⁰⁹ Panthak Talmel Sangathan convener, Kewal Singh, while dubbing this move by SGPC as an act of "deceit", argued that the 'new calendar' (amended Calendar) could not be called Nanakshahi Calendar. Kewal Singh also appealed to the Sikh community and Sikh religious organizations to reject the amended calendar and adopt the original Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003 to observe the Sikh events.¹¹⁰ Strongly favouring the adoption of Purewal created original version (2003) Nanakshahi Calendar, noted Sikh scholar Balwant Singh, who was also the member of the team set up for finalization of Nanakshahi Calendar, stated: "*Sant Samaj members have no scientific reason behind their move. It is their vested interest only that they want to go back to the Bikrami Calendar.*"¹¹¹ The Sikh bodies, leaders and scholars opposing the amended Nanakshahi Calendar were of the firm view that the amendments made in the original Nanakshahi Calendar were inspired and encouraged by 'Hindutva' forces, and the changes amounted to 'saffronisation' of the unique Sikh Calendar.¹¹²

Removal of Takht Damdama Sahib Jathedar

As per the aspirations of the majority of Sikh religious groups and organizations, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib Balwant Singh Nandgarh advocated the adoption of original Nanakshahi Calendar implemented by Akal Takht Sahib in 2003.¹¹³ However, under the

108 See, "Sant Samaj firm on Bikrami calendar, hands over memo to Takht Jathedar", *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sant-samaj-firm-on-bikrami-calendar-hands-over-memo-to-takht-jathedar/story-KOeVD5xjPa7TFOG69PTw4N.html>, accessed on 17/08/2016.

109 "End of road for Nanakshahi calendar, virtually", *The Tribune*, March 15, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/end-of-road-for-nanakshahi-calendar-virtually/53733.html>, accessed on 07/07/2016.

110 "SGPC Virtually Ends Nanakshahi Calendar", March 16, 2015, available at <http://singhstation.net/2015/03/sgpc-virtually-ends-nanakshahi-calendar/>. accessed on 20/10/2017. Also see, "End of road for Nanakshahi calendar, virtually", *The Tribune*, March 15, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/end-of-road-for-nanakshahi-calendar-virtually/53733.html>, accessed on 07/07/2016.

111 See, "Nanakshahi calendar author accuses Sant Samaj of vested interests", *The Times of India*, December 14, 2013, available at https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Nanakshahi_calendar-author-accuses-Sant-Samaj-of-vested-interests/articleshow/27318519.cms accessed on 04/05/2017.

112 See, "Withdraw amendments in Nanakshahi calendar: Sikh bodies", January 17, 2010, available at <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-withdraw-amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-bodies-1335904>, accessed on 19/10/2016.

113 "Nandgarh celebrates Gurburb following Nanakshahi calendar", *Hindustan Times*, January 5, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/nandgarh-celebrates-gurburb-following-nanakshahi-calendar/story.html>, accessed on 11/02/2017. Also see, "Nandgarh committed to Nanakshahi calendar", *The Tribune*, January 1, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/nandgarh-committed-to-nanakshahi-calendar/24785.html>, accessed on 11/02/2017.

pressure from an inflectional organization- the Sant Samaj’, the original Nanakshahi Calendar was amended by SGPC as per Bikrami Calendar in 2010. Since then, Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh had opposed the amendments made by SGPC in the Nanakshahi Calendar (in 2010). Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib says that Bikrami Calender creates confusion on dates of historical Sikh days, and due to Bikrami calendar, important days related to Sikh Gurus are gradually extending further. The Jathedar argued that: **“If Sikhs continue to celebrate days as per Bikrami Calender, then Gurbani would no longer remain as factual.”**¹¹⁴ Jathedar Nandgarh accused Hindu right-wing organisation Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) for the amendments in original Nanakshahi Calendar, and pushing the SGPC for reverting back to Bikrami Calendar. Explaining the importance of original Nanakshahi Calendar and recognizing it as manifestation of distinct and separate identity of Sikhs, Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh says:

“All Sikh children know that the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi is on October 2 because it is celebrated every year on the same day. They do not, however, remember the birth anniversaries of Sikh Gurus, since the Bikrami Calendar keeps changing the dates every year. How do we blame them if they have lost touch with Sikh history. Nanaksahi calendar, as symbol of separate Sikh identity, can solve this problem.”¹¹⁵

In 2014, the Sikh Clergy (Takht Jathedars), announced that Guru Gobind Singh’s birth anniversary (*Gurpurb*) will be celebrated on December 28 (2014), as per the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar. Thus, the SGPC celebrated the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh on December 28, following the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar.¹¹⁶ As this date (December 28, 2014- as per amended Nanakshahi Calenadar) for the ‘Gurpurab’ celebrations coincided with the Martyrdom Day of the *Sahibzadas* (Tenth Guru’s sons), the Sikh clergy’s move was widely criticized from various Sikh quarters.¹¹⁷ Reacting to this decision taken by Sikh clergy and SGPC leadership, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib, invincibly argued that it will be wrong to celebrate the *Parkash Parv* (birth anniversary) of

114 See, “Jathedar Nandgarh Asks Sikhs to Celebrate Gurpurb of Guru Gobind Singh Ji on Jan 5”, December 15, 2014, available at <https://www.sikh24.com/2014/12/15/breaking-jathedar-nandgarh-asks-sikhs-to-celebrate-gurpurb-of-guru-gobind-singh-ji-on-jan-5>, accessed on 15/02/2017.

115 *ibid.*

116 “Speculation rife over SGPC ousting Nandgarh”, *The Times of India*, January 12, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Speculation-rife-over-SGPC-ousting-Nandgarh/articleshow/45847374.cms>, accessed on 11/02/2017.

117 The rift in the Sikh community came to the fore after the Sikh clergy at Takht Shri Patna Sahib made it clear that they would celebrate Gurpurab on December 28. Even the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), which is also ruled by the SAD, decided to celebrate Gurpurb on December 28, 2014

Guru Gobind Singh on the day that coincides with the Martyrdom Day of *Sahibzadas* (Guru Gobind Singh ji's sons).¹¹⁸

Differing with the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib Balwant Singh Nandgarh openly supported original Nanakshahi Calendar and appealed Sikhs to celebrate *Parkash Gurburab* (birth anniversary) of Sri Guru Gobind Singh on January 5 (2015), date which is in accordance to original Nanakshahi Calendar. Keeping firm on his stand to abide by original (2003) Nanakshahi Calendar, Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh celebrated the *Parkash Parv* (birth anniversary) of Guru Gobind Singh on January 5 (2015) – as per the original Nanakshahi Calendar.¹¹⁹

Amidst the controversy arising out of diametrically opposite stands of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh¹²⁰ on Nanakshahi issue, the two factions came two flashpoint. Calendar came to flashpoint. Reacting strongly, SGPC executive committee, on January 17, 2015, sacked the Takht Damdama Sahib Jathedar.¹²¹ The 12 year stint of Balwant Singh Nandgarh as Takht Damdama Sahib Jathedar came to an abrupt end when SGPC removed him by a majority vote amid opposition from some members of the executive committee of SGPC.¹²² The SGPC executive in its statement said: ***“Jathedar Giani Balwant Singh Nandgarh is relieved of his duties for creating confusion and division in the Sikh community, disobeying orders of Akal Takht, causing a tussle between Takhts and disrespecting the Guru Granth Sahib.”***¹²³

118 “Nandgarh committed to Nanakshahi calendar”, *The Tribune*, January 1, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/nandgarh-committed-to-nanakshahi-calendar/24785.html>, accessed on 11/02/2017.

119 Marking the Gurburab celebrations, the Akhand Path Sahib (non-stop recitation) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib with Bhog ceremony on January 5 (2015) was held at the residence of Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh. Jathedar was willing to celebrate the Gurburab on January 5, 2015 (as per original Nanakshahi Calendar) at Takht Damdama Sahib but SGPC did not allow him to do so. Then he came to observe the sacred day at his residence. Earlier Jathedar Nandgarh also did not participate in the Nagar Kirtan to mark Gurburab celebrations (birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh) organized by SPGC at Takht Sri Damdama Sahib on Dec 28, 2014.

120 Believed to be architect of removing Guru Granth Sahib from small Deras where the Sikh tenets were not properly followed, Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh also remained at the forefront when he firmly opposed Dera Sacha Sauda in 2007. Jathedar Nandgarh also never took any salary from SGPC which the Takht Jathedars are entitled to.

121 “SGPC removes Takht Sri Damdama Sahib Jathedar” *Business Standard*, January 17, 2015, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/sgpc-removes-takht-sri-damdama-sahib-jathedar-115011700520_1.html, accessed on 30/01/2017.

122 “Amid ‘rift’, SGPC removes Nandgarh as Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, January 18, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/amid-rift--sgpc-removes-nandgarh-as-jathedar/31403.html>, accessed on 14/02/2017. Also see, “ਸਥਾਪਤੀ ਨੂੰ ਰਾਸ ਨਹੀਂ ਆਇਆ ਹਲ ਵਾਹਕ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ” *Sikh Sangarsh*, January 18, 2015, available at <http://sikhsangharsh.com/21440>, accessed on 04/02/2017.

123 SGPC handed the additional charge of Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib to Giani Gurmukh Singh who was serving as the Head Granthi of Akal Takht Sahib at that time.

The removal of Jathedar Giani Balwant Singh Nandgarh from the office of Takht Damdama Sahib Jathedar was almost a certainty as he displeased the SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leadership by refusing to change his stand on the Nanakshahi Calendar. Jathedar Nandgarh's staunch support for the original Nanakshahi Calendar earned him the wrath of the pro-Sanatan Sant-Samaj which along with 150 members of the SGPC had submitted memorandums seeking his immediate dismissal from the Takht.¹²⁴ The Jathedar took a bold and principled stand in favour of the original Nanakshahi calendar which irked Akali Dal leadership and the Sant Samaj.¹²⁵

The unceremonious removal of Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh from the office of Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib was strongly condemned by various Sikh organizations in Punjab and abroad, but not surprisingly welcomed by Sant-Samaj Deras and their proponent.¹²⁶ In context to unceremonious removal of Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib by SGPC over the issue of Nanakshahi Calendar, senior SGPC member Karnail Singh Panjoli said: *"The RSS is trying to finish off the distinct identity of the Sikhs and the original Nanakshahi Calendar is being targeted under this conspiracy. We want the original Nanakshahi calendar of 2003 to be implemented. Nandgarh was raising voice for it, but it didn't go down well with the anti-Panthic forces."*¹²⁷ The SGPC's decision to remove Jathedar Nandgarh was opposed and condemned by various Sikh activists, scholars and even by few members of SGPC itself.¹²⁸ The controversial decision had opposition from within

124 See, "Jathedar Nandgarh removed, replaced with a Badal Yes Man", January 18, 2015, available at <http://www.panthic.org/index.php>, accessed on 15/02/2017,

125 "SGPC gearing up to remove Nandgarh", *Hindustan Times*, January 11, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sgpc-gearing-up-to-remove-nandgarh/story-Ow.html>, accessed on 14/02/2017.

126 "Jathedar Nandgarh removed, replaced with a Badal Yes Man", January 18, 2015, available at <http://www.panthic.org/index.php>, accessed on 15/02/2017.

127 "Experts question legality of Nandgarh's removal", *The Tribune*, January 18, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/experts-question-legality-of-nandgarh-s-removal/31494.html>, accessed on 15/02/2017.

128 Two SGPC executive members Bhajan Singh Shergill and Mangal Singh Mumbai — opposed the move to remove Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh. Both of them who were very critical of the decision to remove Jathedar Nandgarh said that the decision taken by the SGPC was illegal as Takht Sahib Jathedars could be removed only by the SGPC's General House. Former DSGMC chief Paramjit Singh Sarna, noted lawyer HS Phoolka and former Sikh Gurdwara Judicial Commission chairman KS Patti also condemned the SGPC executive committee's controversial decision to remove the Takht Jathedar on the grounds that SGPC executive was only functioning as a caretaker body and, thus, it did not have right to take a major decision like removing a Jathedar. SGPC executive committee was working as caretaker body and new House was yet to take over as Sehajdhari appeal remained pending in Supreme Court at that time. See, "Experts question legality of Nandgarh's removal", *The Tribune*, January 18, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/experts-question-legality-of-nandgarh-s-removal/31494.html>, accessed on 15/02/2017

SGPC establishment also.¹²⁹ Sikh organizations alleged that the unceremonious decision to sack the Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib was taken under political pressure. The Jathedar of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Giani Balwant Singh Nandgarh, alleged that it was Rashtriya Swam SewakSangh (RSS), the Hindu right-wing organization, behind the controversial changes in the original Nanakshahi Calendar. Jathedar Nandgarh categorically stated that issue of amendments in Nanakshahi Calendar made under the pressure of RSS is a serious attack by radical Hindu organization (RSS) on separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs. In this context, Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda), Giani Balwant Singh Nandgarh, stated:

“The changes in the Nanakshahi Calendar were being affected on the instance and directions of RSS. RSS wants to challenge the Sikh identity by saying that Sikhs were part of the Hindu religion which is absolutely untrue and wrong. RSS has a targeted approach towards creating a breach between Sikhs.”¹³⁰

On his removal from the office of Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib, Balwant Singh Nandgarh, argued:

“I was removed as Jathedar Takht Damdama Sahib due to my firm stand on the Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003. It was not acceptable to the RSS that Sikhs have a separate calendar. RSS made Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) and SGPC go for the Bikrami Calendar. The SGPC got after me for my firm stand on separate Sikh Identity.”¹³¹

(Statement given during an interview to Times of India)

Jathedar Balwant Singh Nandgarh also got the support of known Sikh leader and former SGPC secretary late Manjeet Singh Calcutta. Mr. Calcutta appreciated the bravery of Jathedar Nandgarh by saying: ***“Most of the Jathedars are mere stooges of the Akali Dal, but Jathedar Nandgarh is the one, who at times, voices his righteous opinion without any fear.”***¹³² The pro-Nanakshahi Calendar Sikh organisations alleged that the move to remove Jathedar Nandgarh was orchestrated by Shiromani Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal.

129 “Amid ‘rift’, SGPC removes Nandgarh as Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, January 18, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/amid-rift--sgpc-removes-nandgarh-as-jathedar/31403.html>, accessed on 14/02/2017.

130 See, “RSS Deras Behind Nanakshahi Calendar Controversy: Jathedar Nandgarh”, December 15, 2014, available at <https://www.sikh24.com/2014/12/15/rss-deras-behind-nanakshahi-calendar-controversy-jathedar-nandgarh/#.WjUmitKWbIU>. Also see, “Jathedar Nandgarh Being Opposed By Badal”, December 18, 2014, available at <http://sikhsangat.com/index.php?/topic/76143-jathedar-nandgarh-being-opposed-by-badal/&page=3>, accessed on 10/09/2016.

131 “Firm Stand on Nanakshahi calendar led to my Removal: Nandgarh”, *The Times of India*, January 18, 2015, available on <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Firm-stand-on-Nanakshahi-calendar-led-to-my-removal-Nandgarh/articleshow/45926884.cms>, accessed on 17/02/2017.

132 “Calendar row: Nandgarh stands firm, SAD draws flak”, *The Tribune*, December 19, 2014, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/calendar-row-nandgarh-stands-firm-sad-draws-flak/19879.html>, accessed on 15/-2/2017.

These Sikh bodies and leaders also accused Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh and the then SGPC President, Avtar Singh Makkar, of succumbing to political pressure. For his firm stand in favour of original Nanakshahi Calendar (2003), Takht Damdama Sahib Jathedar Giani Balwant Singh got the support of large section of the *Panthic* groups and organisations that included SAD (Amritsar), SAD (Panch Pardhani), SAD (Delhi), Dal Khalsa, etc.¹³³

Sikh Diaspora and Nanakshahi Calendar

The Sikh Diaspora has also openly criticized the SGPC move to make amendments in the original Nanakshahi Calendar without taking the community into confidence. Pal Singh Purewal, a Canadian Sikh who is the creator of the original Nanakshahi Calendar, questioned the urgency behind the modification of the Nanakshahi Calendar¹³⁴ and argued that the changes made in the Calendar will push the Nanakshahi Calendar back to Bikrami Calendar, and it will be a retrograde step. Mr. Purewal stated: ***“If these changes made by SGPC are accepted then it will be a misnomer to call it a Nanakshahi calendar.”***¹³⁵ According to Purewal, nearly 80 per cent of the Gurdwaras abroad are following the original Nanakshahi Calendar. In the context, Pal Singh Purewal claimed that: ***“There has been excellent acceptance of Nanakshahi Calendar by Sikhs and Sikh organizations abroad because they are not influenced by politics in Punjab.”***¹³⁶ He blamed “vote-bank politics” for the amendments made in the Nanakshahi Calendar. Purewal claimed that all Sikh organizations and groups in the Diaspora accepted and followed original version (2003) of Nanakshahi Calendar, except for some fringe groups.¹³⁷ The architect of the original Nanakshahi Calendar,

133 “Controversy over Nanakshahi Calendar, SGPC may remove Jathedar Nandgarh”, *The Tribune*, January 12, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/sgpc-may-remove-jathedar-nandgarh/28956.html>, accessed on /14/02/2017.

134 Pal Singh Purewal, a Canada based Sikh intellectual who created the Nanakshahi calendar , objected to the amendments saying it was highly objectionable as any change in the calendar would reduce it to a *“carbon copy of Bikrami Calendar”*. He claimed the Nanakshahi calendar was based on religious, historical and scientific research of many years. Earlier, Pal Singh Purewal had requested Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar to consult him before making any change in it but in vain. See, “Akal Takht nod to calendar amendment”, January 4, 2010, available at <https://www.ndtv.com/cities/akal-takht-nod-to-calendar-amendments-408205>, accessed on 15/10/2016.

135 See, “SGPC Nanakshahi Amendments Questioned”, January 4, 2010, available at <http://panthic.org/articles/5197>, accessed on 17/04/2016.

136 “Re-implement original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal”, *The Times of India*, March 13, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Re-implement-original-Nanakshahi-Calendar-Purewal/articleshow/46548847.cms>. Also see, “Akal Takht should re-implement the original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal”, March 12, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/international/news/akal-takht-should-re-implement-the-original-nanakshahi-calendar-purewal--38543.aspx>, accessed on 19/06/2016.

137 “Purewal flays changes in Nanakshahi calendar - Says it is due to vote-bank politics”, *The Tribune*, February 18, 2011, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20110218/main7.htm>, accessed on 15/10/2016

Pal Singh Purewal, logically criticised the amendments and informed that as a result of these changes, Guru Gobind Singh's *Parkash Parv* (birth anniversary) *would be celebrated twice in 2017, 2022 and 2025, while it would not fall in 2015, 2018 and 2023.*¹³⁸

Canada-based Sikh Pal Singh Purewal also blamed the Sant Samaj and Damdami Taksal for creating controversy over the Calendar.¹³⁹ He explained that when the original Nanakshahi Calendar was adopted in 2003, there were no problems and that the amendments in the Calendar were made in 2010 due to pressure on SGPC and Akal Dal leadership from various corners which created anomalies. Purewal argued that current Calendar is being called 'Nanakshahi' just to mislead the Sikh community.¹⁴⁰ Pal Singh Purewal, the creator of the original Nanakshahi Calendar, appealed to Akal Takht Sahib to re-implement the original Nanakshahi Calendar, irrespective of the disagreement on it by Sant Samaj and other Sikh bodies. Raising his voice for the need of adopting the original Nanakshahi Calendar, Pal Singh Purewal said: "*The Akal Takht should re-implement the original Nanakshahi Calendar immediately, and let Sant Samaj follow whatever Calendar it wants in the Deras.*"¹⁴¹ Purewal emphasized that Akal Takht Sahib should not let Deras to dominate and impose their will on Sikh community. In this context, Pal Singh Purewal added: "*Let the Derawallahs go whichever way they want to. They are following their own Rehat Maryada (religious code of conduct).*"¹⁴² For Pal Singh Purewal and supporters of his viewpoint, "***Calendar is a necessary and an important part of the identity.***"¹⁴³

138 See, "Purewal flays changes in Nanakshahi calendar says it is due to vote-bank politics", *The Tribune*, February 18, 2011, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2011/20110218/main7.htm>, accessed on 17/10/2016.

139 As quoted in an interview published in *The Indian Express*. See, "Amendments in Nanakshahi calendar behind date controversy : Purewal", *The Indian Express*, January 2, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/kids-hot-spot/news/amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-behind-date-controversy-purewal--37209.aspx>, accessed on 17/06/2016.

140 Talking about the 2010 amended version of original Nanakshahi Calendar Pal Singh Purewal said: "*Wholesale changes were made in the calendar in 2010. All 12 sangrants were changed to Bikrami Sangrants. The dates of all major Gurburabs were changed including the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh as well as the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh.*" As quoted in an interview to published in - *The Indian Express*. See, "Amendments in Nanakshahi calendar behind date controversy Purewal", *The Indian Express*, January 2, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/kids-hot-spot/news/amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar-behind-date-controversy-purewal--37209.aspx>, accessed on 17/06/2016.

141 "Re-implement original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal", *The Times of India*, March 13, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Re-implement-original-Nanakshahi-Calendar-Purewal/articleshow/46548847.cms>. Also see, "Akal Takht should re-implement the original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal", March 12, 2015, available at <http://punjabnewsexpress.com/international/news/akal-takht-should-re-implement-the-original-nanakshahi-calendar-purewal--38543.aspx>, accessed on 19/06/2016.

142 "Re-implement original Nanakshahi Calendar: Purewal", *The Times of India*, March 13, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Re-implement-original-Nanakshahi-CalendarPurewal/articleshow/46548847.cms>., accessed on 19/06/2016.

143 *ibid.*

Washington based senior Sikh leader Amarjit Singh also favoured the original Nanakshahi Calendar and argued that after the worldwide acceptance of Nanakshahi Calendar, it made life much easier for Sikhs everywhere because the dates of Sikh sacred and religious days no longer change from year to year as they used to under the Hindu Bikrami Calendar. Favouring the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar worldwide, he argued : ***“Gurpurbs (celebrations devoted to birth days of Sikh Gurus) now always fall on the same date, every year. More than that, the Nanakshahi Calendar is now seen by the Sikhs all over the world, as a symbol of Sikh pride and separate religious identity, which is anathema to the Hindutva elements.”***¹⁴⁴ Amarjit Singh warned the Akali Dal leadership that Sikh Diaspora will not tolerate any compromise on crucial Sikh issues like that of Nanakshahi Calendar, and strongly urged the SGPC executive members to stand firm on their decision already made regarding the concerned Calendar which has been accepted by the Sikhs worldwide since its implementation in 2003.¹⁴⁵ The coordinator of American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (AGPC) Pritpal Singh also rejected the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar. Pritpal Singh stated that Sikhs in America did not accept the unilateral changes made in the original Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003. He alleged that 2010 amendments in original Nanakshahi Calendar were made by Damdami Taksal Chief Harnam Singh Dhumma and the then SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar, who didn't represent the aspirations of Sikhs.¹⁴⁶ Pritpal Singh, the convener AGPC, informed that a big section of Sikh Diaspora have refused to accept the amended version of the Nanakshahi Calendar (2010) as the changes were not made with consensus.¹⁴⁷

Majority of the Sikh organizations and groups in the Diaspora demanded that SGPC should invite Pal Singh Purewal, the architect of the Nanakshahi Calendar, for open discussion that will thrash out any doubts over Calendar controversy. Heads of various Gurdwara Committees in United States and Canada expressed their resentment over the amendments made in the Nanakshahi Calendar by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak

144 See, “Sikh Calendar ? SGPC Nanakshahi Amendments Questioned”, January 4, 2010, available at <http://panthic.org/articles/5197>, accessed on 17/06/2017.

145 ibid

146 “Sikhs in Europe reject Nanakshahi calendar”, *The Times of India*, March 15, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/sikhs-in-europe-reject-nanakshahi-calendar/articleshow/57639093.cms>, accessed on 07/10/2017

147 “Sikh Religious Society Organizes Two -day Conference in Chicago to Implement Mool Nanakshahi Calendar”, *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 2017, available at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/naperville-sun/community/chi-ugc-article-sikh-religious-society-organizes-two-day-con-2017-11-18-story.html>. Also see, “Sikh bodies launch Nanakshahi original calendar”, *Business Standard*, March 14, 2017, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/sikh-bodies-launch-nanakshahi-original-calendar-117031400828_1.html, accessed on 11/12/2017.

committee (SGPC), the premier religious body of the Sikhs. They jointly passed a resolution to observe all *Gurpurabs* and important Sikh events according to original Nanakshahi Calendar that was adopted by the Sikh community in the year 2003 under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib.¹⁴⁸

Recently in November 2017, the American Sikh Council (ASC)¹⁴⁹ representing Sikh groups, intellectuals and organizations of America, held a conference in Chicago with objective to implement the original Nanakshahi Calendar.¹⁵⁰ Chicago Sikh Conference which was attended by Sikh groups and representatives from United States, Canada, India and Australia made a fervent appeal to all social and religious organisations of the Sikhs to make serious attempts to ensure full implementation of the *Mool* (original) Nanakshahi Calendar. Pal Singh Purewal (the architect of the original Nanakshahi Calendar), who was the main speaker at the conference, said: ***“The Sikh Sangats across the world need to take steps to ensure smooth and universal implementation of the Nanakshahi Calendar, which is the sovereign symbol of the distinct Sikh faith.”***¹⁵¹ Gurdwara management committees of Canada, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, and even Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak rejected the amended version of the Calendar and continue to abide by the Original version (2003) of the Nanakshahi Calendar.¹⁵²

148 In the meet at Fremont (San Francisco), the heads of various Sikh organizations expressed their objection to the changes made by SGPC in Nanakshahi calendar. See, “Sikh Diaspora objects as SGPC makes changes in Nanakshahi Calendar, December 1, 2010, available at <http://www.topnews.in/sikh-diaspora-objects-sgpc-makes-changes-nanakshahi-calendar-2251723>, accessed on 20/10/2016. Also see, “American Sikhs hold conference to implement original Nanakshahi Calendar”, *The Times of India*, November 17, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/american-sikhs-hold-conference-to-implement-original-nanakshahi-calendar/articleshow/61679503.cms>, accessed on 21/12/2017.

149 The American Sikh Council (ASC) is an umbrella organization representing Sikhs in the United States. It is an elected body of Sikh Gurdwaras and institutions. Currently, 73 gurdwaras and other Sikh institutions across the US, are its members.

150 “American Sikhs hold conference to implement original Nanakshahi Calendar”, *The Times of India*, November 17, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/american-sikhs-hold-conference-to-implement-original-nanakshahi-calendar/articleshow/61679503.cms>, accessed on 21/12/2017. Also see, “Adopt Mool Nanakshahi Calendar, stop confusion, says Sikh Chicago meet”, *The World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/adopt-mool-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-chicago-meet/>, accessed on 21/12/2017.

151 Speech and statement of Pal Singh Purewal made at Sikh Chicago Conference available at - “Adopt Mool (original) Nanakshahi Calendar, stop confusion, says Sikh Chicago meet”, *The World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/adopt-mool-nanakshahi-calendar-sikh-chicago-meet/>, accessed on 21/12/2017.

152 See, “SGPC unveils Nanakshahi calendar in Amritsar”, March 14, 2010, available at <http://www.sify.com/news/sgpc-unveils-nanakshahi-calendar-in-amritsar-news-national-kdovudjddahsi.html>, accessed on 19/10/2016.

Global Sikh Council (GSC)¹⁵³, a worldwide Sikh organisation with membership of more than 20 national level Sikh organisations from around the world, also out-rightly rejected the decision of SGPC in context to release of new Nanakshahi Calendar. In the context, Gulbarg Singh, the President of Global Sikh Council, stated: “*Any decision, made by any committee, formed by the SGPC by exploiting the name of Akal Takht Sahib, to sabotage Nanakshahi Calendar, the symbol of Khalsa Panth’s sovereignty, will not be acceptable.*”¹⁵⁴ American Gurdwara Pabhandhak Committee (AGPC) also rejected the new calendar (2015 - 16) published by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Rejecting the SGPC initiative to resolve the conflict over Calendar issue, the Coordinator of AGPC, Pritpal Singh, stated: “*We reject the committee constituted by the Sikh clergy to resolve the Calendar row and the Calendar released by the SGPC.*”¹⁵⁵ It is pertinent to mention here that American Gurdwara Pabhandhak Committee (AGPC) had been following the original Nanakshahi Calendar since 2003.¹⁵⁶

Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Committee and Nanakshahi Calendar

The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC)¹⁵⁷ rejected the amendments made in Nanakshahi Calendar in the year 2010, and have been following the original (2003) Nanakshahi Calendar since its inception. The members of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and the Sikhs living in Pakistan has been abiding by the original Nanakshahi Calendar which was adopted in 2003 under the aegis of Akal Takht

153 Global Sikh Council (GSC) was formed in 2014 as a result of concerns felt by diaspora Sikhs over the mushrooming of various deras run by sants and babas, who mislead gullible Sikhs to follow distorted versions of our Gurus teachings. GSC is a common platform currently representing Sikhs from more than 20 countries, to deliberate and discuss multiple challenges facing Sikhs across the world. For concerned information, see, Harsaran Singh, “Global Sikh Council committed to resolve Panthic issues”, The World Sikh News, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/global-sikh-council-committed-to-resolve-panthic-issues/>, accessed on 23/09/2017. Also see, “Global Sikh Council press release post 2018 AGM in Dubai”, April 4, 2018, available at <https://asiasamachar.com/2018/04/04/18536/>, accessed on 10/04, 2018.

154 *ibid.*

155 Statement of Pritpal Singh, the coordinator of American Gurdwara Pabhandhak Committee (AGPC). See, “SGPC Virtually Ends Nanakshahi Calendar”, March 16, 2015, available at <http://singhstation.net/2015/03/sgpc-virtually-ends-nanakshahi-calendar/>. Also see, “End of road for Nanakshahi calendar, virtually”, *The Tribune*, March 15, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/end-of-road-for-nanakshahi-calendar-virtually/53733.html>, accessed on 20/10/2017.

156 “SGPC Virtually Ends Nanakshahi Calendar”, March 16, 2015, available at <http://singhstation.net/2015/03/sgpc-virtually-ends-nanakshahi-calendar/>. accessed on 20/10/2017.

157 The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) is a Sikh religious organisation in Pakistan. PSGPC was formed by the Government of Pakistan and is entrusted with the maintenance of Sikh religious institutions, places of worships in Pakistan. Unlike Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in India, PSGPC is not an Independent fully Sikh-owned body and is controlled by Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) of Pakistan. This organisation is entrusted with the maintenance of Sikh religious institutions, places of worships (*Gurdwaras*) and the well-being of the Pakistani Sikh community.^[5] Its main organisation is based in Lahore in the province of Punjab.

Sahib.¹⁵⁸ In the context, President of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee Sardar Sham Singh declared that Pakistani Sikhs would continue to observe the Sikh religious festivals according to the original (2003 version) Nanakshahi Calendar.¹⁵⁹ Sardar Sham Singh confirmed that: *“Pakistani Sikhs unanimously accepted the original Nanakshahi Calendar issued in 2003 from Sri Akal Takhat Sahib. Since then Sikh Pakistanis have been celebrating all Gurburabs and observing other holy days in accordance with the Nanakshahi Calendar 2003.”*¹⁶⁰ The President of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) argued that the issue of Nanakshahi Calendar was not a prerogative of the SGPC rather it was related to the entire Sikh community and their identity.¹⁶¹

As per the newspaper reports, Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) held a celebration (in 2017) at Gurdwara Janamasthan Nankana Sahib (birth place of Guru Nanak Dev), and released the original version of Nanakshahi Calendar.¹⁶² While rejecting the new edition Nanakshahi Calendar (2015-16), the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) member Ramesh Singh stated that: *“Earlier, there were some differences and confusion over the Calendars but now the Sikhs of Pakistan have decided to observe all religious days according to Pal Singh Purewal authored calendar.”*¹⁶³ In regard to Nanakshahi Calendar controversy, few newspapers reported that Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) had introduced certain pre-

158 "Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments in the Nanakshahi Calendar", *The Nation*, March 15, 2017, available at <https://nation.com.pk/17-Mar-2015/pakistani-sikhs-reject-amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar>, accessed on 21/10/2017. Also see, "Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Committee Says No to SGPC 'Nanakshahi Calendar'", March 16, 2015, available at <http://dailysikhupdates.com/pakistan-sikh-gurdwara-committee-says-no-to-sgpc-nanakshahi-calendar/>, accessed on 21/10/2017.

159 Information as given by Sardar Sham Singh (President PSGPC) along with other representatives of Pakistan's Sikh community, to Newsmen at Gurdawara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal, Comments published in *The Dawn* on March 17, 2015. See, "Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments to Nanakshahi Calendar", *The Dawn*, March 17, 2015, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1170098>, accessed on 13/10/2017.

160 Pakistan Sikh Gurwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) President Sardar Sham Singh declared that Sikh Pakistanis would continue to observe religious festivals according to the 2003 Nanakshahi Calendar. The committee rejected the amended version of calendar. See, "Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments to Nanakshahi Calendar", *The Dawn*, March 17, 2015, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1170098>, accessed on 05/08/2016. Also see, "Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments in Nanakshahi calendar", March 17, 2015, *The Nation*, available at <https://nation.com.pk/17-Mar-2015/pakistani-sikhs-reject-amendments-in-nanakshahi-calendar>, accessed on 05/08/2016.

161 See, "Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments to Nanakshahi Calendar", *The Dawn*, March 17, 2015, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1170098>, accessed on 05/08/2016.

162 See, "Sikhs in Europe reject Nanakshahi calendar", March 15, 2017, available at <http://www.sikhnewsexpress.com/sikhs-in-europe-reject-nanakshahi-calendar-sne/>, accessed on 19/10/2017. Also see, "Sikhs in Europe reject Nanakshahi calendar", *The Times of India*, March 15, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/sikhs-in-europe-reject-nanakshahi-calendar/articleshow/57639093.cms>, accessed on 19/10/2017.

163 "Sikhs in Europe reject Nanakshahi calendar", *The Times of India*, March 15, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/sikhs-in-europe-reject-nanakshahi-calendar/articleshow/57639093.cms>, accessed on 19/10/2017.

conditions which the SGPC needed to meet to get the *Kar Sewa* of historic Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, Narowal (Pakistan).¹⁶⁴ As per these newspaper reports, the conditions put forth by Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) were: (i) Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) should follow original Nanakshahi Calendar of 2003, and (ii) the SGPC should make a declaration with effect to recognize the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC). These pre-conditions brought an interesting twist and turn to the ongoing Nanakshahi Calendar issue.¹⁶⁵ However, being firm to the original (2003 version) Nanakshahi Calendar, the President of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) Sardar Sham Singh appealed to the Sikhs across the globe to reject the controversial amendments in the Nanakshahi Calendar which were made by SGPC the year 2010. He argued that Sikhs in Pakistan and other parts of the world were not bound to follow the amendments which had converted the Nanakshahi Calendar to the Bikrami Calendar. **Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) affirmed that it will continue to follow the 2003 version (original) Nanakshahi Calendar in future as it symbolised the distinct identity of the Sikhs.**¹⁶⁶

In sharp contrast to the firm stand by Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) in favour of original Nanakshahi Calendar, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have been pressurising Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Committee to observe and follow the Sikh religious events as per amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar. In a written statement issued by SGPC, the then President of SGPC, Avtar Singh Makkar, strictly recommended PSGPC to start following the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar. The statement by Avtar Singh Makkar said: “*PSGPC should come out of the influence of few handful of foreign based Sikhs and observe Sikh religious days only according to Akal*”

164 The historic Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara holds great significance for the Sikh community as first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev ji spent last 18 years of his life at this sacred place. The distance between Dera Baba Nanak (district Gurdaspur) and Kartarpur Sahib (Narowal, Pakistan) is just 3 km. The Gurdwara is just about four kilometers from the international border and is visible on a clear day from Dera Baba Nanak in India. Devotees in Indian side converge at international border (Dera Baba Nanak) and offer their prayers.

165 See, “Kar sewa: Unfazed by PSGPC’s move, SGPC to send team to Pak”, *The Tribune*, August 9, 2015, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/kar-sewa-unfazed-by-psgpc-s-move-sgpc-to-send-team-to-pak/117530.html>. See also, PSGPC raises Nanakshahi calendar as rider to handing over Kartarpur Sahib Kar Sewa to SGPC, August 8, 2015, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2015/08/08/psgpc-raises-nanakshahi-calendar-as-rider-to-handing-over-kartarpur-sahib-kar-sewa-to-sgpc/>, accessed on 09/08/2016.

166 For concerned information see, “Pakistani Sikhs reject amendments to Nanakshahi Calendar”, *The Dawn*, March 17, 2015, available at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1170098>, accessed on 05/08/2016.

Takht Sahib approved Nnanakshahi Calendar.”¹⁶⁷ Avtar Singh Makkar, the SGPC chief, also firmly stated that: “*No organization can go alone ignoring our supreme temporal seat, soon or later, they have to abide by Akal Takht Sahib.*”¹⁶⁸

It is worth mentioning that apart from Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC),¹⁶⁹ many other prominent Sikh religious bodies have been sticking to the original Nanakshahi Calendar since 2003. The amendments to the Nanakshahi Calendar carried out in 2010 at the behest of the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib have led to more discrepancies rather than offer clarity over significant dates in Sikh history. The Sikhs in Pakistan, America, Canada and other parts of the world continue to observe events according to the 'original' Nanakshahi calendar of 2003, despite Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh's directives in 2010 to all Sikhs to follow the amended version of the Calendar.

SGPC Calendars for 2015 and 2017

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the leading Sikh body, finally sounded death knell for the original Nanakshahi Calendar (2003 version) by publishing a new version (special one year edition for 2015-16) of Calendar that bears the stamp of the lunar-based traditional Bikrami Calendar followed by Sikhs before 2003.¹⁷⁰ On March 14, 2015, Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh released the new calendar as “Nanakshahi Samat 547” (2015-16) from Akal Takht Sahib Secretariat (Golden Temple complex, Amritsar).¹⁷¹ After

167 See, “Nanakshahi Calendar Issue, SGPC warns Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee” May 23, 2015, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2015/05/23/nanakshahi-calendar-issue-sgpc-warns-psgpc/>, accessed on 12/09/2016. It is due to the calendar row that Pakistan had denied visas to the members of an SGPC Jatha for observing the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev in 2011 and 2012.

168 See, “Follow our order on NC, SGPC tells Pak gurdwara body”, *The Times of India*, May 23, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ludhiana/Follow-our-order-on-NC-SGPC-tells-Pak-gurdwara-body/articleshow/47392022.cms>, accessed on 29/05/2016 Also see, “Nanakshahi Calendar Issue: SGPC Warns Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee”, May 23, 2015, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2015/05/23/nanakshahi-calendar-issue-sgpc-warns-psgpc/>, accessed on 29/05/2016.

169 In 2014, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) president Avtar Singh Makkar made a four-day visit to Pakistan. On his return he claimed to have convinced Sikhs across the border that the amended Nanakshahi calendar is the “officially recognised” calendar approved by the Akal Takht Sahib. Information gathered through discussion on calendar issue with SGPC officials and members. Important information also available at , “SGPC chief claims Pak Sikhs’ support”, *The Tribune*, May 23, 2014, available at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sGPC-chief-claims-pak-sikhs-support/story-ohtml>, accessed on 11/09/2016.

170 The new ‘Nanakshahi Samat 547’ calendar coincided with the first day of the first month of ‘Chet’ of the Sikh New Year. See, “Amritsar: Sikh calendar released as Nanakshahi Samat 547”, *Hindustan Times*, March 14, 2015. Also see, “End of road for Nanakshahi calendar, virtually”, *The Tribune*, March 15, 2015.

171 Expecting protest from those backing the Original Nanakshahi Calendar, the SGPC officials changed the venue of its release at the eleventh hour from Gurdwara Manji Sahib Diwan Hall to the Akal Takht secretariat. Takht Keshgarh Sahib Jathedar- Giani Mal Singh, Takht Damdama Sahib acting Jathedar- Giani Gurmukh Singh, Harmandir Sahib priests - (Granthis) Giani Raghbir Singh and Giani Gurminder Singh were also present at the occasion of the release of special version of Nanakshahi Calendar. The

the release of this ‘new edition’ Calendar published by SGPC, the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, while clarifying that Calendar would be applicable for the current year only (2015-16),¹⁷² also informed that: “*the next Nanakshahi Calendar would be published on the recommendation of a expert committee constituted for the purpose on the directions of Akal Takht Sahib to find a permanent solution to the prevailing confusion.*”¹⁷³ On releasing the 2015 version of Nanakshahi Calendar, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh appealed to the Sikh community worldwide to observe the new Nanakshahi Calendar only.¹⁷⁴ Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also urged Sikh religious bodies and organizations to follow the ‘latest version’ to give the message of unity across the globe. In this context, Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh asserted: “*This Nanakshahi Samat 549 Calendar (amended version) has mentioned Gurbani dates as per Gurbani and historic sources. The Sikhs should follow this as it will lead to unity among the Sikh community.*”¹⁷⁵ Though after releasing the Calendar, Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh tried to project it as ‘Nanakshahi Calendar’, the dates of major Sikh events mentioned in it neither matches with the original Nanakshahi Calendar (2003 version) nor with the amended version of 2010.¹⁷⁶ Notwithstanding the similarity of the 2010 amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar with the traditional Bikrami datebook, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib claimed that:

special edition calendar was released from Akal Takht Secretariat on March 14, 2015. Information based on my field visits at Golden Temple complex and discussion with few concerned SGPC officials at Amritsar.

- 172 On March 9, 2015 five Sikh head priests (five Jathedar Takht Sahibs) after a marathon meeting announced formation of panel to solve long pending separate Sikh Nanakshahi Calendar row. Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh informed that the panel was to sort out various issues as raised by numerous Sikh scholars and Sikh intellectuals to bring certain amendments. Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also told that concerned 2015 Calendar is temporary and that the final calendar will be released with certain rules and amendments. Giani Gurbachan Singh, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also informed that panel would submit its report by December 2015 and meanwhile SGPC would continue to publish calendar as per its own way keeping in view the Sikh traditions and sentiments of the community. Information based on my field visits at Golden Temple complex and discussion with few concerned officials at Amritsar.
- 173 Comments of Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh while briefing the Media agencies. Information also available at - “New Nanakshahi Calendar brings new confusion”, *The Times of India*, March 15, 2015.
- 174 The special edition Nanakshahi Calendar (for 2015-16) that was released in March, 2015 is printed in Gurmukhi. The calendar says "Nanakshahi Samat 547" right at the top. Even the date numerals are in Punjabi and Hindi, in scripts that only a few people in the modern times may be able to read.
- 175 See “Nanakshahi Calendar released”, *The Tribune*, March 19, 2017.
- 176 For example, in the new calendar released in March 2015, the birth anniversary of Guru Ram Das, which used to be celebrated on October 9 every year but as per the amended Nanakshahi calendar, the concerned religious occasion fell on October 29 in 2015. The death anniversary of Guru Amar Das fell on September 28, instead of September 16 during the previous years. Similarly, the dates of Gurta Gaddi Diwas of Guru Amar Das, death anniversary of Guru Angad Dev, death anniversary of Guru Hargobind, Gurta Gaddi Diwas of Guru Teg Bahadur, birth anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur, birth anniversary of Guru Arjan Dev, birth anniversary of Guru Angad Dev and Gurta Gaddi Diwas of Guru Hargobind were different (as per new Calendar released in March 2015 by SGPC under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib) from those in the earlier two years when the amended Nanakshahi calendar was being followed. The new calendar also did not make a mention of Hindu festivals.

"This is a Nanakshahi Calendar in letter and spirit, and all Sikhs must celebrate or observe their historic and religious events for the current year (2015-16) in accordance with it."¹⁷⁷

However, the move of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), to implement 'special edition' Nanakshahi Calendar (2015-16) was widely criticized by Sikh leaders, Sikh religious organizations and groups worldwide. The radical Sikh organization Dal Khalsa strongly criticised and condemned the SGPC decision to implement special edition Nanakshahi Calendar (2015-16)¹⁷⁸. In the context, the spokesperson of Dal Khalsa, Kanwarpal Singh, said:

"Calendar mentions Nanakshahi Samwat 547 at top, but all the dates have been mentioned as per Bikrami Calendar. The dates regarding all Gurburabs have been changed. The 'Parkash Parv' (birth anniversary) of the fourth Guru, Guru Ramdas ji has always been celebrated on October 9 every year all over the world. But as per 2015 Calendar issued by SGPC, this Sacred Day is set to come on October 29. By issuing this Calendar, the SGPC has betrayed the whole Sikh community, as it is Bikrami Calendar under the name of Nanakshahi Calendar."¹⁷⁹

*(English translation of statement/explanation provided in Punjabi)*¹⁸⁰

The special edition Nanakshahi Calendar 2015-16 (*Samwat 547*) mentioned only 79 occasions against the 126 in Nanakshahi Calendar 2014-15.¹⁸¹ The 11 member committee constituted by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) claimed that special edition Calendar (2015-16) was prepared on the basis of *Gurbani* and important Sikh historic sources. This SGPC Calendar for the year 2015-16 gave a complete miss to all religious occasions of Hindus, Muslims and Christians, besides some important Sikh historical events listed in the earlier Nanakshahi Calendars.¹⁸² The special edition Nanakshahi Calendar (2015-

177 See, "Amritsar: Sikh calendar released as Nanakshahi Samat 547", *Hindustan Times*, March 14, 2015.

178 Discussion with Dal Khalsa leader and Spokesperson, Kanwar Pal Singh, was extremely helpful to get familiar with perspectives of very influential organization of the radical Sikhs, the Dal Khalsa. Headquarter of Dal Khalsa is based in Amritsar.

179 The statements, perspectives and comments of Kanwarpal Singh (Dal Khalsa Spokesperson) in regard to the release of 'Special Edition' Nanakshahi Calendar (2015-16) were noted during my conversation with him on the controversy over Nanakshahi Calendar that has divided the Sikh community.

180 Statement as made (in Punjabi) by Kanwarpal Singh, Dal Khalsa spokesperson : "ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਦੇ ਉਪਰ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਸੰਮਤ 547 ਲਿਖਿਆ ਹੈ ਪਰ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਤਾਰੀਕਾਂ ਬਿਕਰਮੀ ਸੰਮਤ ਦੇ ਹਿਸਾਬ ਨਾਲ ਅੰਕਿਤ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ ਹਨ। ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਤਾਰੀਕਾਂ ਬਦਲ ਦਿੱਤੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ ਹਨ। ਚੌਥੇ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਜਨਮ ਦਿਹਾੜਾ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਵਿਖੇ ਅਤੇ ਸਾਰੀਆਂ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ 9 ਅਕਤੂਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਸੀ, ਪਰ ਇਸ Calendar 2015 ਦੇ ਮੁਤਾਬਿਕ ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਜਨਮ ਦਿਹਾੜਾ 29 ਅਕਤੂਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਆ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਇਸ Calendar (2015) ਨਾਲ SGPC ਨੇ ਸਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਨੂੰ ਧਖਾ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਦੀ ਨਾਮ ਹੇਠ ਬਿਕਰਮੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ।"

181 The Nanakshahi Calendar of 2014- 15 included Sri Krishna Janamashtami, Ram Navmi, Mahavir Jayanti, Mahatma Budha Jayanti, Eid -ul -Zuha, Bhagwan Valmiki anniversary , Good Friday and Christmas Day. It also included the birth anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The 2015-16 edition gave miss to all these mentioned historic and religious events.

182 "New Nanakshahi Calendar brings new confusion", *The Times of India*, March 15, 2015, accessed on 02/09/2017.

16) published by SGPC mentioned few new historic events, few important ones were not listed, and there was significant difference in dates of few very important religious events related to Sikh history.¹⁸³ All these changes and alterations in religious and historic events in the special edition Nanakshahi Calendar (2015-16) remained at the centre of controversy and confusion within the Sikh community and various Sikh organizations.¹⁸⁴ Though introduced in the guise of Nanakshahi Calendar, the Calendar on a new pattern virtually marked the end of the road for the original Nanakshahi Calendar that was introduced in 2003, and was later amended in the year 2010.¹⁸⁵

Similar to as done in 2015, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh (on March 8, 2017) along with few SGPC members released the Sikh Calendar published by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) for the year 2017-18.¹⁸⁶ The 2017 edition of Nanakshahi Calendar is an amended version of the original Nanakshahi Calendar that was introduced in 2003 and was later amended in 2010.¹⁸⁷ On the occasion, Jathedar Akal Takht Giani Gurbachan Singh, while urging the Sikh community to observe the latest version Nanakshahi Calendar (as published by SGPC in 2017) both for personal as well as religious purposes, stated that: "*Sikh bodies shouldn't blow their own trumpet and instead*

183 Leading to more confusion for the Sikh community, : the martyrdom anniversary ('Shaheedi Diwas') of Guru Arjan Dev was observed on June 1 in Nanakshahi Calendar 2014-15, but fell on May 22 as per the new one released for 2015-16, and on June 16 according to the original Nanakshahi Calendar. Similarly, the birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh was given as December 28 in the 2014-15 Nanakshahi Calendar, but was fixed as January 16 in the new calendar for 2015-16; it was January 5 as per the Original Nanakshahi calendar. Similarly, the dates of Gurta Gaddi Diwas of Guru Amar Das, the dates of death anniversaries of Guru Angad Dev, Guru Hargobind, and Guru Harkrishan ji were different from calendar of previous years. Also the dates of Gurta Gaddi Diwas of Guru Teg Bahadur, birth anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur, birth anniversary of Guru Arjan Dev, birth anniversary of Guru Angad Dev and Gurta Gaddi Diwas of Guru Hargobind were different from those in the last two years when the amended Nanakshahi calendar was being followed. This information is based on comparative study of (regarding dates of religious and historic events in Sikh history) Nanakshahi Calendar for the year 2014-15 and special edition Nanakshahi calendar for 2015-16.

184 The new calendar –special edition calendar for 2015-16 interestingly listed the death anniversaries of Sukhdev Singh Sukha and Harjinder Singh Jinda- the assassins of former Army Chief General Arun Vaidya, and that of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale . It also gave the dates of the deaths of Satwant Singh and Kehar Singh, assassins of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, but did not mention the name of Beant Singh, another assassin of Mrs. Gandhi. These events were part of the Nanakshahi Calebdar edition for 2014-15. The new calendar also missed out Sikh religious days like Chotta Ghallughara, Morcha Guru Ka Bagh and Sarhind Fateh Diwas. The new edition did listed Independence Day and Republic Day. Information based on study of special edition Nanakshahi Calendar for the year 2015-16. Discussions with Dal Khalsa leadership and few members of SGPC was extremely helpful to know the changes made in this Calendar.

185 See, "End of road for Nanakshahi calendar, virtually", *The Tribune*, March 15, 2015

186 Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh and few SGPC members released the so called 'Nanakshahi calendar' at Akal Takht Sahib Secretariat, Golden Temple Complex, on March 08, 2017. See , "Nanakshahi calendar released", *The Tribune*, March 9, 2017.

187 The calendar has been controversial among the Sikh community as the same events related to Sikh gurus were observed even twice a year. Most of the Sikh religious bodies across the globe alleged that the original Nanakshahi Calendar was amended in 2010 following the reservations by influential Sant Samaj.

should unite under the aegis of the Akal Takht."¹⁸⁸ Emphasizing on the authenticity of the concerned Calendar, Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh added: "Majority of Sikh sects, including Nihangs, Nirmalays, Udhasis and Damdami Taksal, observe Sikh religious days according to the SGPC-published Calendar."¹⁸⁹

Lack of consensus and divisions within the mainstream Sikh organizations on the issue of Nanakshahi Calendar has created an intense Patnhic Crisis. The Sikh organizations remain divided even for the celebrations of most prominent religious and sacred days of Sikh religion. To illustrate a very relevant example, the Sikh bodies were seen grossly divided on the occasion of 413th anniversary of the first *Prakash* of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib (anniversary of first installation of Guru Granth Sahib) in Harmandir Sahib (Amritsar), owing to differences over the date of 'Gurpurab'. While the pioneer Sikh religious institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) celebrated the Gurpurab on August 22, 2017- the date according to amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar, the other Sikh religious and educational bodies announced to celebrate the Sacred Day on September 1, 2017 - which falls according original Nanakshahi Calendar adopted in 2003.¹⁹⁰

It was Kirpal Singh Badungar under whose tenure as Presidentship, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) had adopted the original Nanakshahi Calendar (Pal Singh Purewal creation) in 2003, which under the pressure of vigorous opposition by several politico-religious bodies was later amended in the year 2010. Fourteen years later (in 2017), Kirpal Singh Badungar who became the President of SGPC for second time, led the SGPC celebrations of 414th anniversary marking the installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (Parksh Purab Sri Guru Granth Sahib) according to the 2010 amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar - also called a "carbon copy" of traditional Bikrami Calendar.¹⁹¹ The Calendar controversy which has divided the Sikh community and Sikh religious organizations revolves

188 "Akal Takht Jathedar releases Nanakshahi calendar, says majority Sikhs support it", *The Times of India*, March 9, 2017.

189 For the statement by Jathedar Akal Takht sahib, see, "Akal Takht Jathedar releases Nanakshahi calendar, says majority Sikhs support it", *The Times of India*, March 9, 2017. Also see, "HT Explainer: Know about the controversial Nanakshahi calendar", *Hindustan Times*, March 6, 2018, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/ht-explainer-know-about-the-controversial-nanakshahi-calendar/story-UeKm0yTcDtat1FCRIel86K.html>, accessed on 21/03/2018.

190 Information based on my observations and discussions with SGPC members and members of various Sikh bodies. Majority of information was gathered from SGPC Headquarters, Dal Khalsa Office, Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar. The concerned occasion (413th anniversary of the first *Prakash* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib which was celebrated by SGPC on August 22, 2017) at Golden Temple Complex was also covered during the field study.

191 See, "Akal Takht nod to calendar amendments" January 4, 2010, available at <https://www.ndtv.com/cities/akal-takht-nod-to-calendar-amendments-408205>, accessed on 15/06/2016. Also see, "SGPC executive approves amendment in Nanakshahi calendar amidst chaos", January 03, 2010, available at <http://www.sikhnet.com/discussion/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=3223>, accessed on 15/06/2016.

around Bikrami Calendar, original Nanakshahi (2003) and amended Nanakshahi Calendars (2010).¹⁹² Majority of the Sikh scholars, religious organizations and leaders who favour the adoption of original Nanakshahi Calendar for the Sikh community, firmly argue that it was on the influence and pressure of RSS and Sant Samaj that Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) amended the 2003 (original) version of Nanakshahi Calendar and the adopted the amended version in the year 2010.¹⁹³

Sant Samaj's opposition to Nanakshahi Calendar

Sant Samaj (Gurmat Sidhant Parcharak Sant Samaj) - a conglomerate of around 152 Sikh religious organizations has been demanding to get rid of Nanakshahi Calendar and revert to the old Bikrami version. Sant Samaj leaders argue that amended Nanakshahi Calendar had led to chaos and created a divide among the community. Sant Samaj alleges that Nanakshahi Calendar had various shortcomings and it was not in consonance with the principles of *Gurbani* and Sikh philosophy. Sant Samaj has been protesting against the original Nanakshahi Calendar since its implementation in the year 2003.¹⁹⁴ In the context, Baba Harnam Singh Khalsa, the chief of Gurmat Sidhant Parcharak Sant Samaj, says:

“The Nanakshahi Calendar was not thoroughly debated and was launched in haste despite protests. It has not helped bring unanimity in Panth. Instead, it created a divide within the heads of five takhts and confusion among community member.”¹⁹⁵

192 Bikrami Calendar is based on lunar charts and dates of *Gurpurbs* and *Sangrands* keep on changing every year. The original Nanakshahi Calendar (2003 version) is based on solar charts and it had fixed the dates of all major *Gurpurbs* except three and all 12 *Sangrands*. Amendments were made to it in the year 2010 on the insistence of the Sant Samaj. The scenario turned chaotic in year 2014 when the Sikh clergy announced a new date for celebrating Guru Gobind Singh's birth anniversary. As the *Gurpurb* was coinciding with the martyrdom day of *Sahibzade* on December 28, 2014, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib announced the *Gurpurb* on January 7, 2015. This resulted into three dates for the *Gurpurb*, which was falling on January 5 as per the original Nanakshahi Calendar. However, within a week, Akal Takht Sahib was forced to make a volte face as a majority of the Sikhs had made preparations for celebrating the event on December 28, 2014.

193 For concerned information see, “Sant samaj Want Akal Takht to Discard Nnanakshahi Calendar and revert to Bikrami Calendar”, December 13, 2014, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2014/12/23/sant-samaj-want-akal-takht-to-discard-nanakshahi-calendar-and-revert-to-bikrami-calendar/>, accessed on 11/11/2016. Also see, “The amendments in the Nanakshahi Calendar have been made under pressure from RSS and Sant Samaj, Pal Singh Purewal”, *The Times of India*, February 17, 2011. available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/The-amendments-in-the-Nanakshahi-Calendar-have-been-made-under-pressure-from-RSS-and-Sant-Samaj-Pal-Singh-Purewal-/articleshow/7514813.cms>, accessed on 15/10/2016. Information also available at - “Revert to Bikrami Calendar: Sant Samaj” *The Tribune*, December 23, 2014, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/revert-to-bikrami-calendar-sant-samaj/21431.html>, accessed on 21/12/2016.

194 “Revert to Bikrami Calendar: Sant Samaj” *The Tribune*, December 23, 2014, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/revert-to-bikrami-calendar-sant-samaj/21431.html>, accessed on 21/12/2016. Also see, “Sant Samaj: Revert to Bikrami calendar”, available at <http://sikhsangat.org/2013/sant-samaj-revert-to-bikrami-calendar/>, accessed on 22/12/2016.

195 “NC created divide in panth: Sikh conglomerate”, *The Times of India*, December 23, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/NC-created-divide-in-panth-Sikh->

In regard to the controversy created by the Calendar issue, the chief of Sant Samaj Harnam Singh Khalsa claimed that Nanakshahi Calendar had separated Sikhs from their history and historical dates. In the context, he stated, "***Till 2003 there was no confusion on observing Sikh religious days according to Nanakshahi Samwat Calendar (common calendar). But after Nanakshahi Calendar was launched, the controversies refused to die down.***"¹⁹⁶ Harnam Singh Khalsa also said that the confusion among Sikhs persisted even after amendments in the Nanakshahi Calendar in 2010. Speaking in favour of Bikrami Calendar, the Sant Samaj Chief Harnam Singh Khalsa said: "***We want same Nanakshahi Samwat Calendar which we have been using from the times of Guru Nanak Dev till 2003.***"¹⁹⁷ While giving the reference of several hand-written edicts of Sikh Gurus which had mentioned dates on it according to *Nanakshahi Samwat* Calendar, Harnam Singh Khalsa argued that, "*How can we deny those realities, dates in Nanakshahi Calendar don't match with the Sikh history and events.*" On the question about favour of Nanakshahi Calendar by numerous Sikh organizations, the leader of Sant Samaj Harnam Singh Dhuma, said: "*It is nothing but obstinacy, the Jathedar and those supporting Nanakshahi Calendar should analyze the Sikh history and historical events and should see by themselves how they are different from Nanakshahi Calendar.*"¹⁹⁸

The Sant Samaj, an influential group of numerous Deras and sects, handed a memorandum to Giani Gurbhacahn Singh, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, for reverting back to traditional Bikrami Calenadr.¹⁹⁹ The memorandum handed to Jathedar by Sant Samaj head Harnam Singh Dhuma (leader of Damdami Taksal) contained the signatures of leaders of numerous religious organisations and sects.²⁰⁰ The memorandum said: "***The Nanakshahi calendar, be it the original version of 2003 or the revised one of 2010, has only caused***

conglomerate/articleshow/45611397.cms, accessed on 23/11/2017. Also see, "Sikh bodies against implementation of Bikrami Calendar", *The Times of India*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Sikh-bodies-against-implementation-of-Bikrami-Calendar/articleshow/45645071.cms>, accessed on 23/11/2017.

196 "NC created divide in panth: Sikh conglomerate", *The Times of India*, December 23, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/NC-created-divide-in-panth-Sikh-conglomerate/articleshow/45611397.cms>, accessed on 18/07/2016.

197 "NC created divide in panth: Sikh conglomerate", *The Times of India*, December 23, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/NC-created-divide-in-panth-Sikh-conglomerate/articleshow/45611397.cms>, accessed on 18/07/2016.

198 *ibid.*

199 See, "NC created divide in panth: Sikh conglomerate", *The Times of India*, December 23, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/NC-created-divide-in-panth-Sikh-conglomerate/articleshow/45611397.cms>, accessed on 21/07/2016

200 "Sant Samaj firm on Bikrami calendar, hands over memo to Takht Jathedar", *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sant-samaj-firm-on-bikrami-calendar-hands-over-memo-to-takht-jathedar/story-KOcVD5xjPa7TFOG69PTw4N.html>, accessed on 17/08/2016.

confusion among the Sikhs."²⁰¹ At Akal Takht Secretariat, it was virtually a show of strength by the Sant Samaj where the meeting with Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib took place.²⁰² Harnam Singh Dhuma, chief of Gurmat Sidhant Parcharak Sant Samaj, led a delegation of 43 saints representing different religious sects to meet Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. They urged the Jathedar for his intervention for the implementation of Bikrami Calendar. In the concerned meeting, Sant Samaj made it clear that they would stop at nothing short of bringing back the traditional Bikrami calendar. On meeting the Jathedar in context to Calendar issue, the Sant Samaj chief Harnam Singh Dhumma, said: "*We have conveyed our viewpoint to the Jathedar. It is for him to take a decision. We have told him that Sikhs should follow the Calendar which was in circulation when Guru Nanak Dev was born and that was the Bikrami calendar and not the Nanakshahi Calendar.*"²⁰³ Various media reports and information gathered from Sikh religious organizations clearly reflect that Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which is an ally of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), desires to get Bikrami Calendar adopted and implemented, for which it also started a process to build the consensus. The meeting of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib with Sant Samaj was an integral part of this process.²⁰⁴ In March 2015 and 2017, the Jathedars of five Sikh Takhts, the highest seats of religious authority in the Sikh community released a Calendar on a new pattern for the 'Sikh New Year'. Though, the Calendar was released in the guise of Nanakshahi Calendar, it virtually marked the end of the road for the original Nanakshahi Calendar that was adopted in the year 2003 under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib.

Prominent sects/groups that have come in support of the traditional Bikrami Calendar include: Nihang *Jathebandis*, Damdama Taksal, Rarra Sahib Samparda, Nanaksaria Samparda, Bhuchowale Sant, Ratwara Sahib Dera, Baba Hari Singh Randhawa, Hariavela Wale, etc.²⁰⁵ There are supporters of the Bikrami Calendar even in the Shiromani Gurdwara

201 *ibid.*

202 On December 21, 2014, a delegation of Babas and Sants of various Sikh Deras and sects united under the organization named 'Sant Samaj' appeared before the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib at Akal Takht Secretariat (Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar), and handed him the memorandum for reverting the Sikh community back to Traditional Bikrami Calendar. The delegation to Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib was led by Baba Harnam Singh Dhuma, the chief of Damdami Taksal.

203 "Sant Samaj firm on Bikrami calendar, hands over memo to Takht Jathedar", *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sant-samaj-firm-on-bikrami-calendar-hands-over-memo-to-takht-jathedar/story-KOcVD5xjPa7TFOG69PTw4N.html>, accessed on 17/08/2016

204 "Sikh Samaj wants Akal Takht to discard Nanakshahi Calendar and convert to Bikrami Calendar", *Sikh Siyasat Bureau*, December 22, 2014, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2014/12/23/sant-samaj-want-akal-takht-to-discard-nanakshahi-calendar-and-revert-to-bikrami-calendar/>, accessed on 21/07/2016.

205 Based on information collected by discussing the concerned matter with various Sikh organizations and groups like Dal Khalsa, Dera Ratwara Sahib Gurdwara (Mullanpur Garibdass, Mohali), Nihang

Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) too. Prominent among them is senior Akali Dal leader and current SGPC General Secretary Amarjit Singh Chawla.²⁰⁶

Summing up, it can be stated that changes made in the original version of Nanakshahi Calendar and adoption of its amended version erupted huge controversy within the Sikh community across the globe. As in the amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar, the SGPC returned to the old system of fixing dates as per the Bikrami Calendar, many called the ‘amended version’ as ‘Bikrami’ with the name of “Nansakshahi Calendar” on it. Majority of the Sikh organizations and groups termed it a step taken by SGPC under the pressure from the Sant Samaj, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).

Sikh Gurdwara management bodies in Europe, North America, Australia and Pakistan have been following the original version of Nanakshahi Calendar since the time it was adopted under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib in 2003. Apart from the Gurdwara management bodies, various influential Sikh organizations and groups all over the world have been opposing the amended version of the Nanakshahi Calendar citing that by doing so the SGPC has reverted to the Bikrami Calendar. Adoption of amended version of Nanakshahi Calendar by SGPC has been dogged by confusions and controversies which have divided the Sikhs all over the world. The members of Sant Samaj have been urging the Akal Takht Sahib to revert back to Bikrami Calendar, and this demand has further sharpened the divisions within the Sikh religious organizations.

The controversy related to Nanakshahi Calendar has given tough time to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which has been grappling to get the amended 2010 version of Nanakshahi Calendar implemented among all Sikh organizations across the globe. At present, a few sections of the Sikh community are following the amended Nanakshahi Calendar while others continue to follow its original version. The basic premise behind the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar was the clear cut assertion of Sikh identity and Sikh faith as an independent religion with its own Calendar. Those Sikh institutions and organizations that favoured the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar argued that a separate Sikh Calendar is the need of the time as it would reinforce separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs.

Organizations at Gurdwara Harian Velan (Bajraur, Hooshiarpur), DamdamiTaksal (Mehta, Amritsar), etc.

206 See, “Sant Samaj firm on Bikrami calendar, hands over memo to Takht Jathedar”, *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sant-samaj-firm-on-bikrami-calendar-hands-over-memo-to-takht-jathedar/story-KOcVD5xjPa7TFOG69PTw4N.html>, accessed on 17/08/2016.

II

Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) is recently formed organization responsible for the upkeep of Sikh Gurdwaras located in Haryana. It was formally formed on July 11, 2014, through legislative process by the Bill passed by Haryana Legislative Assembly. Before this, the Gurdwaras of Haryana were legally and officially under the management of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) since it was established by a historic 1925 Sikh Gurdwara legislation. The Haryana Government led by then Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda passed the Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, 2014, by the way of a resolution on July 11, 2014.²⁰⁷ Enacted under provisions of the Reorganisation of Punjab Act, 1966, Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill became law on July 14, 2014, after receiving assent from the then Governor of Haryana, Jagannath Pahadia.²⁰⁸ The Bill then got notified as an Act. Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill states:

"The Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, 2014, is to provide for better autonomous management and effective supervision of Gurdwaras and Gurdwara properties in Haryana and matters related thereto."²⁰⁹

The idea of a separate Gurudwara management committee for Haryana was originally propounded by Jagdish Singh Jhinda who started the campaign on December 27, 2000 and the late Harbans Singh Dachar supported it.²¹⁰ Jagdish Singh Jhinda and Didar Singh Nalvi who spearheaded the movement for the formation of separate Gurdwara management committee for Haryana²¹¹ were elected President and senior vice President respectively of the

207 "Haryana assembly passes bill for separate Sikh Gurdwara Committee", *Hindustan Times*, July 11, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140712124307/http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/chandigarh/haryana-vidhan-sabha-passes-hsgpc-bill-amid-din-ruckus-walkouts/article1-1239383.aspx>, accessed on 29/10/2014.

208 "Governor gives assent to Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill", *Hindustan Times*, July 14, 2014. Also see, "Haryana Governor clears Gurdwara Bill", *The Hindu*, July 14, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/haryana-governor-clears-gurdwara-bill/article6210973.ece>, accessed on 21/10/2014.

209 "Governor has given assent to Bill for separate SGPC: Hooda", *The Economic Times*, July 14, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/governor-has-given-assent-to-bill-for-separate-sgpc-hooda/articleshow/38370377.cms>, accessed on 23/10/2014.

210 Former Haryana Finance Minister Harmohinder Singh Chattha explained that Harbans Singh Dachar had started the movement for a separate Sikh Gurdwara management committee 15 years ago, he took the movement to such a level that the Congress had to include the demand in its election manifesto. See, "HSGPC Act not to be revoked, says Chattha", *The Tribune*, July 21, 2014, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140722/haryana.htm#2>, accessed on 27/10/2014.

211 More than 2.75 lakh Sikhs of Haryana submitted their affidavits to the State Government to form separate Haryana SGPC. The issue was discussed in the state assembly on March 15, 2007 in which 81 MLAs supported the move. See, "Cong Demands Separate SGPC in Haryana to secure Sikh Vote Bank", *The Pioneer*, July 7, 2014, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/chandigarh/cong-demands-separate-sgpc-in-haryana-to-secure-sikh-vote-bank.html>, accessed on 28/10/2014.

newly notified HSGPC.²¹² The Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) established its Headquarters at Kurukshetra.²¹³

Conflict over the Formation of Haryana Gurdwara Committee

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) were locked in a bitter controversy with the Congress Government in Haryana over the creation of the Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). Both Sikh organisations, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), vigorously opposed the move to form new body for management of Sikh shrines located in Haryana.²¹⁴ There are around 12 lakh Sikhs living in Haryana that comprises about six percent of the Haryana's total population.²¹⁵ The decision of the Congress Government in Haryana to enact a law seeking to constitute an independent Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to manage the affairs of the Gurdwaras in the State of Haryana sparked a huge controversy. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) maintained the status quo and forcefully asserted that Haryana Government has no legal and religious authority to enact such a law.²¹⁶

Until recently, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) controlled 52 Gurdwaras in Haryana, of which eight are of high historical importance and earn crores every year, 17 have an annual income of up to Rs. 20 lakh and the remaining earn less than Rs. 20

212 Besides Jhinda and Nalvi, Harpal Singh Palli, Jagir Singh Yamunanagar, Bhupinder Singh Assandh and Harpal Singh Palli were also elected as Vice President, General Secretary and Joint Secretary, respectively. Six members of the Executive Committee were also elected. See, "Finally, truce in Haryana Gurdwara panel; Jhinda to continue as chief", *Hindustan Times*, May 08, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/finally-truce-in-haryana-gurdwara-panel-jhinda-to-continue-as-chief/story-TjtLY1TXR7U3h74qCbaKCI.html>, accessed on 11/09/2017.

213 "Amid opposition, Haryana announces separate SGPC", *The Hindu*, July 7, 2014. Also see, "Convention of Haryana Sikhs to seek separate panel to manage Gurdwaras", *The Hindu*, June 15, 2015, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/convention-of-haryana-sikhs-to-seek-separate-panel-to-manage-gurdwaras/article6117192.ece>, accessed on 21/10/2014.

214 "Convention of Haryana Sikhs to seek separate panel to manage Gurdwaras", *The Hindu*, June 15, 2014. Also see, "Haryana assembly passes bill for separate Sikh Gurdwara committee", *Hindustan Times*, July 11, 2014, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20140712124307/http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/chandigarh/haryana-vidhan-sabha-passes-hsgpc-bill-amid-din-ruckus-walkouts/article1-1239383.aspx>, accessed on 19/09/2014.

215 Though Sikhs are not big vote bank in Haryana, what makes them electorally viable is that most Sikh families live in villages and towns straddling 20 of the state's 90 Assembly constituencies across Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Sirsa, Karnal, Yamunanagar, Fatehabad and Hisar district of Haryana. Haryana has the second largest Sikh population in India after Punjab. See, "HSGPC tiff: Will an indecisive Modi govt cost BJP the Haryana polls?", *First Post*, July 28, 2014, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/hsgpc-tiff-will-an-indecisive-modi-govt-cost-bjp-the-haryana-polls-1636755.html>, accessed on 20/10/2014.

216 "Why a SGPC in Haryana is a big political blow to the Akali Dal", *First Post*, July 21, 2014, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/sgpc-haryana-big-political-blow-akali-da-1628039.html>, accessed on 25/06/2015.

lakh per year.²¹⁷ The historical Gurdwaras fall under direct control of SGPC with no local involvement. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) known as the “mini-parliament of Sikhs”, which controls the management of Gurdwaras across Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, will lose over 72 Gurdwaras in Haryana if the new law (for creation of HSGPC) comes into force.²¹⁸

The increasing prosperity and revenue of the Gurdwaras located in Haryana is seen as the essential reason behind the formation of separate Gurdwara committee by Sikhs of Haryana. This is also the main reason why SGPC has been so unwilling to surrender the control of historic Gurdwaras in Haryana. Control over the *Golak* - over Rs 100 crore (offerings of the devotees per year) that Haryana's Gurdwaras earn from donations by devotees, and income from properties including over 2,000 acres of farmland, has clearly found favour with the community.²¹⁹ The formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC), a long-pending demand of the Sikhs of Haryana, had more to it than was apparent. The decision also involved the crucial aspects like daily collection of money and turf issues. Haryana is home to important historic Gurdwaras and the collections from the Sikh shrines in the State are estimated in crores.²²⁰

Response of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib

Amid the intense conflict between SGPC and Sikhs of Haryana over the formation of new Gurdwara body, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh, appealed to the

217 Information collected from officials/members of SGPC concerned with the management of Gurdwaras located in Haryana. Relevant Information was gathered through discussion with committee officials employed at Gurdwara Nada Sahib (Panchkula) and Gurdwara Chevin Patshahi (Kurukshetra).

218 “Maintain status quo on Haryana gurdwaras: Akal Takht”, *Deccan Herald*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/422130/maintain-status-quo-haryana-gurdwaras.html>, accessed on 10/08/2016. Also see, “Haryana announces separate panel for its gurdwaras”, *Business Standard*, July 6, 2014, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/haryana-announces-separate-panel-for-its-gurdwaras-114070600437_1.html, accessed on 10/08/2016.

219 See, Yogesh Snehi (2014), “Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vo.1-XLIX No. 34, August 23, 2014. Naveen S Grewal (2014), “War within: The battle for control of gurdwaras”, *The Tribune*, July 6, 2014, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140706/pers.htm>, accessed on 09/11/2016.

220 SGPC controlled 52 Gurdwaras in Haryana, of which eight are of historical importance and earn crores every year, 17 have an annual income of up to Rs 20 lakh and the remaining earn less than Rs 20 lakh per year. SGPC claims that in 2013-14, the gross income from all Haryana Gurdwaras put together was Rs 32.04 crore - a tentative figure. The top body of the Sikhs maintains that in the years from 2009-10 to 2013-14, Haryana Gurdwaras gave a total of Rs 35.80 crore to SGPC, of which the committee spent Rs 31.27 crore on Haryana Gurdwaras and SGPC-run institutes in the state. However, HSGPC do not buy such claims of SGPC. President of HSGPC Jagdish Singh Jhinda claims that Haryana Gurdwaras gave Rs 180-200 crore to SGPC in the last five years - more than five times the sum claimed by SGPC. Relevant Information was gathered through discussion with SGPC officials/members employed in Haryana and Punjab. Also see, Veenu Sandhu (2014), “Haryana gurdwara row: A political squabble over religious economics”, *Business Standard*, August 11, 2014, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/a-political-squabble-over-religious-economics-114080900687_1.html, accessed on 16/09/2016.

Sikhs of Haryana not to form separate Gurdwara management committee parallel to SGPC to manage the affairs of Gurdwaras. The supreme religious institution of the Sikhs, the Akal Takht Sahib, constituted a ten member committee to talk with Sikh leaders of Haryana who have been striving hard to form new Gurdwara management committee for the state of Haryana. The Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh restrained the eleven-member ad-hoc executive committee (including HSGPC President Jagdish Singh Jhinda) and other office bearers of newly announced Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) from beginning the functioning of the concerned committee.²²¹ Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib also ordered the members and supporters of HSGPC not to disturb the previous administrative system being carried out by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Akal Takht Sahib, the highest seat of temporal and religious authority for Sikhs, instructed the SGPC to continue to manage Gurudwaras located in Haryana.²²² Giving his verdict clearly in favour of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib said:

"Formation of separate Haryana Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (HSGPC) has created unrest among the Sikh community. Let the day to day affairs of Gurudwaras in Haryana to be managed by the SGPC to maintain peace and harmony. Nobody would interfere in the management of SGPC."²²³

Making the ongoing dispute more intense and bitter, the two warring factions called for separate Sikh conventions to prepare the blueprint for their agitations. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) supported by SGPC called Amritsar World Sikh Convention at Amritsar, while similar convention was called by Sikhs of Haryana at Karnal.²²⁴ However, in a bid to defuse

221 "Akal Takht restrains Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee office bearers from functioning", *The Economic Times*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/akal-takht-restrains-haryana-sikh-gurdwara-management-committee-office-bearers-from-functioning/articleshow/39110244.cms>. Also see, Virender Kumar (2014), "Return of Gurdwara politics", *The Indian Express*, July 22, 2014, available <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/return-of-gurdwara-politics/>, accessed on 17/10/2014

222 "Akal Takht bars HSGPC from functioning", *Mail Online India*, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2707754/Akal-Takht-order-banning-Sikh-gatherings-blessing-disguise-Punjab-CM.html>. Also see, Virender Kumar (2014), "Return of Gurdwara politics", *The Indian Express*, July 22, 2014, available <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/return-of-gurdwara-politics/>, accessed on 17/10/2014.

223 Statement by Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh. See, "Maintain Status Quo on Gurdwaras: Akal Takht", *The Daily Pioneer*, July 28, 2014, available at <http://www.dailypioneer.com/todays-newspaper/maintain-status-quo-on-gurdwaras-akal-takht.html>. Also see, "Akal Takht bars HSGPC from functioning", *Mail Online India*, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2707754/Akal-Takht-order-banning-Sikh-gatherings-blessing-disguise-Punjab-CM.html>, accessed on 23/10/2014.

224 Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), headed by Prakash Singh Badal, declared that it would hold a mega Panthic Convention called the 'Vishal Panthic Ikath' — to be attended by Sikhs from across the world including scholars and priests — on July 27, 2014, at Manji Sahib in the Golden Temple complex to chalk out a

the situation, the Akal Takht Sahib, the highest Sikh seat of temporal authority, stepped in by directing to call off all Sikh congregations planned by Akali Dal and Sikhs of Haryana. Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh, issued the directive to all Sikhs of Haryana, the Shiromani Akali Dal, SGPC and the entire Sikh community for not holding any kind of rally or convention that could lead to further tension.²²⁵ At a hurriedly-convened press conference, the Jathedar Akal Takht said that in the light of the existing circumstances, nobody could be allowed to hold convention or rally anywhere in Punjab and Haryana as it may deepen the crisis within the Sikh community.²²⁶ Strictly directing the Sikh organizations to call of all the conventions, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh said:

"All Sikhs are concerned today. The Sikh quam (community) is facing a new challenge. At such a time, I feel that any probable clash among the Sikh community be stopped at any cost. Being the chief Sewadar of the community, I direct all Sikh organizations and groups to call off their conventions in Amritsar (Punjab) and Karnal (Haryana)."²²⁷

On the conflict over separate Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC), the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib said that Sikh leaders from Haryana and Akali leaders from Punjab would be asked to come to the Akal Takht to find a solution. As a result of the directives issued by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, the separate conventions that were called by the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Amritsar and by Haryana Sikh leaders in Karnal

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- programme on how to deal with Haryana's brazen move to form separate Sikh body for Gurdwaras in Haryana. See, "Why a SGPC in Haryana is a big political blow to the Akali Dal", *First Post*, July 21, 2014, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/sgpc-haryana-big-political-blow-akali-dal-1628039.html>, accessed on 29/10/2014.
- 225 "HSGPC row: Akal Takht puts Sikh conventions in Punjab and Haryana on hold", *India Today*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/akal-takht-puts-all-gatherings-on-hold-201833-2014-07-27>, accessed on 24/10/2014. Also see, "Haryana SGPC: Akal Takht calls off Sikh conventions", *South Asian Times*, July 26, 2014, available at <http://www.thesouthasiatimes.info/index.php?param=news/55098/Top%20Story/46>, accessed on 24/10/2014.
- 226 "Separate SGPC row: Akal Takht steps in, Sikh leaders call off congregation", *India Today*, July 26, 2014, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/sgpc-akal-takht-punjab-sikhs-haryana-sikhs-kaptan-singh-solanki-sad-upkar-singh-sandhu-giani-gurbachan-singh-avtar-singh-makkar-201814-2014-07-26>, accessed on 25/10/2017. Also see, "Akal Takht cancels all Sikh conventions after UP religious riots", *Mail Online India*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2706901/Akal-Takht-cancels-Sikh-conventions-UP-religious-riots.html>, accessed on 27/10/2014.
- 227 In the light of the disturbed circumstances, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Giani Gurbachan Singh directed the Sikh organizations not to hold convention or rally anywhere in Punjab and Haryana as it may deepen the crisis in the Sikh religious circles. Jathedar Akal Takht sahib also informed that both the parties (Sikh leaders from Haryana and Akali leaders from Punjab) would be asked to come to Akal Takht Sahib to find a solution to the current problem which arose after formation of a separate Gurdwara Committee for shrines located in Haryana. See, "Akal Takht steps in to avert crisis, Sikh meets called off", *The Indian Express*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/akal-takht-steps-in-to-avert-crisis-sikh-meets-called-off/>, accessed on 29/10/2014. Also see, "HSGPC Row: Akal Takht puts Sikh conventions in Punjab and Haryana on hold", *India Today*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/akal-takht-puts-all-gatherings-on-hold-201833-2014-07-27>, accessed on 26/10/2014.

(Haryana) were called off.²²⁸ In context to the directions issued by Akal Takht Sahib, Punjab Congress leader Captain Amarinder Singh termed the Akal Takht's intervention in the intense conflict as "historic", and stated: "It is a right step taken to ease the tension. I welcome the decision of the Akal Takht as its intervention has defused the situation. Otherwise the Akali Dal would have ended up fighting with Haryana Sikhs."²²⁹ As both sides (SGPC and HSGPC) were locked in a bitter stand-off over the creation of the separate Gurdwara management body for Haryana, the conventions were being seen as a flashpoint between the two rival sides with the potential of dividing the Sikh community.²³⁰

Excommunication by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib

The Sikh clergy (Jathedars of five Takhts) led by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib excommunicated the President of newly formed Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (Jagdish Singh Jhinda), senior vice-president (Didar Singh Nalvi)²³¹ and Haryana's then Finance Minister (Harmohinder Singh Chatha) from the Sikh community.²³² They were excommunicated (on July 16, 2014) from the Sikh Panth on charges of defying the directives of Akal Takht Sahib, and going ahead with the formation of separate management committee for Gurdwaras located in Haryana. After the excommunications of concerned Haryana Sikh leaders from the Sikh community, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib said that the excommunicated leaders of Haryana will remain excommunicated as long as they do not approach the Akal Takht and ask for forgiveness. Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh alleged that concerned

228 ibid.

229 "Akal Takht steps in to avert crisis, Sikh meets called off", *The Indian Express*, July 27, 2014, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/akal-takht-steps-in-to-avert-crisis-sikh-meets-called-off/>, accessed on 29/10/2014. Also see, "Separate SGPC row: Akal Takht steps in, Sikh leaders call off congregation", *India Today*, July 26, 2014, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/sgpc-akal-takht-punjab-sikhs-haryana-sikhs-kaptan-singh-solanki-sad-upkar-singh-sandhu-giani-gurbachan-singh-avtar-singh-makkar-201814-2014-07-26>, accessed on 25/10/2017.

230 "Convention of Haryana Sikhs to seek separate panel to manage Gurdwaras", *The Hindu*, July 15, 2014, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/convention-of-haryana-sikhs-to-seek-separate-panel-to-manage-gurdwaras/article6117192.ece>, accessed on 09/11/2014.

231 Excommunicated by Akal Takht Sahib for forming a separate Gurdwara body in Haryana, Didar Singh Nalvi informed that he was not going to appear before the Akal Takht. In the context, he said: "We have fought the battle for the Sikhs of Haryana and can't betray them now. I am ready to appear before the Sikh high priests if SGPC withdraws its case against the formation of HSGMC from the Supreme Court and gives it due recognition." See, "Excommunicated by Takht, HSGMC chief keen to clarify", *The Times of India*, April 4, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/excommunicated-by-takht-hsgmc-chief-keen-to-clarify/articleshow/58004117.cms>, accessed on 16/05/2017.

232 Nearly two years after the Akal Takht had ordered his excommunication from the Panth, Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (HSGMC) president Jagdish Singh Jhinda voln against him. As per the report published in Times of India, Jhinda told TOI that the Akal Takht had summoned him before his excommunication, but he couldn't comply with the orders due to "some reasons" at that time. In the context, Mr. Jhinda said: "Now, the situation has changed. I have written to Akal Takht jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh. I want to appear before Sikh high priests and clarify my position," See, "Excommunicated by Takht, HSGMC chief keen to clarify", *The Times of India*, April 4, 2017, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/excommunicated-by-takht-hsgmc-chief-keen-to-clarify/articleshow/58004117.cms>, accessed on 16/05/2017.

Haryana Sikh leaders had connived with the Congress party for dividing the single largest representative institution of the Sikh community, the SGPC.²³³

When group of few members of newly created Gurdwara management body for Haryana led by its President Jagdish Singh Jhinda came to pay obeisance at Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple, Amritsar) and Akal Takht Sahib, as thanks giving before taking charge, they were not allowed to enter the premises of Akal Takht Sahib by SGPC officials and its task force. The SGPC's contention was that excommunicated community members could not enter Sikhism's highest temporal seat, the Akal Takht Sahib.²³⁴ In this context, the additional secretary of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Vijay Singh, stated: ***"Jagdish Singh Jhinda could not be allowed to enter the Akal Takht Sahib. Akal Takht Sahib has excommunicated him and directed the Sikh Panth to boycott him politically, religiously and socially till he seeks pardon. We (SGPC officials) had orders that Jhinda must not be allowed to enter; but others were free to pay obeisance at the Akal Takht Sahib."***²³⁵

This highly controversial act of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the premier religious institution of Sikh community, of not letting Jagdish Singh Jhinda (President HSGPC) to pay obeisance at Akal Takht Sahib was criticized and condemned by various Sikh organizations.²³⁶ Coordinator of American Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (AGPC) Pritpal Singh expressed concern on the matter related with excommunication of Sikh leaders of Haryana. In the context, he categorically stated: ***"It is a matter of serious concern that top Sikh institution, the Akal Takht Sahib, is losing credibility all because Akal Takht***

233 See, "Akal Takt Excommunicates Haryana Minister", *The Pioneer*, July 17, 2014, available at <https://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/chandigarh/akal-takht-excommunicates-haryana-minister.html>, accessed on 26/10/2016. Also see, "Haryana SGPC Issue: Akal Takht Excommunicates Three", *The Outlook*, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/haryana-sgpc-issue-akal-takht-excommunicates-three/850102>, accessed on 26/10/2016.

234 Even though president of HSGMC Jagdish Singh Jhinda, 10 members of the HSGMC executive, and five other supporters paid obeisance (On July 28, 2014) at Harmandir Sahib, they could not enter the Akal Takht Sahib premises, aggressive tactics of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) were in full display at the Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, as its security task force backed by Punjab police personnel blocked the entry of members of the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (HSGMC) to the Akal Takht. As soon as the HSGMC members emerged from the Harmandir Sahib and headed towards the Takht, SGPC task force and policemen in civil clothes joined hands to block the stairs leading to the first floor of Akal Takht Sahib's building. The SGPC's contention was that excommunicated community members could not enter Sikhism's temporal seat, the Akal Takht Sahib. Information about the situation as gathered from few concerned SGPC officials employed at Golden Temple, Amritsar. Relevant information also available at, "SGPC Task Force Blocks Haryana Committee Members From Entering Akal Takht Sahi" July 29, 2014, available at <https://www.sikh24.com/2014/07/29/sgpc-task-force-blocks-haryana-committee-members-from-entering-akal-takht-sahib/#.W2xJdiQzbIU>, accessed on 11/02/2015.

235 See, "SGPC-cops block Jhinda, HSGMC group from entering Akal Takht", *Hindustan Times*, July 28, 2014, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sgpc-cops-block-jhinda-hsgmc-group-from-entering-akal-takht/story-6YLoftnWkml2E6af8zTwnL.html>, accessed on 02/02/2015.

236 Based on discussion with leaders/ members of various Sikh organizations like Dal Khalsa, United Akali, Dal, HSGPC, etc.

Jathedar's independence is under question.²³⁷ Bhai Mohkam Singh, the convener of United Sikh Forum met Jathedar Gurbachan Singh (on July 17, 2014) and demanded that decision to excommunicate the Haryana Sikh leaders be withdrawn. Bhai Mohkam Singh argued that issue related with formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Patbandhak Committee is purely political and the concerned Sikh leaders of Haryana (Jagdish Singh Jhinda and Didar Singh Nalvi) were not the signatories to the Act which have been framed by the Government of Haryana.²³⁸ However, the excommunication of concerned Haryana Sikh leaders by Akal Takht Sahib further strengthened the claim of SGPC to keep intact the management and control of Gurdwaras located in Haryana, and not let the officials and supporters of HSGPC to take charge. In this context, the then SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar said:

“The newly elected ad-hoc President of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC), Jagdish Singh Jhinda has been excommunicated by the Akal Takht Sahib. In such controversial circumstances, the charge of Haryana-based Sikh shrines could never be handed over to the person who has been excommunicated from the Sikh Panth by the highest seat of the Sikh community, the Akal takht Sahib.”²³⁹

Response of SGPC

The formation of a new Gurdwara committee sparked a bitter tussle between the Amritsar-based Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and the new panel over control of Sikh shrines in Haryana. The formation of a separate Sikh body for Haryana has been widely opposed by SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal. Ever since the Haryana assembly passed the legislation for the creation of HSGMC enabling the Haryana-based body's takeover of the management of Gurdwaras in the State, a frenzied struggle has been on.²⁴⁰ Harbhajan Singh, SGPC member from Kurukshetra, who filed a petition in Supreme Court challenging the legitimacy of Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, contended that the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara (Management) Act, 2014, was not only a hasty enactment but also against the constitutional provisions and the Punjab Reorganisation Act,

237 “AGPC to convene Sikh Conclave on the issue of Akal Takht's s .Supremacy,” *The Times of India*, July 17, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ludhiana/AGPC-to-convene-Sikh-Conclave-on-the-issue-of-Akal-Takhts-supremacy/articleshow/38552718.cms>, accessed on 03/09/2016.

238 See, “United Sikh Forum urges Akal Takht Jathedar to take back decisions excommunicating HSGPC leaders”, July 18, 2014, available at <https://sikhsiyasat.net/2014/07/18/united-sikh-forum-urges-akal-takht-jathedar-to-take-back-decision-excommunicating-hsgpc-leaders/>, accessed on 03/09/2016.

239 “SGPC chief adopts tough stance against HSGMC”, *The Indian Express*, August 1, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sgpc-chief-adopts-tough-stance-against-hsgmc/>, accessed on 23/10/2014.

240 See, “HSGPC, SGPC leaders at loggerheads to take possession of 72 gurdwaras in Haryana”, *India Today*, July 21, 2014, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/haryana-sikh-gurudwara-prabandhak-committee-sgpc-akali-dal-201098-2014-07-21>, accessed on 27/10/2016. Also see, “Punjab, Haryana set to fight gurdwara battle in court, Times of India, July 1, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Punjab-Haryana-set-to-fight-gurdwara-battle-in-court/articleshow/37547669.cms>, accessed on 27/10/2016.

1966. The petitioner argued that wilful attempt was being made by Sikhs of Haryana, prompted by the State Government, to wrest control of Gurdwaras from the members of SGPC by the use of force.²⁴¹ As per the petition by SGPC:

"Under the law, Haryana cannot legislate in respect of a subject where the field is already occupied by central legislation as the subject of religious institutions correlates to Entry 28 List III. The strict provisions with regard to interstate body corporate under the law have not been complied with. "It is important to note that mandate with regard to several actions including reservation of constituencies, constitution of Sikh Gurudwara Elections Tribunal and notification of Gurudwaras for bringing them within the provisions of Section 85 of the 1925 Act have been done by the Central Government ."²⁴²

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) backed by Shiromani Akali Dal executed their battle planning under which they fortified many Gurdwaras in Haryana.²⁴³ The then President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC, Avtar Singh Makkar, refused to hand over the charge of Gurdwaras located in Haryana in the hands of the newly-formed Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). Truckloads of SGPC supporters were sent into Haryana from Punjab to camp in the Gurdwaras. SGPC even sent a task force to various Gurdwaras in Haryana to maintain their control.²⁴⁴ Clashes erupted outside Gurdwara *Chhevin Patshahi*, one of the biggest Gurdwaras in Haryana, when members of HSGPC forcibly tried to enter the Sikh shrine.²⁴⁵ The supporters of newly

241 "SC restrains Haryana SGMC from taking control of Gurdwaras", *The Hindu*, August 7, 2014, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-restrains-haryana-sikh-gurdwaras-management-committee-from-taking-control-of-gurdwaras-in-the-state/article6292014.ece>. Also see, "SC: Control of gurdwaras can't be handed over to Haryana SGPC now", *First Post*, August 7, 2014, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/india/sc-control-of-gurdwaras-cant-be-handed-over-to-haryana-sgpc-now-1654359.html>, accessed on 21/10/2015., accessed on 21/10/2015.

242 See, "SC: Control of gurdwaras can't be handed over to Haryana SGPC now", *First Post*, August 7, 2014, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/india/sc-control-of-gurdwaras-cant-be-handed-over-to-haryana-sgpc-now-1654359.html>, accessed on 21/10/2015.

243 See, "Tension in Kurukshetra as Haryana Sikhs try to take over Gurdwara", *The Hindu*, August 3, 2014, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/tension-in-kurukshetra-as-haryana-sikhs-try-to-take-over-gurdwara/article6275683.ece>. Also see, "HSGPC, SGPC leaders at loggerheads to take possession of 72 Gurdwaras in Haryana" *India Today*, July 21, 2014, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/north/story/haryana-sikh-gurudwara-prabandhak-committee-sgpc-akali-dal-201098-2014-07-21>, accessed on 22/10/2014.

244 On August 6, the clearing outside the Chhevin Patshahi Gurdwara in Haryana's Kurukshetra district turned into a battlefield of sorts. Supporters of the ad-hoc Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (HSGMC), a newly-created body that is staking claim to the Gurdwaras of Haryana, clashed with the police. They came armed with lathis and swords. The police were desperate to prevent their entry into the Gurdwara because inside the historic shrine, the armed 'task force' of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was determined to fight a bloody battle to fend off the bid to take over what SGPC has believed for years is its prerogative: the management - and finances - of all important Sikh shrines. Earlier, the same day, HSGMC had succeeded in taking over control of two other important Gurdwaras of Haryana - in Kaithal and Yamunanagar - from SGPC.

245 "HSGMC members clash with police in Kurukshetra", *The Economic Times*, August 6, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/hsgmc-members-clash-with-police-in-kurukshetra/articleshow/39756700.cms>, accessed on 23/10/2014.

formed Haryana Gurdwara Committee pitched against SGPC have used everything, from force to legalities, to try and win the battle. **At play here was not just the struggle to control shrines but a more explosive combination of religion, politics and money.**²⁴⁶

Avtar Singh Makkar, the then president of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), led a delegation to the Governor of Haryana and made a strong appeal on him to return the concerned legislation, on the basis that State Assembly was not competent to pass a law on a subject that was governed by an Act of Parliament.²⁴⁷ SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar also submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Haryana that Haryana Assembly by passing the Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, 2014, has engrossed upon the area of SGPC with a blatant constitutional transgression and a shameless interference in the religious affairs of the Sikh community.²⁴⁸ However, despite the appeals of SGPC, the Governor of Haryana cleared the Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, 2014, thus making the way the formation of separate management committee for Gurdwaras located in Haryana.²⁴⁹ Remaining strong and firm on his stand, the SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar, kept on asserting that its only the right and responsibility of SGPC to look after the Gurdwaras in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and the Union Territory of Chandigarh.²⁵⁰

As Haryana constituted separate Sikh Gurdwara management committee for the Sikh shrines located in Haryana, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) forcefully insisted that SGPC is the

246 On August 6, the clearing outside the Chhevin Patshahi Gurdwara in Haryana's Kurukshetra district turned into a battlefield of sorts. Supporters of the ad-hoc Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (HSGMC), a newly-created body that is staking claim to the Gurdwaras of Haryana, clashed with the police. They came armed with lathis and swords. The police were desperate to prevent their entry into the Gurdwara because inside the historic shrine, the armed 'task force' of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was determined to fight a bloody battle to fend off the bid to take over what SGPC has believed for years is its prerogative: the management - and finances - of all important Sikh shrines. Earlier, the same day, HSGMC had succeeded in taking over control of two other important Gurdwaras of Haryana - in Kaithal and Yamunanagar - from SGPC.

247 "Haryana Governor clears Gurdwara Bill", *The Hindu*, July 15, 2014, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/haryana-governor-clears-gurdwara-bill/article6210973.ece>, accessed on 21/10/2014.

248 "HSGPC supporters continue to sit on dharna, SAD meets Governor", *The Economic Times*, August 3, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/hsgpc-supporters-continue-to-sit-on-dharna-sad-meets-governor/articleshow/39543371.cms>. Also see "Haryana Governor clears Gurdwara Bill", *The Hindu*, July 15, 2014, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/haryana-governor-clears-gurdwara-bill/article6210973.ece>, accessed on 21/10/2014.

249 Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) chief Avtar Singh Makkar even demanded the immediate removal of Haryana Governor Jagannath Pahadia and Chief Secretary SC Choudhary on the issue of formation of a separate Gurdwara management body to look after the Sikh shrines located in Haryana. Mr. Makkar alleged that Haryana Governor acted more like a Congress leader than the constitutional head of the State. For relevant information, see, "SGPC chief seeks removal of Guv, Chief Secretary", *The Tribune*, July 21, 2014, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140722/haryana.htm#2>, accessed on 29/10/2014.

250 See, "SGPC chief adopts tough stance against HSGMC", *The Indian Express*, August 1, 2014, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sgpc-chief-adopts-tough-stance-against-hsgmc/>, accessed on 05/08/2016.

sole administrator of Sikh shrines. It also got the support of its ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which took a firm stand in favour of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and SGPC, by opposing the formation of separate body for management of Sikh shrines in Haryana. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government at the Centre argued that Haryana Government cannot make separate Act in this regard on its own as it is only the Indian Parliament that is empowered to make any amendments in the Sikh Gurdwara Act.²⁵¹ While criticizing the Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, 2014, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) termed the Haryana Government's legislation passed in the Haryana assembly as "illegal and unconstitutional".²⁵² The affidavit filed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lead Union Government against the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) stated that it was "illegal" to form a separate body for Gurdwaras in Haryanan, and that Haryana Government had no authority to form it.²⁵³ The leaders of newly formed Haryana Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) slammed Union Home Ministry for filing an affidavit in the Supreme Court against its formation. In sharp contrast to this, HSGPC President Jagdish Singh Jhinda, argued that the Sikhs of Haryana had earned their right to have a separate Gurdwara committee after a prolonged struggle and the Union Government was bent upon hurting the Sikhs of Haryana on the instance of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).²⁵⁴ In the context, Mr. Jhinda said:

For the last nearly 15 years, we are fighting for our constitutional right to form a Gurdwara management committee in the State (Haryana). We want that the Sikhs of Haryana get the right to manage Gurdwaras. A case regarding the validity of the Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Management Act is pending in the Supreme Court and it is in the final stage.²⁵⁵

The move to form independent Gurdwara management committee for shrines in Haryana was vigorously opposed and condemned by the leaders of Shiromani Akal Dal (SAD). The then Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, and SGPC President Avtar Singh

251 See, "HSGPC tiff: Will an indecisive Modi govt cost BJP the Haryana polls?", *First Post*, July 28, 2014, available at <http://www.firstpost.com/politics/hsgpc-tiff-will-an-indecisive-modi-govt-cost-bjp-the-haryana-polls-1636755.html>, accessed on 20/10/2014.

252 "Centre, Haryana govt caught up in political slugfest over HSGPC legislation", July 19, 2014, available at <http://post.jagran.com/amp/articles/centre-haryana-govt-caught-up-in-political-slugfest-over-hsgpc-legislation-1405752491>, accessed on 28/10/2014. Also see, "CM urged to defend Sikhs' right to manage Gurdwaras in state", *The Tribune*, July 13, 2017.

253 "Haryana government's move on gurdwara affairs finds echo in Lok Sabha", *The Economic Times*, July 21, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/haryana-governments-move-on-gurdwara-affairs-finds-echo-in-lok-sabha/articleshow/38804013.cms>, accessed on 23/10/2014.

254 "Convention of Haryana Sikhs to seek separate panel to manage Gurdwaras", *The Hindu*, June 15, 2014, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/convention-of-haryana-sikhs-to-seek-separate-panel-to-manage-gurdwaras/article6117192.ece>, accessed on 21/10/2016.

255 See, "CM urged to defend Sikhs' right to manage gurdwaras in state", *The Tribune*, July 13, 2017, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/cm-urged-to-defend-sikhs-right-to-manage-gurdwaras-in-state/435660.html>, accessed on 19/07/2017.

Makkar, termed the decision of Haryana Government (to form HSGPC) as “planning of the Congress Party to divide the Sikhs.”²⁵⁶ Taking recourse to *Panthic agenda*’ and reacting aggressively to the formation of separate Gurdwara committee by Congress lead Haryana Government, the Akali Dal patron Parkash Singh Badal threatened to launch a *morcha*, (mass agitation), and even threatened to quit from the office of the Chief Minister of Punjab.²⁵⁷ Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal argued that Haryana Government’s move to create a separate Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was an attack on the Constitution and an attempt by the Congress Government to meddle in the religious affairs of the Sikh community.²⁵⁸

Condemning and criticizing the passing of Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, Union Food Processing Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal MP (from Bathinda), Harsimrat Badal, stated that Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has demanded action on how the concerned Bill was passed by the Governor of Haryana. Harsimrat Badal, the wife of Akali Dal President Sukhbir Singh Badal, also charged Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda with playing "petty politics" as Haryana Assembly had no right and authority to legislate such an Act. In this context, she said: ***“Haryana Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda has violated the Constitution. The Sikh Gurdwara Act do not fall in the jurisdiction of the State. I am shocked that such a senior Governor has given into the demands of the ruling Congress Government and played into the hands of the Chief Minister by giving his assent to such a legislation”***²⁵⁹ Member Parliament and Akali Dal leader Harsimrat Badal expressed shock on the Haryana Sikh Gurdwaras (Management) Bill, 2014, by saying: . *“I am shocked how the Governor of Haryana has even signed on this Bill. It is totally unconstitutional and illegal.”*²⁶⁰

On July 17, 2014, the Punjab Legislative Assembly passed a resolution declaring the newly formed Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) null and void. On July 18, 2014, Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal and Akali Dal MPs met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley and M. Venkaiah

256 “Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee row: Shiromani Akali Dal calls Sikh's congregation on July 27”, *The Economic Times*, July 19, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/shiromani-gurdwara-parbandhak-committee-row-shiromani-akali-dal-calls-sikhs-congregation-on-july-27/articleshow/38686375.cms>, accessed on 20/10/2014

257 See, “Badal threatens to quit as Punjab CM over Haryana SGPC”, *Hindustan Times*, July 16, 2014 available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/chandigarh/badal-threatens-to-quit-as-punjab-cm-over-haryana-sgpc/story-4R6RLHeiTR3c4dotT6LVEO.html>, accessed on 23/10/2014. Also see, “Badal jumps into SGPC battlefield: Goes all out to protest against formation of a separate Gurdwara body in Haryana”, *Mail Online India*, July 23, 2014, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/indiahome/indianews/article-2703394/Badal-Goes-protest-against-formation-separate-gurdwara-body-Haryana.html>, accessed on 29/10/2014.

258 “No State govt has power to enact law on SGPC, says Sukhbir Singh Badal”, *The Economic Times*, July 26, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/no-state-govt-has-power-to-enact-law-on-sgpc-says-sukhbir-singh-badal/articleshow/39008821.cms>, accessed on 28/10/2014.

259 “Haryana decision on separate SGPC unconstitutional: Harsimrat Badal”, *The Economic Times*, July 17, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/haryana-decision-on-separate-sgpc-unconstitutional-harsimrat-badal/articleshow/38557106.cms>, accessed on 27/10/2014.

260 *ibid*

Naidu and sought the Union Government's intervention to annul the Congress lead Haryana Government's decision to form a separate Gurdwara management committee for Sikh shrines located in Haryana.²⁶¹ It was Parkash Singh Badal, the then Chief Minister of Punjab, who led the Shiromani Akali Dal's protest against the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). Raising his voice and full-fledged support in favour of the authority and legitimacy of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Mr. Badal asserted:

"Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is the Parliament of the Sikhs. We will not tolerate any move to divide or split it."²⁶²

As of now, the control of Gurdwaras in Haryana has not been formally handed over to Haryana Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India directed the rival groups, the SGPC and HSGPC, to maintain status quo on the management and control of Gurudwaras in Haryana²⁶³ till further orders, and directed the State Government to take all steps to maintain law and order.²⁶⁴ The Apex Court passed this order after Haryana Government submitted that Haryana Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) has taken control of around 6-7 out of 52 Gurudwaras in the state, a contention refuted by SGPC which submitted that its rival has taken over just one shrine in Kurukshetra district. The Supreme Court Bench also directed Haryana Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) and the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to open separate bank accounts to keep the offerings of 52 Gurudwaras located in Haryana till the time the Supreme Court rules on the validity of the law enacted by the Haryana

261 "Parkash Singh Badal seeks Centre's intervention to stop separate SGPC Committee for Haryana", *The Economic Times*, July 17, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/parkash-singh-badal-seeks-centres-intervention-to-stop-separate-sgpc-committee-for-haryana/articleshow/38499171.cms>, accessed on 26/10/2014.

262 *ibid.*

263 Harbhajan Singh, a resident of Haryana and member of SGPC had filed a petition in the Hon'ble Supreme Court challenging the constitutional validity of Haryana Sikh Gurudwara (Management) Act, 2014 under which a separate committee was formed to manage the affairs of the Gurudwaras in the state. The petitioner said that Section 72 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 says that the power to make law in respect of SGPC as an Inter-State Body Corporate has been reserved to the Central Government only and there is no provision in law for any bifurcation by enacting a State legislation. See, "Supreme Court orders status quo on management of Haryana gurdwaras", *The Economic Times*, August 8, 2014, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/supreme-court-orders-status-quo-on-management-of-haryana-gurdwaras/articleshow/39815530.cms>. Also see, "Supreme Court to hear plea over gurdwaras in Haryana", *The Hindu*, August 6, 2014, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-to-hear-plea-over-gurdwaras-in-haryana/article6286991.ece>, accessed on 27/10/2014.

264 See, "Control of Gurdwaras in Haryana: SC orders for status quo", *The Times of India*, August 7, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Control-of-gurdwaras-in-Haryana-SC-orders-for-status-quo/articleshow/39814755.cms>, accessed on 28/10/2014. Also see, "SC: Control of Gurdwaras can't be handed over to Haryana SGPC now", *First Post*, August 7, 2014, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/india/sc-control-of-gurdwaras-cant-be-handed-over-to-haryana-sgpc-now-1654359.html>, accessed on 28/10/2014.

Government.²⁶⁵ The Apex Court passed the order a day after violent clashes took place in Haryana as the Sikh supporters of the newly formed committee Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) forcibly attempted to take over the Gurdwara *Chhevin Patshahi* (Kurukshetra) which is one of the prime Gurdwaras located in Haryana.²⁶⁶

Bibi Jagir Kaur, former president Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) who campaigned for SGPC interests in Kurukshetra, termed the Supreme Court's interim orders as the "victory of truth". She affirmed:

"The Congress lead Haryana Government's conspiracy to divide the Sikhs by interfering in their religious affairs has failed. This is the victory of truth. The Gurdwaras which have been looked after by SGPC for all these years will continue to remain under the management of SGPC till the Supreme Court rules otherwise. The efforts being made by members and supporters of Haryana Gurdwara Committee to forcibly occupy our sacred places of worship shall not stand any chance now."²⁶⁷

On the opposite side, the president of newly created Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC), Jagdish Singh Jhinda, said:

"We respect the country's judicial system and have full faith in it. Our struggle in court of law shall continue. Our Committee to manage the Gurdwaras located in Haryana was constituted as per the legal provisions prescribed under the Constitution. The separate SGPC Act has full legal validity and sanctity, and even the courts shall honour it. This is the legal right of the Sikhs of Haryana we shall definitely get it."²⁶⁸

The case regarding the validity of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Management Act, 2014, is pending in the Supreme Court of India and the matter is under adjudication. Following the status quo orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, the Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) has been managing only five Gurdwaras in Kaithal, Kurukshetra and Yamunanagar districts of Haryana. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) manages the remaining Gurdwaras.

265 "SGPC row: SC steps in to restrain Haryana", *The Indian Express*, August 8, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sc-restrains-haryanas-new-management-body-to-take-over-any-more-gurdwaras-orders-status-quo/>. "Control of gurdwaras in Haryana: SC orders for status quo", *The Times of India*, August 7, 2014, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Control-of-gurdwaras-in-Haryana-SC-orders-for-status-quo/articleshow/39814755.cms>. Also see, "SGPC row: Supreme Court orders status quo", *Deccan Chronicle*, August 8, 2014, available at <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/140808/nation-current-affairs/article/sgpc-row-supreme-court-orders-status-quo>, accessed on 21/10/2014.

266 In order to control the disturbed situation, the police had to use batons, water cannons and tear gas shells to disperse the protesters. All notified Gurdwaras in India are currently under the SGPC. See, "Tension in Kurukshetra as Haryana Sikhs try to take over Gurdwara", *The Hindu*, August 3, 2014, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/tension-in-kurukshetra-as-haryana-sikhs-try-to-take-over-gurdwara/article6275683.ece>, accessed on 29/10/2017.

267 Statement of Bibi Jagir Kaur (former President SGPC) while briefing the press and media persons. See, "SGPC row: SC steps in to restrain Haryana", *The Indian Express*, August 8, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sc-restrains-haryanas-new-management-body-to-take-over-any-more-gurdwaras-orders-status-quo/>, accessed on 24/10/2014.

268 Statement by Jagdish Singh Jhinda, president HSGPC, after the interim orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. See, "SGPC row: SC steps in to restrain Haryana", *The Indian Express*, August 8, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/sc-restrains-haryanas-new-management-body-to-take-over-any-more-gurdwaras-orders-status-quo/>, accessed on 24/10/2014.

Gurdwaras by their very nature and Sikhism as a religion emerged as a reaction to orthodoxies and casteism in established religions. Sikh faith and Gurdwaras have very strong appeal cutting across religious communities. Hence, the demand for a separate managing committee for the shrines located in Haryana should not be seen as a demand of the Sikh community alone. Therefore, the possessive and proprietarily approach of the political entity-Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) towards Gurdwaras is seen with disdain.²⁶⁹

While Shiromani Akali Dal sounded the bugle for an agitation against the formation of the Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC), the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) vowed to fight a decisive battle for the termination of the controversial law enacted by the Haryana Government, and thus abandon the newly formed separate Sikh body for management of Gurdwaras located in Haryana. As per the status quo orders of the Supreme Court of India,²⁷⁰ the Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) has been managing only five Gurdwaras in Haryana located at Kaithal, Kurukshetra and Yamunanagar districts, while the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) manages the all the remaining Gurdwaras. The emotive religious-political tussle on the issue of separate Gurdwara management body for Haryana on the lines of SGPC resulted in serious conflict marked with divisions and internal fighting between the Sikhs of Punjab and Haryana.

It can be summarized that the formation of the Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) in 2014 triggered a major dispute between Sikhs of Punjab and Haryana. The then Chief Minister of Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, and SGPC President Avtar Singh Makkar, declared to fight against controversial legislation of the then Congress Government in Haryana to control the management of Sikh shrines located in the territory of Haryana State. The formation of separate management body for Sikh shrines in Haryana was seen as an attempt to dislodge the dominance and authority of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

This chapter has studied two recent issues which have been the centre of controversy and conflict within the Sikh religious institutions. The role of pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, in context to: (i) controversy over Nanakshahi Calendar and (ii) conflict over the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) - has been the subject of intense debate and discussion within the Sikh religious and political circles. The chapter has attempted to explore and explain the role of Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in regard to these issues of concern.

269 Surinder Singh Jodhka (2014), "Gurdwara as Arena", *The Indian Express*, August 4, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/gurdwara-as-arena/>, accessed on 03/11/2016.

270 "Haryana sikh gurdwara management committee chief files plea for restraint, *The Times of India*, November 5, 2016, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Haryana-sikh-gurdwara-management-committee-chief-files-plea-for-restraint/articleshow/55255376.cms>, accessed on 21/07/2017.

Chapter-6

Sikh Institutions and Identity: The Emerging Politico-Religious Dynamics

In this chapter, the study has attempted to explain and highlight the emerging scenario within the Sikh religious and political circles, on the basis of the role of pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in contemporary times. An attempt has been made to put forth the emerging impact of contentious issues and conflicts connected with the identity of Sikhs which have already been discussed in detail in the previous chapters. Nature and pattern of the existing relationship between the leading Sikh institutions, and the impact of emerging politico-religious dynamics on the status and authority of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, forms an integral part of this chapter.

Fusion of Religion and Politics

Religion and identity are the pillars around which role of premier Sikh institutions and Sikh politics has revolved. In quest of distinct and separate identity, the Sikh community has often taken recourse to religion. The Singh Sabha movement had such aims. With the explicit support of the Government, Singh Sabha Movement successfully carved out a distinct identity for the Sikhs, that too in face of strong opposition from the Arya Samaj which itself was laying the base of a separate identity of Hindu community. The Gurdwara Reform Movement crystallized the work begun by the Singh Sabha movement. Both Singh Sabha and Gurdwara Reform movements claimed to be religious in nature, but their anti-Government stance gave them the complexion of a political movement.¹ Thus, the first Sikh reformation in form of Singh Sabha and Gurdwara Reform Movement led to a symbiotic relationship between religion and politics, and also between the Sikh religious and political institutions.²

The formations of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) were aimed at fostering the cause of the *Panth* and reaffirm the

1 During the Gurdwara Reform movement, the Sikhs developed a passion for politics. It seems difficult in the light of slogans, programmes, agitations and literature of the period to draw a line between religion and politics.

2 Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (1994), "Religion and Politics - The Sikh Perspective", in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi. Paramjit Singh Judge (2004), "Politics of Sikh Identity and Its Fundamentalist Assertion", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, Issue No. 35, 28 Aug, 2004, available at <https://www.epw.in/journal/2004/35/special-articles/politics-sikh-identity-and-its-fundamentalist-assertion.html>, accessed on 21/06/2016. Also see, Parveen S. Thampi (2008), "Simmering Discontent: Sikhs in Punjab are fighting Many Wars", *The Economic Times*, March 8, 2008, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/the-big-story/simmering-discontent-sikhs-in-punjab-are-fighting-many-wars/articleshow/2846479.cms>, accessed on 21/09/2017.

essential elements of Sikh identity. Both the Sikh organizations, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) tried to outstrip their limitations, and despite claims to the contrary, started raising voice even on non-religious issues. Later on, the Shiromani Akali Dal assumed the role of the protector of Sikh *Panth* in political matters. The efforts aimed at institutionalizing religion-based politics, had thus began. Possibly the rapid pace at which the political activities gained momentum at the individual level, it was not possible to keep politics separate from religion and their lay thin dialectics of Indian politics; the secularization of politics was a myth.³

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) came into existence with main objective to look after the administration of the historical Gurdwaras and preaching of *Gurbani*, Sikhism and Sikh identity in their real perspective. The SGPC did very commendable work by improving administration of Gurdwaras, establishing educational institutions and hospitals. Gradually, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) became the key institution in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. An eminent Sikh scholar, Professor Harbans Singh, declared Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) as a “Unique Ecclesiastical Institution”⁴ of the Sikhs, while Khushwant Singh entitled it as “Parliament of the Sikhs” and “Government within the Government.”⁵

The provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act and role of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in contemporary times must also be evaluated in contrast to the true spirit of the Sikh Sacred Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. The “eternal living Guru” of the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib, is a unique Sacred Scripture which consists of the thoughts and poetry of six Sikh Gurus and divinely inspired Saints from length and breadth of India, belonging to different religious traditions, castes, professions and social backgrounds.⁶ Some of these

3 Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon (1994), “Religion and Politics (Third Perspective),” in Gopal Singh (ed.), *Punjab – Past, Present and Future*, Ajanta Publications, New Delhi, 194-198., N. Gerald Barrier (2004), “Authority, Politics, and Contemporary Sikhism”, in Pashaura Singh, N. Gerald Barrier & W. H. McLeod (eds) *Sikhism and History*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 207-212

4 Harbans Singh (1983), *Heritage of the Sikhs*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, p. 280. Also see, Harbans Singh (1998), *The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism: E-L, Volume 2 of The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, p. 147

5 Dalip Singh (1981), *Dynamics of Punjab Politics*, Macmillan India Limited, New Delhi, p. 91. Also see, “About SGPC” at <http://sgpc.net/about-sgpc/>, the official website of SGPC.

6 The Guru Granth Sahib is truly unique among the world’s great scriptures. It is considered the supreme spiritual authority, head of the Sikh religion and eternal living Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Granth Sahib ji contains writings of not only 6 Sikh Gurus but also writings of people who belonged to other faiths, castes and regions. They include (i) 3 Sikhs (Bhai Satta ji, Bhai Balwand ji and Bhai Sundar ji), (ii) 11 Bhats: (The eleven Bhattas whose baani is included in Guru Granth Sahib are - Kalshar, Jalap, Kirat, Bhika, Salh, Bhalh, Nal, Gyand, Mathura, Bal and Harbans) (iii) 15 Bhagats: (Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas, Sheikh Farid, Trilochan, Dhanna, Beni, Sheikh Bhikan, Jaidev, Surdas, Parmanand, Pipa, Ramanand, Sadhna, Sain). See, Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1983), *Sovereignty of the Sikh Doctrine*

Saints belong to so called low-caste Hindu brahmanical classification. These include: Bhagat Ravidas, Bhagat Kabir and Bhagat Namdev. All these Saints have been given a place of pride in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. All messages are an integral part of the Holy Bani and are equally revered. There is also no doubt in the fact that Sikhs regard Guru Granth Sahib as sovereign, supreme and final authority. Guru Granth Sahib is the best example of inclusiveness, pluralism, interfaith, inter-caste and spiritual philosophy.⁷

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, Sikhs are not primarily concerned with religious doctrines, authentication of sacred scriptures, and details relating to rituals and ceremonies. Discussion on overall themes and specific publications or authors remains lively especially in journals, media and on the internet. It is power, authority and politics revolving around minoritarian fold of Sikh religion, identity concerns of the Sikhs, and the role of leading Sikh institutions, that tends to underpin much public debate and actions.

In the previous three chapters, attempt was made to deal in detail with the contentious issues, conflicts and controversies which are in direct relationship with identity of Sikhs in contemporary times. The focus was to explore and explain various dimensions of these crucial issues and discuss them from diverse politico-religious angles and perceptions. The comprehensive study of these critical issues, conflicts and controversies, which are centred on the role of premier Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, bring in dynamic emerging politico-religious scenario which also poses crucial threats and challenges to identity of Sikhs.

Clearly as explained in the previous chapters, Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC are premier Sikh institutions. However, their concept, historical establishments and nature of working differ from each other. The study of the contemporary role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC has vital implications on the identity of Sikhs worldwide. The complexities, contradictions and political dynamics in the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, the key Sikh institutions, not only impact the identity of Sikhs, but also have significant implications on

(*Sikhism in the Perspective of Modern Thought*), Bahri Publications, New Delhi, pp.81-82. Also see, Harbans Singh (1986), "The Guru Granth Sahib: Guru Eternal for the Sikhs", in Noel Q. King, Daljeet Singh & Hari Ram Gupta (eds.), *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications, Chandigarh, pp. 211 – 218.

7 Ganda Singh (1986), "Guru Gobind Singh designates Guru Granth Sahib to be the Guru", in Gurdev Singh (ed.) *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications, Chandigarh, pp. Harbans Singh (1986), "The Guru Granth Sahib: Guru Eternal for the Sikhs", in Noel Q. King, Daljeet Singh & Hari Ram Gupta (eds), *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition*, Siddharth Publications for Academy of Sikh Religion & Culture, Patiala, pp.211-217. Kharak Singh (2004) "The Religion of The Shabad Guru", *Abstracts of Sikh Studies*, Vol. 6(4), pp.11-12.

their own status, authority and legitimacy. In order to arrive at a correct evaluation and know the exact implications of the contemporary role of Sikh religious institutions, it is essential to understand the importance of real Sikh postulates as enshrined in its Sacred Scripture - Guru Granth Sahib.

I

In part (I) of this chapter, the study analyses the role of SGPC in regard to the issues, conflicts and controversies which pose serious challenges and threats to separate and distinctive features of Sikh identity. The analysis is based on the role of pioneer Sikh institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) vis-a-vis the issues of contention which have been dealt in detail in the previous chapters of the study. On the basis of such explanation and analysis, an attempt has been made to understand and highlight the emerging religious and political scenario within the Sikh community.

SGPC and Cast Factor

Sikhism as founded by Guru Nanak Dev invited all irrespective of caste, creed, race and colour to join him as equals. Guru Nanak Sahib was followed by nine Sikh Gurus who kept up the tradition of equality. Respect for manual labour is enjoined on Sikhs so that no one is held to be high or low because of his occupation. Sikh commitment to equality is demonstrated by the institutions of *sangat* and *langar*. Since commensality is the most important element of caste, such practices break down caste barriers. Sikhism, due to its egalitarian principles and unique ideology was naturally more attractive to low castes and many joined the faith in their search of social equality.⁸ The most significant and radical development towards the establishment of egalitarian and casteless society was the founding of the Khalsa by the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh, in 1699. It is beyond doubt that Sikhism emerged and evolved as an emancipating force for the lowest of the low. First Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev was clear and firm on this as he says:

ਨੀਚਾ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਨੀਚ ਜਾਤਿ ਨੀਚੀ ਹੂੰ ਅਤਿ ਨੀਚੁ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਨ ਕੇ ਸੰਗਿ ਸਾਥਿ ਵਡਿਆ ਸਿਉ
ਕਿਆ ਰੀਸੁ॥ ਜਿਥੈ ਨੀਚ ਸਮਾਲੀਅਨਿ ਤਿਥੈ ਨਦਰਿ ਤੇਰੀ ਬਖਸ਼ੀਸ਼॥(੧੫)

I am the lowest of the low castes; low, absolutely low; I am with the lowest in companionship, not with the so-called high. Blessing of Almighty are where, the lowly are cared for.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Ang (page) p.15)

8 For multidimensional understanding of Sikh faith, values, practices and beliefs, see, W. Owen Cole & Piara Singh Sambhi (1999), *Sikhism Beliefs and Practices*, Adarsh Books, New Delhi, pp. 18-36. Also see, Gurdev Singh (1986), *Punjab Politics (Socio-Political Orientation of the Sikh Gurus)*, V.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, pp. 16-20

Gradually, the social, economic and political forces came into play and inevitably all kinds of distinctions came in. Sikhism does not have any Brahmin class as such, but the equivalent position is occupied by *Jatts*, a land-owning economically dominant caste.⁹ Belonging to the peasant caste, which is a low caste in Hindu caste set up, they had converted to Sikhism. After adopting Sikhism as religion, *Jatts* found mobility and soon established themselves at the top by virtue of their wealth and political power. Under the impact of various socio-economic and historical factors, Sikh society got split into several castes like Jats, Aroras, Ramdasias, Khattris, etc. These castes are further sub-divided, and thus the caste system in Sikh community also became hierarchical in nature. The various castes were strictly ranked, and commensality and connubial was adhered to rigidly. All Sikhs were equal in *langar*, but in the outside world caste based social differences are legitimized. **In fact, so entrenched had the caste system become in the Sikh psyche that same Sikhs who demanded that the Indian Constitution should recognize them as a separate religion because they did not recognize caste, now argued that not recognizing ‘Sikhs’ as untouchables was discrimination against Sikhs.** Moreover the caste status became hereditary and rigid with the passage of time, and currently it lays very strong basis for vote-bank politics within the Sikh community.¹⁰

It would be completely unfair to shy away from the fact the there is distortion of values and principles of Sikhism by the Sikh community itself in the present socio-economic and political scenario. Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith, strictly opposed and condemned the caste based social hierarchy that was peraviling at every level in the society. But, in complete contradiction to Guru’s teachings, caste system has found its stronghold within the Sikh community. Today, the Sikh community is clearly divided into set of caste categories which are stratified in a way that taking birth in one cast is considered to be a

9 Belonging to the peasant caste, which is a low caste in Hindu caste set up, Jatts converted to Sikhism. After adopting Sikhism as religion, Jatts found mobility and soon established themselves at the top by virtue of their wealth and political power. See, Ravinder Kaur (2003), “Jat Sikhs – A Question of identity”, in Bidyut Chakrabarty (ed), *Communal Identity in India – Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 282-284. Paramjit Singh Judge (2002) “Religion, Caste, and Communalism in Punjab”, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 51, No.2 (September 2002) pp. 189-192.

10 There have been incidences when so called Mazhabis Sikhs were denied access to Gurudwaras and village wells. When the Sikhs took service in British army, Sikh regiments were caste based, since the higher castes would neither mix nor take orders from lower castes. Caste has been a way for Jats to retain their social dominance especii lay in rural sectors See, Niranjan Singh (1988), *Sikh Jagat vich Futt ate es de Karan* (f;Zy irs ftZu c[ZN ns/ fJ;d/ ekoB), Lokgeet Publication, Sirhind, pp. 55-54. Surinder S. Jodhka (2004), “Sikhism and the caste question: Dalits and their politics in Contemporary Punjab”, *Contributions to the Indian Sociology*, Volume: 38 issue: 1-2, February 1 , 2004, pp. 165-188.

blessing while taking birth in another is considered to be a curse. The caste system operates so strongly in rural parts of Punjab that people have established caste-specific Gurudwaras, cremation grounds and places of congregation.

- Caste in SGPC Establishment

Now, if we look at the important Sikh institutions of today, it is found that same non-discriminatory and egalitarian policy as established by Sikh philosophy does not appear to apply. Although, the Sikhs continue to assert that there is no discrimination based on caste, creed or race, it is clear that this position is not tenable. For example, if we look at the top five officials of Shiromani Gurdawara Parbandhak Committee over the last 15 years, it becomes clear that even the top brass in the pioneer Sikh institution do not practise what was preached by the Sikh Gurus. The so called "lower-castes" have had no proportional representation on these elite institutions during recent times. It is a fact that so called "lower caste" (as per the prevailing caste based social hierarchy) officials do not often become the presidents, vice-presidents or secretaries of SGPC on regular basis. This surely tells a story about the way the top Sikh institution, the SGPC functions. **If there was no caste based consideration, then the lower caste members of Sikh community who are significant in number must have occupied the important positions in SGPC.**¹¹ The fact that SGPC do not encourage different castes and sects into the important jobs in Gurdwara committees points to the fact that leading Sikh institution, the SGPC, is not paying heed to the message and teachings of the Sikh Gurus.

There is complete rejection of caste system in Sikhism. Sikh Gurus out-rightly condemned the institution of caste and caste based discriminations through their teachings and sacred writings. The founder of Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev, says:

ਜਾਣਹ ਜੋਤਿ ਨ ਪੁਛਹ ਜਾਤੀ ਆਗੈ ਜਾਤਿ ਨ ਹੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Recognize the Lord's Light within all, and do not consider social class or status; there are no classes or castes in the world hereafter. (1) (Pause)

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Ang (page) p.349)

11 As per 2011 census, there were 2,633,921 Mazhabis in the Indian state of Punjab, of whom 2,562,761 declared themselves to be Sikhs. Also Punjab has the highest percentage of Scheduled Caste population amongst all the states of the Country. The scheduled caste population in Punjab is 88.60 lakh which is 31.94% of the total population (277.43 lakh) of the State. Punjab accounts for 2.3% of the total population and 4.3% scheduled caste population of India. *Source: Scheduled Caste Population By Religious Community, 2011 India Census, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India*, available at <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/SCST-Series/SC14.html>, accessed on 13/08/2017.

Tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, dispelled people's ignorance about the evil of caste system, by saying:

ਮਾਨਸ ਕੀ ਜਾਤਿ ਸਬੈ ਏਕੈ ਪਰਚਾਨਬੋ ॥

(All the human beings, as a species, are recognized as one and the same)

(Dasam Granth)¹²

However, in total contradiction to Sikh Gurus teachings, the sub clause 2 of clause 44 of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, says:

***"The State Government shall from time to time, and after such consultation with the board or as it considers proper select 20 plural constituencies, each returning two members of whom one shall be a Sikh belonging to any of the Scheduled Castes notified as such under Article 341 of the Constitution and the other shall be a Sikh who does not belong to any of those Scheduled Castes."*¹³**

As Sikh Gurus completely denounced the caste system, the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Sikh Code of Conduct) drafted by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) also abolishes and rejects the institution of caste. The SGPC published Sikh Rehat Maryada states that ***"Sikh should not believe in caste or descent"***.¹⁴ However, the reality of the functioning of this largest Sikh religious institution is very much contradictory and against the basic principles and teachings of Sikhism. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee reserves constituencies for scheduled castes and women candidates.¹⁵ Till date, no sincere efforts have been made to do away with the reservation clause from Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 by the Sikh political and religious leadership, even as noted Sikh intellectuals have made calls for its amendment. The blame predominantly lies on Sikh politicians and SGPC leadership for not raising their voice against the removal of reservation clause from the Gurdwara Act, as their career and political gains thrives on caste-based politics.

While evaluating the role of SGPC in context to the caste issue, following three facts have very crucial implications:

- (i) Sikh Gurdwara Act provides for Caste based Reservation in SGPC
- (ii) SGPC has Caste column in its Voter Form
- (iii) SGPC accepts the institution of Caste

12 Bani - *Akaal Ustat*, Dasam Granth (pg.49)

13 See 44 (2) of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925.

14 See, "SGPC Rehat Maryada in Punjabi" available at <http://sgpc.net/sikh-rehat-maryada-in-punjabi/>, the official website of SGPC.

15 SGPC composes of 191 members, out of whom 170 are elected, 15 co-opted, and the remaining six include Takht Jathedars (Jathedars of the five Sikh Takhts) and the Head Granthi of Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), Amritsar. Total 170 members are elected out of 120 constituencies out of which 50 constituencies are reserved. Out of total 50 reserved seats, 20 are reserved for scheduled caste members and 30 for women. All reserved constituencies are double constituencies electing one female or scheduled caste candidate along with a male or from a general category member.

The above two points are explained and highlighted in the previous chapters. (i) The provision of caste based reservation in election of SGPC members, and (ii) presence of caste column in SGPC Voter Form establishes the fact that (iii) SGPC accepts and sanctions caste in its election, representation and management. The act of recognition and sanctioning of the caste factor by SGPC (particularly through declaration of one's caste) is very much contradictory to its own definition of "Sikh" as mentioned in Sikh Rehat Maryada which is published by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). This fact highlights that caste based reservation is integral part of SGPC elections and administration. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) **Voter Form also has the caste column with clear intention and objective to know the caste of the Sikh voter.** The caste set up within the Sikh community is not just visible in the State Assembly or Government institutions but is also visible in the formation of the SGPC, where the allotment of tickets for contesting the elections is made with the motive of garnering the caste-based vote bank. The sole purpose of caste based considerations and representation in SGPC is the electoral and political gains of Shiromani Akali Dal.¹⁶ The process of exploiting the caste factor by SGPC for political motives is explained by Kirpal Singh Bathinda (regular columnist in Punjabi newspapers – *Ajit and Spokesman*) in the following words:

“The main purpose of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Akali Dal which were established under the auspices of Akal Takht Sahib, is to work at political level to preach and spread the Sikh religion. But these Sikh institutions have forgotten their original duties and in order to attain their narrow political interests, they are further increasing the evil of casteism by creating dalit wings and backward classes wings, etc in their organizations. By appointing some opportunistic people from caste groups like Mazhabi Sikhs, Ramdasias Sikhs, Kabirpanthis, Ramgharias, etc. at various ranks in organizations of SGPC and Akali Dal, they are used to get the votes of people of their respective castes.”¹⁷

(English translation of an excerpt of the article published in Punjabi)¹⁸

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- 16 Ashutosh Kumar (2004), “Electoral Politics in Punjab: Study of Akali Dal”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, No. 14/15 (Apr. 3-16, 2004), pp. 1515-1520. Sutapa Saryal (2016), “Ethnic Polarization in Punjab and the Role of AKali Dal”, *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 23, Issue - 2, 2016, pp. 573:578
- 17 English translation of an excerpt of an article published in Punjabi. See, Kirpal Singh Bathinda, “ਜਾਤ ਪਾਤ ਸਮਾਜ 'ਚ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਡਾ ਕੇਹੜਾ”, *The Sikh Spokesman*, available at <http://www.sikhspokesman.com/contentlist2.php?cat=1>, accessed on 08/02/2018.
- 18 Original Text (in Punjabi) of an excerpt from an article written by Kirpal Singh Bathinda : “ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲ ਦਾ ਮੁਢਲਾ ਕੰਮ ਹੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਪਸਾਰ ਲਈ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਕ ਪੱਧਰ 'ਤੇ ਕੰਮ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ ।ਪਰ ਇਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਵੀ ਆਪਣੀ ਸੋਝੀ ਸਿਆਸਤ ਲਈ ਆਪਣੇ ਫਰਜ਼ਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਭੁੱਲ ਕੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਦਲ ਵਿੱਚ ਦਲਿਤ ਵਿੰਗ, ਪਛੜੀਆਂ ਸ਼੍ਰੇਣੀ ਵਿੰਗ ਆਦਿਕ ਬਣਾ ਕੇ ਜਾਤ ਪਾਤ ਨੂੰ ਵਡਾਵਾ ਦੇ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। ਐੱਸ. ਜੀ .ਪੀ .ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲ ਆਪਣੀਆਂ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਮਜ਼ਬੂਤੀ ਸਿੱਖ, ਰਾਮਦਾਸੀਏ ਸਿੱਖ, ਕਬੀਰਪੰਥੀ, ਰਾਮਗੜੀਏ ਸਿੱਖ, ਆਦਿ ਅਨੇਕਾਂ ਵਰਗਾਂ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਕੁਝ ਮੌਕਾ ਪ੍ਰਸਤ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕੁਝ ਅਹੁਦੇ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੀ ਜਾਤ ਨਾਲ ਸਬੰਧਤ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਵੋਟਾਂ ਵਟੋਰਨ ਲਈ ਵਰਤਿਆ ਜਾ

Practice of caste in religion and politics, and thus caste based reservations in Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) has led to further enhancing the caste hierarchy and sharpening of caste- discriminations in the Sikh society. Such role and functioning of SGPC in Sikh religious affairs clearly proves that SGPC, the most influential Sikh body, recognizes the institution of caste, accepts the caste hierarchy in Sikh community, and thus provides for reservations too. **Recognition and acceptance of the institution of caste is in total opposition to the Sikh ideology and identity as established by the Sikh Gurus.**

It has been discussed in detail in the previous chapters that Sikh ideology and identity are based on the principle of casteless society. Sikhism outrightly rejects and condemns the institution of caste. But here we see that SGPC, the pioneer religious institution of the Sikhs and the body responsible for management of historical Gurdwaras, is functioning on caste lines. Sanctioning the caste hierarchy and continuous domination of *Jatt* caste in the management and decision making process of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has resulted in influx of non-Jatt castes to various sects and Deras both in Punjab and abroad. The clear acceptance and recognition to the caste hierarchy and functioning on similar basis by the leading Sikh religious institution (SGPC), the sole representative body of the identity of Sikhs worldwide, puts big question mark on the emerging role of SGPC. No institution can present and assert for the casteless identity of Sikhs, if the institution itself works on casteist lines. Neither such an institution can serve towards the establishment of socially equal society as propounded by revered Sikh Gurus through their sacred writings and lives.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) under the reservation provisions of Sikh Gurdwara Act gives representation to Sikh scheduled castes, such as Mazhabi Sikhs, Ramdasia Sikhs and Kabir Panthi Sikhs. Some scholars of Sikh studies argue that provisions in the Sikh Gurdwara Act regarding caste based reservation for SGPC membership were incorporated as a preventive measure against caste discrimination. **But ironically, the provision for caste based reservation has actually encouraged the Sikhs to keep themselves permanently confined to their castes in order to get elected as members of SGPC. As such, the institution of caste got more firm and deeply connected to the socio-economic and political status of the Sikhs.**¹⁹

ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ।” See, Kirpal Singh Bathinda, “ਜਾਤ ਪਾਤ ਸਮਾਜ ’ਚ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਡਾ ਕੇਹੜਾ”, *The Sikh Spokesman*, available at <http://www.sikhspokesman.com/contentlist2.php?cat=1>, accessed on 08/02/2018.

19 “Quota has no place in SGPC Poll”, *The Times of India*, December 10, 2003, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Quota-has-no-place-in-SGPC-poll/articleshow/349083.cms>, accessed on 21/06/2016. Kashmir Singh (1989), *Law of Religious Institutions – Sikh Gurdwaras*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp. 176 – 182. Also

The inclusion of clauses in the Sikh Gurdwara Act pertaining to 'caste' acknowledges the Brahminical caste social hierarchy, encourage distinctions and intensify perceived differences. Therefore, the caste consideration in election, composition and representation process of SGPC is in direct contradiction to egalitarian teachings of Sikh Gurus and principles of Sikhism as enshrined in Sikh sacred scriptures. **Caste regarding provisions in the Sikh Gurdwara Act and implementation of the same in the working of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) are non conducive for *Panthic* unity and equality.** The contradictions between the caste provisions of the Sikh Gurdwara Act and teachings of Sikh Sacred Scriptures has subsequently lead to disparities, disagreements and conflicts, thereby adversely affecting the efficiency in role and functioning of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

According to contemporary existential reality, the distinctive principles and values of Sikh philosophy stand endangered today. Taking the first tenet, i.e. equality, it is an established fact that at present, Sikh community constitutes not only a highly differentiated but also an extremely hierarchical group. There exist clear-cut distinctions based especially on caste, region and various other socio-economic factors. This kind of demarcation within the Sikh community gets rigidly manifested through the identification of large number of Gurdwaras based on caste identity (Jatts, Ramdasias, Mazhabis, Sainis, Ramgharias, etc.) of Sikhs. The teachings of the Sikh Gurus and their sacred writings, the revolutionary concepts of *sangat* and *langar*, highest respect of manual labour in Sikhism - all have exercised a liberating and reformative influence on the depressed sections. However, the evolution of the Sikh community and the working of leading Sikh institution, the SGPC, did not result in the end of casteism but rather in the evolution of a Sikh caste hierarchy parallel to that of the Hindu caste system.

In present times, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has become an institution which has further lead to rise in economic and political power of economically dominant castes and sects, especially the *Jatt* Sikhs of Punjab. What the dalit sections gained from Sikh faith and religion, is getting socially lost because of denial of their participation in the management of Sikh affairs and the decision making process of the prominent Sikh institution, the SGPC. Highly caste based elections and politico-religious role of SGPC has lead to further divisions and segregation of the Sikh community into sects and classes. The caste based reservation and consideration of caste factor within the functioning of SGPC

see, Surjit Singh Gandhi (1993), *Perspectives on Sikh Gurdwaras Legislation*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, pp.208-210.

defeats the purpose of getting the individuals fully devoted to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. The politicization of SGPC by Shiromani Akali Dal on caste lines to increase its *panthic* vote bank further violates the foundation principles of SGPC, and contradicts the objectives and goals of the largest religious institution of the Sikh community. The factions and groupism within the SGPC regarding its role, functioning and decision making has diverted the powerful religious institution of Sikhs away from its original principles, values and objectives.

SGPC and Dera cult among Sikhs

There has been a constantly churning challenge to the oneness of Sikh religion and Sikh community by the self centred, sectarian and materially motivated Deras which are a great force to reckon with, and for which the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been too weak and negligent. The so called *sants/babas* or spiritual guides have revived the old culture of having a ‘living Guru’ and are advocating veneration of pictures, idols and statues for salvation. Namdharis, Nirankaris and Radhasoamis are the products of this cult.

The present landscape of Punjab is dotted with Deras or camps run by deified humans with sublime titles of *Sants* and *Babas*. Punjab has been witness to the emergence of large number of Deras due to the continued social exclusion and pervading inequality in the social and economic order that refuses to go away despite the rise of Sikhism, which in normative terms is opposed to caste based discrimination and glorifies manual labour. Over time, little of those ideals converted into practice. Caste discrimination continued, resulting in Dalit groups like the Ad- Dharmis splintering out of Sikhism, and eventually leaving it entirely.²⁰ In order to get the Dalit segments (within the Sikh community) back to mainstream Sikh religion, Karnail Singh Panjoli, SGPC executive committee member, suggests:

“To get the dalit brethren back into the Sikh fold, the SGPC President and its members should go home to home and village to viallge. I think that Dalit members of SGPC should encourage the Dalit sections to return back to mainstream Sikh religion, which have drifted away from Sikh faith and have attached themselves with Deras. They need to be fully explained about the concept of Sikhi and basic principles of Sikhism. Neither there ever has been any planning by the SGPC for the return of dalit brethren back to Sikhism, nor

20 Some of the most influential deras continue to run into conflict with Sikh orthodoxy, which perceives their growing sway in Punjab as a threat to the Sikh identity. The alarming trend, as exemplified by the violent flashpoints related to the Dera Sacha Sauda (2007), Dera Ballan (2009) and Dera Noormahal (2010) has led to the emergence of new caste and sectarian faultlines in Punjab's volatile social milieu.

has any program been initiated by the SGPC for this purpose. I have written a letter to SGPC President raising the concern to move in this direction.²¹

*(English translated version of statement made in Punjabi)*²²

The changing religious landscape of Punjab is bewildering. The State has old, historic Gurudwaras run by the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the apex institution of the Sikhs. There are Gurudwaras which are not under the SGPC but follow the norms of the institution and preach from Sri Guru Granth Sahib. And then there are Deras - the offshoots and the breakaways from Sikhism which are headed by *Dehdhari Gurus, sants* or *babas* (embodied Gurus). The Sikh faith prohibits human worship. For the faithful, the sacred words of the Gurus and other saintly figures, as collectively compiled in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, are commanded to be the spiritual guide. The ten Sikh Gurus in their lifetime preached this fundamental tenet and Guru Gobind Singh before shedding his mortal frame enthroned Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs, and ended the lineage of living Gurus. In Sikhism, “Shabad”²³ is the “Guru” (divine light) and not the body, and Guru’s eternal form is “Shabad”. In this context, Sri Guru Granth Sahib says:

**ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ ॥
ਗੁਰੁ ਬਾਣੀ ਕਹੈ ਸੇਵਕੁ ਜਨੁ ਮਾਨੈ ਪਰਤਖਿ ਗੁਰੁ ਨਿਸਤਾਰੇ ॥**

(The Word, the Bani is Guru, and Guru is the Bani. Within the Bani, the Ambrosial Nectar is contained.

If His humble servant believes, and acts according to the Words of the Guru's Bani, then the Guru, in person, emancipates him.)²⁴

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Ang (page) 982)

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- 21 The views and suggestions were given by Akali veteran and SGPC core committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli. The statement, suggestion and views were recorded while my discussion with Mr. Panjoli on reasons responsible for vast Dera following by dalit segment of Sikhs.
- 22 Original statement as made (in Punjabi) by snior SGPC leader and member Karnail Singh Panjoli : “SGPC ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਅਤੇ ਮੈਂਬਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦਲਿਤ ਭਾਈਚਾਰੇ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਵਾਪਿਸ ਮੌਜੂਦ ਲਈ ਪਿੰਡ-ਪਿੰਡ, ਘਰ-ਘਰ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਾਲਾ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ। ਮੈਂ ਸਮਝਦਾ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਦਲਿਤ ਭਾਈਚਾਰਾ ਜੋ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਤੋਂ ਦੂਰ ਜਾ ਚੁੱਕਾ ਹੈ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵਾਪਿਸ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਵਿੱਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ SGPC ਦ ਜੋ ਦਲਿਤ ਭਾਈਚਾਰੇ ਦੇ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਹਨ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦਲਿਤ ਭਾਈਚਾਰੇ ਕੋਲ ਜਾ ਕੇ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੇ Concept ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਾਉਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਵਲ ਪ੍ਰੇਰਿਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ। SGPC ਦੇ ਮੈਂਬਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦਲਿਤ ਭਾਈਚਾਰੇ ਦੇ ਵਿਹੜਿਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਣ ਦੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਕਦੇ ਕੋਈ Planning ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਨਾਂ ਹੀ ਕੋਈ Program ਆਰੰਭਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੈਂ SGPC ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਨੂੰ Letter's ਲਿਖ ਚੁੱਕਾ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪਾਸੇ ਤੁਰਨ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ।”
- 23 In Sikhism, the term ‘Shabad’ refers to a hymn or paragraph or sections of the Holy Text that appears in Guru Granth Sahib. The script used for the *Shabad* is Gurmukhi.. *Shabad* is the term also used to refer to hymns within other Sikh scriptures. It is the word of the ‘Guru’.
- 24 Meaning (in Punjabi) of the term ‘Shabad’ by fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ramdas Ji : ਗੁਰੂ ਰਾਮਦਾਸ ਜੀ ਕਹਿੰਦੇ ਹਨ (ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ) ਬਾਣੀ (ਸਿੱਖ ਦਾ) ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ, ਗੁਰੂ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਮੌਜੂਦ ਹੈ। (ਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ) ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਤਮਕ ਜੀਵਨ ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲਾ ਨਾਮ-ਜਲ ਹੈ, ਜਿਸਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖ ਹਰ ਵੇਲੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਹਿਰਦੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਂਭ ਰੱਖਾ ਹੈ। Source : *Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Ang (page) 982.*

The flow of Sikh population towards *Deras* and *Sants* at first a trickle, now a trend - is in turn giving rise to questions about the future direction of Sikhism. Sikhism and Sikh Gurus emphasised inclusion, and propagated and preached a religious tradition that was syncretic in its world view. The Deras emerged as a sign of protest to the exclusionary practices of the dominant mainstream Sikh religious institutions, especially the SGPC. The proximity of Dera cult to the idea of a 'living Guru' along with a tendency to incorporate other traditions besides Sikh traditions, made them appear subversive. A history scholar Babusha Maingi rightly says:

“By and large these deras challenged fundamentalists (Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee) who claim as the protagonists of Sikhism and restricted the membership of the heterogeneous Sikh groups (particularly the non-jats) in the Sikh institutions and organisations.”²⁵

While the proliferation of the Dera culture is a social reality, what has complicated matters is the politicisation of Deras. Political parties on both sides of the spectrum, assiduously court and patronise the Deras as a captive vote bank. **Infact, the rising polarisation of Deras on political lines is a reaction to the Shiromani Gurdawa Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) reducing itself to a religious wing of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), rather than living up to its original purpose of preaching and propagating the Sikh faith as per the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib.** This fact was accepted even by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib (who is recognized as the spokesperson the Sikh Panth), Giani Gurbachan Singh. He categorically stated that lack of preaching of Sikhism was one of the main reasons behind rise of Dera Sacha Sauda following. Giani Gurbachan Singh instructed that Shiromani Parbandhak Committee's *Dharam Parchar Lehar* (SGPC drive for religious preaching) should focus on the areas in Malwa from where the most number of Sikhs had switched loyalties to the Dera Sacha Sauda.²⁶ In the context, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib said:

25 Nandini Rathi (2017), “Why deras and sects find Punjab fertile for growth”, *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2017., available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/why-deras-and-sects-find-punjab-fertile-for-growth-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-rape-case-conviction-dera-sacha-sauda-4815609/>, accessed on 03/09/2017.

26 DeraSachaSauda has its presence in the Malwa region that has the maximum 69 of the 117 assembly segments of Punjab. Of these, the Dera has a major influence on at least 40 constituencies, especially among Dalit Sikhs. The 'deras' largely fill up the spiritual vacuum. People started moving out of the ambit of mainstream Sikhism into the orbit of-proclaimed 'godmen'. Most of these deras also have their own collection of loosely structured dos and don'ts, which are often in conflict with the tenets of Sikhism. The flow of people towards *deras* and *sants*, now a trend – is in turn giving rise to questions about the future direction of Sikhism. For information see, Madanlal (2009), “Gurudom: The Political Dimension of Religious Sects in Punjab”, *South Asia Research*, Vol. 29(3): 223–234, available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.866.4492&rep=rep1&type=pdf>. See,

“Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been already focusing on preaching of Sikhism in Malwa belt and we will try to make it more intense. As far as Sikhs getting attracted to Dera Sacha Sauda was concerned, lack of preaching of Sikhism is also one of the strong reasons. But then many people get attracted to Dera due to their materialistic needs. Any Sikh who leaves Guru Granth Sahib for a living so-called godman can be only called a mentally sick.”²⁷

Large numbers of people from the scheduled castes and rural proletariat of the Sikh community felt alienated from the established Sikh institutions who like Akali Dal have also been dominated by *jatt* landlord class of the Sikhs. The popularity of Deras is directly related to the perception among the downtrodden sections in Punjab and Haryana that Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), the premier Sikh institution, is dominated by the upper caste Sikhs who are also economically well off. The Deras play very crucial role in the articulation of dalit identity and their interests. In fact, in Punjab, the religious rebellion from mainstream Sikhism and conflict with established Sikh institutions has become a vehicle of Dalit resistance and assertion.²⁸

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has failed in its role as it has not carried out the required propagation of Sikhism, especially among the economically backward sections of society. The pioneer Sikh religious institution, the SGPC, is to be blamed for not propagating the Sikh religion and identity in inclusive and liberal manner. It was Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Commiittee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) of 1920's that faught hard to liberate Gurdwaras from the control of mahants, and then placed them back under the corporate control of Sikh *Panth*. But in the present times, its Akali Dal and SGPC which have been supporting and patronizing Deras to seek their help both in men and money for vested political interests.²⁹

“DeraSachaSauda announces support to SAD-BJP alliance in Punjab polls”, *The Indian Express*, February 01, 2017, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/feb/01/dera-sacha-sauda-announces-support-to-sad-bjp-alliance-in-punjab-polls-1565858.html>, accessed on 17/03/2017. Also see, Neeru Sharma (2014), “Rise of Deras in Punjab: A Serious Challenge to Main Stream Sikhism”, *Review of Arts and Humanities*, March 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 83-86.

27 See, “Doors open for dera followers to return to Sikh fold: Akal Takht”, *The Indian Express*, August 30, 2017, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/doors-open-for-dera-followers-to-return-to-sikh-fold-akal-takht-gurmeet-ram-rahim-singh-4819881/>, accessed on 07/10/2017. See also, “GharWapsi? Akal Takht Urges Sikhs To Correct 'Mistake' Of Joining Dera, Dera Hits Back”, *Darpan*, August 31, 2017, available at <http://www.darpanmagazine.com/news/interesting/ghar-wapsi-akal-takht-urges-sikhs-to-correct-mistake-of-joining-dera-dera-hits-back/>, accessed on 11/10/2017.

28 Arvinder Singh (2014), “Deravad-An Offshoot of Discontentment Among Dalit Sikhsin Punjab”, *International Journal of Research*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, February 2014, pp. 87-91 available at <http://internationaljournalofresearch.org/>, accessed on 21/07/2017.

29 Surinder Jodhka (2008), “Of Babas and Deras”, *Seminar* (No. 581), January 2008, pp. 54-57. Chander Suta Dogra (2007) “The Morphed Gene Their more inclusive, less conservative aspect roils Sikhism”, *The Outlook*, May 28, 2007, available at <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/the-morphed->

The emergence and expansion of the Deras is also an outcome of at least some material improvement in the conditions of the weaker sections of society and their associated political assertion. The increasing Dera cult among the Sikhs is also a response to the social and religious exclusion experienced by the followers of the Deras within the established religious institutions representing the organised religion, the Sikhism.

The institutions which were established on basic principles of Sikhism were to carry forward the teachings of Sikh Gurus, and manage the religious affairs of the Sikhs on similar basis, have drifted away from their original objectives and goals. This is the reason that even a highly controversial sect like Dera Sacha Sauda that does not even claim to be associated with Sikh religion, emerged as serious threat to Sikh religion and top Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC. The phenomenon is a complex one that not only involves religious aspect, but also the present day Sikh politics of vote bank.³⁰

SGPC, Sikh Gurdwaras Act and Sehajdhari Issue

The controversy regarding the identity and voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs has its roots in the 1944 amendment to the Sikh Gurdwara Act, 1925, under which Sehajdhari Sikhs were given voting rights in the SGPC elections. The Parliament in its wisdom in 1944 kept a safeguard in Sikh Gurdwara Act that only Amritdhari Sikhs (baptized Sikhs) will be eligible to contest the election to the SGPC. The legislation to include Sehajdhari Sikhs into fold of mainstream Sikhism by amendemnet in 1944 in Sikh Gurdwara Act was religious move which was liberal and progressive in nature. The Akalis have always opposed this amendment and pressurized the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at Center in 2003 to issue a notification to bar Sehajdhari Sikhs from voting in SGPC elections.³¹ Thus, the Sehajdhari Sikhs were debarred of their voting rights through a notification issued by the Union Home Ministry in the year 2003.³² Unfortunately for the Sikh faith as a whole, the vested interests and particularly the SGPC have succeeded in their evil designs to prevail

gene/234750, accessed on 17/06/2015. Also see, "Tohra presents 'proof' of SAD leaders patronising deras", *The Times of India*, September 16,202, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Tohra-presents-proof-of-SAD-leaders-patronising-deras/articleshow/22392755.cms>, accessed on 26/04/2017.

30 Pramod Kumar, "Decoding politics of 'Messengers of God': Deras in Punjab", *Times of India*, August 28, 2017. Ashutosh Kumar (2014), "Dera as sites of Electoral Mobilization in Indian Punjab : Examining the Reasons that Political Parties flock to the Deras", *Asian Ethnicity*, Volume 15, Issue 3, pp. 335-350.

31 Bowing to political pressure and on totally extraneous consideration and without any application of mind, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at Centre issued a notification, whereby the word 'Sehajdhari' was omitted from Section 49 and 92 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act and they were deprived of their right to vote in SGPC elections .

32 In the year 2008, the SGPC adopted a resolution stating that they would stick to the definition listed in the Gurdwaras act 1925. According to SGPC definition, a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' was only someone born into a non-Sikh family but was gradually adopting Sikhism. The resolution made it clear that according to the SGPC, any Sikhs born into Sikh families who changed their 'keshdhari roop' (appearance) would be considered 'patit', as would be 'Sehajdharis' who, after adopting the faith, cut their hair.

upon the Union Government to disfranchise a large section of population such as Sehajdharis with the single stroke of the pen (through notification dated 8/10/2003).

As per the statements and facts given by Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP), the Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2016, debarred more than 60 percent of the eligible Sikhs from voting for the their leading religious institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).³³ It is contradiction of justice because an individual in spite of being a ‘Sikh’ was to have no right or say in the election of the members of Boards and Committees which are elected for the management and upkeep of Gurdwaras. In 2011, the Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) produced figures to show that 70 lakh voters out of the 1.75 crore Sikhs in Punjab were declared non-Sikhs under the category of ‘Sehajdharis’ and were prevented from voting in SGPC elections, the Sikh religious institution known as the “Parliament of Sikhs”.³⁴ **If the figure of “70 lakh” of Sehajdhari Sikhs as given by the Sehajdhari Sikh Party is correct, then the SGPC committees so constituted would hardly represent the collective will of the Sikh masses, which will go against the spirit of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 and general scheme of the Constitution.**

Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) that represents the interests of Sehajdhari Sikhs claims that Sehajdhari Sikhs are definite ‘Sikhs’. The party thus justifies the rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs to vote in SGPC elections, in the following words:

“We respect the Amritdhari and Khalsa Sikhs (baptized Sikhs), but we cannot bear if someone label us as Patit (apostate) when we have never been baptized. We (Sehajdhari Sikhs) have the equal right to select honest, capable, competent and wise people to manage our Gurdwaras. We are very much the Sikhs of Guru Nanak Dev ji and we have no other religion except Sikhism, and we believe only in Sri Guru Granth Sahib ji . We are Sikhs by birth too as we are born in Sikh families. How can we be thrown out of the religion by 15 percent people (baptized Sikhs) as 85 percent of Sikh population across the globe is Sehajdhari?”³⁵

On April 25, 2016, Lok Sabha, where Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in majority, passed a bill (Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Bill, 2016,) to amend 91-year-old Sikh Gurdwaras Act to exclude Sehajdhari Sikhs from their voting rights in SGPC elections. The matter is still pending adjudication before the Supreme Court of India but this legislation to amendment has been brought in haste without waiting the judgement of the Apex Court of India. The bill proposes to remove the exception given to Sehajdhari Sikhs in 1944 to vote in the elections to select the members of the board and the committees constituted under the Sikh Gurdwara Act.

34 As per 2011 census of India, Sikhs comprised about 57.6 percent of Punjab’s population. The 2011 SGPC voter listed 5.5 million Keshdhari voters—only a third of the Sikhs in Punjab—as real Sikhs. See, Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016. Also see, “Census 2011: %age of Sikhs drops in Punjab; migration to blame”, *The Times of India*, August 27, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/Census-2011-age-of-Sikhs-drops-in-Punjab-migration-to-blame/articleshow/48689317.cms>, accessed on 13/11/2017.

35 Statement made by national president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP), Dr. Paramjit Singh Rannu, while explaining the basis of Sehajdhari Sikh identity and expressing the stand of Sehajdhari Sikh Party on

As Indian Parliament passed the Bill (Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act, 2016) to amend a 91-year-old law to exclude Sahajdharis from voting in the elections to Sikh religious bodies, the new Amendment in the Sikh Gurdwara Act is seen as a religion based political strategy by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the behest of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to maintain its control over management and resources of SGPC, the Sikh religious body which have a budget parallel to Punjab Government.³⁶ Expressing his views on the implications of this crucial amendment, Parmjit Singh Rannu, president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party stated:

"The new Amendment (Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act, 2016) is a political move by BJP-Akali coalition, which has wide cultural implications, and is the attempt of fascist forces to divide the Sikh minority into a sub minority."³⁷

The Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which was pushed through at the insistence of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partner Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), seeks to take away the voting rights of non-Amritdhari (non-baptized) Sikhs in Sikh religious institutions including the SGPC. Sehajdhari Sikh Party chief Paramjeet Singh Rannu affirms that the strategy of disfranchising the Sehajdhari Sikhs prove that SGPC, the largest Sikh religious institution, is being influenced by the Shiromani Akali Dal and the Hindu right wing organization, the RSS which operates with the agenda of diluting the religious minorities of India. The leader of the Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP) views the plan and strategy to exclude the Sehajdhari Sikhs from mainstream Sikh religion as an attempt by Akali Dal leadership to narrow down the voters of SGPC, control its huge finances and ultimately establish dominance over power structures in the Sikh community.³⁸

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) which has been controlling the SGPC for years, lobbied hard for the exclusion of 'Sehajdhari Sikhs' from participating in the SGPC elections. As per the stand taken by Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the amended bill was necessary so that only Sikhs be involved in the management of Gurdwaras. Politically, a smaller electorate is easier to handle, while it also helps the Akali Dal strengthen its Panthic and politico-religious

their right to vote in elections of Sikh religious bodies. The statement and views were recorded during my in-depth discussion with Mr. Rannu on issue of Sehajdhari Sikh voting rights.

36 Namit Hans (2016), "Why Sahajdhari Sikhs are opposing the SGPC Act Amendment Bill", *The Indian Express*, April 27, 2016. Also see, See, "HT Explainer: What's behind excluding Sehajdharis from Sikh body polls?", *Hindustan Times*, April 27, 2016, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/who-are-sehajdharis-more-about-sikh-gurudwara-act-amendment-in-lok-sabha/story-.html>, accessed on 18/07-2017.

37 Statement made by of Paramjit Singh Rannu, the president of Sehajdhari Sikh Party (SSP). The statement was recorded in one of the meetings with Dr. Rannu while discussing the political dynamics behind the Sikh Gurdwara Amendment Act, 2016.

38 Explanation based on perspectives, views and opinions of Dr. Parmjit Singh Rannu (President of Sehajdhari Sikh Party) which were noted during my discussion with him on the concerned issue.

credentials. As Sehajdhari Sikhs were given voting rights only, they are not eligible to contest the elections, and thus cannot become the members of committees constituted under Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). Sehajdhari Sikhs who were enjoying the voting rights under Sikh Gurdwaras Act from last seven decades were disfranchised by the amendment made in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act in 2016. **This represents narrow mindedness and impression of intolerance towards a particular minority by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiromani Akali Dal and SGPC, who are the political forces behind the passing of such a Bill (Sikh Gurdwara Amendment 2016) which is regressive in nature.**³⁹

By excluding Sehajdharis from SGPC vote bank through this controversial amendment (Sikh Gurdwaras Amendment Bill, 2016), the 1925 Sikh Gurdwara Act has been manipulated to maintain the hold of Shiromani Akali Dal over the Sikh voters. Sehajdhari Sikhs may not maintain an unshorn hair identity, but they have full faith in the Sikh Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib. Thus, the move to disfranchise the Sehajdharis is a severe attack on their faith and identity. **Disfranchising the Sehajdhari Sikhs from elections to Sikh religious body (SGPC) may be a political victory for Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), but it is definitely setback to the ethos of Sikhism which propagates the principle of inclusion of all and exclusion of none.** This policy of political and religious exclusion is in complete contradiction to Sikh philosophy and values. The concerned Amendment to the Sikh Gurdwara Act has clearly established a religious divide within the Sikh community.⁴⁰

Diametrically opposed to the Sikh philosophy as propounded by Gurus, the SGPC passed some resolutions in pressing upon the Union Government to delete the word ‘Sehajdhari’ from Section 49 and 92 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act on the basis of unfounded and misplaced twin myths. One is that in the garb of Sehajdharis, non-Sikhs such as Muslims and Christians were being enrolled as voters, second, that the management and control of SGPC was in danger of being wrested away from the Sikh community. Both these apprehensions at the SGPC were/are totally unfounded for the simple reason that enough

39 Vipin Pubby (2016), “Non-baptised Sikhs oppose Bill seeking to exclude them from key community poll”, April 18, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/806781/non-baptised-sikhs-oppose-bill-seeking-to-exclude-them-from-key-community-poll>, accessed on 26/04/2017. Relevant information available at “Amarinder terms SGPC Act amendment as unfortunate”, *The Hindu*, April 26, 2016. Also see, “SGPC Act amendment unfortunate: Amarinder”, *The Indian Express*, April 26, 2016.

40 Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “The Question Of Sehajdhari Rights Is Also A Question Of Sikh Identity”, *The Caravan A Journal of Politics and Culture*, March 20, 2016 available at <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/punjab-sehajdhari-rights-question-sikh-identity>, accessed on 19/07/2017. Amandeep Sandhu (2016), “Nearly 10 million Sikhs have lost their religion because of this organisation”, May 12, 2016, available at <https://scroll.in/article/807847/nearly-10-million-sikhs-have-lost-their-religion-because-of-this-organisation>, accessed on 17/07/2016.

safeguard has been provided at the time of enrolment as voters. Second apprehension completely defies logic for the simple reason that purity of management is already granted under the provisions of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, where only Amritdhari Sikhs (baptized Sikhs) are eligible to contest the election for SGPC. Thus, it clearly seems that the present issue instead of being religious is more or less a political struggle for control of SGPC funds which run into crores and it is common knowledge that such funds are blatantly used for political battles. In this context, a renowned Sikh scholar Jaspal Singh writes:

“In reality, this issue (Sehajdhari issue) is purely religious in nature and related with preaching and propaganda of the religion. It has been our misfortune that even the solely religious issues have been discussed by us (the Sikhs) from the political perspective, and efforts are made to solve such issues merely in terms of political gains and losses. We (Sikh community) have never viewed that how heavy cost we might have to pay for this in religious field. Then, the excuse given for such perspective is the principle of combination of ‘religion and politics’, but this principle is never understood by us (Sikhs) nor it is defined in right terms.”⁴¹

*(English Translation of excerpt in Punjabi)*⁴²

Sehajdharis are typically understood to be Sikhs who are not baptized Sikhs or does not follow all five tenets of Khalsa order, but believes in the ten Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib. However, what constitutes a Sehajdhari Sikh and whether they should be allowed to vote in the SGPC elections, has been contested several times over the two decades. The debate over the issue of voting rights of Sehajdharis has also raised a key question within the Sikh community: who exactly is a ‘Sikh’. A prominent Sikh scholar who is most acknowledged for interpretations on various aspects of Sikhism, Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, in his monumental work “Mahan Kosh”, has defined the term “Sehajdhari” as following:

“A person who remains at ease with liberal thought, who is an integral part of Sikhs, does not adhere to the amrit and kach-kirpan, but believes in the ten Gurus and Guru Granth Sahib and has no other religion.”⁴³

41 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, p.138.

42 As quoted by Dr. Jaspal Singh in his book titled “Sikh Dharm Te Rajneeti”. The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here: “ਅਸਲ ਵਿਚ ਇਹ ਮਸਲਾ ਸ਼ੁੱਧ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਰ ਨਾਲ ਜੁੜਿਆ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ। ਸਾਡੀ ਬਦਕਿਸਮਤੀ ਇਹ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਨਿਰੋਲ ਧਾਰਮਕ ਮਸਲਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਅਸੀਂ ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਕ ਦ੍ਰਿਸ਼ਟੀ ਤੋਂ ਵਿਚਾਰਿਆ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਕ ਲਾਭ-ਹਾਨੀ ਦੇ ਨਜ਼ਰੀਏ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਇਹੋ ਜਿਹੇ ਮਾਮਲਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਨਜਿੱਠਣ ਦੀ ਕੋਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ। ਕਦੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਵੇਖਿਆ ਕਿ ਧਾਰਮਕ ਖੇਤਰ ਵਿਚ ਉਸਦੀ ਕਿੰਨੀ ਕੀਮਤ ਅਦਾ ਕਰਨੀ ਪਵੇਗੀ। ਫਿਰ ਬਹਾਨਾ ਇਸਦਾ ਧਰਮ ਤੇ ਰਾਜਨੀਤੀ ਦੇ ਸੰਜੋਗ ਦਾ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ ਜਿਸਨੂੰ ਨਾ ਅਸੀਂ ਕਦੇ ਸਹੀ ਅਰਥਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਸਮਝਿਆ ਹੈ ਨਾ ਉਸਦੀ ਸਹੀ ਵਿਆਖਿਆ ਕੀਤੀ ਹੈ।” See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, p.138.

43 See, Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition) , *Gurshabad Ratmakar: Mahan Kosh* , Bhasha Vibag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930), p. 137. Also see, Davinder Singh Chahal (2008), “Controversy over Sehajdhari Sikh- But Who is a Sikh”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, Dec 31, 2008, available at <http://www.iuscanada.com/journal/articles/sehjdhari.pdf>, accessed on 19/12/2017.

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha's definition is based on the easy understanding of the term: Sehadhari ('Sehaj' meaning 'ease', and 'dhari', meaning 'follower'). Through his definition, Bhai Nabha kept the Sikh religion open to Sikhs who could not follow strict Khalsa discipline, as well as those not born into the Sikh families, but who wanted to adopt Sikhism. In the footnote related to definition of a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' as given in widely acknowledged work 'Mahan Kosh', Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha specifically mentions that those Amritdhari Singhs who hate the Sehadhari Sikhs are non-aware of the fundamentals of the Sikh Religion itself. Although, Bhai Nabha's definition of a 'Sehajdhari' (as given in *Mahan Kosh*) became the widely understood description among the Sikh community, but was not used when key amendments were made to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Sehadhari Sikhs, however, were not defined in the Sikh Gurdwaram Act until 1959.

The 1959 amendment in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 defined the Sehadhari Sikhs and returned them the right to vote in SGPC elections. The Sikh Gurdwara Act stated that a 'Sehajdhari' was a Sikh who followed Sikh rites and rituals, believed in Guru Granth Sahib, but was not 'patit' (apostate). This definition given by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is not consistent with the definition given by Bhai Nabha in Mahan Kosh. However, 1959 definition of a 'Sehajdhari Sikh' as given in the Sikh Gurdwara Act laid the ground for the SGPC's attempts to debar Sehadhari Sikhs of their voting rights in the elections of SGPC. According to Sikh scholar Jaspal Singh, who has extensively written on Sikh philoposhy and Sikh politico-religious affairs, an 'Amritdhari Sikh' is the purest form of Sikh and to reach at this level of purity in Sikhism, 'Sehajdhari' stage or form is of utmost importance. In the context, Jaspal Singh writes:

***“There is only one formula to spread Sikh faith in whole world - First, the non -Sikh is to become a Sehadhari Sikh, then Sehadhari Sikh evolves as Keshdhari Sikh, and ultimately the Keshdhari Sikh upgrades as a Amritdhari Sikh.”*⁴⁴**

*(English translation of excerpt written in Punjabi)*⁴⁵

In context to distinction between Amritdhari (baptised Sikhs) and Sehadhari Sikhs, the Sindh High Court in the year 1945 observed that:

“There is no essential or doctrinal difference between Amritdhari Sikhs (Akalis , Khalsas or Singhs) and Sehadhari Sikhs. The former are distinguished by the fact tht they go through a ceremony of initiation or

44 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, p.140 .

45 As quoted by Dr. Jaspal Singh in his book titled “Sikh Dharm Te Rajneeti”. The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here: “ਸਿੱਖੀ ਨੇ ਜੇ ਸਾਰੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਫੈਲਣਾ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਫਾਰਮੂਲਾ ਇੱਕੋ ਹੈ- ਗੈਰ-ਸਿੱਖ ਨੇ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਬਣਨਾ ਹੈ, ਫਿਰ ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੇ ਕੇਸ਼ਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਤੇ ਫਿਰ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ।” See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, p.140 .

baptism and observe with strictness the five Kakkas (Kakars); Sehajdharis are indifferent about these forms; but all are Sikhs in that they believe in the ten Gurus and Granth Sahib and accept no other authority in religion.⁴⁶

(Dayal Singh Char Singh vs. Tulsidas Tarachand, 1945)

Through its labeling of ‘Sikhs’ who have cut their hair as ‘patit’ (apostate), the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been attempting hard to invert the definition of the term ‘Sehajdhari’. By declaring the Sehajdharis Sikhs as “patit” or apostate, a large number of individuals have lapsed from the Sikh religion. SGPC has preferred to interpret the law in letter, but not in spirit. Raising his voice against the legal battles to define the religious beliefs of Sikhs, the former chairman of National Commission for Minorities, Tarlochan Singh, argues: ***“The court of law should not intervene in such matters (defining a Sikh) as religion is something individual and personal, and a direction or order of a court cannot distinguish between a Sikh and a non-Sikh.”***⁴⁷ Tarlochan Singh, ex- Member Parliament (Rajya Sabha) who has travelled extensively to educate people about the teachings of Sikhism, also adds: ***“If an individual has belief in Sikhism, no one has any right to challenge his or her belief. As such it is no matter for legal adjudication.”***⁴⁸ However, through amendments to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, Government interventions and by use of legal means, the identity of Sehajdhari Sikhs is challenged time and again, and they have been jostled in and out of the Sikh community for almost two decades.

Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha, who belonged to the earliest batch of Singh Sabha reformers and had a great share in the formation of the modern opinion about Sikhism, in his famous work “Gur-Shabad Ratnakar Mahan Kosh” (Encyclopedia of Sikh Literature), defines the ‘Sikh’ as:

“(1) As the disciple of Guru Nanak Dev, (2) Who has adopted Sikhism as his religion, founded by Guru Nanak Dev, (3) Who considers Guru Granth Sahib as his scripture and (4) Who believes in the identification of all the ten Gurus.”⁴⁹

As per the invaluable and unique philosophy propounded by Sri Guru Granth Sahib recognized as “eternal living Guru” of Sikhs, a reference in regard to definition of the ‘Sikh’

46 See, “Dayal Singh Char Singh vs. Tulsidas Tarachand, 1945”, in Kashmir Singh (2004), *Commentary on the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925*, published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, pp.11-12

47 “SGPC to file fresh affidavit in court Challenges HC locus standi in Sikh matters”, *The Tribune*, December 29, 2008, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2008/20081229/punjab1.htm>, accessed on 27/03/2018.

48 ibid

49 Kahn Singh Nabha (1981) (latest edition) , *Gurshabad Ramakar: Mahan Kosh* , Bhasha Vibag, Punjab, Patiala, (originally started in February 1926, completed in October 26, 1927 and printed in April 13, 1930), p. 192. Also see, Davinder Singh Chahal(2008), “Controversy over Sehajdhari Sikh But Who is a Sikh”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal* , Dec 31, 2008, available at <http://www.iuscanada.com/journal/articles/sehjdhari.pdf>, accessed on 27/09/2016.

can be gainfully made to Ang 305-306 (page 305-306) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Hereby, the fourth Guru Sahib, Guru Ram Das, has expressed the way of living of a ‘Gursikh’ in the following manner: ⁵⁰

“He who calls himself a Sikh of the true Guru, he should get up in the early hours of the morning and remember the Name of the Lord. He should make effort to rise before the day dawns and take a bath in the pool of nectar. Under the instructions of the Guru, he should repeat the mantram of the Guru all his troubles will end and all his sins and blemishes will be destroyed. Then when the day dawns, he should sing the bani of the Guru and remember the Name of the Lord while sitting or moving. He who remembers my Lord with every breath and loaf, that is Gursikh. I beg for the dust of the feet of that Gursikh, who not only repeats the Name of the Lord but also makes others to repeat it.” ⁵¹

(Var Gauri M4, Ang 305-306, Sri Guru Granth Sahib)

At Ang - 1349 (page 1349) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Raj Prabhati of Bhagat Kabir Jiu Ki Bani, says:⁵²

“The Lord created awareness in the universe through his light first (enlightenment) and then created all the human beings through the nature. The whole work came into existence through the light of the Prime - soul, then how could some persons be considered pious (virtuous) and some other as vicious (sinful).” ⁵³

(Ang 1349 (page 1349) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib)

The definition of Sehajdhari Sikh as provided by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has no religious sanction as far as the fundamental

50 ਮ: 4 ॥ ਗੁਰ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਜੇ ਸਿਖੁ ਅਖਾਏ ਸੁ ਭਲਕੇ ਉਠਿ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ ॥ ਉਦਮੁ ਕਰੇ ਭਲਕੇ ਪਰਭਾਤੀ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ਕਰੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਰਿ ਨਾਵੈ ॥ ਉਪਦੇਸਿ ਗੁਰੂ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਜਪੁ ਜਾਪੈ ਸਭਿ ਕਿਲਵਿਖ ਪਾਪ ਦੇਖ ਲਹਿ ਜਾਵੈ ॥ ਫਿਰਿ ਚੜੈ ਦਿਵਸੁ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਗਾਵੈ ਬਹਦਿਆ ਉਠਦਿਆ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਵੈ ॥ ਜੇ ਸਾਸਿ ਗਿਰਾਸਿ ਧਿਆਏ ਮੇਰਾ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੇ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਵੈ ॥ ਜਿਸ ਨੇ ਦਇਆਲੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸੁਆਮੀ ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਉਪਦੇਸੁ ਸੁਣਾਵੈ ॥ ਜਨੁ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਯੁਕਿ ਮੰਗੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਕੀ ਜੇ ਆਪਿ ਜਪੈ ਅਵਰਹ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ - (ਅੰਗ 305, Guru Granth Sahib)

51 Meaning in Punjab: ਚੌਥੀ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਾਕ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਨੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਦਿੰਦੇ ਹੋਏ ਕਿਹਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਜੇ ਮਨੁੱਖ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਦਾ ਸੱਚਾ ਸਿੱਖ ਅਖਵਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਭਾਵ, ਜਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਲੋਕ ਸੱਚਾ ਸਿੱਖ ਆਖਦੇ ਹਨ ਉਹ ਰੋਜ਼ ਸਵੇਰੇ ਉੱਠ ਕੇ ਹਰਿ-ਨਾਮ ਦਾ ਸਿਮਰਨ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ, ਹਰ ਰੋਜ਼ ਸਵੇਰੇ ਉੱਦਮ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ, ਇਸ਼ਨਾਨ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਫਿਰ ਨਾਮ-ਰੂਪ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਦੇ ਸਰੋਵਰ ਵਿਚ ਟੁੱਭੀ ਲਾਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ, ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਦੇ ਉਪਦੇਸ਼ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦੇ ਨਾਮ ਦਾ ਜਾਪ ਜਪਦਾ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਇਸ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਉਸ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਪਾਪ-ਵਿਕਾਰ ਲਹਿ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਹਨ; ਫਿਰ ਦਿਨ ਚੜ੍ਹੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਦੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਦਾ ਕੀਰਤਨ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਦਿਹਾੜੀ ਬਹਿੰਦਿਆਂ ਉੱਠਦਿਆਂ ਭਾਵ, ਕਾਰ-ਕਿਰਤ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦਾ ਨਾਮ ਸਿਮਰਦਾ ਹੈ । ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਦੇ ਮਨ ਵਿਚ ਉਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਚੰਗਾ ਲੱਗਦਾ ਹੈ ਜੇ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਨੂੰ ਹਰ ਦਮ ਯਾਦ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ ।

52 ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥

ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੇ ਮੰਦੇ ॥੧॥ Ang - 1349 (page 1349), Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

53 Meaning in Punjabi (ਭਾਵ ਅਰਥ:) ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਸਿਰਜਨਹਾਰ ਅੱਲਾਹ ਨੇ ਆਪਣੀ ਇਲਾਹੀ ਤਾਕਤ (ਕੁਦਰਤ) ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਵਾ ਕੀਤਾ, ਇਸੇ ਸ਼ਕਤੀ ਸਦਕਾ ਹੀ ਸਾਰੇ ਮਨੁੱਖ/ਬੰਦੇ ਹੋਂਦ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਏ। ਉਸ ਰੱਬੀ-ਰੋਸ਼ਨੀ/ਹੁਕਮ-ਸੱਤਾ/ਕੁਦਰਤ ਕਾਰਨ ਹੀ ਇਹ ਸਾਰਾ ਜਗਤ ਹੋਂਦ ਵਿੱਚ ਆਇਆ ਹੈ। (ਕਿਉਂਕਿ ਸਾਰੇ ਇਨਸਾਨ ਇੱਕੋ ਹੀ ਮਿੱਟੀ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ, ਇੱਕੋ ਹੀ ਸਾਜਨਹਾਰ ਦੇ ਸਾਜੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਇੱਕੋ ਹੀ ਪਰਮ ਜੋਤਿ ਦੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਜਗ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਲਈ) ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ (ਸਾਰੇ ਮਨੁੱਖਾਂ) ਵਿਚ, ਦੁਨਿਆਵੀ ਵਖਰੇਵਿਆਂ ਦੇ ਆਧਾਰ 'ਤੇ, ਕੋਈ ਚੰਗਾ ਜਾਂ ਬੁਰਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ!

tenets of the Sikh religion are concerned. One is either a Sikh or not a Sikh. The definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ as given by Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee (SGPC) is in sharp contradiction to the conception of “Gursikh” (the Guru’s Sikh) as given in Guru Granth Sahib , the ‘eternal living Guru’ and the supreme ultimate authority for the Sikhs. Sachkhand Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple , Amritsar), which is most sacred religious and spiritual center of Sikhs and visited by followers of all religions all over the world, has gates on all four sides but one causeway to reach the sanctum sanctorum. These gates symbolize and signify human brotherhood and equality where everyone irrespective of cast, creed or race can seek spiritual solace and religious fulfillment without any hindrance. The basis of Sikh faith - one Almighty God, and service to humanity and equality are widely known. However, the largest representative institution of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), by controlling the definition of ‘Sikh’ and reducing its numbers for vested political interest, has narrowed the passage that leads to Sikhism.

At the core of it, the question of the Seajdhari voting rights is a question of identity. The Sikh religious institutions that seek to accept or reject a believer must look at whether the person follows the basic principles and values of the Sikh religion and not the sham of external appearance only.⁵⁴ It is bewildering that from the vast ocean of Sikh thought and philosophy, SGPC by defining the Sikh and categorizing him only on the basis of presence or absence of hair, Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee (SGPC) is drifting away from real perspective on Sikhism and Sikh identity. The result is the marginalizing of those individuals, including many very devout people, who define themselves unhesitatingly as ‘Sikh’ without conforming to the (entire) Khalsa discipline.

Both historically and philosophically, it is well established fact that Sikh Gurus fought against all kind of social inequalities that divided the society on basis of inherited backgrounds like caste, gender, race, etc. But it is ironical and highly contradictory that

54 In this context, a noticeable incident from the year 2008 is worth mentioning. As per this incident, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) disallowed Bhai Ghulam Mohammad Chand,⁵⁴ a descendant of Guru Nanak’s life-long friend and musician Bhai Mardana ji (arguably the first Sikh) from reciting *Shabad Kirtan* (hymns from the scripture of Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib) in Golden Temple, Amritsar because he was not Amritdhari Sikh (baptized Sikh). Every time Bhai Ghulam Mohammad Chand visited India, he expressed his strong desire to perform at the Golden Temple, where his ancestors used to sing praises to the Almighty. But the apex Sikh religious body, the SGPC, did not allow this, being not a Sikh. Despite numerous appeals by Sikh scholars and various Sikh organizations, the SGPC did not accede to the request. Bhai Ghulam Mohammad Chand passed away in Lahore in the year 2015 at the age of 80 with his desire unfulfilled. See, Rashmi Talwar (2001) “Rababi’s unfulfilled Desire”, *The Tribune*, April 13, 2001, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010413/art-trib.htm#1>, accessed on 16/06/2016. Also see, “Rababi Ghulam Mohammad passes away in Lahore”, *The Times of India*, May 1, 2015, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Rababi-Ghulam-Mohammad-passes-awa-Lahore/articleshow/47115639.cms>, accessed on 16/06/2016.

largest Sikh religious institution which is responsible for preaching Sikhism and upholding the real Sikh identity, the SGPC, has itself evolved into a phenomenon that is further sharpening and intensifying the divisions within the Sikh community.

Sikh Institutional Response to RSS Agenda

Historically, the Sikhs have moved in and out of multiple identities, yet their quest for an exclusive identity has been the most significant feature of their history. Although the meanings of identity have differed in certain contexts and in response to various challenges, the Sikhs have hardly ever integrated with any specific version of Hinduism.

Hindutva forces lead by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang (RSS) which represent the supremacist and casteist sections have been attempting to suffocate and belittle the Sikh identity with their fraternal embrace. They are over-anxious to claim Sikhism as a sect of Hinduism, and include the Sikh Gurus in the list of their *rishis*, *munis* and national heroes. This is an erroneous view. In fact, the basic flaw in Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang's (RSS) assertion is that they disregard the differences that have historically existed between the lives and experiences of the people of the two communities i.e. Hindus and Sikhs. In this context, a renowned Sikh historian and expert on Sikh issues, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, highlights following core objectives of RSS⁵⁵:

- (i) To acquire the control of management of Sikh Gurdwaras in their own hands.
- (ii) To academically and philosophically prove that Sikhism is not a separate religion, but an integral part of Hinduism.

Like Muslims, the Sikhs have resisted the *Hindutva* project of absorption and sameness. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang's agenda of suppressing the contested history and identity of the Sikhs is a contrived agenda, for it rests on a spurious notion of Hindu identity. Even more disturbing for the Sikh community and Sikh institutions are the *Hindutva* brigade's (Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh) efforts to project Sikh faith as anti-Muslim cult by emphasizing solely on the Sikh Gurus struggle against the Mughal rulers, hence giving it a communal slant. The dominant and the rational opinion within the Sikh community is that Sikh Gurus opposition to Mughals was a struggle against tyranny, oppression and

55 Known Sikh scholar and historia, Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon, while speaking about RSS and its strategy towards Sikh religion and Sikh religious institutions, explains that RSS predominantly has two main objectives. He says:

“RSS ਨੇ ਇਕ ਤਾਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਿਆ ਨੂੰ ਕੰਟਰੋਲ ਕਰ ਲਵੇ ਜਿਵੇਂ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ਾ ਨੇ ਕੀਤਾ ਸੀ। ਅਧਿਆਤਮਕ ਤੌਰ ਤੇ proof ਕਰ ਦੇਵੇ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਕੁਝ ਹੈ ਹੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਇਹ ਹਿੰਦੂਆ ਦਾ ਹਿੱਸਾ ਹੀ ਹੈ। ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ਾ ਨੇ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਕੀਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਇਹੀ Framework RSS ਅਤੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਤੱਤ ਵਰਤ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। ਜਿਵੇਂ ਕਿ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ਾ ਨੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ translation distorted form ਵਿੱਚ ਕਰਵਾਈ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੇ ਕੰਟਰੋਲ ਵਿੱਚ ਕੀਤਾ। ਉਹੀ ਕੰਮ RSS ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲ ਰਾਹੀਂ ਕਰ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ। RSS ਦਾ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲ ਅਤੇ SGPC ਉੱਪਰ ਕੰਟਰੋਲ ਹੈ।”

exploitation, not a battle against Islam and Muslim community in general. The RSS strategy to project Sikhs as a shield of Hinduism against Islam is a highly distorted view of Sikh philosophy and principles.⁵⁶

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang, the radical Hindutva outfit, has been propagating vigorously in Punjab over the past two years or so. In a devious attempt at subsuming Sikh faith and its distinct identity within the Hindu fold, the RSS and its offshoot - Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, have been projecting through a calculated revanchist campaign - the idea that Sikhism is a branch of the Hindu religion and the Sikhs are the sword arm of the Hindus. The RSS initiatives and its stringent efforts aimed at integrating the Sikhs with Hindus by appropriating their religious literature, history and symbols, are very much the part of its overall strategy to realize the objective of establishing a “Hindu Rashtra”.⁵⁷

Since Shiromani Akali Dal - Bharatiya Janata Party’s (SAD-BJP) combine defeat in the Punjab Assembly elections 2017, there was a feeling in sections of the Sangh Parivar that the Sikh party, Shiromani Akali Dal, could be on the decline. RSS has been trying hard to expand itself in Punjab through its wing, the Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, which has been rearing its head of late. In what seems to be an attempt to create a new Sikh leadership and fill the perceived vacuum, the BJP’s ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), wants its affiliate Rashtriya Sikh Sangat to play a pivotal role in Sikh religious and political affairs.

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, reacted sharply in mid-2000 by issuing an edict condemning the “sinister designs” of the anti-Panthic forces to create confusion about the unique and distinct identity of the Sikhs. SGPC core committee member, Kanail Singh Panjoli, alleges RSS of making constant attempts to disgrace and degrade the position of single representative body of the Sikh community, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, and damage the *Panthic* traditions of the Takht Sahibs (five Takhts of Sikh religion). He expressed grief over the fact that some leaders of the Sant

56 Parveen Swami, “RSS forays into Punjab”, *Frontline*, Volume 17 - issue 11, May 27 – June 9, 2000, available at <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1711/17110410.htm>, accessed on 10/07/2017. Chandar Suta Dogra (2017), “RSS's Renewed Drive to Expand its Presence Has Revived Old Fears for Sikhs in Punjab”, *The Wire*, November 2, 2107, available at <https://thewire.in/politics/punjab-rsss-renewed-drive-expand-presence-revived-old-fears-sikhs>, accessed on 17/11/2017.

57 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (in Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, pp.77-80. Santokh Singh Dharam (1986), *Internal and External Threats to Sikhism*, Gurmat Publishers, IL, pp. 142-146.

Samaj and Jathedars of Takht Sahibs, knowingly or unknowingly, are becoming the part of such RSS tricks.⁵⁸

The mistrust and hostility between Sikhs and RSS is not a new thing. Even though, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) enjoy an opportunist political alliance in Punjab, these parties have no common ideology, but they draw a minimum common programme for themselves to gain power. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sang (RSS) is accused of making inroads into Sikh religious matters under the garb of Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) political alliance with Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) under leadership of Badals is now openly blamed by various influential Sikh organizations for easily allowing the entry of RSS in Sikh religious affairs. In this context, former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Bhai Ranjit Singh, states:

“It was Parkash Singh Badal who allowed the entry of RSS into Sikh community and its religious affairs. The Present Jathedars and Granthis (priests) of the Takhts (five Sikh Takhts) have no respect and regard for any Gurmatta or Hukumnama. They are unaware of the loss that RSS is incurring to them and the Sikh community.”⁵⁹

*(Translation of statements made in Punjabi)*⁶⁰

While explaining the objective of RSS and emphasizing on the dire need to free SGPC from the dominant control of Akali Dal leadership, Bhai Ranjit Singh adds:

“The RSS objective behind the formation of Rashtriya Sikh Sangat is to infiltrate into Sikh Community and Sikh religious institutions, and ultimately swallow the distinct Sikh identity and Sikh religion. It is our bad luck that SGPC and our religion (Sikh religion) have come up in the wrath of Badal family. Badals need to be excommunicated from the Sikh Panth.”⁶¹

*(Translation of statements made in Punjabi)*⁶²

58 On the basis of discussion with senior SGPC leader and member (Fatehgarh Sahib), Karnail Singh Panjoli.

59 The views, perspectives and statements of former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Bhai Ranjit Singh, were noted during my brief discussion with him. In the discussion with the former Jathedar, the issue of RSS and people responsible for RSS entry into Sikh religious affairs was discussed. As Bhai Ranjit Singh had served at the highest position in the Sikh community as the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, the insights provided by him very highly beneficial for the study.

60 Original statement (in Punjabi) made by Bhai Ranjit Singh (former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib) :
“ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਵਿਚ RSS ਨੂੰ Entry ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲਾ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਸਿੰਘ ਬਾਦਲ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਜੋ ਤਖਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਨੇ ਜਾਂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ ਹਨ, ਇਹ ਬਾਬਾ ਬੁੱਢਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਨਾਂ ਤੇ ਕਲੰਕ ਲੱਗੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ। ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਨਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਗੁਰਮੱਤੇ ਦੀ ਕਦਰ ਹੈ, ਨਾ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮੇ ਦੀ ਕਦਰ ਹੈ, ਨਾ ਹੀ ਇਹ ਸਮਝ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਵਛਫ ਸਾਡਾ ਕੀ ਨੁਕਸਾਨ ਕਰ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ।” Source: The views, perspectives and statements of former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Bhai Ranjit Singh, were noted during brief discussion with him.

61 The perspectives and statements of former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib Bhai Ranjit Singh noted during my brief discussion with him on concerned issues.

62 Original Statement (in Punjabi) made by Bhai Ranjit Singh (former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib), while discussing the concerned issue with him - “RSS ਨੇ ਜਦੋਂ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਬਣਾਈ ਹੈ, ਉਸਦਾ ਮਤਲਬ ਹੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਘੁਸਪੈਠ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਸਾਡੇ ਧਰਮ ਨੂੰ ਖਤਮ ਕਰਨਾ ਅਤੇ ਉਹ ਹੌਲੀ-ਹੌਲੀ ਆਪਣੇ

Both the SGPC and the Akal Takht Sahib share a vision of Sikhism once again under attacks this time either from divisive elements within the Sikh Panth or through ill-fated alliances with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the arch-enemy now replacing the Arya Samaj as a foe - the RSS. In such an atmosphere, interpretations of religious doctrine and political strategy have become fused. In this context of conflict and political manoeuvring, the Sikh Rehat Maryada and the courts and laws affecting Sikh public life and institutions have received new attention and have become part of many publicized disputes.

Sikh politico-religious institutions and their leaders have always been willing to accept diverse ideas and perspectives, but in acceptance they have adapted and transformed their inheritance. Although, the Sikh premier religious institutions – the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have not been able to work the various strands and sects into a harmonious whole, they have not yet lost their distinct identity. This holds good for almost every manifestation of Sikh life and thought. Sikh consciousness lead by Akal Takht Sahib has invariably followed an independent course.

Sikh institutional opposition to Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh's (RSS) stems from hardline Hindu organization's stringent efforts to appropriate Sikhism as part of Hindu culture and not as a separate entity. The RSS in Punjab has inherited the Arya Samaj's mission of bringing Sikhs back into the Hindu fold. Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh's deliberate denial of the Sikh identity as a separate religious community is deeply resented by Sikh community at large and Sikh religious institutions, especially the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The RSS is attempting to galvanise the support base by seemingly addressing social and economic issues to build legitimacy with the Sikh community. It is very much clear that Akal Takht and SGPC authorities have been successful in calling out the RSS at least on ideological level.

SGPC and Calendar Controversy

In last few years, the Sikh *Panth* has been under the impact of raging controversy over adoption and observance of Nanakshahi Calendar. The controversy over Nanakshahi Calendar has divided the Sikhs living in Punjab and other parts of the globe. The Calendar controversy has divided the community vertically and the two factions have, in fact, begun celebrating important Sikh festivals on different dates. Sikhs were left in utter confusion and

ਇਸ ਏਜੰਡੇ ਵੱਲ ਵਧ ਰਹੇ ਹਨ। ਇਹ ਸਾਡੀ ਬਦਨਸੀਬੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ SGPC ਅਤੇ ਸਾਡਾ ਧਰਮ ਬਾਦਲ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਦੇ ਹੱਥ ਆ ਚੁੱਕਾ ਹੈ, ਉਸ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੀ ਕੋਈ ਪੇਸ਼ ਨਹੀਂ ਜਾ ਰਹੀ। ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਥ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਛੇਕਣ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ।' The views, perspectives and statements of former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Bhai Ranjit Singh, were noted during discussion with him on the corned issue.

for the next few years some followed the lunar calendar (Bikrami Calendar) while others used the solar calendar, i.e. the Nanakshahi Calendar.⁶³

Following reservations expressed by the Sant Samaj in 2010, amendments were made in the original Nanakshahi Calendar which was in implementation since 2003. This created a paradoxical situation within the Sikh community with majority of Sikh bodies around the globe objecting to the amendments, which were allegedly done under the RSS influence. Sikh religious bodies and politicians, anxious to establish the separateness of the Sikh community have been the firm supporters of the Nanakshahi Calendar and recognize it as another pillar of Sikh identity.

The arguments about the Calendar are concerned not only with its accuracy and relevance, but also the identity and status of Sikhism and the Sikh community within Hindu-majority India. Traditional Sikhs opposed the change because it broke with the past, but Sikh radical and fundamentalist organizations supported it on the basis that it gave Sikhs their own Calendar and emphasized their separate identity from Hindus. The contradictory demands of the Sikh bodies and organizations have already divided the Sikh community. The issue has given tough time to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which has been grappling to get the amended Nanakshahi Calendar implemented among all Sikh organisations in the world.

The crisis that SGPC has created with the Nanakshahi Calendar issue is definitely linked with the identity of the Sikhs all over the world. As a result of this Calendar crisis, at present, the Sikh community is following three different calendars both for religious events and personal use. Sikhs are confused in the dates provided by traditional Bikrami Calendar, Nanakshahi Calendar (2003) and amended Nanakshahi Calendar (2010) for same events. The Sikhs living in Punjab and other parts of globe do not know which calendar to observe and follow for the celebration of religious events.

Due to Calendar confusion, Sikhs living in Punjab and different parts of the world are not sure about the dates marking the important religious and historical occasions that led to the evolution of separate Sikh identity and sharpening of its boundaries. There is immense

63 Many Sikh experts and religious leaders have argued that the Nanakshahi Calendar cannot be termed as new calendar of Sikhs as it is just a "solarised" version of the Hindu Bikrami Calendar or a version of the Western Calendar with added Sikh elements. For years, Sikhs all over the world have used the Bikrami Samvat Calendar, based on lunar movements to determine dates for events related to Sikh Gurus and festivals. Pal Singh Purewal (architect of 2003 original Nanakshahi Calendar) and supporters of his view point claim that Nanakshahi Calendar is more scientific and logical, and thus accurate in arriving at crucial dates. Majority of the Sikh groups and institutions in the Diaspora have adopted original Nanakshahi Calendar.

confusion not only within the Sikh community in general; even prominent Sikh religious bodies around the globe have been observing Sikh religious days as per different Calendars. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has failed to evolve a Calendar which is recognized and acceptable to the Sikhs living across the globe. The adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar and then the controversial amendments made in the original Calendar by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) - has led to numerous contradictions and vital inconsistencies within the Sikh community and organizations.

At present, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the pioneer Sikh institution, is following amended Nanakshahi Calendar (2010 amended version), while Pakistan Sikh Gurdawara Prabhandhak Committee (PSGPC) and American Sikh Gurdawara Prabhandhak Committee (ASGPC) has been following the original Nanakshahi Calendar (2003 version) for observing most important days of Sikh religion and history. Similarly large number of Sikh bodies and organizations, especially abroad, are following Purewal's original Nanakshahi Calendar. Each time there is a *Gurpurb* (Sikh tradition of celebration of an anniversary related to the lives of the Sikh Gurus) or any other sacred religious event related with the Sikh Gurus, the Sikh community remains confused and divided due to different dates (as per three different Calendars) given for the same event. Even after more than a decade of intense debate and controversy, no consensus has been made by the Sikh leaders and institutions on relevance and observance of any one Calendar.

Sikhs, who are already a minority community, are now celebrating their important religious and historic events as per different Calendars. Important historical and religious events are always the main sources of maintaining and asserting the separate identity for any major religion. The clarity regarding the historical record of the vital events become an important source of the establishment and evolution of the religious identity. The consensus in such religious events become much more essential when the matter is related to a minority religion, which is also comparatively the youngest faith, i.e. - the Sikhism.

For making the Nanakshahi Calendar a religious emotional issue, it has been linked to that of distinctive Sikh identity with the argument that when other religions have their own Calendars, Sikhism also needs to have its own brand. But it is important to understand that Sikhism has doctrinal, ideological and institutional identity which makes it a distinctive and unique religion. Calendar is a mode of determining time spans and not religious

identity.⁶⁴ However, in contrast to this view, many Sikh religious and political leaders, Sikh bodies around the globe, experts and scholars, are of the firm view that separate Calendar is essential to assert and maintain separate Sikh identity. This view is quite famous among the Sikhs in Diaspora. Thus Nanakshahi Calendar is gaining popularity in the Sikh Diaspora and is likely to become the de- facto standard of the Sikhs worldwide.

Conflict over Haryana Gurdwara Committee

Authority over the Gurdwaras provides access to what probably is the major political communication channel of the Sikh community. Religious and political communications are inextricably related in the Gurdwaras just as the Akal Takht Sahib in Amritsar symbolizes the inseparability of spiritual and temporal authority for the Sikh community. In addition, Delhi and Mumbai have their separate Gurdwara committees which are directly related to Sikh politics and SGPC. Takht Hazoor Sahib (Nanded, Maharashtra) and Takht Patna Sahib (Patna, Bihar) are also managed by separate Sikh Gurdwara committees which do not fall under the jurisdiction of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. Symbolically, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) provides a structure for the legitimization of leadership among the Sikh community.

With this backdrop in mind, the demand for Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) represents the legitimate aspirations of the Sikhs of Haryana. After all Gurdwaras always had the shared function of the community's participation, and the demand of separate Sikh body for management of Gurdwaras located in Haryana seems like a legitimate disenchantment against almost hegemony of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) over the management of Sikh shrines through SGPC. The recent controversy over the control of management of Sikh shrines in Haryana is also linked to a larger historical process where Gurdwaras assume a significant legitimising social and political space for the diverse community of Sikhs.

The formation of a separate Gurdwara management committee in Haryana in the year 2014 brought the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) into an existential crisis. Shiromani Akali Dal and SGPC resorted to every trick in the book to stop the Congress Government of Haryana from forming the separate SGPC in Haryana. A matter that involved religion and faith transformed into highly intense political battle with then Chief Minister of

64 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (2003), *Liberating Sikhism from 'The Sikhs' - Sikhism's Potential for World Civilization*, Unistar Books, Chandigarh, pp. 168-169.

Punjab, Parkash Singh Badal, demanding the intervention of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led Union Government to get the decision of the Haryana Government revoked.

Shiromani Akali Dal's vigorous and forceful opposition to the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) whereby it took recourse to its traditional style of politics by announcing a *Morcha* (mass agitation) was seen by many as the party's return to the *Panthic* agenda. On the other hand, many Sikh intellectuals and leaders argued that there was nothing Panthic about Akali Dal's agitation against the separate Sikh body for Gurdwaras in Haryana ; infact it was Shiromani Akali Dal's exclusive fight for the control of 'Guru ki Golak' (offerings made by devotees) of Gurdwaras in Haryana.⁶⁵ In this context, the ex-secretary of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Raghubir Singh Rajasansi, stated :

“There is no doubt that the issue of separate Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee for Gurdwaras located in the state of Haryana is a Panthic issue. It will be recognized as Shiromani Akali Dal's Panthic agenda only if the party consults all the rival Sikh groups and unanimous decision is made. But, if Akali Dal takes the decision by consulting only the groups which are close to it, then it will clearly be a Badal agenda.”⁶⁶

A separate Sikh Gurdwara committee for Haryana means significant loss of both votes and financial resources for Shiromani Akali Dal as it has established its control over SGPC. If the new Act comes into force, Shiromani Akali Dal can lose upto 12.5 lakh strong Sikh community in Haryana.⁶⁷ The pioneer Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), will loose more than Rs. 200 crore annually which comes in form of donations and offerings made by the devotees at nearly 70 Gurdwaras in Haryana. And if the move to form separate Sikh body for management of Gurdwaras in Haryana is successful, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) can loose sway over the SGPC in the elections.

65 Virender Kumar (2014), “Return of Gurdwara politics”, *The Indian Express*, July 22, 2014, available <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/return-of-gurdwara-politics/>, accessed on 17/10/2014 . Relevant information available at - “Why a SGPC in Haryana is a big political blow to the Akali Dal”, *First Post*, July 21, 2014, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/sgpc-haryana-big-political-blow-akali-da-1628039.html>, accessed on 25/06/2015. Also see, Veenu Sandhu (2014), “Haryana gurdwara row: A political squabble over religious economics”, *Business Standard*, August 11, 2014, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/a-political-squabble-over-religious-economics-114080900687_1.html, accessed on 16/09/2016.

66 Statement made by ex-secretary of SGPC, Raghubir Singh Rajasansi. The statement and perspectives were noted during discussion with Raghubir Singh, whereby he expressed his views and observations on the Akali Dal's fight against the formation of separate management committee for Gurdwaras in Haryana.

67 Support of Sikhs of Haryana is very vital for Akali Dal as the party has been preparing to contest Haryana Vidhan Sabha elections. SAD's political agenda in Haryana has never been a secret. Eager to remove the regional party tag, it has been trying hard for years to expand its base in nearby areas, especially Haryana, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Sikh leaders of Haryana claim every right to have their own separate Gurdwara management committee for the State of Haryana. Their argument is based on the geographical and political changes that have taken place since the adoption of Sikh Gurdwaras Act (1925) in the undivided Punjab. Sikh leaders of Haryana argue that as state of Haryana came into being in 1966 (which is much later after the Gurdwara Act of 1925), the Sikhs of Haryana have every right to manage the Gurdwaras located in their State. Didar Singh Nalvi, President of ad-hoc Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) and one of the main leaders of the movement that led to the formation of separate Sikh body Haryana,⁶⁸ firmly claims that Sikhs of Haryana owe every right to manage their own Gurdwaras. Didar Singh Nalvi explains this claim in the following words:

“Out of nearly 200 crore offerings at Gurdwaras located in the State of Haryana, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) hardly spend Rs 30 crore (annually) on the management and maintenance of Gurdwaras located in Haryana. As Haryana is our own State, the Gurdwaras and their properties belong to the Sikhs of Haryana. We are very much capable of looking after our Gurdwaras and we have every right to do so. Why should SGPC have control over the management of Gurdwaras that are located in Haryana?”⁶⁹

The case of separate Gurdwara management bodies for Sikh shrines in Delhi, Patna (Bihar) and Nanded (Maharashtra) also add weight to the demand for separate Sikh body for Gurdwaras in Haryana. Thus under the changing politico-religious scenario whereby Shiromani Akali Dal’s stronghold over Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is being challenged from various corners, both Akali Dal and SGPC need to realise that Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 is not the best argument to bolster their claim on Gurdwaras outside the territory of Punjab.⁷⁰ The largest representative body of the Sikhs, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has no jurisdiction on Gurdwaras outside Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh. SGPC also does not seem to be interested in serving the

68 “Coup in HSGMC, Nalvi replaces Jhinda as president”, *The Tribune*, April 9, 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/community/-coup-in-hsgmc-nalvi-replaces-jhinda-as-president/389448.html>. Also see, “Nalvi replaces Jhinda as state gurdwara committee president”, *The Tribune*, April 2017, available at <http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/haryana/community/nalvi-replaces-jhinda-as-state-gurdwara-committee-president/389560.html>, accessed on 19/09/2017.

69 Statement of Didar Singh Nalvi - one of the most influential Sikh leaders of Haryana. His views and statements were recorded during my discussion with him on the controversy related to formation of separate Gurdwara management committee for Gurdwaras in Haryana. Didar Singh Nalvi strongly presented the claim of Haryana Sikhs to manage their own religious affairs through HSGPC.

70 The Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925 which legitimizes the establishment and authority of SGPC and provides the legal framework in which pioneer Sikh religious institution must operate, itself became a significant factor in the struggle for power. The Indian Judiciary has increasingly been dealing with its petitions, charges, and parliamentary amendments for the interpretation of statutes and practice. Since Sikh Gurdwara Act creates the ground rules for SGPC elections, the politically dominant Sikh factions have made constant efforts to amend the legislation to further strengthen their base.

Gurdwaras located in Pakistan and Bangladesh. If the move to form separate body for Haryana is successful, other states like Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand are also likely to be encouraged to opt for separate Sikh bodies. It also puts a big question mark on Shiromani Akali Dal's role in Sikh politics.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) never really attempted to address the grievances behind the demand for Sikh of Haryana for a separate management committee for Gurdwaras located in Haryana. Broadly, the allegations of the Sikhs of Haryana who supported the separate Gurdwara committee for Haryana are: (i) Shiromani Akali Dal controlled SGPC is Punjab-centric, (ii) SGPC functions in biased manner, (iii) it lacks accountability and transparency in the handling of funds, and (iv) SGPC predominantly serves the interests of Akali Dal politicians.⁷¹ The extent to which Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been politicized by the hegemonic dominance of Akali Dal leadership over the single largest representative body of the Sikhs, the SGPC, it can be concluded that creation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) in 2014 was an outcome of biased role and complete mismanagement of SGPC resources for vested political interests. **Further, the demand for a separate Sikh body for the management of Sikh shrines in Haryana has put SGPC in crisis of authority and legitimacy, and has also threatened the dominance of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) over SGPC affairs.**

II

In section (II) of this chapter, the study underlines the existing pattern of relationship among the concerned Sikh institutions and the emerging politico-religious dynamics within the Sikh religious and political circles. The study here also highlights the impact of this emerging political dynamics on the role, authority and status of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, the leading Sikh institutions.

Akali Dal's Dominance over SGPC affairs

Since the Gurdwara Reform Movement of 1920-25, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) came to represent the ultimate institutional expressions of the identity of Sikhs and its communal and political

71 Virender Kumar (2014), Return of Gurdwara Politics, *The Indian Express*, July 22, 2014, available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/return-of-gurdwara-politics/>, accessed on 17/08/2017. Yogesh Snehi (2014), "Vicissitudes of Gurdwara Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.1-XLIX No. 34, August 23, 2014. Naveen S Grewal (2014), "War within: The battle for control of Gurdwaras", *The Tribune*, July 6, 2014, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2014/20140706/pers.htm>, accessed on 09/11/2016.

consciousness. They entertain close, even symbiotic ties, with each other and the boundaries between religion and politics have always tended to be blurred in Punjab. The Akali Dal leaders are likely to strategically use religious issues to foster their own political interests and those of the Sikh Community. Shiromani Akali Dal which claimed to have earned the prized position of the saviour of the Sikh *Panth* was formed as a central organisation to undertake the unification and co-ordination of various local Akali *Jathas* for the reform of Gurdwaras. The Shiromani Akali Dal was technically regarded as subordinate body of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).⁷² In their infancy, the SGPC controlled Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) as the latter used to execute the decisions of the former. With the passage of time, the Shiromani Akali Dal has gained control and is dominating over the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee's decision making and management process.

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has been enjoying overwhelming majority since the first elections of SGPC, and has continued to do so. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) being the majority party in SGPC elections, therefore, also claims to be the spokesperson for the Sikh community and its politico-religious interests. On the basis of its claims as the spokesman of Sikh community, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) reiterates its *panthic* and minority demands with significant level of legitimacy. The continuing dominance of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), especially the Badal faction, over the electoral and decision making process of SGPC has severely dented the independent image of SGPC. There is general impression and misconception that Shiromani Akali Dal and SGPC have the single identity. **As Shiromani Akali Dal's political identity generally pervades over the structural, functional and decision making process of SGPC, its legitimacy as representative institution of Sikhs is now being questioned.**

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) termed as "Parliament of the Sikhs" is considered as a barometer of Sikh political thinking. Whosoever controls SGPC has very influential control over the Sikh politico-religious decision making process. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), especially under leadership of Badals, has been closely involved with the politico-religious and administrative affairs of the SGPC. The politics of Parkash Singh Badal, five times Chief Minister of Punjab and viewed as prominent leader of Sikhs,

72 After the Gurdwara Reform Movement when SGPC mainly confined itself to religious affairs, the Shiromani Akali Dal tried to become the protector of Panth in political matters. And thus, gradually the Shiromani Akali Dal became the leading political organization of the Sikhs.

has been intricately interlinked with the affairs of the most important Sikh religious body, the SGPC.⁷³ Bhai Mohkam Singh, the chief of United Akali Dal,⁷⁴ explains the dominance of current Akali Dal leadership over SGPC in the following words:

“It’s sheer badluck of the Sikh community that one family (Badal family) has grasped the whole community. This family (Badal family) is such a blot on the Sikh community that is not letting the community to move forward towards prosperity and lead the society in various aspects. Today, the Sikh religion is badly grasped in the grip of politics. Instead of letting SGPC work independently, Sardar Badal and his family have limited the SGPC to serve their interest and desires.”⁷⁵

*(English translation of the explanation/statement given in Punjabi)*⁷⁶

Emphasizing on the dire need to free the pioneer Sikh institution, the SGPC, from the control of political families, Bhai Mohkam Singh adds:

“The name of the SGPC President comes in an envelope, which is not known to anyone except the Badal family. Today, it is utmost need of the Sikh community to put an end to this practice, so that new people and new trends come in. This is essential for the solution of the issues which are crucial for community. SGPC is the central organization of the Sikhs which was formed after the sacrifice of numerous lives. The control of Badal

73 The Akalis actively contest the SGPC elections conducted by the Gurdwara Election Commission. The SGPC elections are to be held every five years on the basis of adult Sikh franchise and are of crucial importance as the Assembly throws up leadership of the community. “Control of a working majority in 155 person statutory body says Paul Wallace in an essay Political Dynamics of Punjab, “is the key to Sikh Politics”. This has been known as a fact of life to every Punjabi. In all, 170 members from 120 constituencies are elected and an additional 15 members are nominated from different states. “*The Akalis,*” says an SGPC member, “have two constitutions - one, where they call themselves a Panthic party and the other, where they present themselves as a secular party.”

74 Bhai Mohkam Singh is the former leader of Damdami Taksal and chief of United Akali Dal (UAD). On November 22, 2014, former Damdami Taksal Leader Bhai Mohkam Singh floated a new political party in Punjab named as United Akali Dal (UAD). Ledaers and members of various Sikh organizations got together to form this Party. The UAD is Sikhism centric political party formed with the aim of to provide an alternative of Akali Dal in Pujab. Leaders of United Sikh Movement (USM) and Insaaf Lehar (IL) have played leading role in setting up of United Akali Dal. For information see, “Breaking: Political Party United Akali Dal Formed in Punjab”, available at <http://www.sikh24.com/2014/11/22/breaking-political-party-united-akali-dal-formed-in-punjab/#.VJ2hi14AA>, accessed on 16/08/2017. Also see, “New Political party United Akali Dal formed in Punjab”, available at <http://singhstation.net/2014/11/new-political-party-united-akali-dal-formed-punjab/>, accessed on 17/08/2017.

75 The statement was made by Bhai Mohkam Singh, Chief of United Akali Dal (UAD). His statements, views and comments were recorded during the discussion with him to acquire relevant information and develop insights about politico-religious dynamics behind the role of SGPC.

76 Explanation/ *Statemenet as made by Bhai Mohkam Singh (in Punjabi)*: “ਇਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਬੜੀ ਵੱਡੀ ਬਦਕਿਸਮਤੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇੱਕ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ (ਬਾਦਲ) ਨੇ ਕੌਮ ਨੂੰ ਚੰਗੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਜਕੜ ਲਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਸਾਡੀ ਕੌਮ ਤੇ ਇੱਕ ਅਜਿਹਾ ਗ੍ਰਹਿਣ ਲੱਗਾ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ। ਜੋ ਸਾਡੀ ਕੌਮ ਨੂੰ ਅੱਗੇ ਵਧਣ-ਫੁੱਲਣ ਤੋਂ ਅਤੇ ਸਮਾਜ ਦੀ ਅਗਵਾਈ ਕਰਨ ਤੋਂ ਰੋਕ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਸਾਡਾ ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਿਕ ਜਕੜ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਹੁਤ ਬੁਰੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਫਸਿਆ ਹੋਇਆ ਹੈ। ਸ. ਬਾਦਲ ਅਤੇ ਉਸਦਾ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ, ਉਹ SGPC ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣਾਂ ਕੌਮ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਬਜਾਇ ਆਪਣੀਆਂ ਖਵਾਹਿਸ਼ਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਲੋੜਾਂ ਤੱਕ ਹੀ ਸੀਮਤ ਕਰ ਕਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ।” The statements and views of Bhai Mokam Singh were recorded during the discussion with him to acquire relevant information and develop insights into politico-religious dynamics behind the role of SGPC.

family over SGPC is a blot on the pioneer institution of the Sikhs. This blot (control of Badal family over SGPC) needs to be removed.⁷⁷

*(English Translation of statement made in Punjabi)*⁷⁸

Similarly, late Manjeet Singh Calcutta, former SGPC Secretary and a known name in Sikh political and religious circles, says:

“The grip of the Badal family on the SGPC has virtually strangulated this august institution of the Sikhs. Serious efforts need to be made to regain the lost glory and prestige of the body which has done so much for the Sikh nation.”⁷⁹

Due to the electoral system as provided by the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been politicized too much. As elections (to elect SGPC members) are contested on party basis, it has become an established practice that SGPC office-bearers and members owe their offices to the Akali Dal party chiefs, and not to the Sikh community or any religious cause. Except for very brief intervals, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has always been controlling the SGPC affairs.⁸⁰ In the existing Akali-Dal dominated SGPC organization, except Gurcharan Singh Tohra, all SGPC Presidents in the recent past were propped up by the Akali Dal patrons. The names include former SGPC chiefs: Avtar Singh Makkar, Bibi Jagir Kaur, Sewa Singh Sekhwan, Tota Singh, and the newly elected current SGPC President Gobind Singh Longowal.⁸¹

Statements of SGPC leaders expressing their gratefulness and ensuring faithfulness to the Akali Dal leadership has been immensely lowering the prestige not of these occupants only but of the SGPC offices as well. For an example, Avtar Singh Makkar, who remained SGPC president for close to 11 years, owes his appointment to this highest office of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to Akali Dal patron Parkash Singh Badal and his wife. In this regard, the following statement of Avtar Singh Makkar is worth mentioning:

77 The statement was made by Bhai Mohkam Singh, Chief of United Akali Dal. His experiences, perspectives and opinions were very useful for this study as he has been a vibrant personality in Sikh politico-religious field. He is well known senior Sikh leader and has also been the leader of Damdami Taksal.

78 Explanation/ *Statement as made by Bhai Mohkam Singh (in Punjabi)*: “SGPC ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਦਾ ਨਾਮ ਇੱਕ ਲਿਫਾਫੇ ਵਿੱਚੋਂ ਨਿਕਲਦਾ ਹੈ ਜਿਸ ਦਾ ਬਾਦਲ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਤੋਂ ਬਿਨਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਨੂੰ ਪਤਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦਾ। ਅੱਜ ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਵੱਡੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਲਿਫਾਫੇ ਨੂੰ ਪਾੜ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਜਾਵੇ, ਨਵੇਂ ਲੋਕ ਅੱਗੇ ਆਉ, ਨਵੀਂ ਹਵਾ ਆਏ, ਨਵੇਂ ਬੁੱਲ੍ਹੇ ਹੋਣ- ਕੌਮ ਵਿਕਸਤ ਹੋ ਸਕੇ ਅਤੇ ਕੌਮ ਦੇ ਮਸਲੇ ਹੱਲ ਹੋ ਸਕਣ। SGPC ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਕੇਂਦਰੀ Body ਹੈ, ਸਾਡੇ ਬਜ਼ੁਰਗਾਂ ਨੇ ਬੜੀਆਂ ਕੁਰਬਾਨੀਆਂ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਬਣਾਇਆ ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਜੋ ਗ੍ਰਹਿਣ (ਬਾਦਲ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ) ਲੱਗਾ ਹੈ, ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਤੋੜਿਆ ਜਾਵੇ।” The statements and views of Bhai Mokam Singh were noted during the discussion with him on the concerned issues.

79 Statement of former SGPC General Secretary, Manjit Singh Calcutta, as quoted in World Sikh News . See “SGPC hardly functions as Sikh Parliament”, *World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/sgpc-hardly-functions-sikh-parliament/>, accessed on 11/01/2018.

80 The Sikh (SGPC) leadership has become notorious for its shortsightedness, selfishness, illiteracy and nepotism. See, Kashmir Singh (2001) , “SGPC in the Twenty-first Century”, in Harchand Singh Bedi (ed.), *The Sikhs in the New Century*, published by Khalsa College, Amritsar, pp. 198-204.

81 See, “From driver to foster son to SGPC head, Gobind goes a long way as Longowal”, *Hindustan Times*, November 30, 2017.

“I was appointed as SGPC president due to the blessings of Parkash Singh Badal and his late wife Surinder Kaur Badal. When I was appointed SGPC President for sixth time in row, I thanked her personally even though she was seriously ill and bed-ridden. She told me that I was a member of Badal family and I will remain the SGPC President.”⁸²

Similarly, on being elected as 42nd SGPC President, Gobind Singh Longowal (current SGPC Chief), expressed his gratitude towards the Akali Dal patrons in the following words:

“I got this position due to blessings of Guru. I thank President Sukhbir Singh Badal and Parkash Singh Badal for giving me this opportunity. I will perform my job with honesty.”⁸³

An analysis of the present organizational structure reveals that most of the key positions and ranks in SGPC are held by loyalists of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) which is currently being headed by Sukhbir Singh Badal. Gobind Singh Longowal, the current President of SGPC, has been Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) MLA in 1985, 1997, 2002. He won by-elections from Dhuri Assembly constituency in 2015.⁸⁴ SGPC President Gobind Singh Longowal, a four time Akali Dal MLA, has also been Cabinet Minister in Surjit Singh Barnala led Shiromani Akali Dal Government.⁸⁵ Gobind Singh Longowal’s name was

82 Excerpt from the interview of Avtar Singh Makkar as published in *Indian Express*. See “Sukhbir informed me at last moment about plans to pardon Dera head, I warned him against it: Avtar Singh Makka”, *The Indian Express*, September 4, 2018, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/sukhbir-informed-me-at-last-moment-about-plans-to-pardon-dera-head-i-warned-him-against-it-avtar-singh-makkar-5338181/>, accessed on 06/09/2018.

83 For the statement see, “Sukhbir Singh Badal’s pick Gobind Singh Longowal is new SGPC chief”, *The Indian Express*, November 30, 2017

84 In the process to elect the SGPC president for 2017-2018, Gobind Singh Longowal, the Shiromani Akali Dal candidate got 154 of 169 votes beating his rival Amrik Singh Shahpur of Dera Baba Nanak who was the Panthak Front candidate as voting took place in the General house of the SGPC. Amrik Singh Shahpur who got only 15 votes was nominated in the 11-member executive body after some members of the SGPC insisted. All the five high priests; Jathedar Akal Takhat and Jathedars of four Takhats were also present but they did not vote as per tradition. Gobind Singh Longowal replaced Prof Kirpal Singh Badungar as SGPC President who completed his one year term in November 2017. The election was held on November 29, 2017 at Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Golden Temple Complex, Amritsar. See, “Gobind Singh Longowal is the new President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee”, *The Indian Express*, November 29, 2017, available at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2017/nov/29/gobind-singh-longowal-is-the-new-president-of-shiromani-gurdwara-parbandhak-committee-1713960.html>, accessed on 2/12/2017. Also see, “Former Dhuri MLA Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC president”, *The Tribune*, November 30, 2017.

85 Gobind Singh Longowal, once used to drive a car for Harchand Singh Longowal and was his foster son. Longowal’s political career started with the 1985 assembly polls. He also served as a Minister in the Barnala-led Akali Government. Gradually, as five times CM of Punjab Parkash Singh Badal emerged more powerful in Punjab politics, Mr. Longowal left the others and sided with him. He lost in 1992, but was elected again to the assembly in 1997 upon which he became a minister of state for irrigation in the Badal Government. He won in 2002, then lost in 2007 and 2012 Punjab assembly election. Gobind Singh Longowal won the Dhuri bypoll assembly elections in 2015. See, “From driver to foster son to SGPC head, Gobind goes a long way as Longowal”, *Hindustan Times*, November 30, 2017. Relevant information available at- “Meet Gobind Singh Longowal elected as 42nd president of SGPC”, November 29, 2017, available at <http://www.babushahi.com/full-news.php?id=66118&headline=Meet-Gobind-Singh-Longowal-elected-as-42nd-president-of-SGPC>, accessed on 2/12/2017. Also see, “Gobind Singh Longowal’s heir becomes SGPC’s 42nd chief”, *The Times of India*, November 29, 2017,

announced for presidentship of SGPC by Akali Dal and was gradually elected for the same post, despite the fact that he was among few political leaders who were punished for violating the Sikh code of edicts by Akal Takht Sahib (earlier in the year 2017), after he was found to have canvassed votes from Dera Sacha Sauda during the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections.⁸⁶ Gobind Singh Longowal was held *Tankhaiya* (guilty of religious offence) by Akal Takht Sahib for violating its ‘Hukamnama’ (religious edict) directing the Sikh community to boycott the Dera Sacha Sauda sect. In Sikh religious tradition, “Tankhaiya”⁸⁷ is a badge that no Sikh wants to wear.⁸⁸

The dominance and hegemonic control of Shiromani Akali Dal leadership over the appointment of presidents of leading Sikh body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), can be highlighted from one very recent statement of former SGPC Chief Avtar Singh Makkar. On the issue of the appointment of Gobind Singh Longowal as the new SGPC president (who was declared ‘Tankhaiya’ by Akal Takht Sahib for seeking votes from Dera Sacha Sauda in 2017 assembly elections while contesting on Akali Dal ticket from Lehragaga), Avtar Singh Makkar, categorically stated :

***“Vekho ji, jinu Sukhbir ne banata oh jayej hi si
(Look, anyone appointed by Sukhbir is justified).”⁸⁹***

(Excerpt from Avtar Singh Makkar’s interview published in Indian Express)

available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/amritsar/gobind-singh-longowals-heir-becomes-sgpcs-42nd-chief/articleshow/61852668.cms>, accessed on 02/12/2017.

- 86 It was an SGPC committee that probed on the Akal Takht’s orders, to know that how many Sikh politicians had asked Dera Sacha Sauda for votes during the 2017 Punjab elections. The three-member SGPC committee had submitted a list of 44 such politicians to Akal Takht. Gobind Singh Longowal, who contested from Sunam constituency on a SAD ticket but lost the election, was in that list. Mr. Longowal was sentenced and asked to clean the heritage road leading to Golden Temple and also perform volunteer services like cleaning utensils, shoes and the floor inside Golden Temple for one day. He was also asked to organise Akhand Path of Guru Granth Sahib to seek apology. Although Gobind Singh Longowal said that he never went to ask for votes from Dera Sacha Sauda, his name was in the Akal Takht press note issued to name politicians sentenced for seeking votes from Dera Sacha Sauda. He had also performed volunteer’s service along with other politicians in a group activity to seek apology from Akal Takht Sahib. See, “New SGPC chief Gobind Singh Longowal was declared a ‘Tankhahia’ early this year”, *The Indian Express*, November 30, 2017
- 87 ***Tankhaiya***: A person who is guilty of religious offence. As per Sikh tradition, Akal Takht Sahib announces ‘*Tankha*’ (religious punishment) to the guilty for religious misconduct. In Sikh history, notable Sikhs who were announced *Tankhaiya* include prominent names: Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Teja Singh Bhassaur, Professor Pashaura Singh, Piar Singh, Buta Singh, Surjit Singh Barnala, Giani Zail Singh, Gurbaksh Singh Kala Afghana, Prof. Darshan Singh, etc.
- 88 See, “Amid drama, Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC chief”, *Hindustan Times*, November 29, 2017. Also see, “SGPC chief Gobind Singh Longowal was declared a ‘Tankhahia’ early this year”, *The Indian Express*, November 30, 2017, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/new-sgpc-chief-gobind-singh-longowal-was-declared-a-tankhahia-early-this-year-4961123/>, accessed on 02/12/2017.
- 89 Excerpt from the interview of Avtar Singh Makkar as published in *Indian Express*. See “Sukhbir informed me at last moment about plans to pardon Dera head, I warned him against it: Avtar Singh Makkar”, *The Indian Express*, September 4, 2018, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/sukhbir-informed-me-at-last-moment-about-plans-to-pardon-dera-head-i-warned-him-against-it-avtar-singh-makkar-5338181/>, accessed on 06/09/2018.

The purpose and objectives for which Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was established were exclusively religious in nature. However, due to the dominance of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) over its structure and functioning process, the SGPC is now predominantly seen as an institution with vested political interests. The contemporary role of SGPC especially in context to the issues and conflicts that have been discussed in the previous chapters, highlight the fact that political interests of SGPC have taken precedence over its religious interests. This trend is very much contradictory to the objectives of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 and the teachings of the Sikh faith.

There is no doubt in the fact that SGPC asserts significant authority among Sikhs as an elected representative institution of the community. As Shiromani Akali Dal, especially the Badal faction, has continuously dominated the SGPC, the premier Sikh politico-religious institution has been steered in accordance to Akali Dal leadership's own interests and priorities. Supersession of religious affairs by a temporal power is basically against the essential doctrine of Sikhism, the Miri -Piri doctrine, on which the institution of Akal Takht Sahib is based.⁹⁰ In actual practice, the Shiromani Akali Dal, through its systematic control over SGPC has given practical shape to the doctrine of fusion of religion and politics. However, this religion -politics fusion has reached such a dangerous imbalance that the pioneer institution of Sikhs, the SGPC, has become a side wing of the Shiromani Akali Dal, and its sole role and objective of Gurdwara management and propagation of Sikhism as per *Gurmat* (teachings of Guru) has taken the back seat.

SGPC Dharam Parchar (Religious Preaching) - A Core Factor

Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh faith, laid the foundation of Sikh faith during the 15th century, the period of renaissance. During this period, Guru Nanak Sahib challenged the ancient mythology and rituals in which the people of South Asia were shackled for centuries. It was Guru Nanak Sahib who promulgated a scientific and logical philosophy during the 15th century for the world to create a sense of morality to establish peace on this earth. The irony is that after five centuries, if we examine the effect of teachings of Sikh Gurus on the Sikhs in general and Sikh institutions in particular, we can come to the conclusion that what the pioneer Sikh institutions are doing today is in many ways contrary to the Sikh philosophy and faith. It happened so because of the lack of preaching of the Sikh Gurus and Sikhism in their real perspective by the so-called custodians of Sikhism.⁹¹

90 Jasbir Singh Ahluwalia (1999), *The Doctrine and Dynamics of Sikhism*, published by Punjabi University, Patiala, pp. 76-8

91 Gyani Sant Maskeen Singh (1999) *Desh Videsh De Gurdwarian Da Prabhandhki Dhancha Ate Pracharak Shreni* (in Punjabi), published by Gurmat Samagam, Alwar, Rajasthan, 15-22.

The work of the SGPC's Dharam Parchar Committee was to indoctrinate the Sikhs on the religious lines and thought as established by the Sikh Gurus. Accordingly, it was the fundamental duty of the Dharam Parchar Committee of SGPC to make best possible continuous efforts to unite the people by denouncing the institution of caste and caste based discriminations. But the concerned Committee has not worked properly at all for the particular cause. Had SGPC leadership worked selflessly for this cause, caste based Gurdwaras and Deras would not have mushroomed in Punjab. As huge number of Sikh are following various Deras and *Dehdhari Gurus*, both in India and abroad, it's the clear proof of the failure of SGPC's Dharam Parchar Committee. This fact is an ample proof to document that the 'Sikhi Parchar' (to propagate Sikhism) by SGPC has lacked both intent and content to attract and unite the people for the cause of Sikh *Panth* as established by Sikh Gurus. The role, administration and functioning of SGPC in management of Gurdwara affairs has created huge vacuum, which have been well filled by the Deras.

There is good amount of relevant research revealing that majority of the Sikh followers of Deras come from socially and economically backward sections. This clearly shows that SGPC has not been able to propagate the original Sikh thought, ideology and principles among the marginalized sections of the Sikh society. It can be stated that had the Dharam Parchar Committee of SGPC performed its duties earnestly and efficiently, Sikhs would not have been following Deras in such large numbers. In fact, it is due to vital flaws in the role of SGPC, especially in context to *Dharam Parchar* (religious propagation and preaching), that has created further divisions in the Sikh Community.

The Sikh community would not have been divided on caste lines, if the teachings of the Sikh Gurus had reached the Sikh masses in right manner and spirit. As the teachings of Sikh Gurus out-rightly condemn and oppose the institution of caste, even the trend of constructing caste based Gurdwaras would not have taken place if the principles, values and message of Sikh Gurus had reached the people in realistic terms. Also, it is a fact that Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has not done much for the economic requirements of marginalized sections. In this context, SGPC executive committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli, states:

“There is need to understand that people cannot be bound together on basis of Five Kakkars. If we want to prosper Sikh faith, it is essential to look after economic needs of the society alongside the preaching of religious principles and values.”⁹²

*(English translation of statement made in Punjabi)*⁹³

92 Statement made by SGPC executive committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli (SGPC member from Fatehgarh Sahib). Discussion was held with Karnail Singh Panjoli on the issue of Sikhs drifting away from mainstream Sikh religio and institutions.

93 Statement made (in Punjabi) by Karnail Singh Panjoli, the SGPC executive committee member: “ਇਹ ਸਮਝਣ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਧਰਮ ਵਿੱਚ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਿਰਫ਼ ਪੰਜ ਕਕਾਰ ਪਹਿਨਾ ਕੇ ਨਹੀਂ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ। ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਧਰਮ ਦੀਆਂ

As Sikhism under Sikh Gurus emerged and evolved as the religion for equality and humanity, it is precisely due to the failure of SGPC's *Dharam Parchar* (SGPC'S religious preaching and propagation drive) that Sikh community is now divided into various castes, classes, sects and Deras. Away from the real objective of inclusiveness, SGPC has been projecting Sikhism as extremely exclusive religion. The matter of fixing the inclusion in Sikhism has predominantly become the right of the privileged ones who dominate the functioning of Sikh politico- religious institutions, i.e. dominant Akali Dal and SGPC leadership. As discussed in the study, the economically and politically sound caste in Sikh community, the *Jatts*, has been dominating the affairs of Sikh politico-religious institutions, especially the SGPC. As such the matter of Sikh identity has become the prerogative of the dominant class which has strong hold over the decision making process of Sikh politico-religious institutions.

The major cause behind the failure of SGPC's *Dharam Parchar* drive is the Sikh institutions strong nexus with Shiromani Akali Dal. Instead of working for the unity and equality of the Sikh Panth, it has predominantly worked more for the political and electoral gains of Akali Dal leadership. Division of Sikhs into *Jatts* and *non Jatt* has been very well serving the electoral purposes of Shiromani Akali Dal. Then the further divisions among the non-jats and scheduled castes in Sikh Community has created more vote-banks for the Akali Dal, and even other political parties, like Congress, BJP and BSP.

Dharam Parchar Committee (DPC) of SGPC has nowhere made efforts to reduce the discriminations among various caste sects and unite them under the umbrella of Sikhism. We find no such serious initiative, event or program, which the SGPC's Dharm Parchar Committee has organized to enlighten, empower and uplift the socially and economically weaker sections of society on the basis of Sikh thought and fundamentals of Sikhism as enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. The study finds no specific and strong efforts by the Dharam Parchar Committee of SGPC to bring the various caste sects back in the mainstream Sikh religion.

There has been no conscious system-building attempt at presenting the Sikh doctrine in the form of a logically consistent framework- essential for knitting together Sikh ontology, Sikh ethics, Sikh sociology, Sikh polity and Sikh praxis into a coherent pattern. No organised and sincere attempt has ever been by SGPC to indoctrinate Sikh youth in schools and

ਕਦਰਾਂ-ਕੀਮਤਾਂ, ਨਾਲ-ਨਾਲ ਉਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਆਰਥਿਕ ਹਾਲਤ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਮੱਦਦ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਫੁੱਲਿਤ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ।' On basis of discussion held with (senior SGPC leaders and SGPC executive committee member) Karnail Singh Panjoli on concerned issues.

colleges Metaphysical postulates of Sikhism have not been worked out and presented as a logically self-consistent whole. The key-concepts of Sikh philosophy and identity are given diverse and mutually contradictory meanings.

The failure of SGPC's Dharam Parchar drive through its Dharam Parchar Committee has huge implications on the identity of Sikhs. As SGPC is the premier institution of the Sikh community and the representative body of Sikhs, its failure in the 'dharam parchar' impacts and influences the identity of Sikhs worldwide. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) through its existence of over years has failed to accomplish the goals or deal with the challenges which it has been faced with in the contemporary times. It has been too poorly and too inadequately committed to project Sikh religion on an international platform. The representattive Sikh body (SGPC) has miserably failed even to conceive to combat the planned attacks on Sikh religion and Sikhs, thereby damaging the Sikh institutions to the Sikh cause more than its rivals.⁹⁴

Degeneration of SGPC: The Vital Flaws

Keeping in view the lofty ideals of reformers, the Sikh community extended the whole hearted support to the Gurdwara Reform Movement and the Government was compelled to pass the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which was established in the year 1920 became a statutory body of the Sikhs. Since then, the SGPC is striving to achieve the goals laid down by the religious leaders and approved by the Sikh community, but the political interference, illiterate and selfish leadership is inhibiting it from achieving the desired success. The often opportunist misuse of power has raised serious questions as to whether the institution has strayed from its once proud leadership and instead of addressing problems being faced by Sikhs, the recent role of SGPC, has been driven by serious controversies and contradictions. In this context, Karnail Singh Panjoli, SGPC executive committee member, conveyed his views in the following words:

“The faith of Sikhs over SGPC is reducing day by day. There should be no political interference in working of SGPC, it should be fully independent. The main objective of SGPC should be the preaching and propagation of Gurmat in realistic sense.”⁹⁵

*(English translation of the views expressed in Punjabi)*⁹⁶

94 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti (in Punjabi)*, Navyug Publication, New Delhi, pp. 82-86.

95 The statements, views, and perspectives of SGPC executive committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli were noted during discussion with him on failure of SGPC in various aspects. As he has served in SGPC for long time and has been the core executice member, his insights into the concerned issues were highly beneficial for the study.

96 Original Statement (in Punjabi) of SGPC member Karnail Singh Panjoli:

Expressing serious concern over the misuse of SGPC by Sikh politicians for their vested interests, Karnail Singh Panjoli rightly argues:

“For the preservance and prosperity of Khalsa Panth, it is of utmost importance that political groups do not attempt to transform SGPC as their personal institution. In fact the political wing -Akali Dal, should work under SGPC directives to contribute in success of programmes related to preaching and propagation of the Sikh faith. Until the political groups keep using the institution of SGPC for their vested political interest, the Sikhs will remain aloof from the institution.”⁹⁷

(English translation of the statement/perspectives made in Punjabi)⁹⁸

Over the last few years, the reach and impact of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been questioned and debated primarily due to the interference of Akali leadership for their vested political interests. No attempt has ever been initiated to amend regressive sections of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, and there has been complete lack of will and intent to become a fully representative and legitimate body of the Sikh community. The secretary of Global Sikh Council, Gurdip Singh Kundan, explains the failures of SGPC as follows:

“SGPC has miserably failed in proper care and management of all Sikh Gurdwars, historical places and monuments, Sikh culture, traditions, heritage, and the future of the Sikhs. Architecture of the past is being destroyed and placed with marble and gold. There is very little or negligible support to the economically weak and underprivileged sections of the Sikh society. The puppet management under the dominance and control of the present political masters must end. It is high time to set up new global forums and mechanisms to address needs and issues of the Sikhs.”⁹⁹

The process of selecting the President and key office bearers of the premier Sikh body, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has also been one of the

“ਇਹ ਬੇਭਰੋਸ਼ਗੀ ਦਿਨ-ਬ-ਦਿਨ ਵੱਧ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ, ਅਤੇ ਇਹ ਰੋਜ਼ਾਨਾ ਖਤਰਨਾਕ ਹੈ। ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਪੂਰੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਆਜ਼ਾਦ ਹੋਣੀ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ, ਉਸਦੇ ਕੰਮ ਵਿਚ ਕੋਈ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਿਕ ਦਖਲ ਅੰਦਾਜ਼ੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੋਣੀ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ। ਇਸਦਾ ਟੀਚਾ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਸੰਚਾਰ ਹੋਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ।” On basis of discussion held with (senior SGPC leaders and SGPC executive committee member) Karnail Singh Panjoli on concerned issues.

97 The statements and perspectives of SGPC executive committee member Karnail Singh Panjoli were noted during discussion with him on failure of SGPC on the concerned issues.

98 The views, opinions and perspectives of SGPC Executive Committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli were noted during discussion with him on failure of SGPC in various religious aspects. Original statement (in Punjabi) of Karnail Singh Panjoli: “ਖਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਕਾਇਮ ਰਹੇ, ਇਸ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਬਹੁਤ ਵੱਡੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਕਿ SGPC ਨੂੰ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਿਕ ਧਿਰ ਆਪਣੀ ਨਿਜੀ ਸੰਸਥਾ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਯਤਨ ਨਾ ਕਰੇ। ਸਗੋਂ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ SGPC ਤੋਂ ਦੂਰ ਰਹਿ ਕੇ ਉਸ ਦੀ ਸਰਪ੍ਰਸਤੀ ਥੱਲੇ, ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਦੇ ਕਾਰਜਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਯੋਗਦਾਨ ਪਾਉਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ। ਜਿੰਨੀ ਦੇਰ ਤੱਕ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਿਕ ਧਿਰ SGPC ਤੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਪ੍ਰਭਾਵ ਪਾ ਕੇ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੇ ਹਿੱਤਾਂ ਲਈ ਵਰਤਦੇ ਰਹਿਣਗੇ, ਉਦੋਂ ਤੱਕ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਾਡੇ ਤੋਂ ਦੂਰ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਜਾਣਗੇ।” On basis of discussion held with (senior SGPC leaders and SGPC executive committee member) Karnail Singh Panjoli on concerned issues.

99 Statement of the Secretary of Global Sikh Council as published in World Sikh News. See “SGPC hardly functions as Sikh Parliament”, *World Sikh News*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/sgpc-hardly-functions-sikh-parliament/>, accessed on 11/01/2018.

crucial factors responsible for the lowering of its status, prestige and legitimacy. The selection process of successive Presidents of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been under constant attack as it is commonly said that SGPC office bearers come out of the “envelope” of Parkash Singh Badal and now Sukhbir Singh Badal, the chief of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).¹⁰⁰ As per various Sikh organizations, *Panthic* leaders and Akali Dal rival groups, this “envelope system” has been in existence after the death of Gurcharan Singh Tohra in 2004, who headed the SGPC for record 27 years.¹⁰¹ A report published in *Hindustan Times* describes the “envelope system” to name the SGPC President in the following words:¹⁰²

“Under the envelope culture, SAD patron Parkash Singh Badal and SAD President Sukhbir name the new SGPC President in an envelope and have it opened in the General House meeting on the Election Day. During most recent previous elections, former SAD Minister Daljit Singh Cheema has been bringing the ‘Badals’ envelope to the House meeting. The envelope is handed over to an SGPC member, loyal to the Badals, and the name on it is announced. Two other members endorse the name, with the rest of the members giving their approval by raising their hands, amid sloganeering of ‘Jo Bole So Nihal Sat Sri Akal’. After this, the next SGPC President is considered to be elected unanimously.”¹⁰³

Since 2004, after the demise of Sikh stalwart Gurcharan Singh Tohra, it was recently in November 2017, that the so called “envelope system” to name the new President of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was challenged. It was vehemently opposed by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur who heads an anti-Akali Dal *Panthic* group within the SGPC. This *Panthic* group demanded voting by fielding Amrik Singh Shahpur (SGPC member from Dera Baba Nanak), a Shiromani Akali Dal rebel, as their candidate for presidency of SGPC against the name of Gobind Singh Longowal proposed by Shiromani Akali Dal.¹⁰⁴ Explaining the reason

100 See, “Amid drama, Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC chief”, *The Hindustan Times*, November 29, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/gobind-singh-longowal-is-new-sgpc-president/story-VywGx4x8q4Gy4w4JNF7u4K.html>, accessed on 02/12/2017.

101 See, “Total revamp in SGPC with Gobind Singh Longowal as new president”, *Punjab Update*, November 29, 2017 available at <https://punjabupdate.com/total-revamp-sgpc-gobind-singh-longowal-new-president.html>, accessed on 03/12/2017. Also see Harinder Singh (2017), “Can the next SGPC President be of the Panth”, available at https://www.sikhri.org/can_the_next_sgpc_president_be_of_the_panth, accessed on 05/12/2107.

102 As per the news report published in *Hindustan Times* on November 29, 2017. See, “SGPC polls to see ‘envelope culture’ again”, *Hindustan Times*, November 29, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sgpc-polls-to-see-envelope-culture-again/story-R2RULi9Fr2OZpBmlODX2LL.html>, accessed on 04/12/2107.

103 See, “SGPC polls to see ‘envelope culture’ again”, *Hindustan Times*, November 29, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/sgpc-polls-to-see-envelope-culture-again/storR2RULi9Fr2OZpBmlODX2LL.html>, accessed on 04/12/2107.

104 Former SGPC chief Kirpal Badungar who was carrying out the proceedings of the meeting tried to persuade the opponents arguing that they are in minority and the voting would just be wastage of time.

behind forcing for voting in the SGPC House to elect its President, the senior SGPC member and influential Sikh leader, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, said: ***“Our aim was to restore democracy and oppose the envelope culture of Badal family. So, we raised objection to the unanimous declaration of the (SGPC) President.”***¹⁰⁵ Prior to this, the voting for the post of SGPC chief took place in 2002, when former Gurdwara panel President Gurcharan Singh Tohra parted ways with Shiromani Akali Dal patron Parkash Singh Badal.¹⁰⁶

Shiromani Akali Dal’s dominance over the organization and functioning of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is now being openly questioned and challenged by various Sikh organizations, groups and Sikh leaders across the globe. Important and influential Sikh bodies like Dal Khalsa, United Akali Dal (UAD), Sikh Sadbhawna Dal, Sehajdhari Sikh Party and Sukhdev Singh Bhaur *Panthic* Group¹⁰⁷ - all have been strongly criticizing and condemning the interference and dominance of Akali Dal leadership over SGPC in matters of Panthic importance. The so called “envelope system” to name the President of largest body of the Sikhs, the SGPC, has been widely criticized by various Sikh bodies and groups. Above mentioned Sikh organizations and groups are of the firm view that Shiromani Akali Dal’s hegemonic dominance over the SGPC affairs, has not only resulted in the severe degeneration of the SGPC, but has also lead to *Panthic* crisis in the contemporary times.¹⁰⁸

However, the opposition members remained adamant following which voting was held through secret ballot. See, “Amid drama, Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC chief”, *Hindustan Times*, November 29, 2017, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/gobind-singh-longowal-is-new-sgpc-president/story-VywGx4x8q4Gy4w4JNF7u4K.html>, accessed on 03/12/2107. Also see, “Gobind Singh Longowal becomes 42nd SGPC president”, *India Today*, November 29, 2017, available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/pti-feed/story/gobind-singh-longowal-becomes-42nd-sgpc-president-1096961-2017-11-29>, accessed on 02/12/2017.

105 See, “Amid drama, Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC chief”, *The Hindustan Times*, November 29, 2015, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/gobind-singh-longowal-is-new-sgpc-president/story-.html>, accessed on 02/12/2017.

106 On November 29, 2017, at SGPC Headquarters - Teja Singh Samundri Hall, Amritsar, the SGPC meeting was held to name the new SGPC chief for the year 2017-2018. It was former SGPC chief Bibi Jagir Kaur who proposed Gobind Singh Longowal’s name for the position and all SAD-affiliated members who are in majority, gave their approval by raising their hands. At this point, opposition members, led by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, stood up and raised objection to unanimous declaration of the candidate’s name. Due the strong opposition by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur *panthic* group, voting was held within the SGPC House. As Akali Dal enjoys majority in the SGPC House, Gobind Singh Longowal was elected the new SGPC chief with big majority. He got 152 votes while Bhaur group candidate Amrik Singh Sahahpur got just 15 votes. See, “Former Dhuri MLA Gobind Singh Longowal elected SGPC president”, *The Tribune*, November 30, 2017. Also see, “Gobind Singh Longowal declares 42nd SGPC President”, *Daily Post*, November 29, 2017, available at <https://dailypost.in/news/punjab/gobind-singh-longowal-declares-42nd-sgpc-president/>, accessed on 03/12/2017.

107 It was on November 17, 2017 at Amritsar, that senior Sikh leader and 16 times SGPC General Secretary Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, announced to have formed a new Panthic Front. While announcing the formation of the Panthic group in a press conference, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur explained the objective of the group in the following words: ***“We have decided to form this Panthic Front to keep an eye on the SGPC affairs. It will play its role to improve the state of affairs when dignity and credibility of the pivotal Sikh institutions has been seriously compromised for vested political interests.”*** See, “Jathedar Sukhdev Singh Bhaur forms new Panthic front”, November 17, 2017, available at <http://singhstation.net/2017/11/jathedar-sukhdev-singh-bhaur-forms-new-panthic-front/>, accessed on 21/11/2017.

108 Arguments and information based on discussion with leaders and members of influential Sikh bodies like Dal Khalsa, Sehajdhari Sikh Party, United Akali Dal, Sikh Sadbhawna Dal, etc. Discussions were held

Serious flaws in the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 under which Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) was made a legal body, misuse of SGPC's authority and influence by political class, conduct and administration of SGPC Presidents against the fundamental principles of Sikh faith, inadequate *Dharam Parchar*, and sheer lack in independent decision making - have together diluted the authority and legitimacy of the historic Sikh institution. This has resulted in various Sikh organizations across the globe making serious efforts to form Global Sikh organisation to effectively represent the Sikhs community. As an India-based religious institution subject to Government intervention, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), on the basis of its recent role, has failed to evolve as an ideal model of self-governance in contemporary times. SGPC also has been unable to logically or realistically cast its shadow beyond India's political borders into Pakistan, United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, United Kingdom or France, where the Sikhs live in significant number.

Another reason for degeneration of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is self-cantered, self-willed mercenaries entering into the institution as chiefs, without religious commitments or vision. SGPC authorities have seldom attempted to systematically organize a galaxy of learned Sikh scholars and engage them in a drive to create a new politico-societal network based on universal ethics enshrined in *Gurbani*, and facilitate the evolution of a secular and universal brotherhood with Guru Granth Sahib as the central focus.

SGPC has been averse to Sikh intellectuals and men with a vision. Rather than acting as a true "Parliament of Sikhs", it has been dictatorially and arbitrarily acting under its predominantly powerful chiefs who gave way to politically motivated resolutions and actions. In the last decade or so, it has not been any external power or organization that has devaluated Sikh politico-religious institutions. The overtly political role and vacillating policies of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have severely dented its image, credibility and legitimacy. SGPC dominated by self-interested political leaders has been more than enough to devalue the Sikh institutions, especially the supreme religious institution of the Sikhs- the Akal Takht Sahib.

with important Sikh leaders like: Kanwarpal Singh (leader of Dal Khalsa), Paramjeet Singh Rannu (President of Sehajdhari Sikh Party), Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala (leader of Sikh Sadbhawna Dal), Bhai Mohkam Singh (leader of United Akali Dal), etc. Apart from discussions, video interviews in electronic and social media of influential Sikh leaders like Bhai Ranjit Singh (former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib), Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (senior SGPC member and 16 times SGPC General Secretary), Karnail Singh Panjoli (senior SGPC member and SGPC executive committee member), Bhai Baldev Singh Wadala (former Hazoori Raagi at Schakhand Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar), Bhai Joginder Singh Vedanti (former Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib), all formed very relevant and important source of putting forth the concerned statements and arguments. All above mentioned Sikh groups and leaders have been vehemently opposing the dominance of Akali Dal over SGPC affairs.

Impact on Authority and Status of Akal Takht Sahib

Sikhs historically have great respect for the Akal Takht Sahib as supreme and central institution in Sikh religious tradition. Despite a lack of any formal arrangement of sovereignty, the Sikhs consider Akal Takht Sahib as a supreme and sovereign institution. A convincing case for the restoration of this sovereignty through the evidence of history can be made if history is treated more critically. It is evident that whenever circumstances allowed or the Sikhs understood implications, the Akal Takht Sahib was treated as a sovereign institution of the Sikhs. Since its inception, its glorious history and the role played by its Jathedars have guided the Sikhs during very critical times in the past. Akal Takht Sahib has ever remained the centre for the Sikh struggle. The combination of the spiritual and temporal unity and the sovereignty of “Guru Granth Sahib” and “Guru Panth” are expressed uniquely through the institution of Akal Takht Sahib.¹⁰⁹

In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court of India has also concluded that Akal Takht Sahib is a symbol of political and religious powers within the Sikh community. Through the historic judgement, the Supreme Court of India acknowledged and recognized the unique position and status of Akal Takht Sahib. The Apex Court observed:

“It is undisputed that Akal Takht enjoys a unique position amongst the Sikhs. It is indubitable that any communication from Shri Akal Takht, which is represented by eminent members of the community as Hukmnamas, would have great religious persuasive value even though strictly speaking it might or might not be a Hukmnama.”¹¹⁰

The role of the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib is a complex subject that stretches the limits of this study. There is contradictory evidence as to the exact name of the custodian of the Akal Takht Sahib in history – whether it is *Jathedar* or *Mukh Sewadar*. ‘Takht Jathedar’ is a term, which has become of general use but has no historical origin and ideological authority attached to it. In actual practice, the office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib has been traditionally and historically functioning as the religious head and spokesperson of the Sikh *Panth*.

To say that Jathedar is the chief or leader of Akal Takht Sahib is a misnomer. As the term ‘Akal Takht’ literally means, the “Throne of the Almighty”, such a position can only be attributed either to God or to the ‘Guru’.¹¹¹ Therefore the current popular use of the word ‘Jathedar’ of

109 Kirpal Singh (2004), “Guru Granth – Guru Panth : Historical Perspective”, in Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Guru Granth-Guru Panth*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp.31 -33. Also see, Harjinder Singh (2004), “Guru Granth – Guru Panth”, in Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Guru Granth-Guru Panth*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp.59 -62.

110 The concerned statement about the authority and status of Akal Takht Sahib is an integral part of the Supreme Court judgement in the following case: *S.Harcharn Singh vs S. Sajjan Singh And Others on 29 November, 1984*. The said Supreme Court Judgement is available at <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1418217/?type=print>, accessed on 28/01/2018.

111 Kirpal Singh (2002), *Institutional Failure in Punjab with Respect to Sikhism & Missing Sikh Prisoners*, published by Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh, pp.63-64.

Takht is a wrongly used term. There also exists hardly any reference or evidence in the early Sikh history, where the term 'Jathedar' has been used. Clarifying about the real and supposed powers and role of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, learned Sikh scholar Kashmir Singh says:

“He (Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib) is not the occupant of the throne, he is not to issue royal edicts and orders, he is only an attendant or spokesman of the office or throne of Akal Takht Sahib. He cannot dictate the community or arrogate Akal Takht’s powers to himself. He is to act as a Speaker to convene the meetings of Sarbat Khalsa (representatives of the Sikh community) and initiate the discussion on crucial issues and announce the decisions based on combined wisdom.”¹¹²

In accordance with the provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, the management of all the historical Sikh religious places, including Akal Takht Sahib, was invested in SGPC. The Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib, thereafter, is appointed and removed by SGPC, sometimes with the advice of other Sikh organizations and Sikh personalities, while many times without taking any such advice. There is no laid down procedure for appointment/removal of Jathedars, though the *Singh Sahibs* (Jathedars) have the highest authority in the Sikh community.¹¹³ The Sikh Gurdwaras Act authorizes the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to have strong control over the office of Jathedar Akal Takht and other Takht Jathedars.¹¹⁴ The Act empowers the SGPC to have complete control over the appointment, suspension and dismissal of the Takht Jathedars.¹¹⁵ However, Section 135 of

112 Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp.31-32

113 Bhai Ranjit Singh was controversially removed as Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib in the year 1999. In year 2000, under the scenario of dramatic developments in the religio-political affairs of the Sikh community, the SGPC removed Giani Puran Singh as Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib. Later in year 2008, Joginder Singh Vedanti was forced to resign from his position as Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib on August 5, 2008. The procedure of appointing and removing the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib who is regarded as the custodian of the highest seat of temporal authority (the Akal Takht Sahi) has been widely criticized by Sikh scholars and leaders across the globe. The political interests working behind the appointment, removal and role of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib has many times resulted in intense conflicts and controversies within the Sikh religious and political circles.

114 As per the provisions incorporated in the Sikh Gurdwara Act, SGPC is authorized to have full control over the office of Jathedar of three Takhts which are located in Punjab. Sikh Gurdwara Act (Section 133) says: “subject to the provisions of this Act, a committee shall have full powers of control over office-holders.” Section 134 of the Act provides for suspension or dismissal of the Head Ministers/Jathedars on any of the following grounds: “(a) Persistent default in duty of submitting of budgets, accounts, reports or returns, (b) Disobedience of lawful orders of the Committee, (c) Malfeasance, misfeasance, breach of trust or neglect of duty in respect of a trust, (d) Misappropriation or improper dealing of Gurdwara property, (e) Unsound mind or physical unfitness to discharge the functions of office, (f) Misconduct of such a character rendering him morally unfit for office, (g) Persistent default in performance of duties connected with the management or performance of public worship or of any rituals and ceremonies in accordance with the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, (h) Has ceased to be a Sikh. Provision to section 134 empowers the Committee to prescribe the maximum period of service or age limit for retirement of ministers and others.”

115 The dismissal of the Jathedar cannot take place without an inquiry, framing of specific charges in regard to the offence and claimed evidence for or against should be produced in his presence. The order of SGPC to suspend or dismiss a Minister (term 'Minister' here denotes- Jathedar of Takhts) is final and no

the Sikh Gurdwara Act also prescribes specific procedural safeguards before dismissal of “Head Ministers” or what we generally call as ‘Jathedar’ of the Takht. There is no doubt about the fact that Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 vests full authority to appoint and dismiss the “Head Ministers” (Takht Jathedars) in Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

As regards the suspension or dismissal of the “Head Ministers” or Takht Jathedars is concerned, there are numerous grounds and detailed procedure has been laid down in Sikh Gurdwaras Act under sections 134 and 135 of the Act. However, the Act does not lay any procedure and any necessary qualifications required for the appointment of the person as Jathedar (“Head Minister”) of the Takhts. The Act contains no guidelines for SGPC to be followed while making the appointment for the Takht Jathedar. Section 136 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act only says that any person who in the opinion of SGPC is qualified to be the Jathedar (“Head Minister”) can be appointed to this high office.¹¹⁶

It is the irony of the Sikh community that Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, the highest spokesperson of Sikh *Panth* who possesses religious, historical and institutional authority is appointed and removed under the command of a political party- Shiromani Akali Dal. However, various Sikh organisations, Sikh scholars and religious leaders are now raising strong voices against this monopoly of Akali Dal leadership over Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). At times, Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC have been involved in ugly public fights over supremacy of political and ideological dominance, and for securing legitimacy to control resources and discourse.

There have been sensitive cases of alleged violations of Akal Takht Sahib ‘Hukamnamas’ (edicts) by successive Presidents of SGPC and its office bearers.¹¹⁷ On one hand, the Sikh community treats the ‘Hukamnamas’ issued from the Akal Takht Sahib as an

appeal can be made against it to any commission or the court. The power has been used quite frequently for the removal of Jathedars by the SGPC in the recent past. See, *Section 134 and 135 of the Sikh Gurdwar Act of 1925*. Also see, Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 32-34.

116 See Section 134,135 and 136 of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act. For critical appraisal of the concerned provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act, see, Kashmir Singh (2001), “Takhts, Jathedars and Legal Provisions”, *Understanding Sikhism – The Research Journal*, January – July 2001, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp.31-33.

117 Here is an example when ‘Hukamnama’ of Akal Takht Sahib have not been respected by SGPC : In March 2000, the then Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti armed with the consent of ‘Panj Piayres’ ordered the SGPC to make an effort to frame rules regarding appointment, removal and sphere of activity of Akal Takht Jathedars. For this, SGPC president late Gurcharan Singh Tohra formed a committee under the leadership of Bhai Jasbir Singh Khanewale to accomplish the task as given by Akal Takht Sahib. But ironically, the SGPC revoked the committee within few days of the death of SGPC chief Gurcharan Singh Tohra. Similarly in the year 2008, Sikh radical organization Dal Khalsa initiated the project and formed a committee which had the objective to accomplish this job by April 2010. Here too, the effort of Dal Khalsa was strongly criticized by the then SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar.

“order of the Almighty” and on the other hand, the SGPC itself has been violating these edicts. For example, in 2007, the then Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti, pointed out that the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) should remove the middle “Akali” word from the party’s name as they had declared itself to be a secular party. But this order by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib went unheeded.¹¹⁸ Similarly, there have been numerous incidents when the orders and edicts of Akal Takht Sahib have either been violated or not adhered to in right spirit. This has left the Sikh *Panth* perplexed.

The controversies as to appointments, suspensions and dismissals of the Jathedars of *Takhts* on political motivations has further lead to sharp divisions among Sikh as to accept or reject the Jathedars appointed by SGPC. The blame is to be shared by the SGPC for creating such a distressing situation.¹¹⁹ Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has so far failed to evolve any mechanism to build consensus for appointing the Takht Jathedars. However, some *Panthic* groups, especially Dal Khalsa, seized the opportunity and provided the platform to scholars, intellectuals and historians to discuss and deliberate upon the issue.¹²⁰ The Shiromani Akali Dal controlled SGPC is least concerned in codifying the post of the Takht Jathedars as this would end Akali Dal’s control over the office of Jathedar, who is regarded as spokesperson of the Sikh community.¹²¹

The office of Jathedar has been subjected to recent unseemly controversies involving the role of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib and contradictory pulls and pressures. The role of

118 As Shiromani Akali Dal in order to strengthen its non-Sikh vote bank started to shift away from Sikh ‘panthic’ issues and agendas, its credibility and authenticity as the party of the *Sikh Panth* (Sikh community) began to be questioned. Shiromani Akali Dal’s continuing alliance with BJP for political gains, and its alleged links with RSS gave a severe blow to its base on which it was formed, i.e. the ‘Panth’ and ‘Panthic’ agenda’. No, doubt that SAD’s recognition and acceptance as sole political party of Sikh community has been diminishing of late.

119 There is no clear cut procedure and rules as to the designating of the authority to appoint, suspend and dismiss Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib and of other Sikh Takhts. The SGPC has been making crucial decisions to appoint and remove Takht Jathedars on its own without bothering to consult the rest of the *Panth and Panthic Organizations*. It has never taken the Sikh intellectual class into confidence before appointing the new Jathedar s or removing the existing ones.

120 Sikh organization Dal Khalsa provided the platform to scholars, intellectuals and historians to discuss and deliberated upon the issue. A series of seminars was organized by Dal Khalsa in context to framing the rules and procedures for appointment and removal, defining powers and working sphere of the Takht Jathedars. At a first seminar held on October 23, 2003 at Amritsar, the scholars opined that it should not be the sole discretion of the SGPC to appoint or remove the Jathedars at will though it may play the role of a coordinator among the various Sikh organizations for the selection of a person for the post. The draft suggested that the Takht Jathedar should be independent of all kinds of political and administrative pressures and manipulations and answerable to the Panth only.

121 The issue regarding appointment and removal of Takht Jathedars dates back to March 29, 2000, when Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti was appointed Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib after the SGPC sacked Giani Puran Singh unceremoniously. At the time of his appointment, Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti instructed the SGPC to lay down the procedures for the appointment, removal and working spheres of Takht Jathedars. But the SGPC did not pay much attention to his call and as such the important matter was deliberately ignored.

Jathedar has become the fulcrum of the conflicts which has brought various issues relating to the powers of the Jathedar, his status and authority into sharp focus of Sikh political and religious circles. In the context, Jagmohan Singh, the editor of *World Sikh News*, says:

“Notwithstanding the dispute about the historic status and role of the Akal Takht and its Jathedar; since the last four decades, the incumbent of the highest temporal authority of the Sikhs, has had to play a greater role in current religious and political developments. This role has rarely been bold, may be revolutionary on an occasion or two but generally has left the community more divided - questioning the very rationale of such an authority or even worse - denigrating the very importance of such an authority.”¹²²

The pro- Akali Dal behaviour of Giani Gurbachan Singh, (current Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib) in matters of Panthic importance has deteriorated the trust and faith of the Sikhs, thus belittling the authority and status of the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. The biased and unfair conduct of Giani Gurbachan Singh (current Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib) has been widely criticized and condemned by Sikh groups and organizations all over the world. Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib’s most controversial decision to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Raheem for his blasphemous act of presenting himself in the attire similar to that of Guru Gobind Singh, angered numerous sections of Sikhs. This shocking decision led to protests by various Sikh organisations and groups all over the globe. The decision evoked strong reactions not only from within Sikh religious and political circles, but also from Sikh intellectual class. Senior leader and former General Secretary (SGPC), Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, explains the current crisis in following words:

“When in 1978, the Hukamnama was issued against Nirankaris from Akal Takht Sahib, the whole Sikh Sangat (Sikh Community) accepted the Hukamnama with due regard and respect, reason being that the hukamnama from Akal Takht was issued following proper procedure. In recent times, we have seen that Jathedars of five Takht have been taking decisions on various matters of different nature. This has created a difficult and contradictory situation for the Sikh community. As per this new trend, many such issues are taken to Akal Takht Sahib, which otherwise are not of the nature and importance that need to be considered by the Jathedar Akal Takht and other Takht Jathedars.”¹²³

Radical Sikh groups, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) and United Akali Dal, called a Sikh congregation under the name of “Sarbat Khalsa” demanding the removal of Takht Jathedars for their alleged role in exonerating Sirsa based Dera Sacha Sauda head Gurmit Ram

122 See Jagmohan Singh (2017), “Akal Takht is “State within a State”, *Open letter to Jathedar, Akal Takht Sahib*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/akal-takht-is-state-within-a-state>, accessed on 12/06/2017.

123 Statements and perspectives of Bibi Kiranjot Kaur (senior SGPC leader and former SGPC General Secretary) , noted during discussion with her on the concerned issues of the study. As Bibi Kiranjot Kaur has been at helm of SGPCaffairs for long time, insights provided by her were very useful for the study. The statements which were originally made in Punjabi were later translated into English.

Rahim Singh, besides discussing the incidents of sacrilege of Sacred Sikh scripture – Guru Granth Sahib.¹²⁴ The organisers of Sikh congregation held at village Chabba near Amritsar¹²⁵ claimed that they had removed the Takht Jathedars for their failure to uphold the Panthic traditions and sanctity of the Takhts, giving importance to their personal interests, materialistic needs and political ambitions. The massive gathering of numerous Sikh organizations appointed three acting Jathedars of the Takhts.¹²⁶ The Sikh congregation (named as “Sarbat Khalsa”) after removing the Takht Jathedars also went ahead and resolved to frame a draft constitution for the independent stature of Akal Takht Sahib. The draft was to focus on rules for appointment and removal of Takht Jathedars and bring transparency in their working.¹²⁷

The Sikh factions which came out against the ‘pardon’ decision to Dera Sacha Sauda chief and participated in the massive Sikh congregation were: Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD-Amritsar) headed by Simranjit Singh Mann, United Akali Dal led by Mokham Singh, Shiromani Akali Dal (Pardhani), Shiromani Akali Dal (Delhi), Dal Khalsa, Damdami Taksal (Ajnala), Akhand Kirtani Jatha, Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Committee and the All India Sikh Students Federation. The Sikh conclave which was given the name of “Sarbat Khalsa” passed 13 resolutions challenging the hegemonic control of Akali Dal leadership over the decision making process of Akal Takht and SGPC.¹²⁸ The event was attended by more than 1 lakh people who gave their mandate against the Takht Jathedars for allegedly functioning under the influence of the Shiromani Akali Dal.¹²⁹ However, the Sikh conclave named as “Sarbat

124 Sikh congregation named as “Sarbat Khalsa” (held on November 10, 2015) was convened to remove the Takht Jathedar—the Akal Takht (Giani Gurbachan Singh), Takht Keshgarh Sahib (Giani Mal Singh) and Takht Damdama Sahib (Giani Gurmukh Singh). The clerics have been criticised for their decision to pardon Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, the chief of the Dera Sacha Sauda, who had, in 2007, been accused of committing blasphemy by imitating Guru Gobind Singh.

125 After SGPC’s refusal to permit Manji Sahib Gurdwara located in the Golden Temple complex, Sarbat Khalsa was held at Chabba village on the Amritsar-Tarn Taran highway.

126 Terming the Sikh conclave as “Sarbat Khalsa”, the organizers appointed Beant Singh assassination convict Jagtar Singh Hawara as Jathedar Akal Takht. As he was in prison, they appointed former MP and SAD (A) leader Dhian Singh Mand as “officiating Jathedar.” Amrik Singh Ajnala and Baljit Singh Daduwal were appointed Jathedars of Takht Keshgarh Sahib and Takht Damdama Sahib, respectively.

127 The Sikh congregation (named as “Sarbat Khalsa”) was personally attended and proceedings were keenly observed and noted. Information is based on my eye witness account of the massive event held on November 10, 2015 at village Chabba (near Amritsar).

128 The Sarbat Khalsa also “revoked” the *Fakhr-e-Qaum* and *Panth Rattan* honours conferred on Parkash Singh Badal by the Akal Takht, and the title of Shiromani Sewak bestowed on SGPC chief Avtar Singh Makkar. Information based on my eye witness account of the massive event held on November 10, 2015 at village Chabba (near Amritsar). The proceedings of the Sikh conclave were keenly observed and noted. Also see, “Sarbat Khalsa Passes 13 Resolutions”, November 10, 2015, available at <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/sarbat-khalsa-passes-13-resolutions>, accessed on 23/10/2016.

129 “Khalistan cries dominate ‘Sarbat Khalsa’”, *The Sunday Guardian*, November 15, 2015, available at <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/1905-khalistan-cries-dominate-sarbat-khalsa>, accessed on 23/10/2016. Also see, “Security stepped up in Punjab ahead of ‘Sarbat Khalsa’”, *The Hindu*, November 10, 2015, available at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/security-stepped-up-in-punjab-ahead-of-sarbat-khalsa/article7863092.ece>, accessed on 24/10/2016.

Khalsa” was fully opposed and condemned by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhadhak Committee (SGPC) and Shiromani Akali Dal.¹³⁰ The SGPC and the Akali Dal leadership rejected the appointments of “Parallel Jathedars” made at the Sikh congregation. Even as the “Parallel Jathedars” struggled to find mass acceptance, they are often acknowledged as Sikh leaders who have fallen out with the Shiromani Akali Dal establishment. The huge turnout of people at this Sikh gathering was an expression of anger and outrage at the Akali Dal leadership and Sikh clergy lead by Giani Gurabchan Singh, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. Sikh organizations that participated in the event alleged that Akali Dal have established dominant control over Sikh institutions and was using them for its own benefits.¹³¹

In the process of studying the role of Akal Takht Sahib, it is quite clear that (on the basis of the issues studied in the previous chapters) in recent times, various ‘Hukamnamas’ that have come from Akal Takht Sahib lacked consensus and were criticised from various corners. Jathedar Akal Takht and other four Takht Jathedars, who together constitute the Sikh clergy, had issued controversial ‘Hukamnamas’ like those in regard to ex-communication of persons from Sikh religion without going through the proper procedure and conduct. Edicts (‘Hukamnama’) related to Nanakshahi Calendar and Dera Sacha Sauda controversies have been widely criticized by the Sikh community.

In Sikh history, never before has such a situation arisen when any faction or group might have complained that the Jathedar is partisan. Several decisions and edicts delivered by current Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh, has raised intense conflicts and controversies within the Sikh community.¹³² In the reaction to Jathedar Akal Takht’s decision to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda sect, Jagmohan Singh (the editor of *World Sikh News*), in his open letter to Jathedar Giani Gurbachan Singh, says:

“Your present decision with your companion Jathedars to exonerate a pseudo-saint - euphemistically calling himself Gurmit Ram Rahim Singh, has further

130 The SGPC insisted that concerned Sikh gathering had no authority as it was not held according to Sikh tradition. SGPC chief Avatar Singh Makkar said that Sarbat Khalsa could be called only by the Jathedar Akal Takht at Akal Takht Sahib.

131 See, “At Sarbat Khalsa, hardliners appoint Hawara Akal Takht Jathedar”, *The Tribune*, November 10, 2015, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/community/at-sarbat-khalsa-hardliners-appoint-hawara-akal-takht-jathedar/156857.html>, accessed on 23/10/2016. Also see, “Aftermath of the Sarbat Khalsa: What the crisis in Punjab means for SAD”, *The Indian Express*, November 13, 2015, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/aftermath-of-the-sarbat-khalsa-what-the-crisis-in-punjab-means-for-sad/>, accessed on 24/10/2016. The Sikh congregation (named as “Sarbat Khalsa”) was personally attended and proceedings were keenly observed and noted. Information is based on my eye witness account of the massive event held on November 10, 2015 at village Chabba (near Amritsar).

132 Ever since the flip-flop by the existing Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, Giani Gurbachan Singh, has lost his legitimacy with virtually every Sikh organisation seeking his removal. The situation had taken another turn when the Sikh congregation convened by some Sikh organisations on November 10, 2015 at Chabba near Amritsar that was termed as ‘Sarbat Khalsa’ – sacked the three jathedars and replaced them with radicals. The radical Sikhs appointed by ‘Sarbat Khalsa’ congregation have been termed as “Parallel Jathedars” in most of the electronic and print media reports.

confused, divided and challenged the role, status and authority of the temporal seat of the Sikhs. This heretic, ably assisted by the Indian state and the Indian judiciary at all levels through acts of omission and commission, who faces charges of molestation, sexual assaults and murder, is systematically building a dangerous cult -not a sect -seriously threatening and challenging the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and norms of civilized social behaviour.”¹³³

The argument is being advanced that no 'Hukamnama' (edict) has ever been withdrawn in the past. The reason being that earlier the edicts from Akal Takht Sahib were issued after arriving at consensus based on careful deliberations. All the possibilities of differences of opinion were taken care of in advance, so there never was a need to withdraw an edict. It is for the first time that Jathedars are being questioned for their conduct and decisions on the basis that it is in violation of the Khalsa tradition and the mode prescribed by the 'Guru'. The manner in which edicts have been shaped and handed over in recent years by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, the decisions taken from the supreme seat of Akal Takht are being widely criticized and questioned. A prominent Sikh leader Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (SGPC General Secretary for 16 terms), explains the impact of wrong and biased decisions taken from the seat of Akal Takht Sahib as follows:

“I fear that Sikhs don't lose faith in Sikh institutions. We have been preaching and propagating since years that our institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) are supreme, highest in status and have jurisdiction over Sikhs all over the world. But, if biased decisions will be taken from these institutions, then the interest of the Sikhs in them will start to decline.”¹³⁴

During the Misl period, *Misls* (confederations) had mutual quarrels and conflicts, but the seat of Akal Takht was considered supreme and nobody used Akal Takht's authority in one's own favour. However, in recent times, the Shiromani Akali Dal leadership has been under severe attack from various Sikh sections for misusing the authority of Akal Takht Sahib for vested political interests. Highly controversial 'Hukamnamas' (edicts) issued from the seat of Akal Takht Sahib, especially the pardoning of Dera Sacha Sauda chief and excommunication of Sikhs belonging to Akali Dal rival groups, are testimony to the fact. Frequent intervention of Akal Takht in political affairs and misuse of the highest Sikh seat for the interests of particular political class is resulting in erosion of religiously established authority of Akal Takht Sahib. In some events, especially during the tenure of SGPC Chiefs Avtar Singh Makkar and Kirpal Singh

133 See Jagmohan Singh (2017), "Akal Takht is "state within a state", *Open letter to Jathedar, Akal Takht Sahib*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/akal-takht-is-state-within-a-state>, accessed on 12/06/2017.

134 Based on extended conversation with Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (influential Sikh leader, senior SGPC member and 16 times SGPC General Secretary). The impact of few controversial decisions of Jathedars taken from the supreme seat of Akal Takht Sahib was discussed in with him. The statements/perspectives/insights provided by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur in context to role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC were extremely relevant for the study.

Badungar, the Caretaker or Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib has acted as an ordinary official loyal to the President of the SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal. In this context, Karnail Singh Panjoli, the executive member of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, states:

“Akal Takht is supreme and true Takht, but the minds of those who are taking the decisions of the Takhts are not pure. The decision taken by Jathedars of Takht Sahibs (in regard to pardon Dera Sacha Sauda head) is very much against the principles of Akal Takht Sahib. If Jathedars cannot protect and safeguard the principles of Akal Takht Sahib, then they should leave their positions.”¹³⁵

Intellectual class sans faith and religious preachers without insightful knowledge are harming the interests of the Sikh religion and community. Akal Takht Sahib is not the name of the building or structure, but it symbolizes the Sikh principles and the concept of *Miri-Piri* and sovereignty. During the last decade or so, the Jathedars and, SGPC and Akali Dal leadership, have made mockery of the Akal Takht’s status and authority. The senior member of SGPC executive committee, Karnail Singh Panjoli, explains the present state of Sikh institutions in the following words:

“I feel that both Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, the pioneer institutions of Sikh community, are predominantly involved in political functioning. Both the Sikh institutions have failed in preaching and propagation of Gurbani and principles of Sikhism, which have been the main challenges before Sikh Panth. There should have been no interference in working of SGPC. The main task of SGPC is to maintain and safeguard the separate and distinct identity of Khalsa Panth. If anyone is involved in anti-Gurmat activities, the Jathedar Akal Takht has been incapable to summon that person at Akal Takht Sahib and take action against him as per principles of Gurmat. Now, every action of SGPC and Akal Takht is getting biased. Often, the decisions of these two Sikh institutions are taken in favour of those whose activities are anti-panth.”¹³⁶

*(English Translation of views/perspectives originally expressed in Punjabi)*¹³⁷

The nature and extent of political control over the office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib

135 The views and statements of SGPC Executime Committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli, were noted during discussion with him on the concerned issue. The statements were later translated to English as discussion took place in Punjabi.

136 The perspectives and statements of SGPC Executime Committee member, Karnail Singh Panjoli, were noted during discussion with him on the concerned issue.

137 Original statements, and perspectives (in Punjabi) as provided by senior member of SGPC, Karnail Singh Panjoli : “ਮੈਂ ਸਮਝਦਾ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਐਸ.ਜੀ.ਜੀ.ਸੀ ਅਤੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੋਵੇਂ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਸਿਰਮੌਰ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਜਿਆਦਾਤਰ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਿਕ ਕਾਰਜਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਉਲਝ ਗਈਆਂ ਹਨ। ਜੇ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਸਾਹਮਣੇ ਚੁਣੌਤੀਆਂ ਸਨ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਪਾਸਾਰ ਦੀਆਂ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਉੱਤੇ ਪੂਰਾ ਉਤਰਨ ਲਈ ਇਹ ਦੋਵੇਂ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਨਾਕਾਮ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ। SGPC ਦੇ ਕੰਮ ਕਾਰਜਾਂ ਵਿਚ ਕਿਸੇ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਵੀ ਦਖਲ ਅੰਦਾਜ਼ੀ ਕਦਾਚਿਤ ਬਰਦਾਸ਼ਿਤ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰਨੀ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ। ਸ਼ਿਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦਾ ਕਾਰਜ ਖਾਲਸੇ ਦੀ ਅੱਡਰੀ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਅਤੇ ਨਿਆਰੀ ਹਸਤੀ ਤੇ ਪਹਿਰੇਦਾਰੀ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕਰਨਾ ਅਤੇ ਪੂਰੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਵਿਚ ਜਿੱਥੇ-ਜਿੱਥੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਬੈਠਾ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਕੋਈ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਵਿਰੁੱਧ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਹੁੰਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪ੍ਰਤੀ ਗਲਤ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਵਿਰੁੱਧੀ ਆਗੂ ਨੂੰ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਤੇ ਤਲਬ ਕਰਕੇ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਦੇ ਲਪੇਟ ਵਿਚ ਲਿਆਉਣ ਦੇ ਅਸਮਰੱਥ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਹੁਣ ਸਭ ਪੱਖਪਾਤੀ ਹੋ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਜਿਹੜੀਆਂ ਧਿਰਾਂ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਕਰਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੇ ਪੱਖ ਵਿੱਚ ਫੈਸਲੇ ਹੁੰਦੇ ਹਨ।” The statements and views were recorded while my discussion with Mr. Panjoli on the concerned issues.

in matters of *Panthic* importance can be understood through very recent revelations by Avtar Singh Makkar, who served as SGPC Chief for six terms. In an interview to *Indian Express*, former President of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), Avtar Singh Makkar, revealed that Sukhbir Singh Badal, the current Prsediend of Shiromani Akali Dal, had informed him about the plan to get Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim pardoned from Akal Takht Sahib. It is pertinent to mention here that Avtar Singh Makkar was the President of SGPC and Sukbir Badal was the Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab when the crsis regarding ‘Dera Pardon’ erupted in year 2015. However, Avtar Singh Makkar, in his interview stated that he had advised Sukhbir Badal against this move as this could lead to dangerous proportions.¹³⁸The concerned excerpt from the interview of former SGPC President, Avtar Singh Makkar, as published in *Indian Express* is reproduced below:

“I came to know about it only when Sukhbir Singh Badal called me to his residence in Chandigarh and informed about the plans on the morning of September 24, 2015. I warned him against any such move. I advised him to first consult all Sikh bodies and take them into confidence. Sukhbir agreed to my suggestions and told me to meet him again in the evening. I left for Karnal for some function and on the way; I got a Whats App message that Akal Takht had issued pardon to Dera Sacha Sauda chief. I was shocked at the developoment as I was not expecting it so soon.”¹³⁹

(Excerpt from Avtar Singh Makkar’s interview as published in Indian Express)

The historical religious seat of Akal Takht Sahib is now frequently being used like a shield to protect the irrational and biased conduct of the Jathedar. Any attack on unwise and partisan behavior of Jathedar is presented as an attack on supreme institution – the Akal Takht Sahib. The conduct and working of the present lot of Jathedars has undermined the glory and aura of the institution of Akal Takht Sahib and other Takhts. By engaging in petty and personalized politics, few particular Jathedars have lowered their images and stature in the eyes of public in general and Sikhs in particular. More importantly, by doing so, they have degraded and belittled the highest seat of Sikh religious authority, the Akal Takht Sahib. In contemporary times, it has become a common practice that most of the Sikhs judge the status and position of

138 “Sukhbir informed me at last moment about plans to pardon Dera head, I warned him against it: Avtar Singh Makka”, *The Indian Express*, September 4, 2018, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/sukhbir-informed-me-at-last-moment-about-plans-to-pardon-dera-head-i-warned-him-against-it-avtar-singh-makkar-5338181/>, accessed on 06/09/2018. **Also see**, “Now, Makkar speaks up against Akali Dal”, *The Tribune*, September 2, 2018, available at <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/punjab/now-makkar-speaks-up-against-akali-dal/646356.html>, accessed on 06/09/2018.

139 Excerpt from the interview of Avtar Singh Makkar as published in *Indian Express*. See “Sukhbir informed me at last moment about plans to pardon Dera head, I warned him against it: Avtar Singh Makka”, *The Indian Express*, September 4, 2018, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/chandigarh/sukhbir-informed-me-at-last-moment-about-plans-to-pardon-dera-head-i-warned-him-against-it-avtar-singh-makkar-5338181/>, accessed on 06/09/2018.

Akal Takht Sahib and Jathedar according to the treatment and handling of the immediate issue. Many times, Sikhs forget the history of the evolution of Akal Takht Sahib to the present state, and the important role many Akal Takht Caretakers or Jathedars played in Sikh history.

In the last decade or so, the seat of Akal Takht Sahib has been used by the Akali Dal leaders for their factional activities and vested political interests. In recent times, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib has been acting as an agent of the Akali Dal faction and Akal Takht Sahib which is the the highest seat of the Sikh Panth has been defiled by the Akali Dal leadership.¹⁴⁰ Akal Takht Sahib is not a court of mediation between factions/groups, nor it is an industrial tribunal to decide the disputes - the way it is being currently used by the SGPC and Akali Dal leadership. An eminent Sikh scholar, Jaspal Singh, describes the established role of Akal Takht Sahib as follows:

“Akal Takht has no direct relation with day to day political matters and issues. It works for the interests of society and community in times of severe crisis. In more clear words, it can be said that Akal Takht is the guardian of community and societal interests of the Sikh Panth, and thus it works only for the common interests. If Akal Takht is of the view that community interests of the Sikhs are safe and there does not exist any big threat to them, under such circumstances it limits its role and area of action.”¹⁴¹

*(English Translation of excerpt in Punjabi)*¹⁴²

In last few years, due to the serious party factionalism in Shiromani Akali Dal, it did reflect in SGPC also. Even the highest Sikh religious office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib was made controversial by casually removing the Jathedars and appointing others in their places, without consulting other Sikh organizations as was the previous practice. Jathedars of Akal Takht Sahib have been denounced publicly and thrown out of the office.¹⁴³ The role and position of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib has become intensely debated and controversial issue in the last two decades. So many Jathedars - Ragi Darshan Singh, Jathedar Manjit Singh, Bhai Ranjit Singh, Giani Puran Singh and Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti were appointed and removed by the

140 Kulbir Singh Kaura (2003), *Beimaan Sikh Rajneet Ch Fasya Akal Takht* (in Punjabi), Panth Khalsa publications, Jalandhar, pp. 260-269.

141 Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, p.46.

142 As quoted by Dr. Jaspal Singh in his book titled “Sikh Dharm Te Rajneeti”. The original excerpt (in Punjabi) is reproduced here : “ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਦਾ ਰੋਜ-ਮਰਾਹ ਦੇ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਕ ਮਸਲਿਆਂ ਜਾਂ ਮੁੱਦਿਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਕੋਈ ਸਿੱਧਾ ਸਰੋਕਾਰ ਨਹੀਂ। ਉਹ ਤਾਂ ਅਤਿ ਸੰਕਟਮਈ ਘੜੀ ਵਿਚ ਪੂਰੇ ਸਮਾਜ ਦੇ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਹਿਤ ਲਈ ਕਾਰਜਸ਼ੀਲ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਹੋਰ ਸਪੱਸ਼ਟ ਸ਼ਬਦਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਕਿਹਾ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖਤ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਅਥਵਾ ਸਮੂਹਕ ਹਿਤ ਦਾ ਰੱਖਿਅਕ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਉਸ ਸਾਂਝੇ ਹਿਤ ਲਈ ਹੀ ਕਾਰਜਸ਼ੀਲ ਹੁੰਦਾ ਹੈ। ਜੇ ਉਹ ਸਮਝਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦਾ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਹਿੱਤ ਸੁਰੱਖਿਅਤ ਹੈ ਜਾਂ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਕੋਈ ਵੱਡਾ ਖਤਰਾ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਉਹ ਆਪਣੀ ਭੂਮਿਕਾ ਨੂੰ ਸੰਖਿਪਤ ਤੇ ਸੀਮਤ ਕਰ ਲੈਂਦਾ ਹੈ।” See, See, Jaspal Singh (1997), *Sikh Dharam te Rajneeti* (Punjabi), Navyug Publication, New Delhi, p.46.

143 There is no clear cut procedure and rules as to the designating of the authority to appoint, suspend and dismiss Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib and of other Sikh Takhts. The SGPC has been making crucial decisions to appoint and remove Takht Jathedars on its own without bothering to consult the rest of the *Panth and Panthic Organizations*. It has never taken the Sikh intellectual class into confidence before appointing the new Jathedar s or removing the existing ones.

Chiefs of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) in very controversial, unceremonial and disrespectful manner. There is no doubt in the fact that all of them were removed by SGPC as per the political needs and wishes of Shiromani Akali Dal leadership. It was mainly due to the vested interests of the Akali Dal or SGPC leadership. This unhealthy practise has resulted in division among Sikhs, and the weakening of the status and position of Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar's authority, for which SGPC is predominantly responsible.

The office and position of the Takht Jathedar, especially the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, concerns and affects the Sikhs living in different parts of world. But unfortunately, the appointment and removal of the Jathedar has been left to the whims and fancies or prerogative of SGPC and its political bosses. **The cause of the problem also lie in the fact that Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib, being the employee of SGPC (as per the provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925), has to operate under intense political pressure that immensely influences his independence and fairness in decision making.** Most of the Sikh scholars and Sikh organizations unanimously agree that Akal Takht Sahib is supreme seat of religious authority and its supremacy and sovereignty must not be challenged, compromised and questioned. As institutions function through its heads, leaders or office bearers; the independence, conduct and role of Jathedar to uphold the authority and status of Akal Takht Sahib is most vital.

Of late, the Sikh leaders and authorities who are at the helm of affairs at Akal Takht and SGPC have not been functioning as per the Sikh principles, original objectives and expectations of the people. Prominent religious leaders are more or less trading in religion for their political motives and material hunger. Their partisan, autocratic and feudalistic behaviour pattern is alien to the Sikh value system, and is causing a great harm to the future vision of the community. In this context, Jagmohan Singh, the editor of *World Sikh News*, in his open letter to Giani Gurbachan Singh (Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib), says:

“The politico-religious leadership of the Sikhs is virtually non-existent. Willy-nilly, we are engaged in a self-destructive campaign of undermining and denigrating the Sikh ethos and Sikh institutions. The social and cultural leadership of the Sikhs has a small canvas. The religious leadership is helpless. The apex religious body –the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, functions more like a branch than the main source, from which should flow the various roles of the community. The political leadership has its own petty political agenda, with the tag line - the community be damned, who cares!”¹⁴⁴

The slogan that religion and politics of Sikhs go together has polluted the Sikh religious affairs in which politicians have a decisive role and dictate the terms. Instead of

144 See Jagmohan Singh (2017), “Akal Takht is “state within a state”, *Open letter to Jathedar, Akal Takht Sahib*, available at <https://www.theworldsikhnews.com/akal-takht-is-state-within-a-state>, accessed on 12/06/2017.

having any moral or spiritual influence on politics, the Sikh religion is passing through the tough phase of over politicization. Sukhdev Singh Bhaur, sixteen times General Secretary and three times acting President of SGPC, requests the Sikhs and Sikh groups to get united and solve the contemporary crisis within the Sikh community through dialogue and discussions. Sukhdev Singh Bhaur makes his request in the following words:

“I humbly request every Sikh who recites the name of Guru Nanak that - One (a Sikh) may achieve any high rank or may hold any position, when there is concern about the Sikhs, Sikhi (Sikhism), Guru, Granth and Panth, he must consider himself first as a Sikh and establish brotherhood. Instead of fighting with each other, there is need to reach at right conclusions by having dialogue and discussions on the concerned issues. Sikhs must accept the decisions that are taken after having discussions within the Panth. Today, there is no dearth of wise people in Sikh Panth, the community has lot to offer, but we will have to solve our issues by utilizing the people in wise manner.”¹⁴⁵

*(English Translation of the views expressed in Punjabi)*¹⁴⁶

The Sikhs worldwide have been deeply hurt by the recent happenings, degrading events, internal fighting and disturbing developments both at the religious and political platforms of the community. The irresponsible, misleading and biased behaviour, and attitude of high-handedness of Sikh religious and political leaders, has proved a cause of serious concern for the whole Sikh community. This turmoil is a man-made crisis, which has resulted in decline of the legitimacy and authority of pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

Today, there has emerged a major concern for Sikh community in context to their identity and institutions. It is contemporary Sikh political leadership which is predominantly responsible for existing identity and credibility crisis of the Sikhs and their pioneer institutions. Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC are two Sikh politico- religious institutions which are different in nature, concept and authority; but their pattern of functioning is no more independent and both are facing functional crisis mainly due to excess interference of political power centre in the Sikh stream.

145 The views, perspectives and statements of known Sikh leader Sukhdev Singh Bhaur were noted during discussion with him on the concerned issue.

146 Statement/Request as made by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur: “ਮੈਂ ਹਰ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮਲੇਵਾ ਨੂੰ ਬੜੀ ਨਿਮਰਤਾ ਸਿਹਤ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਦਾ ਹਾਂ। ਜਿਹੜਾ ਮਰਜ਼ੀ ਰੁਤਬਾ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰੇ। ਜਿਹੜੀ ਮਰਜ਼ੀ ਕੁਰਸੀ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰੇ। ਪਰ ਜਦੋਂ ਸਵਾਲ ਸਿੱਖ ਦਾ, ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦਾ, ਗੁਰੂ ਦਾ, ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਦਾ, ਪੰਥ ਦਾ, ਉਸ ਵੇਲੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਨੂੰ ਸਭ ਤੋਂ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਸਿੱਧ ਸਮਝੋ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਈਚਾਰਾ ਸਥਾਪਿਤ ਕਰੋ। ਇੱਕ ਦੂਜੇ ਨਾਲ ਲੜਨ ਦੀ ਬਜਾਏ ਸੰਵਾਦ ਕਰੋ, ਵਿਚਾਰ ਕਰੋ, ਅਤੇ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਕਰਕੇ ਜੋ ਸਿੱਟਾ ਨਿਕਲਦਾ ਹੈ ਮੰਨ ਲਵੋ। ਪੰਥਕ ਫੈਸਲੇ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ ਕਰਨੇ ਪੈਣਗੇ। ਪੰਥ ਵਿੱਚ ਬੈਠ ਕੇ ਮਸਲੇ ਵਿਚਾਰੋ ਅਤੇ ਜੋ ਹੱਲ ਨਿਕਲਦਾ ਹੈ, ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਮੰਨੋ। ਪੰਥਕੋਲ ਸਿਆਣੇ ਬੰਦਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਕਮੀ ਨਹੀਂ, ਬਲੀਦਾਨ ਦੇਣ ਵਾਲਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਕਮੀ ਨਹੀਂ, ਬਹੁਤ ਕੁਝ ਹੈ। ਪਰ ਸਹੀ ਤਰੀਕੇ ਨਾਲ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਕਰਕੇ ਆਪਣੇ ਮਸਲੇ ਹੱਲ ਕਰਨੇ ਪੈਣਗੇ।” Based on extended conversation with Sukhdev Singh Bhaur (influential Sikh leader, senior SGPC member and 16 times SGPC General Secretary). The statements, views and perspectives provided by Sukhdev Singh Bhaur in context to the concerned issues were extremely relevant for the study.

In sum up, it can be logically documented that besides the outside constraints great danger is simmering at the domestic front threatening the basis, status and integrity of the apex Sikh religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC. There has emerged big crisis in fundamental roles of Sikh institutions, which is to maintain and uphold the distinct and separate identity of Sikhs. Heated arguments over the nature of the SGPC, the role of Akal Takht Sahib in modern Sikh life, the applicability and interpretation of Sikh principles, and legal decisions and legislation affecting the Sikh identity - all have implications for Sikhs living within and outside India.

The infighting in the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and the Akali Dal for self-interested goals has adversely affected the smooth and efficient running of the central organization of the Sikhs, which was founded after a long hard struggle and numerous sacrifices. Pressures based on caste, class, family considerations, self-aggrandizement, false pride, lust for power and money are weakening the fabric of Sikh egalitarian solidarity posing serious threat to the glorious humanitarian and democratic advancement heralded by Sikh Gurus in the history of human civilization. The main reason is not any structural defect in these institutions, but it lies on the shoulders of the individuals managing and representing these institutions.

Day-to-day happenings related to Sikh affairs and Sikh institutions do explore and highlight the fact that Sikh religious bodies are divided, their representatives speak in different languages, and their acts reflect their double faces on major issues confronting the community, may it be in context of Sehajdhari Sikh identity issue, Dera cult, Calendar issue, Sikh belief and practices, role of institutions or the Gurdwara Legislation. The major reason behind this institutional crisis is the dominance of selfish, inefficient and corrupt religious and political leadership at the helm of Sikh affairs. In the recent past, Sikh religious leadership has been least concerned for the interest of the community and upholding the principle values and basic doctrine of the Sikh faith

This chapter has attempted to explain and highlight the emerging politico-religious dynamics within the Sikh community on the basis of: (i) contemporary issues, conflicts and controversies within the Sikh religious circles, and (ii) role of pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, in context to the concerned issues. An attempt has been made to study the concerned issues and the respective roles of the Sikh institutions under the light of fundamental Sikh principles and values. On the basis of such analysis, the chapter focussed to highlight and document the emerging crisis of legitimacy and credibility in Sikh institutions (Akal Takt Sahib and SGPC) for which Sikh politico-religious leadership is predominantly responsible. Due to this simmering crisis and unrest, the challenges, threats and concerns that have emerged before the Sikh community and apex Sikh religious institutions - form the core part of the study.

Conclusion

Findings of the Study

Sikhism arose as a new revolutionary force, aimed at spiritual rejuvenation, moral upliftment and socio-political emancipation of the people. It introduced a qualitatively new mode of thought in the realm of religious philosophies of the world. On one hand, Sikhism sought to release people from the stranglehold of the ritualistic, caste ridden, priest-dominated and retrogressive social order, and on the other, it challenged the tyranny of the contemporary rulers. With its new conception of man, society and state, Sikhism contained the seeds of new civilization in world history radically distinct from the earlier ones.

Sikhs possess strong sense of their own distinct identity and community. The Sikh communal consciousness is predominantly the result of social movement among Sikhs in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and early decades of twentieth century which reformulated and crystallized the Sikh identity and established new norms for Sikh orthodoxy. Sikh Gurudwara legislation, Gurudwara management and the role of Sikh politico-religious institutions have deep impact on the whole Sikh community. The Sikh religious institutions are in existence to uphold and preserve the Sikh religious principles, traditions, values and distinctive aspects of Sikh identity. The study emphasizes on the continuing significance for the minority Sikh community of their relationships with their politico-religious governing institutions. This relationship is vitally consequential for Sikhs individually and collectively in many dimensions. What it means to be a 'Sikh' has always been shaped by the policies and actions of governing Sikh institutions and authorities.

I

The basic doctrinal issues among Sikhs have largely been resolved over the last hundred years or so. Similarly, patterns of worship and matters surrounding rites of passage such as birth; marriage, and death have become standardized mainly through the activist programs of the Singh Sabhas and their intellectual successors. Today, most public discussions, whether in conferences, journals or newspapers, electronic and social media, focus on another set of issues that fuel bitter debate, and sometimes violent confrontation. The debates and discussions in the second decade of 21st century reflect the complex politico-religious dynamics of controversies and conflicts related with role of Sikh institutions. The present day debates and discourse in Sikh political and religious circles predominantly focus on emerging concerns, threats and challenges before Sikh identity, and simmering danger to the credibility and status of premier Sikh institutions.

The study has focussed on the role of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), in context to issues and conflicts

which are directly concerned with the identity of Sikhs. The issues, controversies and conflicts studied in this work centre upon the influential roles of Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the custodians of the Sikh religion and identity. No doubt, the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC vis-a-vis the crucial issues within the Sikh community has deep impact on the life and identity of Sikhs worldwide..

The study has attempted to explore and explain the role of leading Sikh politico-religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, in regard to issues which have been at the centre of controversies, conflicts and cause of heated debates within the Sikh religious and political circles. These issues are: (i) Role of Akal Takht and SGPC in context to Caste factor in contemporary Sikh society (ii) Sehajdhari Sikhs and their voting rights in SGPC (iii) Role and Response of SGPC and Akal Takht Sahib in regard to increasing Dera cult among Sikhs (iii) RSS's anti-Sikh approach and response of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC (iv) Controversy over Nanakshahi Calendar (v) Conflict over formation of Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC). The understanding and analysis of these issues demonstrate that they impact the crucial aspects of the identity of Sikhs, both directly and indirectly. On the basis of in-depth study of contemporary issues and conflicts (which have been dealt with in the study), it becomes very clear, that even today, the Sikh struggle for a separate and distinct identity is still continuing which of course is now mixed up with a number of varying factors from within and outside the Sikh community.

The role and response of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), in regard to above mentioned issues, forms the core of the study. The understanding of the role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC in regard to the concerned issues holds significant importance because the emerging politico-religious scenario leads to crucial consequences and implications for the Sikh community in general, and Sikh institutions (Akal Takht and SGPC) in particular. As such, this study has attempted to explain and document the resulting concerns, threats and challenges. The politico-religious dynamics and its implications on the role, authority and status of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, forms the crux of the study. On the basis of explorations and explanation of the relevant facts, the study also highlights the major contradictions and discrepancies in the contemporary role of the SGPC and teachings of the Sikh religion.

Sikh religious leadership's conduct and decisions regarding *Panthic* matters, caste factor in SGPC, Sehajdhari identity and their voting rights, Sikh institutional response to threats challenging the distinct Sikh identity, conflict over the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar and formation of new Gurdwara management committee - all are political in the broad sense that they involve struggle over resources and power structures, and ultimately,

the authority within the Sikh community. The in-depth study of these issues and conflicts highlight the ongoing struggle for political power within the Sikh political class, and emerging crisis of credibility and legitimacy in the custodian institutions of Sikh community.

The study sets necessary historical context for understanding the role of concerned Sikh institutions in the formation and evolution of separate and distinct Sikh identity. The work constructs a narrative which highlights the historic and philosophical context that led to the establishment and evolution of premier Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak committee (SGPC). The study makes general reference to determining events in Sikh religious history but predominantly focuses on present day issues, conflicts and controversies which directly and indirectly impact the identity of Sikhs in significant way.

Sikhs historically have great respect for Akal Takht Sahib as supreme and central institution in Sikh religious tradition. Despite a lack of any formal arrangement of sovereignty, Sikhs consider Akal Takht Sahib as supreme and sovereign institution. Over the years, Sikhs have migrated to other countries in large numbers but they are religiously and spiritually tied to Akal Takht Sahib. Due to its religious and historical importance, the decisions taken from the seat of Akal Takht Sahib often affect and influence every single Sikh on the globe.

The supreme seat of Akal Takht Sahib embodies the Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri* which was consolidated by Guru Hargobind Sahib, the sixth Sikh Guru. Guru Hargobind Sahib gave practical shape to the *Miri-Piri* doctrine by representing both spiritual (*Piri*) and temporal (*Miri*) authority. The sense of spirituality, religious background and doctrinal basis of Akal Takht Sahib makes it stand as the institution of highest authority and influence among the Sikhs. The authority of Akal Takht Sahib is based on the unique concept of *Miri-Piri*, the essence of which means that Sikhism embraces the spiritual concerns of the man as well as the temporal concerns of society and State. The combination of the spiritual and temporal unity and the sovereignty of Guru Granth Sahib and *Guru Panth* are expressed uniquely through the unique institution of Akal Takht Sahib.

The Gurdwara Reform Movement culminated in 1925 with the adoption of legislation related to the management and control of Sikh shrines in the form of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925. The Gurdwara Act provided legal framework for Sikhs communal consciousness and separatism from the Hindus which continues to be valid even today. The reform movement also saw the genesis of two Sikh organizations, a central committee for the management of Sikh shrines - the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak Committee (SGPC), and

it's political wing – the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which have continued to govern the direction of Sikh politics primarily based on Sikh identity.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) came into existence with main objective to look after the administration of the historical Gurdwaras and preaching of *Gurbani*, Sikh philosophy and identity in their real perspective. Gradually, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) became the key institution in the religious affairs of the Sikhs. In course of time, the SGPC became the authoritative voice of the Sikhs and laid the claim to represent the authority of the *Guru-Panth*. The control of several hundred Sikh shrines provided the SGPC with access to the enormous resources derived from religious property and daily offerings. Contests for the authority over SGPC became primary political battle within the Sikh community, and thus SGPC provided a powerful base for leadership in the Sikh community. The central body for the management of Sikh shrines established under the Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandhak (SGPC), rapidly became an arena and base for Sikh politics.

II

Findings of the study on the basis of understanding and evaluation of the undertaken issues are highlighted as under:

Cast pertaining provisions of Sikh Gurudwaras Act of 1925 and functioning of SGPC on cast lines highlight that SGPC recognizes the institution of cast and accepts the cast based social hierarchy. The pioneer institution of Sikhs, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), accepts the caste based reservation and also makes appointments to various important offices on caste considerations. This divisive practice within SGPC establishment is very much contradictory to Sikh principles and teachings of the Sikh Gurus. The caste considerations in election, composition and representation process of SGPC is in direct contradiction to egalitarian teachings of Sikh Gurus and principles of Sikhism as enshrined in Sikh Sacred Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. By giving more prominence to political and electoral aspects than the fundamental values of Sikhism, SGPC leadership has established 'caste' as a vital factor in the working of largest representative body of the Sikhs. Rationally, no institution can represent the casteless identity of Sikhs, if the institution itself operates on caste lines and provides representation on caste considerations. Neither such an institution can serve towards the establishment of socially equal and inclusive society as propounded by Sikh Gurus through their sacred writings and lives.

Caste regarding provisions in Sikh Gurdwaras Act and adoption of the same in the functioning of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) are highly non-

conducive for *Panthic* unity and equality. There are sharp contradictions and discrepancies in the caste based role of SGPC in contrast to unique philosophy of Sikhism (as enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib) which denounces and rejects the institution of caste. Recognition and acceptance of the institution of caste is in total opposition to the Sikh ideology and identity as established by the Sikh Gurus. Instead of rejecting the institution of caste and refuting the caste based discriminations as per the teachings of Sikhism, the role of SGPC has resulted in further divisions and fragmentation on caste lines within the contemporary Sikh society. As such, the institution of caste got more firm and deeply connected to the socio-economic and political status of the Sikhs, even within the premier Sikh religious institution. No strong and decisive action has been taken by SGPC to oppose and discourage caste based practices and trends within the Sikh community. The contradictions between the caste related provisions of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act and egalitarian teachings of Sikh Gurus have subsequently lead to disparities, disagreements and conflicts, thereby drifting the SGPC away from its original objectives and goals.

At the fundamental level, the issue of the Sehajdhari voting rights and their exclusion from mainstream Sikhism - is a question of identity. Sehajdhari Sikhs constitute significant section of Sikhs which historically has been an integral part of Sikh community. This large section of Sikh population consists of the non-baptized Sikhs, who are born in Sikh families and have no other religion except Sikhism, and believe in Guru Granth Sahib only. It is a historical fact that all Khalsa Sikhs were Sehajdhari Sikhs at one point in their lives because no-one is born a baptized Sikh (*Amritdhari Sikh*). Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) by making use of legal means has been constantly trying to exclude the Sehajdhari Sikhs from the religion of their birth (Sikhism). It is immoral, irrational and beyond comprehension to force an individual out of his faith through a piece of legislation.

By excluding the Sehajdhari Sikhs from Gurdwara elections and Sikh religious establishment, the BJP-Akali Dal nexus and SGPC have raised serious questions over the identity of Sehajdhari Sikhs. Disfranchising Sehajdhari Sikhs and their exclusion from mainstream Sikh religion has resulted in sharp divisions and serious identity crisis within the Sikh community. By severe attack on identity of Sehajdhari Sikhs and labelling them as "Patits" (apostates), the approach and role of SGPC have created identity based politico-religious segregation within the contemporary Sikh society. The 2016 Amendment made in the Sikh Gurdwara Act by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime on the behalf of SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has legally left Sehajdhari Sikhs without any religion. They are not Hindus and do not belong to any other religion, and legally they cannot claim to be

‘Sikhs’. The phenomenon has resulted in complex identity crisis within Sikh community that has vital implications on electoral politics of Sikh religious bodies, especially the SGPC.

The debate over identity and voting rights of Sehajdhari Sikhs highlight the fact that Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) gives primary importance to physical aspects of Sikhs while very less attention is paid to spiritual, religious and philosophical aspects of Sikh religion. The role and contributions of Sehajdhari Sikhs in Sikh history has been neglected and their exclusion from the mainstream Sikh religion is based exclusively on physical/bodily aspects. It is bewildering that from the vast ocean of Sikh thought and philosophy, it is the matter of physical appearance that has been selected to mark the definition of a ‘Sikh’. It is a self - defeatist strategy that the uniqueness and magnificence of the Sikh religion has been reduced to physical aspects.

The move to disfranchise the Sehajdhari Sikhs of their voting rights in SGPC elections through legal and constitutional means is a religion based political strategy by the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) at the behest of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to maintain its control over the management of Sikh Gurdwaras and resources of SGPC. Sometimes through challenges to their identity and other times through amendments to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, Sehajdharis have been jostled in and out of the Sikh community for almost two decades. The politically motivated move to disfranchise the Sehajdhari Sikhs is contradictory to Sikh philosophy and principles of Sikhism which primarily emphasize on equality and inclusiveness. The definition of ‘Sehajdhari Sikh’ as provided by SGPC and Sikh Gurdwara Act has no religious sanction. This further leads to sharp contradictions and discrepancies between the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib and the realistic role of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

The largest representative Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has very rigidly defined the Sikhs and the courts of law have given them one third of the Sikh community in Punjab and may be half of the community worldwide. This phenomenon ultimately converts an already minority religion into a sub-minority religious community. A big question mark has been raised over the identity of the rest of the Sikhs. The resulting crisis also dissolves the representative nature of the SGPC which claims to represent the identity and interests of the Sikhs worldwide. By controlling the definition of ‘Sikh’ and reducing the number of mainstream Sikhs merely for political and electoral gains, the SGPC has narrowed the causeway of the Sikh religion. Serious flaws in Sikh Gurdwaras Act and categorization of Sikhs for vested political interests has resulted in identity crisis that has been created by the so called custodians of Sikh community. The biggest failure of

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been its lack of desire, inability and incompetence to maintain, affirm and project the identity of the Sikhs as established by Sikh Gurus through their lives and sacred writings.

The proliferation of Deras and fast growing linkage between Deras and socio-religious and economic factors have evolved 'Derawaad' as a new buzzword in the social and political discourse of the Sikhs. The Deras emerged as a sign of protest to the caste and class based exclusionary functioning of the Sikh religious institutions, especially the SGPC. The politicization of Deras and their role in the socio-political mobilization of Sikhs, especially the weaker sections of the society, has developed new political equations in Punjab. As Dera cult has been flourishing in Punjab with large number of Sikhs following the *Dehdhari* (embodied) *gurus/sants/babas*, there is no doubt in the fact that *Derwaad* has emerged as a major threat to the Sikh religion and its distinct identity. The proximity of Dera cult to the idea of a 'living Guru' along with a tendency to incorporate other traditions, besides Sikh traditions, made them appear subversive. The flow of people towards Deras which now has become a trend – is in turn giving rise to questions about the future direction of Sikhism.

As large number of Sikh are following various Deras and *Dehdhari Gurus*, both in India and abroad, it reveals the failure of SGPC's Dharam Parchar Committee (Committee for religious preaching and propagation). There are ample proofs to document that *Dharam Parchar* drive by Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has lacked direction, will and intent to attract and unite people on the basis of Sikh philosophy. The politico-religious role of SGPC in regard to Sikh religious affairs has created huge vacuum which has been well filled by the Deras, where socially and economically marginalized sections of society experience a sense of security and relief, away from the hostile realities of caste hierarchy and dominance of politically empowered class. The premier Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has been incapable to adequately propagate the original Sikh thought, values and principles especially among the marginalized sections of the Sikh community, and unite the masses on the basis of Sikh philosophy.

The failure of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is most visible in the increasing trend of Dera following among the Sikhs both within and outside the country. The key responsible factor behind this SGPC failure has been the inconsistencies and weakness in its *Dharam Parchar* (religious preaching and propagation) drive and lack in its will to emerge as welfare body for the marginalized sections of society. Being a cash-rich religious institution, SGPC has devoted very less attention towards economic or financial needs of the economically weaker sections of Sikh society. At the core level, it is the vital

failure in propagation of religious preaching of Sikh Gurus by SGPC that has resulted in various un-Sikh practices within the Sikh community. The fundamental reason behind the failure of SGPC's *Dharam Parchar* drive is SGPC's strong nexus with Shiromani Akali Dal due to which the apex Sikh body has been unable to adjust its priorities and goals as per the needs of the Sikh community. The controversial role of SGPC and Akali Dal leadership in Dera Sacha Sauda conflict has immensely dented the credibility and image of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) as the custodian institution of the Sikhs. Instead of working for the unity and prosperity of Sikh Panth, SGPC has predominantly been working for the political and electoral gains of Shiromani Akali Dal.

There has been a constantly churning challenge to the oneness of Sikh community by Deras which are great force to reckon with and for which the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been too weak and negligent. Instead of making suitable and adequate efforts to bring the Dera followers back to mainstream Sikhism, the SGPC has been patronizing the Deras for which the vote bank politics of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and its dominance in SGPC affairs is primarily responsible. Predominantly due to lack of egalitarian and inclusive approach in the role in SGPC, sharp divisions and segregation has crept up within the contemporary Sikh society.

Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh's intentions and strategy to subjugate the religious minorities (especially Sikhism) into wider Hindu culture is no more a secret agenda. Sikh opposition to RSS stems from the latter's strategy to appropriate Sikhism as part of Hinduism and not as a separate religious entity. RSS has been intensely propagating that Sikh Gurus were true Hindus and therefore Sikhs should feel proud as the sword-arm of Hinduism. By constantly attempting to solidify this link between Hindu and Sikh identities, the RSS has devised a strategy to decay the foundations of the Sikh faith and erode the distinctiveness of Sikh identity and history. There is no doubt in the fact that RSS, especially during Narendra Modi led BJP regime, has been able to spread its wings within the Sikh community and Sikh institutions. Taking recourse to both religious and political means, RSS has been trying hard to create confusion within Sikh institutions and expand its influence in Sikh religious affairs.

Although the leading Sikh institution, the Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), firmly claims to be the guardian of the Sikh interests and their distinct identity, still RSS has been allowed to infiltrate into Sikh religious affairs and management of Gurdwaras. The formation of Rashtriya Sikh Sangat, a wing of RSS, and its constant working in Punjab under RSS agenda, reflects double standards of Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The *non-panthic* alliance of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) with Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP), and control of Shiromani Akali Dal over SGPC, has made the effective interference of RSS into Sikh religious affairs an existing reality. Anti-minority and anti-Sikh agenda of RSS, and misuse of SGPC by current Akali Dal leadership for vested political interests, together poses grave threat and challenge to distinct and separate identity of the Sikhs.

The response of the pioneer Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, to RSS agenda has been a mixture of decisiveness, contradictions and double standards. The centralization of SGPC power structure in hands of Akali Dal leadership has allowed active interference of RSS in Sikh religious affairs. However, in spite of this fact, the Sikh institutions (Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC) have been successfully upholding the dignity of the principles of Sikhism and value of *Panthic* traditions at almost every forum, wherever they have faced an ideological attack by RSS against Sikh religion. There is no doubt in the fact that custodian institutions of Sikh religion, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, have been successful in calling out the RSS at least on ideological level. Sikh identity consciousness lead by Akal Takht Sahib has invariably followed an independent course.

RSS's deliberate denial of Sikhism as a separate religious community with distinct identity is deeply resented by mainstream Sikh institutions and the Sikh community at large. This resentment lies at the heart of the Akal Takht's Sahib's 'Hukamnama' (edict) that directed the Sikhs for complete boycott of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The historic 'Hukamnama' of Akal Takht Sahib declared RSS as the antithesis of Sikh values that seeks to undermine the fabric of the Sikh way of life and distinct identity of the Sikhs. The entry and active interference of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), an orthodox Hindu organization, in Sikh religious affairs, puts a big question over the capability and credibility of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) to handle the Sikh affairs independently.

For making Nanakshahi Calendar a religious emotional issue, it has been linked to that of separate and distinct Sikh identity with the argument that when other religions have their own Calendars, Sikhism need to have its own brand too. Sikh religious organizations and groups anxious to establish the separateness of the Sikh community have been the firm supporters of Nanakshahi Calendar as a pillar of Sikh identity. The arguments about the Calendar are concerned not only with its accuracy and relevance, but also the identity and status of Sikhism and the Sikh minority community within Hindu-majority India.

The controversy related to Nanakshahi Calendar has given tough time to Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which has been grappling to get the amended

2010 version of Nanakshahi Calendar implemented among all Sikh organizations across the globe. SGPC leadership has been under severe attack of Sikh organizations for making controversial changes in original Nanakshahi Calendar under the pressure from Sant Samaj, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD). At present, few sections of the Sikh community are following the amended Nanakshahi Calendar while others continue to follow its original version that was adopted in 2003 under the aegis of Akal Takht Sahib. The basic premise behind the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar is the clear cut assertion of Sikh identity and Sikhism as an independent religion with its own Calendar. Sikh groups and organizations which favour the adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar argue that separate Sikh Calendar is the need of the time as it would reinforce separate and distinct identity of the Sikhs. For them, a separate Calendar, the Nanakshahi Calendar, is essential to counter the anti-Sikh voices that consider Sikhs as part of Hindus on the basis that Sikh community uses the Bikrami Calendar which is traditional Hindu Calendar.

Sikhs who are a religious minority community are now celebrating their important religious and historic events as per different calendars. Important historical and religious events are always the significant sources of maintaining and asserting distinct identity for any major religion. The clarity regarding historical record of sacred and religious occasions is extremely important for religious communities and their identity. The clarity and consensus in community's historical events and sacred occasions become much more essential when the matter is related to a minority religion, which is also comparatively the youngest religious faith, i.e. the Sikhism. However, the apex body of Sikhs, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), has failed to evolve a Calendar that has the sanction and approval of Sikh organizations across the globe. The adoption of Nanakshahi Calendar and highly controversial amendments made in the original Nanakshahi Calendar by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have resulted in crucial contradictions and divisions within the Sikh community. Even after more than a decade of intense debate and controversy, no consensus has been made by the Sikh religious leadership on relevance and observance of any one particular Calendar.

The demand for Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) represents the legitimate aspirations of the Sikhs of Haryana. Gurdwaras always had the shared function of the community's participation, and the demand of separate Sikh body for management of Gurdwaras located in Haryana seems like a legitimate disenchantment against almost absolute hegemony of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) over the control of Sikh religious affairs through Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The

controversy over the control of management of Sikh shrines located in Haryana is also linked to a larger historical process where Gurdwaras assume a significant legitimising social and political space for the diverse community of Sikhs.

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been on a war path against the formation of Haryana Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (HSGPC) in 2014 by the then Congress Government of Haryana. The emotive religious-political tussle on the issue of separate Gurdwara management body for Haryana on the lines of SGPC resulted in intense conflict marked with divisions and internal fighting between the Sikhs of Punjab and Haryana. The formation of separate Sikh body for the management of Sikh shrines in Haryana has challenged the legitimacy of SGPC among Sikhs living outside Punjab. The phenomenon is also seen as an attempt to dislodge the dominance and authority of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) over Sikh religious affairs.

III

To explore, understand and analyse the contemporary role of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), in context to concerned issues of Sikh identity was the main objective of the study. Findings based on the contemporary role of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC are highlighted as under:

Day-to-day happenings related to Sikh affairs and Sikh institutions do highlight the fact that Sikh religious bodies are divided, their representatives speak in different languages, and their acts reflect their double faces on major issues confronting the community. There is complete lack of consensus among the leading Sikh institutions over matters of *Panthic* importance, may it be in context of Sehajdhari voting rights, Sikh Gurdwaras legislation, Nanakshahi Calendar, formation of separate Gurdwara committee for shrines in Haryana, etc. The representatives, leaders and members of Sikh bodies are divided on crucial issues confronting the Sikh community

Besides the outside constraints, great danger is simmering at the domestic front threatening the basis, sanctity, status and integrity of apex Sikh institutions - the Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). There has emerged deep crisis in their fundamental role of preserving and upholding the distinctive aspects of Sikh identity. In contemporary global and domestic scenario, there is big question mark on the identity-survival and preservation capabilities of the core Sikh institutions, particularly the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). The SGPC through its existence of over ninety years has failed to accomplish the goals or deal with the challenges which it has been faced with in the twenty-first century. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee

(SGPC) has been too poorly and inadequately committed to project Sikh religion on an international platform. It has miserably failed to combat and counter the planned attacks on distinctive aspects of Sikh identity, thereby devaluing the Sikh institutions to the Sikh cause more than its rivals.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has been averse to Sikh intellectuals and men with a vision. Rather than acting as true parliament of Sikhs, it has been dictatorially and arbitrarily acting under its powerful chiefs who gave way to politically motivated resolutions and actions. The role of SGPC leadership, especially in recent times, has reminded the Sikh community to think about the degenerating, self-centred, self-willed mercenaries entering into it as chiefs, without religious commitments or vision. Although, the premier Sikh religious institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, have not been able to work the various strands and sects into a harmonious whole, they have not yet lost their distinct identity. This holds good for almost every manifestation of Sikh life and thought.

In spite of the fact that Sikh philosophy advocates unity, harmony and inclusiveness, yet the role of SGPC has been divisive and exclusive both in theory and practice. The matter of fixing the conditions and standards for inclusion in mainstream Sikh religion has predominantly become the right of the dominant Sikh political class. Discrepancies and contradictions in the concerned role of SGPC have subsequently jeopardized the actual goals and objectives of SGPC for which this institution was established. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is to be blamed for not propagating the Sikh religion and identity in inclusive and liberal manner especially among the socially and economically marginalized sections of Sikh society.

Both historically and philosophically, it is a well-established fact that Sikh Gurus fought against all kinds of social inequalities that divided the society on basis of inherited backgrounds like caste, gender, race, etc. The premier Sikh institution, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), was to uphold the sovereignty of Sikh doctrine by implementing the teachings of Sikh Gurus into daily lives of the Sikh community. It is the foremost task of SGPC to manage its affairs as per the basic principles of Sikhism and traditions as established by the Sikh Gurus. However, it is ironical and highly contradictory that SGPC, the pivotal Sikh institution, which is responsible for preaching Sikh values and upholding the real Sikh identity has itself evolved into a phenomenon that is further sharpening and intensifying the divisions within the Sikh community.

Due to the contradictory and inefficient role of SGPC, especially in recent times, the basic tenants of Sikhism - inclusiveness, equality and egalitarian society have taken the

backseat. The dominance of elite Sikh political class over the decision making process of SGPC has diverted the powerful religious institution of Sikhs away from principles, values and teachings of Sikh religion. In contemporary scenario with diverse socio-political and economic challenges, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has failed to govern the Sikhs in accordance to basic principles and values of Sikhism. Dominance of Sikh political class over SGPC affairs, has not only resulted in severe degeneration in the role of SGPC, but has also led to *Panthic* crisis in the contemporary times.

In actual practice, Shiromani Akali Dal through its dominant control over SGPC has given practical shape to the fusion of religion and politics. However, this religion - politics fusion has reached such an adverse level that SGPC, the pioneer institution of Sikhs, has become a side wing of the Shiromani Akali Dal, and its sole role and objective of Gurdwara management and propagation of Sikhism has taken the back seat. The overtly political role and vacillating policies of SGPC leadership have severely dented the image, credibility and legitimacy of the central institution of Sikhs which was formed after numerous sacrifices. There seems to be emerging a strong legitimate disenchantment against the dominance of Akali Dal leadership over the decision making process of SGPC in matters of religious importance. Shiromani Akali Dal's dominance over organization and functioning of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) is now being openly questioned and challenged by various Sikh organizations, groups and Sikh leaders across the globe. Insights into current politico-religious dynamics of Sikh community also reflect the emergence of serious challenges to the dominance and authority of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) over Sikh religious affairs.

Akal Takht Sahib, the highest seat of religious and temporal authority among Sikhs, has been defiled by the Sikh politico-religious class predominantly by Shiromani Akali Dal leadership through its dominant control over SGPC. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) both through political means and legal provisions of Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925 has established firm hold over the office of the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. In recent times, the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib who is recognized as the sole spokesperson of the Sikh Panth, has been working under the strong influence of SGPC and Akali Dal leadership. As explained and highlighted in the study, the office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib is often being used for the political and personal interests of the dominant Akali Dal leadership. The edicts issued by Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib under extreme political influence, especially the 'pardoning' of Dera Sacha Sauda chief, has defamed and degraded the office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib. Also the manner in which various Jathedars of Akal Takht Sahib have

been handled by SGPC, especially in recent past, the office of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib is losing its respect, dignity and status.

Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib and the other *Singh Sahiban* of the Takhts (Takht Jathedars) have crucial role in making the collective processes work so that *Miri-Piri* (temporal-spiritual) institution, the Akal Takht Sahib, is acknowledged and respected as the voice of the *Guru Khalsa Panth*. The Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib should justify his decisions to the Sikh *Panth* which alone should be responsible for his/her appointment or removal. The role and authority of Jathedar should not be undermined and dictated by any political party, group or organization.

Misuse of the supreme seat of Sikh community, Sri Akal Takht Sahib, merely for individual and political vested interests is great disrespect to the institution which has guided the Sikhs at various periods of time and played determining role in Sikh history. Akal Takht Sahib, a unique institution that symbolizes the eternal and indivisible authority, is being frequently misused by Sikh religious and political leadership as a forum for discord and division. The study of the role of Akal Takht Sahib highlights that in the recent past, the authority of the highest seat of Sikh *Panth* has frequently been used to settle matters which are *non-panthic* and pure political in nature. This is against the essence and tradition of Akal Takht Sahib which is to guide the *Panth* in times of crisis and uphold the sovereignty of *Miri-Piri* doctrine.

A relationship between religion and politics is very much in accordance to concept of *Miri -Piri* in Sikhism. But the emerging trend and relationship pattern of religion and politics in contemporary Sikh politico-religious affairs has come to a dangerous point. The fusion of religion and politics within the Sikh religious affairs has reached such a dangerous point that authority of apex Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, has become a tool in the hands of Sikh political class to protect and enhance their vested political interests. This religion-politics fusion has created an acute identity and institutional crisis in Sikh community, for which Sikh politico-religious leadership is predominantly responsible. The cause is not any major inherent defect in premier Sikh politico-religious institutions, but lies with the persons managing them. The major culprit is the practice of throwing up undesirable, inefficient and incapable persons at the helms as the leaders/managers and members of extremely vital and important Sikh institutions.

The Sikhs worldwide have been deeply hurt by the recent happenings, degrading events, internal fighting and disturbing developments both at the religious and political platforms of the community. The authority and status of Akal Takht Sahib, the role of SGPC as the custodian of Sikh interests and identity, emerging pattern of relationship between two pioneer

Sikh institutions, the Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC, and the involved political dynamics in Sikh religious affairs – all have become central to the ways Sikhs think and act. On the basis of in-depth study of contemporary role of Akal Takht Sahib and Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), and emerging nature of conflicts and controversies in Sikh religious affairs, it can be documented that Sikh institutions are facing acute crisis of institutional credibility and legitimacy. The authority of Akal Takht Sahib has been degraded and defiled by strong interference of vested SGPC and Akali Dal leadership in matters of *Panthic* importance. This unhealthy trend has not only hampered the traditional and religious supremacy of the unique seat of Akal Takht Sahib, but it has also tarnished the faith of Sikh community in free and fair working of the institution.

Very often the slogan - "Panth is in Danger" - is raised by Sikh political and religious leaders. This basically happens whenever their leadership face crisis. On the basis of understanding of contemporary role of apex Sikh institutions and analysis of the issues dealt with in the study, it can be stated that Sikh Panth is in danger lesser from any outer body, but much more from present-day Sikh leadership that have been paying no heed to principles and values of Sikhism. Of late, the Sikh leaders and authorities who are at the helm of affairs of Akal Takht Sahib and SGPC have not been functioning as per the Sikh principles, original objectives and expectations of the people. Prominent religious leaders are more or less trading in religion for their political motives and material hunger. Their partisan, autocratic and feudalistic behaviour pattern is alien to the Sikh value system, and is causing a great harm to the future vision of the Sikh community. It is predominantly due to weak religious character and un-Sikh conduct of Sikh religious leadership that non-Sikh organizations like RSS has been able to make inroads into Sikh religious affairs. Until the mantle of Sikh religious affairs and control of core Sikh institutions is in the hands of opportunist and vested political class, the legitimacy, credibility and independence of Sikh institutions is under threat.

The root cause of the simmering crisis in credibility and legitimacy of apex Sikh institutions is the wrong interpretation and conception of the *Miri-Piri* doctrine which connotes the temporal and spiritual components of life. The unique Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri* implies that politics and governance should be religion and valued based. However, on the basis of explorations and analysis made in the study, it can be documented that Sikh religious and political class, in complete contradiction to Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri*, has taken the wrong route, whereby political interests have become supreme and matters of *Panthic* importance are being driven by vested political interests. The emerging politico-religious dynamics within the Sikh community in general and Sikh institutions in particular reflect

complete contradictions to Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri*. Instead of being guided by spiritual and moral values in matters of governance and politics, the Sikh politico-religious leadership is being governed by materialistic concerns and political ambitions.

Today, the pivotal Sikh institutions are operating in the time of renewed insecurity and danger to *Panth* both from within and outside. The practice of appointing undesirable, inefficient and incapable persons at top religious positions coupled with partisan and feudalistic conduct of Sikh politico-religious leadership is not letting the apex Sikh institutions to uphold and maintain the identity of Sikhs as per the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, the ‘eternal living Guru’ of the Sikhs and supreme authority in Sikhism. By institutionalized control over the role of *Takhts* in hands of opportunistic Sikh political class, the authority, prestige and status of the highest Sikh religious seats has been steadily diminishing and the future portents are really grave. The future prospects regarding supremacy, credibility and legitimacy in the role of Akal Takht Sahib will predominantly depend upon the nature and shape of the ultimate conflict between highly venerated institution of the Sikhs, the Akal Takht Sahib, and the Sikh political class.

To sum up, Sikhs today are in need of an internal reformation and renaissance. Sikh community is in dire need of the determined, intelligent and capable leadership to efficiently manage the Sikh religious affairs. As Sikh institutions are based on the values and philosophy of Sikhism, it is only the Sikh leaders fully devoted to the teachings of Sikh Gurus who can resolve the present *Panthic* and institutional crisis in Sikh community. There is need to re-develop Sikh religious leadership with full devotion towards Sikh philosophy and teachings of Sikh religion, so that they could become more authentic reflection of the Sikh faith and distinct Sikh identity.

To uphold the dignity and distinctiveness of Sikh identity, it is essential that premier Sikh institutions should be free and fair in their working, and their respective roles must reflect the core values, tenets and principles of Sikhism. The independence and supremacy of Akal Takht Sahib is of utmost importance to uphold the spirit and relevance of unique Sikh doctrine of *Miri-Piri* and distinctiveness of Sikh identity. Thus, it is incumbent on Sikhs worldwide to reassert the sovereignty, supremacy and sanctity of Akal Takht Sahib. The responsibility to manage the Sikh religious affairs through the authority of Sikh institutions must lie in hands of Sikh individuals who possess the intellect, wisdom and ability to guide the *Panth* on the basis of philosophy and teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, ‘the eternal living Guru’ of the Sikhs and supreme most authority in Sikhism.

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 The Hindu
 The Indian Express
 The Times of India
 The Tribune

Appendix-I

Appendix – I is the collection of 'Hukamnamas' (edicts) of Akal Takht Sahib which are concerned with the study.

ਜਾਤ - ਪਾਤ ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਨਾ ਕਰਨ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ

28-4-1985

ਅੱਜ ਮਿਤੀ 28-4-85 ਨੂੰ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ ਵਿਚ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਗੁਰਮਤਾ ਸਰਬ-ਸੰਮਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਪਾਸ ਹੋਇਆ।

ਕੋਈ ਸਿੰਘ ਜਾ ਸਿੰਘਣੀ ਆਪਣੇ ਨਾਮ ਨਾਲ ਜਾਤ, ਗੋਤ ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਨਾ ਕਰੇ। ਜਾਤ, ਗੋਤ ਦੀ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਕਰਨੀ ਮਨਮਤ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਉਲਟ ਹੈ।

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਗਿ: ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਹੈਂਡ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਗਿ: ਕਿਰਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਗਿ: ਹਰਿਚਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਮਾਹਲੋਂ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਕੇਸਗੜ੍ਹ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਆਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਗਿ: ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਹੈਂਡ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਸੰਤ ਲੱਖਾ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਤਲਵੰਡੀ ਸਾਬੋ

ਭਨਿਆਰੇ ਵਾਲੇ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਵਿਰੁੱਧ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ

ਮਿਤੀ : 17-8-1998

ਅੱਜ ਮਿਤੀ 17-8-98 ਨੂੰ ਪਾਵਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ 'ਤੇ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਭਨਿਆਰਾ ਵਾਲਾ ਜੋ ਆਪਣੇ ਆਪ ਨੂੰ ਸਰਬ-ਸ਼ਕਤੀਮਾਨ, ਧੰਨ-ਧੰਨ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਲਿਖਦਾ ਹੈ ਤੇ ਕਲਗੀਆਂ ਵਾਲਾ ਵੀ ਅਖਵਾਉਂਦਾ ਹੈ, ਦੇ ਖ਼ਿਲਾਫ਼ ਆਈ ਸ਼ਿਕਾਇਤ 'ਤੇ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਹੋਈ। ਇਸ ਪਿਆਰਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ 'ਤੇ ਹਾਜ਼ਰ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਆਪਣਾ ਸਪੱਸ਼ਟੀਕਰਨ ਦੇਣ ਲਈ ਵੀ ਕਿਹਾ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ ਪਰ ਉਸ ਨੇ ਨਜ਼ਰ-ਅੰਦਾਜ਼ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਹੈ। ਉਪਰੰਤ ਇਹ ਫ਼ੈਸਲਾ ਲਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਪਾਖੰਡੀ ਸਾਧ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਛੇਕ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ। ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਅਪੀਲ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਪਾਖੰਡੀ ਸਾਧ ਦੇ ਡੇਰੇ 'ਤੇ ਕੋਈ ਨਾ ਜਾਵੇ। ਇਸ ਨਾਲ ਕਿਸੇ ਕਿਸਮ ਦਾ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਵਿਹਾਰ ਨਾ ਰੱਖਿਆ ਜਾਵੇ ਤੇ ਇਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਰਗਰਮੀਆਂ 'ਤੇ ਨਜ਼ਰ ਰੱਖੀ ਜਾਵੇ। ਇਸ ਤੋਂ ਇਲਾਵਾ ਇਲਾਕੇ ਦੀਆਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਪੁਲੀਸ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਸ਼ਾਸਨ ਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਯਾਦ ਕਰਵਾਉਣ ਕਿ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਿਲੀ ਸੁਰੱਖਿਆ ਛਤਰੀ ਦਾ ਇਹ ਗਲਤ ਇਸਤੇਮਾਲ ਕਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ।

ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਦਾਸ,

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਪੰਥ 'ਚੋਂ ਖ਼ਾਰਜ

ਮਿਤੀ : 25-1-2000

ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਪੂਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮਾਂ ਦੀ ਘੋਰ ਉਲੰਘਣਾ ਕਰਨ ਦੇ ਦੋਸ਼ ਵਿਚ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਤੋਂ ਖ਼ਾਰਜ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ। ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਨੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮਾਂ ਦੀ ਬਾਰ-ਬਾਰ ਉਲੰਘਣਾ ਕੀਤੀ।

ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੇ ਐਗਜ਼ੈਕਟਿਵ ਕਮਰੇ ਵਿਚ ਨਵੀਂ ਜੰਤਰੀ ਬਾਰੇ ਚੱਲੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ ਵਿਚ ਦਾਸ ਨੇ ਵਿਰੋਧ ਕੀਤਾ ਪਰ ਇਸ ਦੇ ਉਲਟ ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਨੇ ਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਪੁਰੇਵਾਲ ਨੂੰ ਸਿਰਪਾਉ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਜੰਤਰੀ ਚਾਲੂ ਕਰ ਦਿੱਤੀ। ਉਸ ਉਪਰੰਤ ਜੰਤਰੀ ਉਪਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਗਾਈ ਗਈ।

4 ਨਵੰਬਰ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਜੰਤਰੀ ਉਪਰ ਫਿਰ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਗਾਈ ਗਈ ਪਰ ਬੀਬੀ ਜੀ (ਨੇ) ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਦੇ) ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਾਂ (ਦੀ) ਪਰਵਾਹ ਨਾ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ ਜੋ 14 ਜਨਵਰੀ ਪੋਹ ਸੁਦੀ ਸਤਵੀਂ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਜੀ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ ਦਾ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਪੂਰਬ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾਣਾ ਸੀ, ਪਰ ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਪੂਰਬ 5 ਜਨਵਰੀ (ਨੂੰ) ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਨੂੰ ਮਨਾਉਣ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਬਿਆਨ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਕਈ ਜਗ੍ਹਾ 'ਤੇ ਜ਼ਬਰਦਸਤੀ ਇਹ ਦਿਨ ਮਨਵਾਇਆ ਗਿਆ ਪਰ ਸਾਰੀ ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਬਹੁਤ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਨੇ ਇਹ ਦਿਨ 14 ਜਨਵਰੀ ਪੋਹ ਸੁਦੀ ਸਤਵੀਂ ਨੂੰ ਹੀ ਮਨਾਇਆ।

ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਛੇਕਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਜਿੰਨਾਂ ਚਿਰ ਇਹ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪੇਸ਼ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੁੰਦੀ, ਓਨਾ ਚਿਰ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮ ਲੇਵਾ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅਤੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸਟੇਜ ਤੇ ਬੋਲਣ ਨਾ ਦੇਣ। 27 ਜਨਵਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਹੋਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਐਗਜ਼ੈਕਟਿਵ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ 'ਤੇ ਰੋਕ ਲਗਾਈ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਐਗਜ਼ੈਕਟਿਵ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੇ ਸਾਰੇ ਮੈਂਬਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੇ 2 ਫ਼ਰਵਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਸਵੇਰੇ 10 ਵਜੇ ਤਲਖ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ।

ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਦਾਸ,

- /ਸਹੀ (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਰੋਸ਼ਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
- /ਸਹੀ (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸੂਬਾ ਸਿੰਘ)
- /ਸਹੀ (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਮਿਲਖਾ ਸਿੰਘ)
- /ਸਹੀ (ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਚਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਦਾਸ,
-/ਸਹੀ
(ਪੂਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

ਸਾਬਕਾ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਪੂਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਕੀਤੇ ਐਲਾਨਾਮੇ ਅਣਉਚਿਤ ਤੇ ਨਾਜਾਇਜ਼ ਕਰਾਰ

ਨੰ. 319/AT/00

ਮਿਤੀ : 29-3-2000

ਅੱਜ ਮਿਤੀ 29-3-2000 ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਪੰਥ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਣਿਤ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਹੋਈ ਜਿਸ ਵਿਚ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਸਾਬਕਾ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਪੂਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਜਨਵਰੀ, ਫ਼ਰਵਰੀ ਅਤੇ ਮਾਰਚ 2000 ਵਿਚ ਸਮੇਂ-ਸਮੇਂ ਕੁਝ ਵਿਅਕਤੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਛੇਕਣ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਐਲਾਨ-ਨਾਮਿਆਂ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਘੋਖਵੀਂ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ।

ਸਾਰੇ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਪੂਰਨ ਸੰਮਤੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਸਾਬਕਾ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਜੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਿਤੀ 25-1-2000 ਤੋਂ ਲੈ ਕੇ ਮਿਤੀ 28-3-2000 ਤੀਕ ਦੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਵਿਚਕਾਰ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਛੇਕਣ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਸਮੁੱਚੀ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਅਧੀਨ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਗਏ ਸਾਰੇ ਐਲਾਨ ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦੀ ਸੌਂਝੀ ਸੋਚ ਅਤੇ ਨਿੱਜੀ ਹਿੱਤਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਪ੍ਰੇਰਤ ਸਨ। ਇਹ ਸਾਰੇ ਐਲਾਨ-ਨਾਮੇ ਪੰਥਕ ਸੋਚ, ਪੰਥਕ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਥ ਦੀਆਂ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣਿਤ ਪੰਥਕ ਪ੍ਰੰਪਰਾਵਾਂ ਦੀ ਖੁੱਲ੍ਹਮ-ਖੁੱਲ੍ਹਾ ਉਲੰਘਣਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ। ਜਿਸਦੇ ਫਲ-ਸਰੂਪ ਸਮੁੱਚੀ ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਨਮੋਸ਼ੀ ਹੋਈ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਵਜੋਂ ਮਾਨਸਿਕ ਸੰਤਾਪ ਭੋਗਣਾ ਪਿਆ।

ਸੋ ਸਾਬਕਾ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਪੂਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਮਿਤੀ 25-1-2000 ਤੋਂ ਲੈਕੇ ਮਿਤੀ 28-3-2000 ਤੱਕ ਦੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਵਿਚਕਾਰ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਛੇਕਣ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ ਸਮੁੱਚੀ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਅਧੀਨ ਵੱਖ-ਵੱਖ

ਵਿਅਕਤੀਆਂ ਵਿਰੁੱਧ ਨਿਰਾਧਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਨਿਰਮੂਲ ਦੋਸ਼ ਅਰੋਕੇ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਛੇਕਣ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਗਏ ਸਾਰੇ ਐਲਾਨ-ਨਾਮੇ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਸਰਵ ਸੰਮਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਅਨੁਚਿਤ ਅਤੇ ਨਾਜਾਇਜ਼ ਕਰਾਰ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਰੱਦ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਹਨ। ਇਸ ਦੇ ਫਲਸਰੂਪ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪ੍ਰੋ: ਮਨਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਭਗਵਾਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਮੁੱਖ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਬੀਬੀ ਜਗੀਰ ਕੌਰ ਜੀ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ, ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਅਤੇ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਮੈਂਬਰ, ਸ੍ਰ: ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਸ੍ਰ: ਜਸਵਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਐਡਵੋਕੇਟ, ਸ੍ਰ: ਗੁਰਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਸ੍ਰ: ਰਘੁਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਅਤੇ ਸ੍ਰ: ਸਤਨਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਭਾਈ ਰੂਪਾ, ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਦੋਸ਼ ਮੁਕਤ ਐਲਾਨਿਆ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ। ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਇਹ ਸਾਰੇ ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਿਆਰ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਥਕ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਵਿਚ ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸੌਂਪੀ ਹੋਈ ਸੇਵਾ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਵਾਂਗ ਹੀ ਨਿਭਾਉਂਦੇ ਹੋਏ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਅਸੀਸਾਂ ਦੇ ਪਾਤਰ ਬਣੇ ਰਹਿਣਗੇ।

ਬੀਤੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਦੇ ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਘਟਨਾਕ੍ਰਮ ਉੱਤੇ ਦੁੱਖ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਵਾ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ ਹੋਇਆਂ ਪੰਥ ਦੇ ਨਿਮਾਣੇ ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ, ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਹੋਈ ਨਮੋਸ਼ੀ ਅਤੇ ਹੰਡਾਏ ਮਾਨਸਿਕ ਸੰਤਾਪ ਲਈ ਖਿਮਾ ਦੀ ਯਾਚਨਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ। ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਤਿਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਮੇਹਰ ਕਰਨ।

ਅੱਗੋਂ ਤੋਂ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨਿਮਾਣੇ ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਿਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਮੇਹਰ ਭਰਿਆ ਹੱਥ ਰੱਖ ਕੇ ਸੁਚੱਜੇ ਢੰਗ ਨਾਲ ਸੇਵਾ ਨਿਭਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਬਲ ਬਖਸ਼ਣ। ਇਸ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਸਮੂਹ ਪ੍ਰਾਸਚਿਤ ਲਈ ਮਿਤੀ 30-3-2000 ਦਿਨ ਵੀਰਵਾਰ ਅਰਦਾਸ ਦਿਵਸ ਮਿਥਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਇਸ ਦਿਨ ਸਵੇਰੇ 7-30 ਵਜੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਵੇਲੇ ਦੇ ਦੀਵਾਨ ਦੀ ਸਮਾਪਤੀ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ, ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੇ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਸਨਮੁੱਖ ਸੰਗਤੀ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਇੱਕ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਜਪੁਜੀ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦਾ ਪਾਠ ਕਰ ਕੇ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਪਾਤਿਸ਼ਾਹ ਜੀ ਤੋਂ ਬਖਸ਼ਿਸ਼ ਦੀ ਯਾਚਨਾ ਕਰਨਗੇ।

ਅੰਤ ਵਿੱਚ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਨੂੰ ਹਦਾਇਤ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਕਿ :

- (1) ਜਲਦੀ ਤੋਂ ਜਲਦੀ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ਸੋਚ ਵਾਲੇ ਮਾਹਿਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਸਥਾਪਨਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੇ ਸੇਵਾ ਨਿਯਮ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਨਿਯੁਕਤੀ ਲਈ ਯੋਗਤਾਵਾਂ, ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਦਾ ਕਾਰਜ ਖੇਤਰ, ਕਾਰਜ ਵਿਧੀ, ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀਆਂ, ਸੇਵਾ ਮੁਕਤੀ ਆਦਿ ਦੇ ਆਉਣ ਵਾਲੀਆਂ ਪੰਥਕ ਸਮੱਸਿਆਵਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਮਾਧਾਨ ਅਤੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਸੁਨਿਸਚਿਤ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇ ਤਾਂ ਜੋ ਭਵਿੱਖ ਵਿਚ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਵੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਨਿੱਜੀ ਹਿੱਤਾਂ ਲਈ ਵਰਤੋਂ ਦੀ ਸੰਭਾਵਨਾ ਹੀ ਨਾ ਰਹੇ ਅਤੇ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਵਿੱਚ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਸਮੇਂ-ਸਮੇਂ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਹੁਕਮਨਾਮਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਮਾਨਤਾ ਅਤੇ ਪਵਿੱਤਰਤਾ ਕਾਇਮ ਰਹੇ।
- (2) ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਐਕਟ ਨੂੰ ਬਣਿਆ ਹੋਇਆ ਪੌਣੀ ਸਦੀ ਹੋ ਚੁਕੀ ਹੈ। ਸਮੇਂ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਬਲ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਥਕ ਯੁਕਤ ਦੇ ਅਨੁਸਾਰੀ ਬਣਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਇਸ ਐਕਟ ਅਧੀਨ ਬੀਤੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਵਿਚ ਹੋਈ ਲਾਭ ਹਾਨੀ ਦਾ ਲੇਖਾ-ਜੋਖਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇ ਅਤੇ ਐਕਟ ਵਿਚ ਪੰਥਕ ਹਿੱਤਾਂ ਤੋਂ ਉਲਟ ਜੇ ਕੋਈ ਧਾਰਾ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਦੀ ਸੋਧ ਲਈ ਉਪਰਾਲਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਵੇ।
- (3) ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਕੀ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਆਪੋ ਆਪਣੀ ਥਾਵੇਂ ਪੰਥ ਦੀਆਂ ਗੌਰਵਸ਼ੀਲ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਹਨ। ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਦੇ ਸੇਵਾਦਾਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰੂ-ਪੰਥ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸੌਂਪੀ ਹੋਈ ਜ਼ਿੰਮੇਵਾਰੀ ਪਰਸਪਰ ਪਿਆਰ ਸਤਿਕਾਰ ਅਤੇ ਮਿਲਵਰਤਣ ਦੀ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਅਧੀਨ ਨਿਭਾ ਕੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸੁਰਖਰੂ ਹੋਣਾ ਚਾਹੀਦਾ ਹੈ।

-/ਸਹੀ (ਮੋਹਣ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਹੈੱਡ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ,
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ
-/ (ਚਰਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ,
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

-/ਸਹੀ (ਜੋਗਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ
-/ ਸਹੀ (ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ
-/ਸਹੀ (ਰਵੇਲ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

ਆਰ.ਐੱਸ.ਐੱਸ. ਦੀਆਂ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਸਰਗਰਮੀਆਂ

8 ਸਾਵ ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 536

ਨੰ: ਅ.ਤ./04/3207

ਮਿਤੀ : 23-7-2004

ਸੰਦੇਸ਼

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੇ ਲਗਾਤਾਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਰੋਸ ਪੱਤਰ ਤੇ ਸ਼ਿਕਾਇਤਾਂ ਪੁੱਜ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਪਹਿਲੇ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਪੁਰਬ ਦੀ ਚੌਥੀ ਸ਼ਤਾਬਦੀ ਸਮਾਗਮਾਂ ਸਮੇਂ ਆਰ.ਐੱਸ.ਐੱਸ. ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਨਾਲ ਝੂਠੀ ਹਮਦਰਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਬਹੁਤ ਡੂੰਘੀ ਤੇ ਸ਼ਾਤਰ ਚਾਲ ਨਾਲ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਨੂੰ ਅੰਦਰੋਂ ਖੋਰਾ ਲਾਉਣ ਅਤੇ ਘੁਸਪੈਠ ਕਰਨ ਦੇ ਮਨਸੂਬੇ ਤਹਿਤ 'ਸਰਬ ਸਾਂਝੀ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਯਾਤਰਾ' ਦਾ ਅਡੰਬਰ ਰਚਿਆ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ।

ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਆਰ.ਐੱਸ.ਐੱਸ./ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪਿਛਲੇ ਲੰਬੇ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਸਰਗਰਮੀਆਂ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਜਾ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਹਨ। ਇਸ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਆਪਣੀ ਇਸ ਕੋਝੀ ਹਰਕਤ ਨੂੰ ਅਮਲੀ ਜਾਮਾ ਪਹਿਨਾਉਣ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਹਾਸਲ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਗੁੰਮਰਾਹਕੁੰਨ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਆਨ ਸ਼ਾਨ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਦਾਚਿਤ ਵੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਕਿਸਮ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

ਸਮੂਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ, ਸਿੰਘ ਭਰਾਵਾਂ, ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ, ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸਭਾ ਸੁਸਾਇਟੀਆਂ ਤੇ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਚੇਤ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਸ ਅਖੌਤੀ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਰਾਸ਼ਟਰੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਤੋਂ ਸੁਚੇਤ ਰਹਿਣ ਅਤੇ ਇਸ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਕਿਸਮ ਦਾ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਨਾ ਦੇਣ। ਸਿੱਖ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰਤੀਨਿਧ ਸੰਸਥਾ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਸ਼ਤਾਬਦੀਆਂ ਸਮਾਗਮ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਥਕ ਜਾਹੇ ਜਲਾਲ ਅਤੇ ਧੂਮ-ਧਾਮ ਨਾਲ ਮਨਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਢੁਕਵੇਂ ਪ੍ਰੋਗਰਾਮ ਉਲੀਕੇ ਗਏ ਹਨ, ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਲਈ ਸਮਰ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਦੇਣ।

-/ਸਹੀ (ਤਰਲੋਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ, ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਕੇਸਗੜ ਸਾਹਿਬ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਰੋਪੜ)

-/ਸਹੀ (ਬਲਵੰਤ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ, ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ

ਤਲਵੰਡੀ ਸਾਬੋ (ਬਠਿੰਡਾ)

-/ਸਹੀ (ਜੋਗਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

-/ਸਹੀ (ਇਕਬਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ, ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਜੀ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਪਟਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਬਿਹਾਰ)

-/ਸਹੀ (ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਰਬਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

ਜਾਣੇ-ਅਣਜਾਣੇ ਬੇਮੁਖ ਹੋਏ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਅਵਸਰ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰਨ ਸੰਬੰਧੀ ਗੁਰਮਤਾ

ਮਿਤੀ : 18-7-2006

ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਹੋਈ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਮਿਤੀ 3 ਸਾਵਣ, ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 538
(18-7-2006) ਨੂੰ ਸਰਬ ਸੰਮਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ

ਗੁਰਮਤਾ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ 400 ਸਾਲਾ ਸਿਰਜਣਾ ਅਤੇ ਮੀਰੀ-ਪੀਰੀ ਦਿਵਸ ਦੇ ਇਤਿਹਾਸਿਕ ਸਮੇਂ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਨਿਰਣਾ ਲਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਜਾਣੇ-ਅਣਜਾਣੇ ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖੀ ਦੀ ਰਾਮਕਾਰ 'ਚੋਂ ਬਾਹਰ ਜਾਂ ਬੇਮੁੱਖ ਹੋ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀ, ਜੇਕਰ ਮੁੜ ਗੁਰੂ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਦੇ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਬਣਨਾ ਚਾਹੁਣ ਤਾਂ ਉਹ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ 'ਤੇ ਹਾਜ਼ਰ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ, ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਸਰਵਉੱਚਤਾ ਨੂੰ ਮਨ, ਬਚਨ ਤੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਰਕੇ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ ਤੇ ਸਵੀਕਾਰ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਯਕੀਨ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਉਣ। “ਭੁਲਣ ਅੰਦਰਿ ਸਭੁ ਕੋ ਅਭੁਲ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਰਤਾਰੁ” ਅਤੇ “ਜੋ ਸਰਣਿ ਆਵੈ ਤਿਸੁ ਕੰਠਿ ਲਾਵੈ” ਦੇ ਮਹਾਨ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਿਧਾਂਤ ਦੀ ਰੱਖਣੀ ਵਿਚ ਅਜਿਹੀ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਰੱਖਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਪ੍ਰਾਣੀ ਬਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸੇਵਾ ਦੇ 1 ਮਾਘ ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 538, 13 ਜਨਵਰੀ, 2007 (ਟੁੱਟੀ-ਗੰਢੀ ਦਿਵਸ) ਤਕ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਸਨਮੁੱਖ ਹੋ ਆਪਣੀਆਂ ਭੁੱਲਾਂ ਬਖ਼ਸ਼ਾ ਕੇ ਗੁਰ-ਸਿੱਖ ਪਰਿਵਾਰ ਵਿਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਲ ਹੋ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਨ।

ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਦਾਸ,

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਜੋਗਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

ਕਥਿਤ ਡੇਰਾ ਸੱਚਾ ਸੌਦਾ ਦੇ ਮੁਖੀ ਬਾਰੇ

ਮਿਤੀ : 15-5-2007

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਮਿਤੀ 1 ਜੇਠ ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 539 (15-5-2007) ਨੂੰ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਹੋਈ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ

ਆਦੇਸ਼

ਪਿਛਲੇ ਕੁਝ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਕਥਿਤ ਡੇਰਾ ਸੱਚਾ ਸੌਦਾ (ਸਿਰਸਾ) ਦੇ ਮੁਖੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਵਰਤ ਕੇ ਲੋਕਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਗੁੰਮਰਾਹ ਕਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਹੁਣ ਇਸ ਨੇ ਗਿਣੇ-ਕਿਮੇ ਸਾਜਿਸ਼ੀ ਮਨਸੂਬਿਆਂ ਤਹਿਤ ਦਸ਼ਮੇਸ਼ ਪਿਤਾ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਵਾਂਗ ਵਸਤਰ ਪਹਿਨਣ, ਕਲਗੀ ਲਾਉਣ ਅਤੇ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਛਕਾਉਣ ਦੀ ਨਕਲ ਕਰਕੇ “ਰੂਹਾਨੀ ਜਾਮ” ਬਨਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਦੰਭ ਰਚ ਕੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਭਾਵਨਾਵਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਖਿਲਵਾੜ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਕੋਝਾ ਯਤਨ ਕੀਤਾ ਹੈ। ਉਸ ਦੇ ਹਥਿਆਰਬੰਦ ਸਮਰਥਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਬਠਿੰਡੇ ਅਤੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੰਗਾਨਗਰ ਵਿਖੇ ਸ਼ਾਂਤਮਈ ਰੋਸ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਵਾ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਨਿਹੱਥੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਯੋਜਨਾਬੱਧ ਤਰੀਕੇ ਨਾਲ ਹਮਲੇ ਕਰਕੇ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਅਣਖ ਨੂੰ ਵੰਗਾਰਿਆ ਹੈ। ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਇਹਨਾਂ ਘਟਨਾਵਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਖ਼ਤ ਸ਼ਬਦਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਨਿਖੇਧੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ। ਅਜਿਹੇ ਸਮਾਜ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਸ਼ਰਾਰਤੀ ਅਨਸਰਾਂ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਤ-ਪਨਾਹੀ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੀਆਂ ਰਾਜਨੀਤਕ

ਪਾਰਟੀਆਂ ਦਾ ਇਹ ਭੁਲੇਖਾ ਦੂਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾਂਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਸਿੱਖ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਸਥਾਪਤ ਪਰੰਪਰਾਵਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਛੇੜਖਾਨੀ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਿੱਧੇ ਰਸਤੇ ਪਾਉਣ ਦੇ ਤਰੀਕੇ ਜਾਣਦਾ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਕੇਂਦਰ, ਪੰਜਾਬ ਅਤੇ ਦੂਜੀਆਂ ਸੂਬਾਈ ਸਰਕਾਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸੁਚਤ ਕਰਦਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਾਂਤਮਈ ਮਾਹੌਲ ਨੂੰ ਮੁੜ ਲਾਂਬੂ ਲਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਸਰਗਰਮ ਸ਼ਰਾਰਤੀ ਧਿਰਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਖਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਨੱਥ ਪਾਵੇ ਅਤੇ ਸਮਾਜ ਵਿਚ ਅਮਨ ਸ਼ਾਂਤੀ ਨੂੰ ਬਰਕਰਾਰ ਰੱਖਣ ਲਈ ਗੁੰਮਰਾਹਕੁੰਨ ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਦੁਆਰਾ ਸਿੱਖੀ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ, ਸਿੱਖੀ ਪਰੰਪਰਾਵਾਂ, ਸਿੱਖ ਭਾਵਨਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਠੇਸ ਪਹੁੰਚਾਉਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਇਕੱਠਾ ਅਤੇ ਪ੍ਰੋਗਰਾਮਾਂ 'ਤੇ ਤੁਰੰਤ ਪਾਬੰਦੀ ਲਗਾ ਕੇ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਾਂਤ ਮਾਹੌਲ ਨੂੰ ਖਰਾਬ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲੇ ਅਜਿਹੇ ਭੇਖੀ ਸ਼ਖਸਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਤੁਰੰਤ ਗ੍ਰਿਫਤਾਰ ਕਰਕੇ ਮੁਕੱਦਮ ਚਲਾਏ ਜਾਣ।

ਸਮੁੱਚੀਆਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ, ਸਿੱਖ ਫੈਡਰੇਸ਼ਨਾਂ, ਸੰਤ ਸੰਪ੍ਰਦਾਵਾਂ, ਨਿਰਮਲੇ ਅਤੇ ਉਦਾਸੀ ਸੰਪ੍ਰਦਾਵਾਂ, ਟਕਸਾਲਾਂ, ਨਿਹੰਗ ਸਿੰਘ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ, ਸਟੱਡੀ ਸਰਕਲ, ਮਿਸ਼ਨਰੀ ਕਾਲਜ, ਸਿੰਘ ਸਭਾਵਾਂ, ਦਿੱਲੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਅਤੇ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੇ ਮੈਂਬਰ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ, ਅਹੁਦੇਦਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ, ਚੀਫ਼ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਦੀਵਾਨ ਦੇ ਅਹੁਦੇਦਾਰ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ, ਸਾਰੇ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਦਲਾਂ ਦੇ ਨੁਮਾਇੰਦੇ ਮਿਤੀ 17 ਮਈ, ਦਿਨ ਵੀਰਵਾਰ ਸਵੇਰੇ 11.0 ਵਜੇ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਤਲਵੰਡੀ ਸਾਬੋ (ਬਠਿੰਡਾ) ਵਿਖੇ ਅਗਲੀ ਰਣਨੀਤੀ ਤੈਅ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਹੁੰਮ ਹੁਮਾ ਕੇ ਖਾਲਸਾਈ ਜਾਹੋ-ਜਲਾਲ ਨਾਲ ਪਹੁੰਚਣ।

ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਘਿਨਾਉਣੀ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਅਤੇ ਗਿਣੀ-ਮਿੱਥੀ ਸਾਜਿਸ਼ ਵਿਰੁੱਧ ਪੰਥਕ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਦੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ ਵਿਚ ਅਕਾਲੀ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਦਾ ਫ਼ੈਸਲਾ ਹੋਣ ਤੱਕ ਹਰ ਪੱਧਰ 'ਤੇ ਸ਼ਾਂਤਮਈ ਤਰੀਕੇ ਨਾਲ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾ ਰਹੇ ਰੋਸ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਵੇ ਜਾਰੀ ਰੱਖਣ। ਸਮੂਹ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤ ਨੂੰ ਅਪੀਲ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਉਹ ਅਜਿਹੀਆਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਮਾਰੂ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਥ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਤਾਕਤਾਂ ਦੇ ਨਾਪਾਕ ਮਨਸੂਬਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਅਸਫਲ ਬਨਾਉਣ ਲਈ ਹਰ ਕੁਰਬਾਨੀ ਲਈ ਤਿਆਰ ਹੈ।

-/ਸਹੀ
(ਤਰਲੋਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ
ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਕੇਸਗੜ੍ਹ ਸਾਹਿਬ,
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਨੰਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਰੋਪੜ)
/ਸਹੀ (ਬਲਵੰਤ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ (ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ,
ਤਲਵੰਡੀ ਸਾਬੋ (ਬਠਿੰਡਾ)

-/ਸਹੀ
(ਜੋਗਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ
-/ਸਹੀ (ਇਕਬਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ)
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਪਟਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਬਿਹਾਰ)

ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਚ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਬਾਰੇ

ਨੰ. ਅ.ਤ./09/3570

ਮਿਤੀ : 30-12-2009

ਅੱਜ 17 ਪੋਹ ਸੰਮਤ , ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 541 (30 ਦਸੰਬਰ, 2009) ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ
ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ ਹੋਇਆ

ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਤੇ ਸੰਤ
ਗਿਆਨੀ ਹਰਨਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ, ਮੁੱਖੀ ਦਮਦਮੀ ਟਕਸਾਲ ਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸੰਤ ਸਮਾਜ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਜੋ ਸੁਝਾਅ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ
ਸਾਹਿਬ 'ਤੇ ਭੇਜੇ ਗਏ ਸਨ। ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧ. ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨੇ ਦੀਰਘ ਵਿਚਾਰ-ਵਟਾਂਦਰਾ ਕਰਨ ਉਪਰੰਤ ਨਿਰਣਾ
ਲਿਆ ਕਿ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਵਿਚੋਂ ਕੇਵਲ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਆਗਮਨ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਪੁਰਾਤਨ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ
ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਪੋਹ ਸੁਦੀ ਸਤਮੀ ਨੂੰ ਹੀ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ। ਪੁਰਾਤਨ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਹੀ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦਾ
ਗੁਰਤਾਰਾਦੀ ਬਿਰਾਜਮਾਨ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਕੱਤਕ ਸੁਦੀ ਦੂਜ ਨੂੰ ਹੀ ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ। ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ
ਦਾ ਜੋਤੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਸਮਾਉਣ (ਸੱਚਖੰਡ ਗਮਨ) ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਪੁਰਾਤਨ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਹੀ ਕੱਤਕ ਸੁਦੀ ਪੰਚਮੀ ਨੂੰ ਹੀ
ਮਨਾਇਆ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ। ਮਹੀਨਿਆਂ ਦੀ ਆਰੰਭਤਾ ਬਾਰੇ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਅੰਤਿੰਗ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਤੋਂ ਫ਼ੈਸਲਾ
ਕਰਵਾ ਕੇ ਰਿਪੋਰਟ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ ਵਿਖੇ ਭੇਜੇ।

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਤਰਲੋਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਕੇਸਗੜ੍ਹ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਨੰਦਪੁਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਰੋਪੜ)

/ਸਹੀ

(ਬਲਵੰਤ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਤਲਵੰਡੀ ਸਾਬੋ (ਬਠਿੰਡਾ)

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਜੋਤਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਮੀਤ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸੱਚਖੰਡ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਜ਼ੂਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਨਾਂਦੇੜ (ਮਹਾਰਾਸ਼ਟਰ)

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ

-/ਸਹੀ

(ਇਕਬਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ)

ਜਥੇਦਾਰ

ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਜੀ,

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਪਟਨਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ (ਬਿਹਾਰ)

ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਚ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਬਾਰੇ

ਨੰ. ਅ.ਤ./10/3608

ਮਿਤੀ : 7-1-2010

ਆਦੇਸ਼

ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਦੀ ਵੱਖਰੀ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਹਿਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ ਕਰਕੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ, ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਪਾਸ 28-3-2003 ਨੂੰ ਲਾਗੂ ਕਰਨ ਹਿੱਤ ਭੇਜਿਆ ਗਿਆ ਸੀ। ਇਸ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਨੂੰ ਵੈਸਾਖੀ ਦੇ ਦਿਹਾੜ ਉੱਤੇ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਦਮਦਮਾ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਤਲਵੰਡੀ ਸਾਬੋ (ਬਠਿੰਡਾ) ਦੇ ਅਸਥਾਨ 'ਤੇ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਨੂੰ ਅਰਪਨ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ। ਪਰ ਉਸ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਹੀ ਕੁਝ ਪੰਥਕ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਅਸਹਿਮਤੀ ਪ੍ਰਗਟਾਈ ਜਾਂਦੀ ਰਹੀ। ਇਸ ਦੇ ਮੱਦੇ-ਨਜ਼ਰ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਇੱਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਬਣਾਈ ਗਈ, ਜਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਵਿਚ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਸਤੇ ਸੁਝਾਅ ਦੇਣ ਲਈ ਕਿਹਾ ਗਿਆ। ਵੱਡੀ ਗਿਣਤੀ ਵਿਚ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਗਤਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਜਥੇਬੰਦੀਆਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਵਿਚ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਕਰਨ ਹਿੱਤ ਪੱਤ੍ਰਿਕਾਵਾਂ ਭੇਜੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ। ਜਿਸ ਕਰਕੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਬਾਰੇ ਲੋੜੀਂਦੀ ਕਾਰਵਾਈ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਆਦੇਸ਼ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਗਿਆ। ਬੰਦੀਫੋੜ ਦਿਵਸ 'ਤੇ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਕੁਝ ਵਿਦਵਾਨਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਸ਼ੁਰੂ ਕੀਤੀ ਗਈ। ਬਾਅਦ ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸਾਹਿਬ, ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀਆਂ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ ਸੰਤ ਸਮਾਜ ਅਤੇ 11 ਮੈਂਬਰੀ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਨਾਲ ਲਗਾਤਾਰ ਮੀਟਿੰਗਾਂ ਹੋਈਆਂ। ਜਿਸ 'ਤੇ ਅਖ਼ੀਰਲੀ ਮੀਟਿੰਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਵਿਦਵਾਨਾਂ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਅਵਤਾਰ ਸਿੰਘ, ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਅਤੇ ਸੰਤ ਸਮਾਜ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸੰਤ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਹਰਨਾਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ, ਮੁਖੀ ਦਮਦਮੀ ਟਕਸਾਲ ਅਤੇ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਸੰਤ ਸਮਾਜ ਨੂੰ ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਦੇ ਮਸਲੇ ਬਾਰੇ ਫ਼ੈਸਲਾ ਕਰਨ ਦੇ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ। ਦੋਨਾਂ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨਾਂ ਨੇ ਆਖ਼ਰੀ ਸਹਿਮਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਪਾਸ ਭੇਜਿਆ। ਜਿਸ ਨੂੰ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨੇ ਦੀਰਘ ਵਿਚਾਰ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਬਾਰੇ ਸ਼੍ਰੋਮਣੀ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਅੰਤਿਰਾ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਦੀ ਸਹਿਮਤੀ ਲਈ ਭੇਜਿਆ। ਅੰਤਿਰਾ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਨੇ ਬਹੁ-ਸੰਮਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਆਪਣੀ ਸਹਿਮਤੀ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਵਿਖੇ ਭੇਜ ਦਿੱਤਾ। ਜਿਸ 'ਤੇ ਜਥੇਦਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਸੱਚਖੰਡ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਮੁੱਖ ਗ੍ਰੰਥੀ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਜਸਵਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਮੱਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਰਵੇਲ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ, ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਗਿਆਨੀ ਸੁਖਜਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਨੇ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਸਬੰਧੀ 22 ਪੋਹ, ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 541, ਦਿਨ ਸੋਮਵਾਰ 4 ਜਨਵਰੀ, 2010 ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਤੋਂ ਆਦੇਸ਼ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ। ਜਿਸ ਦੀ ਪੁਸ਼ਟੀ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ 25 ਪੋਹ ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 541 ਮੁਤਾਬਿਕ 7-1-2010 ਨੂੰ ਪੰਜ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਹਿਮਤੀ ਲਈ ਗਈ। ਕੈਲੰਡਰ ਵਿਚ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ ਸੋਧਾਂ ਹੇਠ ਲਿਖੇ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਜ ਕਿ 1 ਚੇਤ ਸੰਮਤ ਨਾਨਕਸ਼ਾਹੀ 542 (ਮੁਤਾਬਿਕ 2010) ਤੋਂ ਲਾਗੂ ਹੋਣਗੀਆਂ :

- (1) ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਅਰਜਨ ਦੇਵ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਸ਼ਹੀਦੀ ਪੁਰਬ - ਜੇਠ ਸੁਦੀ ਚੌਥ
- (2) ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਆਗਮਨ ਪੁਰਬ - ਪੋਹ ਸੁਦੀ ਸੱਤਵੀਂ
- (3) ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਜਤੀ ਜੋਤਿ ਪੁਰਬ - ਕੱਤਕ ਸੁਦੀ ਪੰਚਮੀ
- (4) ਸ੍ਰੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਜੀ ਦਾ ਗੁਰਗੱਦੀ ਪੁਰਬ - ਕੱਤਕ ਸੁਦੀ ਦੂਜੀ
- (5) ਮਹੀਨੇ ਦੀ ਆਰੰਭਤਾ (ਸੰਗਰਾਂਦਾ) ਪੁਰਾਨਤਾ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਹੋਵੇਗੀ।

ਸਮੁੱਚੇ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ ਪੰਥ ਨੂੰ ਆਦੇਸ਼ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਫ਼ੈਸਲੇ ਮੁਤਾਬਿਕ ਹੀ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਜੀ ਦੇ ਗੁਰਪੁਰਬ ਅਤੇ ਬਾਕੀ ਦਿਨ-ਦਿਹਾੜੇ ਮਨਾਏ ਜਾਣ। ਗੁਰੂ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ ਕਰੋ।

ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਦਾ ਦਾਸ,
-/ਸਹੀ (ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ,
ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ)

ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀਆਂ ਬਾਰੇ

ਨੰ: ਅ.ਤ./11/3368

ਮਿਤੀ : 2-9-2011

ਆਦੇਸ਼

ਕੇਂਦਰ ਦੀ ਕਾਂਗਰਸ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀਆਂ ਬਾਰੇ ਜਾਰੀ ਨੋਟੀਫਿਕੇਸ਼ਨ ਵਾਪਸ ਲੈਣ ਤੇ ਵੋਟ ਦਾ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਦੇਣ ਨਾਲ ਵਿਸ਼ਵ ਭਰ ਵਿਚ ਵੱਸੇ ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੇਹਿਰਦੇ ਬੁਰੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਵਲੂੰਧਰੇ ਗਏ ਹਨ। ਕੇਂਦਰ ਦੀ ਕਾਂਗਰਸ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦੀ ਮੰਦਭਾਵਨਾ ਜਗ ਜ਼ਾਹਿਰ ਹੋ ਗਈ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਪੰਥ ਦੀ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਵਿਚਾਰਧਾਰਾ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਲੱਖਣ ਹੋਂਦ ਹਸਤੀ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਸਾਬਤ ਸੂਰਤ ਦਸਤਾਰਧਾਰੀ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਵੱਖਰੀ ਵਿਲੱਖਣ ਕੌਮੀ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ ਹੈ। ਕੇਂਦਰ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦੀ ਇਸ ਭਰਾ-ਮਾਰੂ ਨੀਤੀ ਨਾਲ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕੌਮੀ ਪੱਧਰ 'ਤੇ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਮਜਬੂਰ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ। ਗੁਰੂ ਪੰਥ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਪ੍ਰਮਾਣਿਤ ਤੇ ਸਵੀਕਾਰਤ ਸਿੱਖ ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਵਿਚ ਕੇਵਲ ਸਿੱਖ ਦੀ ਪਰਿਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਅੰਕਿਤ ਹੈ, ਸਹਿਜਧਾਰੀ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਸਿੱਖ ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ 'ਚ ਸ਼ਾਮਿਲ ਹੀ ਨਹੀਂ ਹੈ। ਕੇਸਾਂ ਦੀ ਬੇਅਦਬੀ ਤੇ ਹੋਰ ਬੱਜਰ ਕੁਰਹਿਤਾਂ ਕਰਨ ਵਾਲਿਆਂ ਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਸੂਰਤ ਵਿਚ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਵੀਕਾਰ ਨਹੀਂ ਕੀਤਾ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ। ਸਿੱਖ ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਕੇਵਲ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦਾ ਹੈ ਅਤੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਪਾਸ ਹੀ ਰਹੇਗਾ। ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨੇ ਅੱਜ ਦੀ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਵਿਚ ਦੇਸ਼ ਦੇ ਹੁਕਮਰਾਨਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਤਾੜਨਾ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ ਹੋਇਆ ਕਿਹਾ ਕਿ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ, ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਤੇ ਪਰੰਪਰਾਵਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਕਦੇ ਵੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਹਾਲਤ ਵਿਚ ਖਿਲਵਾੜ ਕਰਨ ਦੀ ਆਗਿਆ ਨਹੀਂ ਦਿੱਤੀ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀ।

ਪਿਛਲੇ ਦਿਨੀਂ ਕੇਂਦਰ ਦੇ ਕਾਨੂੰਨ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੇ ਵੱਖਰੇ ਅਨੰਦ ਮੈਰਿਜ ਐਕਟ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਨ ਨਾ ਕਰਨ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਬਿਆਨ ਨੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਦੂਸਰੇ ਦਰਜੇ ਦੇ ਸ਼ਹਿਰੇ ਹੋਣ ਦਾ ਅਹਿਸਾਸ ਕਰਾਇਆ ਹੈ, ਜਦੋਂ ਕਿ ਸੁਤੰਤਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੋਚ ਦੇ ਧਾਰਨੀ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨੇ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ ਰਾਜ ਸਮੇਂ ਆਪਣਾ ਵੱਖਰਾ ਅਨੰਦ ਮੈਰਿਜ ਐਕਟ ਪਾਸ ਕਰਵਾ ਲਿਆ ਸੀ, ਪਰ ਆਜ਼ਾਦ ਭਾਰਤ ਵਿਚ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਹਰ ਪੱਧਰ 'ਤੇ ਵਿਤਕਰਾ, ਵੱਖਰੇਵਾਂ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਵੱਖਰਾ ਧਰਮ, ਵੱਖਰੀ ਕੌਮ ਮੰਨਣ ਤੋਂ ਆਨਾਕਾਨੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਰਹੀ ਹੈ। ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨੇ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਨੂੰ ਚਿਤਾਵਨੀ ਦੇਂਦਿਆਂ ਕਿਹਾ ਕਿ ਜੇਕਰ ਇਸ ਮਸਲੇ ਨੂੰ ਤੁਰੰਤ ਹੱਲ ਨਾ ਕੀਤਾ ਤਾਂ 26 ਸਤੰਬਰ, 2011 ਨੂੰ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਦੀ ਹੋਣ ਵਾਲੀ ਇਕੱਤਰਤਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਨਿਰਣਾਇਕ ਫ਼ੈਸਲਾ ਦਿੱਤਾ ਜਾਵੇਗਾ।

ਸਿੱਖ ਰਵਾਇਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਪੱਖ ਤੋਂ ਸਪੱਸ਼ਟ ਅਗਵਾਈ ਕਰਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ ਕਿ ਜੇਕਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ ਦੀ ਉਲੰਘਣਾ ਮਹਾਰਾਜਾ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੇ ਵੀ ਕੀਤੀ ਤਾਂ ਉਸ ਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਤਲਬ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਤਨਖ਼ਾਹ ਲਗਾਈ ਗਈ ਸੀ। ਦੁਨੀਆਂ ਭਰ ਵਿਚ ਵੱਸੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਕਿਸੇ ਵੀ ਤਰ੍ਹਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਸਰੇ ਧਰਮ ਜਾਂ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਦੀ ਦਖ਼ਲ-ਅੰਦਾਜ਼ੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਮਸਲਿਆਂ 'ਚ ਸਹਿਣ ਨਹੀਂ ਕਰਦੇ ਤੇ ਨਾ ਹੀ ਕਰਨਗੇ।

ਵਿਸ਼ਵ ਭਰ ਵਿਚ ਵੱਸਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖਾਂ, ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ, ਸੰਪਰਦਾਵਾਂ, ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਸਭਾ ਸੁਸਾਇਟੀਆਂ, ਟਕਸਾਲਾਂ, ਪੰਥਕ ਪਾਰਟੀਆਂ ਆਦਿ ਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਸਮੇਂ ਨਿੱਜੀ ਵਿਤਕਰੇ, ਵੱਖਰੇਵੇਂ ਭੁਲਾ ਕੇ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਦੀ ਵਿਲੱਖਣ ਹੋਂਦ ਹਸਤੀ ਤੇ ਵਿਲੱਖਣ ਪਹਿਚਾਣ 'ਤੇ ਹੋ ਰਹੇ ਹਮਲਿਆਂ ਦਾ ਮੂੰਹ ਤੋੜ ਜਵਾਬ ਦੇਣ ਲਈ ਇਕੱਠੇ ਹੋ ਕੇ ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਲਈ ਤਿਆਰ ਰਹਿਣ। ਕੇਂਦਰ ਦੀ ਕਾਂਗਰਸ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਦੇ ਅੰਦਰੂਨੀ ਮਾਮਲਿਆਂ 'ਚ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਰਹੀ ਦਖ਼ਲ-ਅੰਦਾਜ਼ੀ ਨੂੰ ਹਮੇਸ਼ਾ ਲਈ ਬੰਦ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਹਰ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੂੰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ ਦੀ ਸਰਪ੍ਰਸਤੀ '

ਸੰਘਰਸ਼ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਤਿਆਰ ਰਹਿਣਾ ਪਵੇਗਾ। ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨੇ ਦੇਸ਼ ਦੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਪ੍ਰਧਾਨ ਮੰਤਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਵੀ ਸਿਧਾਂਤਾਂ, ਮਰਯਾਦਾ, ਪਰੰਪਰਾਵਾਂ ਤੇ ਰਵਾਇਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਮੁੜ ਵਾਚਣ ਲਈ ਅਗਾਹ ਕੀਤਾ ਤਾਂ ਕਿ ਜਾਣੇ-ਅਣਜਾਣੇ ਉਹ ਵੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਦੁਸ਼ਮਣ ਸਾਜ਼ਿਸ਼ਾਂ ਦਾ ਸ਼ਿਕਾਰ ਨਾ ਹੋ ਜਾਵੇ।

ਕੇਂਦਰ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਵੱਲੋਂ ਸਿੱਖ ਮਸਲਿਆਂ 'ਚ ਰੋਜ਼ਾਨਾ ਕੀਤੀ ਜਾ ਰਹੀ ਦਖਲਅੰਦਾਜ਼ੀ ਨੂੰ ਰੋਕਣ ਲਈ ਸਿੱਖ ਸੰਸਥਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਕਾਨੂੰਨ ਚਾਰਾਜ਼ੋਰੀ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਆਦੇਸ਼ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ ਨੇ ਜਾਰੀ ਕੀਤਾ।

-/ਸਹੀ (ਗੁਰਬਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ)
ਜਥੇਦਾਰ (ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਸਾਹਿਬ) ਸ੍ਰੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ



ਮਾਰਚ-10	ਚੇਤ	ਅਪ੍ਰੈਲ-10	ਅਪ੍ਰੈਲ-10	ਵੈਸਾਖ	ਮਈ-10	ਮਈ-10	ਜੇਠ	ਜੂਨ-10	ਜੂਨ-10	ਹਾਤ	ਜੁਲਾਈ-10	ਜੁਲਾਈ-10	ਸਾਬਣ	ਅਗਸਤ-10
ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24	ਐਤ 9 1 94 22 24
ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25	ਸੋਮ 2 2 95 23 25
ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26	ਮੰਗਲ 3 3 96 24 26
ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27	ਬੁੱਧ 4 4 97 25 27
ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28	ਵੀਰ 5 5 98 26 28
ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29	ਸ਼ੁੱਕਰ 6 6 99 27 29
ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30	ਸ਼ਨੀ 7 7 100 28 30

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