

SHIROMANI AKALI DAL AND GURUDWARA REFORM MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The main function of *Shiromani Akali Dal* was to reform the *Gurudwara*. At that time the condition of the *Gurudwaras* was very miserable. The *Shiromani Akali Dal* also organized several *Morchas* for the control of the *Gurudwaras* to be given in the hands of the *Sikhs*, such as *Guru Ka Bagh Morcha*, *Chabian Da Morcha*, *Nankana Sahib Da Morcha* and *Jaito Da Morcha* etc. Many *Sikhs* were martyred in those fronts and many were arrested. Yet all allies conquered the *Akalis* and made committee for the management of *Gurudwaras*. This ended the *Gurudwara Reform Movement*. Thus the period from 25th June, 1925 to 20 October, 1926 was very valueable in terms of the organization of the *Shiromani Akali Dal*.

Keywords: *Shiromani Akali Dal*, *Gurudwara*, Reform Movement, Sikh Panth

Shiromani Akali Dal come into existence from the Reformation Movement of the historic *Gurudwara* of the Sikh Panth. The *Gurudwara Reform Movement* was started in the month of on the year summer 1920. At that time the *Gurudwara* were occupied by the *Udasi Mahants*, who dishonest. They considered *Gurudwaras* as their personal property after considering the entire situation of the *Gurudwaras*, *Sikh* leaders felt that there should be such an organization which could protect the interests of the *Gurudwara*. For this objective, on November, 15th *Sarbat Khalsa* called a committee. It was formed to protect the interest of the *Sikhs* which was entitled by the name *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee* (SGPC). To help this organization troops were send to the *Gurudwara*. On 14th December, 1920, the Central organization of the *Akalis* was established. It was the given the name *Shiromani Akali Dal* and the main function of *Shiromani Akali Dal* was to reform the *Gurudwara*, because the conditions of the *Gurudwara* was in worst condition at that time. The *Shiromani Akali Dal* also organized several *Morchas* for the control of the *Gurudwara* to be given in the hands of the *Sikhs* like *Guru Ka Bagh Morcha*, *Chbian Da Morcha*, *Nankana Sahib Da Morcha*, and *Jaito Da Morcha* etc. In the year 1920, the

Sikh had the hold over *Harmander Sahib* Amritsar and *Akal Takhat Sahib* but the hold of Taran Taran was still under British *Mahant*. He brought many evil polices under his rule. When the *Gurudwara* of Amritsar were relieved from the hands of *Mahant* at that time, the attention of *Akalis* was diverted towards Taran Tarn *Gurudwara* also. Bhai Mohan Singh Vaidh who was the leading hand of reformation wave and told to *Mahant* about the evils intentions that forced *Darbar Sahib* Tarn Taran and also asked them for correction. In the month of the year December, 1920, *Jathedar* Lakhsman Singh took his school girls students to Taran Taran *Gurudwara* for the visit but their authorities did not give permission for *Kirtan*. After that Bhai Mohan Singh Vaidh asked the Chief Commissioner Minister King to write a letter and suggested him that he should ask the *Mahants* to bring reform in *Gurudwara* otherwise there could be a chance for mishappening. But the reformers said commissioner himself has given them protection. The incidents occurring continuously at Taran Taran and news reached to the *Akalis* at the office of Amritsar regarding the misbehaviour of *Mahants* towards the devotees. Bhai Teja Singh Bhuchar along with 40 followers reached Taran Taran, when they arrived at *Gurudwara* in the morning, when the *Kirtan* was going on. They sat there and listened *Kirtan*. By the mean time *Mahants* collected the people. On seeing this Bhai Teja Singh Bhuchar said that they have arrived for taking possession instead they have gathered there in order to keep their demanded in front of them. On hearing complaints of the devotees the *Mahant* decided the time 4 o' clock evening to discuss the crucial matter. On the other side *Akalis* and *Mahant's* meeting was held at Banga Dhotian were both parties compromised with each other.

- All *Gurudwara* will looked after according to rules of Shiromani *Gurudwara* Committee.
- To look after *Gurudwara* one place committee will be formed
- The evils will be demolished form *Gurudwaras*
- The priest *Gurudwara* and server of *Gurudwara* will be purely religious
- Any priest who disobey the rules will be punished by the devotees

The *Mahants* got ready for joint committee. They told their decision at night only that they have accepted all the conditions and said to the *Akalis* they are preparing files that were free of cost for both the parties for their signatures on the paper and when the *Akalis* were waiting for signature file at that time *Mahants* attacked of the *Akalis*. The *Mahants* utilized sharp weapons, stones and wounded the members of (*Jatha*), *Mahants* threw over bombs and ran away. Next morning when police reached at the spot. When Magistrate of District met both the parties, at that time seeing the condition, he gave order to the *Mahants* that should not enter *Gurudwara* until *Gurudwara* Committee takes any decision of their own. In this way to *Gurudwara* come under the control of the *Sikhs* and made the committee which consisted of 13 members. It become clear from the punishment given by the court that Government was showing favour to the *Mahants*, so the *Akali* leaders according the *Gurudwara* reform norms opposed the *Mahant*

and priests. On the other side started a struggle against the Government. In the history of *Nankana Sahib* the fight between *Akalis* and Government was one significant incidents. The birth place of Guru Nanak Dev has vital importance of *Sikhs* religious place. In the 20th century *Gurudwara Nankana Sahib* was controlled by *Mahant* Sadhu Ram. During that time the position of *Gurudwara* was miserable. He had started taking drugs inside *Gurudwara* and led luxurious life. Due to illness he expired and after his death Krishan Das *Mahant* come into power. He also followed their footsteps. He arranged the dance of *Kanjaris* on marriage of his nephew at *Darbar Sahib* and served alcohol Krishan Das also suffered from same disease. Sadhu Ram suffered due which he started living at Lahore. One day Narayan Das stole the keys of *Gurudwara* from the pocket of Krishan Das. After the death of Krishan Das, Narayan Das seat on the *Mahant*.

After some time Narayan Das also followed the same path of Krishan Das and started blessing. He was indented to do evil deeds. He kept one *Muslim* lady as prostitute. He arranged her dance in *Gurudwara* and openly took alcohol inside *Gurudwara*. All the *Sikhs* criticized for such a behaviour made a request to the Government to stop such evil happenings but they failed. In 1918 one family from Sind came to visit holy *Gurudwara* but the priest residing here molested their 13 year girls in the evening but the *Mahant* didn't take any action. In the same year six women who come for the visit were also molested by priest and *Mahants*. This condition of *Nankana Sahib* arose the attention of *Akali* Reformers. The *Sikhs* were demanding for resignation but in contrast the Government gave them arms to protect. In October, 1920 there was a religious *Diwan* at village Dharowali, for that *Diwan* a resolution was formed in which *Mahant* Narayan Das was asked to bring reform in running the *Gurudwara*. During this time *Diwan Jathadar* Lakhshman Singh Dharowal declared for organization of *Shadhi Jatha* for the reformation of *Nankana Sahib*. The information of this *Diwan* was reached to Narayan Das, so he instead of changing himself he kept 400 shrewd followers and paid them salary and encouraged them to revolt with full force against *Akalis*. On 26th November, 1920 on the birth of Guru Nanak Dev, he made the arrangement of shrewd people and asked them be present in the *Gurudwara* so that *Akalis* may not take possession of *Gurudwara* and they didn't allow the *Sikhs* to take their *Kirpans* inside the *Gurudwara*. When Bhai Lakhshman Singh Dharowal and some *Sikhs* entered the *Gurudwara*, at that time the *Mahants* encircled them in *Gurudwara*, but due the presence of the Deputy Commissioner their plan failed. *Mahant* Narayan Das's attitude became strict only because of getting support from the Government and stood in front of the *Akalis* reformers. *Shiromani Gurudwara* Organizing committee was also thinking over to have control over *Nankana Sahib*. A meeting was held on 24th January, 1921 in which *Shiromani Gurudwara* Organizing Committee passed a resolution in the month of March that they will organize *Diwan* at *Nankana Sahib* and *Mahants* will be asked to change themselves. *Shiromani Gurudwara* Organizing Committee called one more meeting on 16th February, 1921 and formed 5 members Committee which will support in preparing *Langer* for the devotees who were reading at

Nankana Sahib in the *Diwan*. After considering this decision of *Akalis*, *Mahant* Narayan Das was scared, so he got ready to form a committee at *Nankana Sahib* by involving *Jathadar* Kartar Singh Jhabbar. *Mahant* Narayan Das held a secret meeting with other *Mahant* and they made a plan to kill the *Akali* leaders. *Jathadar* Kartar Singh Jhabbar received the news and he meet Bhai Lakhsman Singh Dharowali and Butta Singh and took the decision that they will reach *Nankana Sahib* on 19th February in year 1921 and they will take possession of *Gurudwara* in 20th February, in year 1921. According to the plan, three *Jathedars* and their *Jathas* decided to get together but when they came to know about their plan at that time S. Teja Singh, S. Harchand Singh and S. Tara Singh called a meeting with the *Shiromani Gurudwara* Organizing Committee and took decision that neither of the *Sikhs* will take possession of *Gurudwara* before the *Diwan* was organized at *Nankana Sahib*. Bhai Dalip Singh and S. Jaswant Singh were given the duties to stop the *Jatha* from coming there. Bhai Kuldip Singh Chibba received a letter as he met Bhai Lakhsman Singh Dharowali and reading the letter, they decided to return back to the *Jatha*. S. Tahil Singh said that he didn't reach here of take possession over *Gurudwara* but they just wanted to visit of the *Gurudwaras*. S. Tahil Singh and others reached there at 6 o'clock and bowed their head down and started *Kirtan*. When this news came of *Mahant* Narayan Das, he dropped his idea of going to Lahore and came to *Gurudwara* and started distributing weapons and ammunition to shrewd people. All the doors of the *Gurudwara* were closed. Nearly 25 *Sikhs* gave up their lives, who were present at that time while 60 *Sikhs* closed the door of one room and wherever, any *Sikh* was found, he was immediately killed. When all the *Sikhs* were killed then *Mahants* gave the order to collect the dead bodies. Those who were injured were burned alive but putting corrosion oil on them. The Government advocate and Vice Rai also tried to destroy the proofs of the dead bodies by putting the dead bodies on fire. Deputy Commissioner reached there at night and saw the dead bodies were still burning. Next day Deputy Commissioner, Chief Minister king of Lahore division, Deputy inspector of central came at *Gurudwara Nankana Sahib* along with 100 British and 100 *Hindustani* soldiers and arrested *Mahant* Narayan Das and his followers. A strict control of the soldiers was put on soldier at *Gurudwara*. *Jathadar* Kartar Singh Jhabbar took other *Sikhs* with him and moved to *Nanakana Sahib*. Deputy started moving towards *Gurudwara*. After some time the *Jahta* of *Jathadar*, *Jathadar* Kartar Singh Jhabbar reached *Nankana Sahib*, the force tried to stop them but in vain the commissioner also wrote a letter to *Jathadar* Kartar Singh Jhabbar in which he gave them order, not to move towards *Nankana Sahib* but *Sikh* paid no attention and a seven member committee was formed and *Akalis* gave the control to *Gurudwara* Organizing Committee without criticism *Gurudwara Nankana Sahib* came into the possession on of *Sikhs*. *Gurudwara* reformation then come into existence was the reason so that Government wanted to form a committee Act. Regarding this matter decision was taken to hold a meeting in the month of March, in the year 1921. But due to *Nankana Sahib's* incident the gathering failed. The Government issued the ordinance for

Gurudwara . According to this they made a plan to form *Gurudwara* Committee in which one of three members there would have been two *Sikhs* and one Government. This plan was criticised by the *Hindus*. That in *Gurudwara* Committee there should also be involvement of the *Muslims* and *Hindus*. According to the *Bill* the *Gurudwaras* were coming under the *Bill* which the Government waited. The *Sikhs* criticised this and *Akalis* held their own meeting and formed seven member committee. They started forming the *Akalis Jathas*. Even then the Government presented a *Gurudwara Bill* in front of the council on 16th April, Instead of passing this *Bill* was rejected in 9th May. The election was held of *Gurudwara* Organizing Committee and Khadak Singh became the president. The government talked again with *Akali* leaders regarding forming *Gurudwara* Committee but none of the *Akali* members wanted the change according to the government, but Government didn't want to give them reorganization. At the time in the month of October *Gurudwaras* Organizing Committee passed a resolution that the keys of Tosakhana must handed over to Sunder Singh Ramgarhia or new president Baba Khadak Singh. When Deputy Commissioner came to know about this news, he immediately went to Sunder Singh Ramgarhia's residence and took back the keys of treasure of Darbar Sahib and Government said that *Gurudwara* Organizing Committee cannot lead the *Sikhs*. So that is the reason for taking the keys and also blamed that *Sikhs* might have spent that money on political works. Bhadhur Singh and gave him keys and send to *Darbar Sahib*. But the Sikh did not allow him get inside. After that Government made a soldier, the head but he died. After that Government got no person which no effect on the *Sikhs* them the Government started their criticized lecture and Government fixed the procession against the *Akalis* at Ajanala when *Akalis* came to know about the Government's plan, they at the same time arranged a *Diwan* at Ajanala. The Government banned the *Jathas* on according to Judicial Act. The *Akali* opposes the peccadillo of the Government on the order of Deputy Commissioner, the *Akalis* were arrested. After few days *Gurudwara* Organizing Committee held a meeting and took a decision to there should be strict Bill the Prince of Wales comes and program organized to the coming must not be participated by the *Sikhs*. Seeing there the Government feared and got ready to return back the keys. But a meeting was held on 6th December, 1921 in which resolution was passed that no Sikh will take back the keys until the Government. The *Akali* leaders from the Jail who were arrested regarding this case.

After that Judge and his affects came to *Akal Takhat* and handed over the keys to Baba Khadak Singh and Baba Khadak Singh took the keys after getting permission from the devotee. The *Akalis* won the *Morcha* of talking the keys back and made a new policy to bring uplift their religion. The Pujnab Government made a issue of *Guru Ka Bagh Morcha*. *Gurudwara Guru Ka Bagh* was built in the memory of Guru Arjun Dev and Guru Teg Bhahadur. Then the *Gurudwara* Organizing Committee took the charge of *Gurudwara* in their own hands on August, 1921. But the land of *Gurudwara* was in the possession of *Mahant*. The *Mahant* reported to the police

about the theft of the property. *Mahant* never objected for that. But when previously too the fuel was being used from this land and *Mahant* had never complained about this before. On 9th August in the year 1922, five *Akalis* were arrested for stealing the woods and they were sent to prison for six months. So, some contemporaries like Sohan Singh Josh, Teja Singh etc. has admitted on the *Akalis* were not arrested on the complaint of the *Mahant* but on the orders of the Magistrate of Amritsar District on hearing this, *Akalis* got frustrated and the *Akalis Jathas* reached the *Guru Ka Bagh* and Started getting from the *Mahants* land. The police arrived there to protect the *Mahant*. From 31st August, *Jatha* of 100 *Singhs* daily departed from *Akal Takhat* to *Guru Ka Bagh*. One the way the police stopped the *Singhs* and started beating them blindly. After that the *Jathas* continued to move. After this Governor stopped the beating of *Sikhs Jathas* and gave the order to arrest them. Till 17th November, 1922, 5606 *Sikhs* were arrested. One retired Government Engineer Rai Bhadur Sir Ganga Ram took the land of *Guru Ka Bagh* on Contact from the *Mahants* and them allowed the *Sikhs* Ganga Ram gave in written to the Government that he don't need the help of the police and then police was removed from there and the Act of arresting came to an end. When the *Gurudwara* wane started at that time Government favoured the *Mahants* and *Sikh Rajas* also didn't give any support to the *Akalis*. Only *Maharaja* of Nabha, Ripudaman supported the *Sikhs* *Maharaja* Ripudaman was a *Desh Baghat* ruler who had a special sympathy with the *Akali* Movement. He celebrated the Martyr's day as a tribute to the Martyrs of *Nankana Sahib* and helped the *Akalis* in secret during the *Guru Ka Bagh* agitation. The British Government was looking for the better action against the *Maharaja*. His excuse was obtained by Patiala. *Maharaja* Bhupinder due to removal on 29 resignations of the *Sikhs* resign. It was understood that due sympathy with the *Akalis*, the throne was taken without and SGPC the Nabha state for restoratives of the *Maharaja*. One *Akhand Path* was arranged at *Gurudwara* Gangsar at Jaito. The english authorities entered the *Gurudwara* and arrested Giani Inder Singh and at the *Sikhs* present there. In this the incident of *Akhand Path* was criticised and passed resolution that one *Jatha* of *Sikhs* will move to Jaito and again started *Akhand Path* at Jaito. *Akalis* started sending the *Jathas* of 25-25 *Sikhs* each. There *Jathas* were beaten badly and they were arrested and sent to Jail and half of them were left in the thick jungles. On 12th October, 1923 British Government declared *Shiromani Akali Dal* and *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak* Committee as guilty and at the same time arrested the *Akali* leaders. After passing four months time, *Jathas* didn't get security at Jaito. Then *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak* Committee declared that 500 *Shahidi Jatha* must be sent at Jaito for *Akhand Path*. This *Jatha* was to start on 10th February in the year 1924 from the Amritsar and was to reach by 21st February, 1924 at Jaito. The Williston Johnson ordered the police to fire on the *Jatha* due to which dozen of *Sikhs* were killed and more that 200 *Sikhs* were wounded. After that *Jathas* were reached at Jaito and this *Morcha* continued. On 27th April, 1925, the eleventh *Jatha* of 101 *Sikhs* moved from *Akal Takhat* to Jaito. So *Jatha* at first organized the *Akand Path*

when they reached Jaito. In this way the *Akhand Path* which was stopped in the mid was started from the beginning and it took one year and ten months, 16 *Jathas* worked hard and got success. During this time their was felt hope of forming *Gurudwara Act* was fully prepared the Government feared on 21st July, 1925 the Government took back the restriction which laid on regarding the commencement of *Path. Akhand Path* was commenced and 101 *Akhand Paths* were completed on 7th August, 1925. Though the *Sikhs* wanted *Morcha* but they left the issue of *Maharaja Nabha's* release made for *Gurudwara Act* which was a failure then attempt was started on again 25th November. The *Bill* was presented on 27th April, 1925. At *Akal Takhat* in the program, on this day *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak* Committee passed a *Bill Gurudwara Bill* in the year 1925, and fulfilled many requirements of *Gurudwara*. Thus the period from 25th June, 1926 to 20th October, 1926 was very valuable in terms of the organization of the *Shiromani Akali Dal*.

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