

The Truth about Shaheed Bhagat Singh

For the information of the film producers, directors and script writers as well as the politicians and senior govt. officers, it is necessary to recall that Sardar Bhagat Singh was born in a Sikh family on 27 September, 1907. He lived an all too short lifespan of 23 years and 6 months, when he was hanged by the British Govt. on 23 March 1931. He was in Keshadhari form till 17 December 1928, the day he assassinated the English DSP Saunders, at Lahore. After shooting him, he went to the D.A.V. College Hostel, cut his hair and shaved his beard, making a dramatic escape from Lahore and traveling to Calcutta in the guise of a rich Hindu accompanied by wife (in reality a lady who posed as his wife) and a servant. On 8 April 1929 he surrendered to the police and was sent to the jail. While in jail he started growing his hair and beard and returned to the Sikh form. Hence he was incognito only for a short period of about four months.

Unfortunately the media love to show him only in cut form, with a hat. So did the movies. Forgotten is his return to the true Sardar *persona*. Indeed he was hanged in the Sikh *persona*. His photograph taken some time before his execution shows him in Sikh form.

The three movies made on his life and times have not projected him as such. Even the government of India and the Parliament House project him in an outlandish hat.

Recently, the Ministry of Social Justice and empowerment, released an advt. In the papers (*Indian Express*, March 23, 2006) which has, for the first time, shown him in proper Sikh form with the name as Sardar Bhagat Singh – which is greatly appreciated. It is hoped that, from now onwards, he will be depicted as such by the Govt. and others. His existing photos and statues wherever installed need to be replaced so that he gets the real and correct identity in the minds of the fellow Indians.

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The Mystique of Akal Takht: A Caveat

Dr. Harjinder Singh Dilgeer has been less than fair to the institution of Jathedar Akal Takht [*The Sikh Review*: Dec. 2005]

Technically there may not have been Jathedar Akal Takht before early 1920s, but historically someone has been exercising a strong central authority on behalf of panth, be it Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia or Akali Phoola Singh. Dr Dilgeer mentions them, and others like Bhai Gurdas and Mani Singh who were incharge of Akal Takht, but calls them “custodians”. How did a custodian evolve into a powerful Jathedar? His statement that from 1920 to 1979, Jathedar Akal Takht was “not known to be any specific entity” is open to question. Indeed the head played an important role in this period. The position of Jathedar has evolved to meet the needs of the time and it has guided and served the community rather well till 1984.

The title of Jathedar, with references to Akal Takht was formally recognised in 1920. On October 12, 1920 Sangat took so-called low caste Sikhs to Akal Takht to pay homage. Priests in charge did not like this and slipped away. The Sangat took over Akal Takht and appointed Teja Singh Bhuchar as Jathedar. A jatha of 25 Sikhs was put at his command to help him to look after the Takht.

On November 15, 1920 Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar convened a meeting of all Sikh organizations and associations. Here Sikhs decided to oust the pro-Government priests from Gurdwaras and formed a committee of 175 members to ensure sound management. That is how Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee was started. Likewise, on December 14, 1920 Shiromani Akali Dal, the political wing of the Panth was launched. Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar was elected secretary of the new Akali Dal. This further added strength to his standing in the community.

Dilgeer recognizes this historic event, but does not give any credit to the Jathedar. However, Giani Kirpal Singh in his book, "Sri Akal Takht Sahib and Jathedar Sahiban" and the eminent scholar, Shamsheer Singh Ashok in his book, "Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee da 50 sala itihās" mentions that the meetings at Akal Takht were called by Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar and they give due importance to his role in founding SGPC and SAD.

Jathedar Buhchar led a jatha to Taran Taran Gurdwara to oust the priests. He succeeded in his mission after some clashes with government agents. He appointed a committee of 15 members to look after the Gurdwara management. He also led jathas to take control of Gurdwara Panja Sahib and a historical Gurdwara in Pashawar. Since such actions involved breach of law, were contrary to law, he was arrested and detained for quite sometime. In October 1921, Jathedar Teja Singh Akarpuri was appointed Jathedar Akal Takht.

Those were the turbulent years for Sikh Gurdwara Reform movement. According to Giani Kirpal Singh, he provided a solid leadership to the Panth in this critical period. In 1923, he was re-arrested when he was leading the first Jatha in the Jaito Morcha. He was kept behind bars till 1926. Next year in 1927 he got elected as member of SGPC and was also appointed as Jathedar of Akal Takht for the second time and remained in this position till 1931.

In 1925, Didar Singh was the jathedar Akal Takht. Akali leaders had come into agreement with the government and the agitation was withdrawn. Sikhs protestors were released, but some in Nabha Jail were adamant and refused to leave the prison. Jathedar Didar Singh went to Nabha and advised them to come out, "since you have come here at the orders of Akal Takht, now I in the capacity of Akal Takht jathedar order you to leave the jails and get out". This had the desired effect and they agreed to obey his order. Such was the authority of jathedar Akal Takht in the Sikh world.

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Celebrating Shahidi Guruparb of Guru Arjun Devji

News papers in Punjab are these days chock-a-block with details of how SGPC and other organizations plan to celebrate the Quatercentennial of Shahidi of our Fifth Guru. Sadly the emphasis is on taking out Nagar Kirtans processions right from Govindwal to Taran Taran to Lahore, The Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee plans to take another "Nagar Kirtan" from Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib to Lahore.

History however records how the compassionate Guru founded a *leprosarium* at Taran Taran where the sick were given proper treatment. Why not expand this institution and look after the old sick and the disabled, giving them shelter, diet and proper treatment free? At least 400 patients should be treated at Taran Taran so that we can perpetuate the noble work started by Guru Arjun. What other way can be better to pay Homage to the Great Guru?

It is time for Sikh intelligentsia to rise and make their voice heard, so that Gurdwara Funds are not wasted on gaudy ceremonials but utilized for humanitarian cause which distinguish the mission of Guru Nanak.

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