

Akal Takht Sahib & The Hukumnama: Concept & History

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2626 Phase - VII, Mohali. 160062. Punjabi.

Hukumnama, literally means “Royal order”. As Akal Takht Sahib is the Throne of the Almighty, the orders issued by Akal Takht Sahib are called *Hukamnamas*. The letters written by the Sikh Gurus too were also called *Hukamnamas*. In the middle ages, the orders from the worldly rulers were also known as *Hukamnamas* but the people carried out the orders under compulsion. However, the *Hukamnamas* of the Gurus was a matter of pride and privilege. Not only the carrying out the Guru’s Order but even the *Darshan* (a simple look) at Guru’s *Hukamnama* was a matter of pride for a Sikh.

The first *Hukamnama* from Akal Takht was issued by Guru Hargobind Sahib himself. **This *Hukamnama* asked the Sikhs to wear arms for self defence.** Since then several *Hukamnamas* must have been issued. Some *Hukamnamas* issued by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, his consort, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, *Sarbat Khalsa*, Akal Takht Sahib, etc. are still available in the original (Two collections of *Hukamnamas* are available in print form, one edited by Dr. Ganda Singh and the other one by Bhai Shamsheer Singh Ashok, both published in 1968 by Punjabi University and the SGPC, respectively. These volumes have *Hukamnamas* by the following: two by Guru Hargobind Sahib, one by Guru Harkrishan Sahib, 22 by Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, 34 by Guru Gobind Singh Sahib, two by Banda Singh Bahadur, two by Thrones, etc.)

During the eighteenth century, the *Sarbat Khalsa* issued *Hukamnamas* to the Sikhs for manifold purposes. Through one *Hukamnama*, Akal Takht Sahib asked the Sikhs to release the wife of a Brahmin (Hindu of priestly class) whom the Afghan Chief of Kasur had carried away. In 1759, *Sarbat Khalsa* issued a *Hukumnama* to the Sikhs to send funds for the reconstruction of the Sikh shrines.

After the British annexation of Punjab - the Sikh Homeland, Akal Takht Sahib was misused by the occupying managers. A '*Hukamnama*' against Professor Gurmukh Singh was issued in 1879. A *Hukamnama*, it has been said, was issued against the *Ghadar* party workers. There is no direct evidence of the issuance of such a *Hukumnama*. As these two and similar *Hukamnamas* were not in accordance with the Sikh ideology, hence the Sikh nation rejected them.

Hukamnamas excommunicating persons or cults guilty of harming the Panth, or for acts of blasphemy, too, have been issued from time to time: Gurdial Singh Nabha (1923), Teja Singh Bhasaur and his associates (1928), Nirankari cult (1978), etc. During the period of attempt at the hijacking of Akal Takht Sahib too '*Hukamnamas*' were issued to excommunicate Zail Singh, Buta Singh, Santa Singh, Rachpal Singh, Surjit Singh Barnala, Pashaura Singh, etc.

A *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 Sahib for their anti-Sikh activities are not *Hukamnamas*. These decisions had been given in

the case of Kartar Singh Bedi (1924), Bhai Narain Singh (1924), Buta Singh, M.L.C. (1935), Master Tara Singh, Fateh Singh and eight members of the Executive of Akali Dal (1962), Piar Singh (1993), etc. In some cases partial decisions were taken by the caretakers of Akal Takht Sahib for forgiving, or for giving minor punishment due to reasons best known to them. These cases were: Zail Singh, Barnala, Buta Singh, Pashaura Singh, etc. The Panth has not accepted these decisions by the respective 'caretakers' of Akal Takht Sahib.

This has happened due to ignorance about the concept of Akal Takht Sahib and its *Hukamnama*. The *Hukamnama* of Akal Takht is the consensus of *Sarbat Khalsa*. During the eighteenth century, the issues of the Sikhs were decided by way of *Gurmata*. The leaders of all the groups, Misl, battalions of the Sikhs used to gather at Akal Takht to finalize a particular issue. **The decision was reached by way of consensus in accordance with the Sikh ideology. This was called *Gurmata*** (the counsel of Guru Sahib). This *Gurmata* was issued to the Sikh nation from Akal Takht as *Hukamnama* of Sarbat Khalsa or Akal Takht. This represented the "will of the Sikh nation".

A *Hukamnama* cannot be issued by a caretaker of Akal Takht by way of personal whim. The political monopolization and the adoption of Western political system made the Sikh intelligentsia indifferent to the institution of Akal Takht. All the *Gurmatas* are not *Hukamnamas*. When a resolve to execute some planning is made, it is called *Gurmata* and it applies to the person 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 *Gurmatas* in the eighteenth century. Some of the well known *Gurmatas* 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 the SGPC (1920), to form Gurdwara Sewak Dal, later named Akali Dal (1920), etc.

There are certain issues which cannot be covered by *Gurmata* or *Hukamnama*. These include the basic principles, postulates and doctrine of Sikhism. A *Gurmata*, which applies to the whole of the Sikh nation (national issues) must represent the will of the whole nation and must not be a decision of an ad hoc hand-picked assembly of special invitees by a party or a faction of self-styled *Jathedar*.

The Akal Takht is not a court of mediation between factions, nor is it an industrial tribunal to decide disputes. Akal Takht should not deal with each and every case like an ordinary tribal court. It should deal with only those issues which are of national importance and the *Hukamnamas* should be issued only after a *Gurmata* has been passed by the *Sarbat Khalsa*.

What is *Sarbat Khalsa* is still a moot point. In the present circumstances, a meeting of all the Sikh is not possible. In such a situation the representatives of all those parties and institutions, which are loyal to Akal Takht as well as plus the Sikh intelligentsia, should form the *Sarbat Khalsa*. Consensus and goodwill are the key. No capricious or sectoral decision can be worthy of compliance by the people. Guru-Panth is supreme and the Akal Takht is its collective conscience.



Genesis of Akal Takht & Status of Jathedar

Jagpal Singh Tiwana (Canada)*

Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti resigned from his position as Jathedar of Akal Takht on August 5, 2008. According to Jathedar Vedanti, he was forced to quit by Akali Chief Minister S. Parkash Singh Badal's men who are running Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.). The un-ceremonial exit of Jathedar Vedanti upset many Sikh bodies and organizations since the position is held in high esteem by Sikhs all over the world. Sometime Jathedar of Akal Takht is compared to Pope in Christianity.

The institution of Akal Takht was started by Guru Hargobind as a political wing of Sikh religion to defend his followers from the tyranny of the rulers of the time. Since its inception in 1606, it has a glorious history and its Jathedar has guided the Sikhs during critical times in the past.

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 Akal Takht called Akal Bunga. Guru Hrgobind used this to take political decisions, issue Hukmanamas and invite his followers to come to the place with arms and horses. The first Hukamnama was issued by the Guru on June 12, 1606 in this context. However, Guru Hargobind had to leave the place in 1634 due to the hostilities of the Mughal rulers and it came in the possession of the Minas, descendants of Prithvi Chand. 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. Historic decisions were taken and strategy was discussed to fight against the Mughal forces and invaders from North-West. Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia and later Akali Phula Singh were the Jathedars of Akal Takht and guided the panth in the critical times. According to H S Dilgeer, "In April 1759 a Hukamnama was issued in the name of the Sarbat Khalsa to all Sikhs to make generous offering for the rebuilding of Darbar Sahib. The seal of Akal Takht was used on the Hukamnama."

By 1799 Ranjit Singh had captured Lahore and established his rule over central Punjab, yet he was not free from the authority of Akal Takht. In 1800, Akali Phula Singh took charge of Akal Takht and conducted its affairs according to Sikh traditions. He even summoned the powerful Maharaja at Akal Takht for having an affair with Moran, a Muslim nautch girl. Ranjit Singh was again punished by Akal Takht when he donated a beautiful canopy after himself using it for some time. In 1805, when Maratha chief, Jaswant Rao Holkar came to Punjab to get Ranjit Singh's support against the British, the Sikh Maharaja summoned a meeting of Sarbat Khalsa at Akal Takht to take a collective decision. This was perhaps the last time when he sought the advice of Sarbat Khalsa. After that he started making his own decisions by consulting his Sikh, Hindu and Muslim ministers and advisors. We don't find much activity at Akal Takht till British took over Punjab in mid 19th century.

Under the British, Akal Takht Jathedar or custodian gradually started asserting his authority. To start with, Sanatani Sikhs (who believed that Sikhism was part of Hinduism) were in control of Darbar

Sahib. They, however, came in clash with radical reformers of Lahore Singh Sabha who were determined to free Sikhism from Hindu influence. Since the Sanatani Sikhs had control of Akal Takht and other takhts, they issued a Hukamnama on 14 March, 1887 excommunicating Prof. Gurmukh Singh, Secretary of Lahore Singh Sabha. Though it was issued by pro-Hindu Sanatani Sikhs, it still had some force and sanctity and it affected Gurmukh Singh's standing in Sikh community. Despite this, Gurmukh Singh did not look back or apologized. However, after 108 years, the *hukamnama* against him was specifically

withdrawn by the World Sikh Convention held in Amritsar in 1995, presided over by acting Akal Takht Jathedar, Manjit Singh.

Role of Jathedar Akal Takht after 1920:

Strictly a manager or a custodian in charge of Akal Takht was not called Jathedar before 20th century. Actually, the title of Jathedar came into being in 1920. The Khalsa Biradari of 'lower caste' Sikhs held a conference at Jalianwala Bagh on October 10-12, 1920 where they resolved to offer *Prasad* at Harimandir Sahib. When they went there the priests refused to accept their offering. At this, Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar reacted sharply and threatened to throw them out if they did not accept their *Prasad*, did not offer *ardas* and took the Vaak. The priests acquiesced and, with Guru's grace, Vaak came in favor of the 'lower caste' Sikhs. After this, Sangat led by Jathedar Jhabbar marched to Akal Takht to do the same. Priests in charge slipped away leaving the holy place vacant. Sangat took over Akal Takht at Jathedar Jhabbar's command. He then advised Sangat to appoint Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar in charge of Akal Takht. A *jatha* of 25 Sikhs was put at his command to help him to look after the Takht. After that he was called Jathedar Akal Takht.

SGPC founded:

On November 15, 1920 Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar called a meeting of all Sikh bodies and organizations at Akal Takht. Here Sikhs decided to oust the pro-Government priests from other Gurdwaras and formed a committee of 175 members to run their management. This is how Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee [S.G.P.C.] was formed. Next month on December 14, 1920 Shiromani Akali Dal, a political wing of the SGPC was launched. Jathedar Teja Singh Bhuchar was elected secretary of the new Akali Dal. This further added strength to his position and standing in the community.

Jathedar Buhchar did not just sit there as a custodian of the place; he provided strong and sterling leadership to the community. He led a *jatha* to Taran Taran Gurdwara to oust the priests forcefully. He succeeded in his mission after some clashes with the 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 Bhai Joga Singh Gurdwara in Pashawar. Since such actions were contrary to law, he was arrested and put in jail for quite for sometime.

During the Jaito Morcha (1923-25), three Jathedars of Akal Takht- Teja Singh Akarpuri on 13 October, 1923, Udham Singh Nagoke on 8 February 1924, and Achhar Singh on 7 May, 1924 - courted arrest. After his release in 1926, Jathedar Akarpuri was 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, Jathedar Didar Singh was the jathedar. Akali leaders had come into agreement with the government and the agitation was withdrawn. Sikhs started coming out of jails, but some in Nabha Jail refused to leave the prison and adopted quite an unreasonable attitude. Jathedar Didar Singh went to Nabha and advised them to come out, "since you have come here at the orders of Akal Takht, I now in the capacity of 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 position of the Akal Takht jathedar in the Sikh world.

Sikh Rahit Maryada:

Teja Singh Akarpuri, Jathedar Akal Takht, stressed the need of a prescribed Rahit for the Sikhs, though unsuccessful attempts had been 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 Rahit Maryada on 15 March 1927. The committee, with Prof. Teja Singh as its convenor, prepared a draft which was thoroughly discussed,

amended and changed according to the wishes of the members at various meetings of the committee held at Akal Takht. In all meetings Jathedar of Akal Takht was present. Even Jathedars of Kesgarh and Patna were also invited. From 1931 to 1934 Gurmukh Singh Musafir, Jathedar of Akal Takht, attended the meetings and then from 1935 till the SRM was finally passed in 1945, Mohan Singh Nagoke, Jathedar Akal Takht, played an important role. He also served as President of SGPC from 1944 to 1948 which put him in much better position to bring the Sikh scholars to an agreement on SRM.

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), the maximum time any Jathedar held this office. His personality added much power and prestige to this august office. Many historic decisions were taken in his time. In 1936 when Govt. banned the wearing of Kirpan by Sikhs, Jathedar Mohan Singh led the first jatha of 100 Sikhs in this morcha against the ban. The ban was withdrawn by the government.

The Rigmala Issue:

Should Rigmala be read while reciting the whole of Guru Granth Sahib at Akhand Paths? The issue had split the community since the beginning of the 20th century. There were well established scholars and religious leaders on both sides. In favor of Rigmala were Bhai Vir Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh, Sant Gurbachan Singh Bhinderanwale, Akali Kaur Singh and some Sants. Those opposing Rigmala were Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Bhai Randhir Singh Narangwal, Giani Gurdit Singh, Piara Singh Padam and others.

In 1945 Mohan Singh called a meeting of Sikh religious leaders and scholars at Akal Takht to resolve the issue. The anti-Rigmala group carried their point with his support. But to keep unity in the Panth, Jathedar issued instructions that reading of Rigmala was optional, though he stopped its reading at Akal Takht. This practice is still in force. Baba Gurbachan Singh Bhinderanwale was staunch supporter of Rigmala. SGPC sent Giani Lal Singh to Bhinderawala to find out if he would abide by the decree of Akal Takht Jathedar. Baba Gurbachan Singh gave in writing that he would honor the decree of Akal Takht.

During Mohan Singh's time as Jathedar, Ardas was amended to include that Sikhs should have unhindered access to Nankana Sahib and other holy shrines which were left in Pakistan after partition of Punjab in 1947.

Punishment to Master Tara Singh:

Master Tara Singh was the most powerful and well recognized leader of the Sikhs in mid-twentieth century. He was president of SGPC when Akal Takht Jathedar Achhar Singh punished him for breaking his fast without fulfilling the terms of his solemn pledge in 1961.

Then there is the historic edict of the Akal Takht Jathedar, Sadhu Singh Bhaura, against the Sant Nirankaris in June 1978. Nirankaris had killed 13 Sikhs on the Vaisakhi day of 1978. This edict was widely welcomed by Sikhs all over the world.

Such has been the authority, moral force and veneration of Akal Takht that powerful men like Maharaja Ranjit Singh, President Zial Singh and Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala had to appear before it when summoned by its Jathedar. Even Bhim Sen Sachar, a Hindu Chief Minister, appeared before Akal Takht and apologized for sending police in Darbar Sahib in 1955. Among the important people who were excommunicated from Panth were Teja Singh Bhasur (1928), Buta Singh (1984), Nihang Santa Singh (1984). Buta Singh and Santa Singh later apologized and underwent punishment.

1984 developments damaged the institution :

Akal Takht Jathedars became controversial after the turbulent developments of 1984.

So many Jathedars - Jasbir Singh Rode, Ragi Darshan Singh, acting Jathedar Manjit

Singh, Bhai Ranjit Singh, Giani Puran Singh- were appointed and removed before the turn of Jathedar Vedanti came this year. All this has affected the credibility and prestige of the Jathedar. One Jathedar would issue an edict, his successor would cancel that. So many edicts were issued that they lost their sanctity and force. One such edict ex-communicating Joginder Singh, editor, The Spokesman, was even challenged in high court.

Sikhs need a strong Central Authority:

That, however, does not mean that the institution of Akal Takht Jathedar is beyond repair and redemption. Sikhs need a strong central authority to resolve so many contentious issues that keep dogging and dividing the community. There should be a procedure to elect a non-partisan Jathedar of Akal Takht. **He should be a man of high integrity and character, deeply knowledgeable about Sikh religion, history and its traditions and could not be easily removed from his position.** He should be able to communicate in English. All India Gurdwara Act as demanded by Akalis should have such provisions. □

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Jathédâr: The Man and the Office

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The question - some time ago - was what to do with the Jathedar of the Akal Takht visiting America!

Some Sikhs in USA remembered that when Jathedar Ajnola, who held the same office, visited New York, a reception for him was mounted in Waldorf Astoria, arguably one of the most prestigious hotels in an incomparable city. It is a different matter that the function erupted in fisticuffs. I don't quite remember how it all concluded because I walked out. Perhaps over ten years ago, Professor

Manjit Singh, who was then the acting Jathedar of the Akal Takht, came calling and the Sikhs of New York honoured him at a lavish spread at the Hilton.

More recently, the outgoing Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedanti, had visited USA. Sikhs were falling all over themselves honouring him - to see him and to be seen by him. But now some uncomfortable question had also surfaced.

Vedanti-ji seems like a very nice, genial, scholarly man. Every one tells me that he is much more approachable than most of his predecessors. They also tell me that he is well intentioned who wants to do the right things, but that he is hemmed in by the political realities in India. All this may very well be true; certainly I am as ignorant of Punjab politics as can be. But he seems to come with considerable unwelcome baggage.

I notice that his name (and therefore his office) has been associated with the summoning of Gurbaksh Singh Kala Afghana and the banning of his books. Now book

banning, like book burning, is a practice that, to my mind, is completely antithetical to Sikh philosophy. **The way to deal with bad ideas is by focusing the light of better and opposing ideas on them in the free marketplace of ideas**, not by book banning and then punishing the messenger. Destroying the messenger makes us no better than the Mullahs of Iran and how they tried to silence Salman Rushdie. It also reminds me of the old Roman Catholic clergy and how it dealt with dissents before Galileo upto nearly the end of twentieth century, when it finally stopped publishing lists of books that its followers were refrained from reading. This is not the company we need to cultivate.

It is also during tenure of Vedanti-ji that Sikh women have raised the flag of rebellion because they are not being permitted to serve - clean, or sing the liturgy - inside the Harmandir (Golden Temple) that is the premier shrine of Sikhs. It is not enough to sing paeans to gender equality every morning as we do - "*So kyon manda akhiye jit jamen rajaan.*" There is absolutely no rhyme or reason to such a discriminatory policy, but the Jathedar sits like an ostrich with his head buried in sand studying the issue.

Sikh women the world over are asking that our *maryada* be reexamined. Why is it that the woman walks behind a man during the Sikh marriage ceremony? Why is it that the bride's father ceremoniously hands her over to the groom? In the ritual of the Sikh wedding ceremony (anand karaj) did we merely adapt the ceremony from the majority Hindu community; Hindus walk several times around a fire, so we perambulate the Guru Granth. These are all issues that will not go away, yet the office of the Akal Takht sits with nary a peep.

Our gurdwaras all over the world, including our historical gurdwaras in India, are built so as to be inaccessible to the handicapped. Admittedly many were built decades, even centuries ago. But the world have moved since. **Now laws demand that public buildings be within reach of the handicapped.** I am reminded of the fact that Professor Darshan Singh, himself a renowned ragi and a former Jathedar of the Akal Takht, was recently refused permission to perform by a Canadian gurdwara because he could no longer sit cross legged - he had both knees replaced. We need to modify our gurdwara facility to accommodate people who cannot sit on the floor, cannot walk in unassisted, need a wheelchair and a ramp. **Yet, the Akal Takht issues no directives and makes no effort to initiate and impel changes.**

The question of the authenticity of major portions of the writings of Guru Gobind Singh continues to divide Sikhs worldwide; the Akal Takht refuses to act decisively, or even to direct an exploratory, investigative, scholar process to deal with matter. The issue of a Sikh (Nanakshahi) calendar hangs fire for years, and the Akal Takht looks for compromises that resolve little.

I look at the fact that Sikhs in India are vying to get reclassified as scheduled classes. Such labels are caste based and that would be absolutely contrary to Sikh teaching. What does the Akal Takht have to say about it? Probably nothing at all.

Then there are the events of 1984. How many Sikhs were killed in those dark years? How many were jailed for years without trials? There are no numbers and even now, 24 years later, there are no efforts at accounting or justice.

Think for a moment. The Holocaust occurred in the 1940's. Sixty years later the fate of the Jewish victims is still being investigated. Guilty Nazis are still being identified. Oral history projects across the world are documenting who did what to whom, so that the world would never forget. The evidence of atrocities against the Sikhs in 1984 is still available but is becoming rapidly tainted and degraded every day. **(Do not forget that uncounted Sikhs died in 1984 at the Akal Takht and the Harimandir). If the Akal Takht will not take the**

lead in preserving our collective history, who will?

Our history also lies in the rare and handwritten documents, many of which were destroyed in 1984. Other documents and artifacts over time have become the property of a few families, but they really, belong to the nation. How to preserve them and yet make them available to people worldwide and scholars is a question that we ignore only at our own peril. Who better to lead us in this in the name of all Sikhs than the Jathedar of the Akal Takht?

At a more personal level, a book ostensibly edited by Jathedar Vedanti himself has become a lightning rod for criticism, but there is no systemic effort to evaluate it. While major issues facing Sikhs remain unresolved, the office of the Akal Takht remains embroiled in local election disputes of gurdwaras or the matter of legitimacy of langar if it is served on chairs and tables, rather than on the floor, and that too in gurdwaras thousands of miles away, in local conditions of which the Takht staff remain entirely uninformed.

I have not raised any issues of which most Sikhs are unaware. These matter invade our consciousness everyday. Yet at the reception for the Jathedar, no one raised any such questions. No one initiated an honest debate. But then I have to add that the format of the meeting did not permit any debate or discussion.

It is as if to question the Jathedar would be disrespect to the office! I suggest that this attitude emerges from our Indian cultural heritage, where people in authority - parents, teachers, religious icons, even politicians and statesmen must never be questioned. A knee jerk response of respect and affirmation is the only way. I add that this could also stem from our colonial legacy when we had masters, but I suspect that the feudal Indian society with its caste system had perhaps already broken the spirit. **The spirit of free inquiry and the emphasis on accountability are inseparable and essential, but they do not seem to be in the Indian cultural ethos.**

Let's look at the President of the United States. I am aware that the office deserves respect, even if, at times, the office-holder does not. The classic examples are Presidents Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam years, Richard Nixon during his Watergate saga, and the current occupant of the office George W. Bush through much of his tenure so far.

Most Americans are able to separate the office from the man. We have enormous respect for the office, but this does not automatically translate into similar reverence for whoever happens to sit in that chair. His legitimate orders are obeyed, but analysis and criticism of the man can, and does, occur; in fact it never ceases.

The best example of the separation of the man from the office that I can think of occurred some years ago during the Presidency of Richard Nixon. The President was to honour American Nobel Prize winners. One man, Linus Pauling, who had won two - for Chemistry and for Peace - spent the morning outside the White House protesting the Vietnam War, and then he dressed up and entered the White House for the ceremony that honoured him and others like him.

The first action was his view of the President's politics. Linus Pauling had the Citizen's Right and the obligation to dissent, and he did so. His second action was respect for the highest office in the land - that of the President.

In fact, not much later, Richard Nixon left the Presidency in disgrace. In retrospect, it was the man that was degraded, not the office. And that is how it should be.

Sometimes the office makes the man, other times the man shapes the office.

It is a lesson that we Sikhs need to learn. We need to keep in mind that it is in discussion and debate that we sharpen our focus, define our goals and hone our skills.

