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Akali Baba Phoola Singh Ji

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## **Baba Phoola Singh Ji Akali**

The rape of Indian honour was mostly done by the invaders who came to this country via Khyber, Gomal and Bomal passes of Suleiman Ranges in the North West of the country. Our great Sikh elders not only closed these routes of ingress of the tyrants for good but they scared them so much that they dared not turn their faces this way again. Akali Phoola Singh was one of the elders in that list, who is much respected amongst the Sikhs for his courage and bravery.

Whichever battle he took part in for the glory and expansion of the Sikh empire, he achieved complete victory. The victory of Multan is a concrete proof of this claim.

Akali Ji fought the battle of Naushehra in 1823 and this was his last battle. The effect of this battle on the minds of Pathans was so grave that they felt disheartened for ever. One of the Pathan who absconded from this battle was Mulan Rashid. He was a brave warrior. When he was asked when would he re-participate in *Jehad* against the Sikhs, Mulan replied, **“I have given up the idea of fighting face to face with Sikhs. If however someone can make a long lance that I can stand on the hills of the border and pick the Sikhs up to Majha, only then can I change my decision But I have no courage to fight them in a battlefield.** Then he touched his own feet and kissed his hands and said, **“Bless my feet that I saved myself from the battle of Naushehra, otherwise I would have been shredded in the field like many of my brethern.**

Mulan Rashid was a well read jovial person. He had

access right upto the court of Kabul. Once he was talking to an erstwhile Governor of Kabul on the subject of battle of Naushetra. The erstwhile Governor said, **“Mulan Ji, the fort of Peshawar is very strong. If it was in Kabul, it would have proved much useful to us.”** Mulan Ji replied, **“If you so desire, that fort can conveniently reach Kabul.”** Everyone sitting there was surprised and asked him how could that be possible? Mulan Ji replied, **“Your four brothers can come with me. I shall tie each of you with the four corners of the fort. Then I shall show you a Sikh advancing towards you. Seeing him coming, you all will run as has been the practice, the fort will also get dragged behind you.”** All those who heard the answer showing such a precarious position of the Pathans laughed loudly and praised Mulan Ji for sketching the behaviour of Pathans so vividly.

**Early Life.** Akali Phoola Singh was born in 1761 in the house of an ordinary Gursikh named Bhai Ishar Singh of *Misl Nishanchian* in the village named Sheehan of Bangar area. In 1762, Ahmad Shah Abdali invaded India to destroy the Sikhs. The Sikhs assembled in the area of Jagraon according to a plan. Their intentions were to drag the forces of Ahmad Shah into the parched desert land of Malwa. The paucity of water would cause them untold problems. Bhai Ishar Singh Ji received mortal wounds during this battle and died after a few days. Before the death of Bhai Ishar Singh, another son named Sant Singh was born in his family. Both lads were entrusted to the care of Baba Narain Singh of *Misl Shahidan* by Bhai Ishar Singh before his death.

At the young age of ten years, Akali Phoola Singh had committed all the *banîs* of *Nitnem*, Akal Ustat, 33 Sawaiyyas

and some more to memory. He loved reading *Gurbânî*, even when he should have been playing. Once a Sikh child had achieved certain amount of profeciency in religious training, it was essential for him to become adept in use of weapons as well. So Akali Ji also started learning the art of wielding weapons. Very soon, he became an expert in the use of sword and archery. He became a good horseman. On coming to the seminary of Baba Narain Singh, he started wearing the garbs of Akali and joined the *misl* of *Shahidan*. He came to Anandpur Sahib alongwith the *Jatha* of Baba Narain Singh. He spent most of his time in the care of Gurudawaras. As he grew up, his high moral character and righteous life earned him a respectable and honourable place in the *Jatha*. So much so that after the death of Baba Narain Singh, he was *defacto* appointed the leader of *the Jatha*.

In 1800, he came to Amritsar from Anandpur. He sorted out the evil and wrong practices commenced by the *Mahants* and other caretakers of Sri Akal Takht and other Gurudwaras. The task of cleaning up *Sarovar* was also undertaken by him during this period.

### **Meeting Maharaja Ranjit Singh.**

In December 1802, Maharaja Ranjit Singh attacked Amritsar in order to annexe it with *Khalsa Raj*. Bhangi *Misl* was looking after the affairs of Amritsar then. Bibi Sukhan, wife of S. Gulab Singh was governing the place after the death of her husband. When she learnt that Ranjit Singh was coming to Amritsar, she changed into male dress and got ready to fight. She deployed her guns in the towers of the fort. Fierce exchange of fire took place from both sides

for four days. On the fifth day, torrential rain and storm raged. Bibi Sukhan escaped from the fort during the night with her son Hardit Singh. She reached the *Haveli* (Mansion) of S. Jodh Singh Ramgarh. Maharaja Sahib took over the fort. He took possession of the famous *Zamzama* gun from this fort. Akali Phoola Singh who was in Amritsar then requested the Maharaja not to indulge in plundering of the city, since it was the city of Guru. The Maharaja accepted the request and both developed a deep bond of affection between themselves. On the recommendation of S. Jodh Singh Ramgarh and a few other Sikhs, Bibi Sukhan was given a *Jagir* of five villages to help her bring up her son and survive for the rest of her life.

**Victory of Kasur.** In 1807, Maharaja Sahib learnt that Kutab-ud-din Khan, the ruler of Kasur was preparing himself for a decisive battle with Lahore. Maharaja Sahib took Akali Phoola Singh and some other leaders and encircled Kasur on 10th February 1807. Two pitched battles were fought outside the city. Sikhs emerged victorious in both the battles. Kutab-ud-Din Khan went into the fort with his remaining army. The Sikh army laid a siege around the fort. Fire was exchanged by both sides for many days. One night, wall of a side was mined and brought down. The *Khalsa* army entered the fort and engaged the enemy in hand to hand combat. Soon, they over powered their enemy. Kutab-ud-Din was captured. He was granted a *Jagir* on the bank of river Satluj and released. The bravery of Akali *Jatha* and the valliance of Baba Phoola Singh Akali fascinated the Maharaja no end.

**Sorting out Hussainis.** In 1808, the British government sent Mr. Metcalfe to the court of Maharaja to develop

friendly relationships between the two. This was part of the statesmanship of the Britishers. Till then all political, religious and social decisions of the Sikhs were taken at Amritsar. So this talk also took place at Amritsar. Mr. Metcalfe was accompanied by a platoon of soldiers and a few horsemen. All of them were Shia Muslims. It was the day of Muharram. They took out a 'Tazia' procession according to their custom. Shouting 'Ya Ali, Ya Hussain', many Shia Muslims passed through the bazaars of Amritsar and reached in front of Sri Akal Takht. The afternoon assembly was in progress in Sri Akal Takht. Much noise and din outside was causing disturbance in the *Kirtan*. Akali Ji sent a couple of Singhs with a view to request the Shia Muslims to stop the noise.

Instead of understanding the request, Muslims spoke some harsh words instead. It came to body blows that brought down the turban of a Sikh. Akali Ji came to know. He took a band of Sikhs and reached there. Fire was exchanged and weapons used, causing injury to many and death to some. As soon as Maharaja Sahib came to know of it, he reached the spot and managed to settle the dispute.

As a result, *Tazia* was never taken out or passed through the vicinity of Sri Akal Takht.

**Attack of Captain Wight.** Before the onset of winter of 1809 Akali Phoola Singh Ji went to Damdama Sahib in order to tie up its administration. In about two months time, a rumour spread that the Britishers were preparing a map of Panjab and may occupy whole of Panjab shortly. To confirm this rumour Akali Ji came to village Chaonka

alongwith his *Jatha*. From a distance, he was pointed at some tents and was told that captain Wight was camping there and preparing the maps. Akali Ji raided the place. Captain Wight had about one hundred infantry soldiers with him at that time. They all ran and took shelter in the nearby village named 'Fato Ke'. Akali Ji surrounded the village. When Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Nabha received the news, he sent his nephew Ran Singh to brief Akali Ji. Ran Singh reached the village just before the launch of attack on village Fato Ke. Ran Singh explained the whole thing, to Akali Ji and after much persuasion managed to stop Akali Ji from his intended action. When the British government came to know of the incident, it asked the Maharaja to hand over Akali Ji to them. The Maharaja Sahib managed to dilly dally the action since he knew the respect, honour and reach of Akali Phoola Singh amongst the Sikhs.

A short while later, Akali Ji came to Amritsar. It was here that he developed difference of opinion on the following issues with the Maharaja.

- (a) Appointing the Dogras on responsible and key posts.
- (b) Deeds of self interests of Misr Ganga Ram who kept enrolling his relatives in Lahore *darbar*.
- (c) Creating unpleasantries between Prince Kharak Singh and the Maharaja.
- (d) False reporting Maharaja Sahib about Kanwar Sher Singh.

To resolve the foregoing matters, Akali Ji left Amritsar and reached Lahore. When the Dogra brothers learnt about Akali Ji's coming to Lahore to meet Maharaja Sahib, they

made sure that he was not permitted to have an audience with the Maharaja. At last Akali Ji forced himself into the fort. The Maharaja met him with much respect and even called for some refreshments those were placed before Akali Ji. Akali Ji did not accept it and said, **“By appointing people of other religion in Khalsa Raj, you are violating the policy. This is harmful to the kingdom. Kalgidhar Patishah has appointed you to be the caretaker of Khalsa Panth. If you do not mend your policies consider this meeting as a farewell visit.”** Maharaja Sahib tried to give his version of his decision, but Akali Ji cut him quick saying : **Panth is Supreme**. He left Lahore and returned to Amritsar. He summoned his *Jatha* members and set out for Anandpur Sahib on the same day, i.e. August 1814. In September 1814, Shahzada Partap Singh of Jind took refuge with Akali Ji at Anandpur. This was necessitated due to discord between the royal members and high officials of Jind.

The British agents asked Akali Ji for Prince Partap Singh. Akali Ji refused. In September 1814, the British Government wrote to Maharaja Ranjit Singh requesting him to call Akali Ji back to his kingdom.

Most of the paper work of Lahore *Darbar* was in the hands of non-Sikhs. The fearless attitude of Akali Ji had always been a thorn in their side. Hatching a deep conspiracy, Akali Ji was declared to be a cause of divide between the Maharaja and the Britishers. These officials took Maharaja's permission and sent an order to Diwan Moti Ram the Garrison Commander at Phillaur to bring Akali Ji forcibly from Anandpur Sahib. In October 1814, Diwan Moti Ram set out towards Anandpur at the head of a small army

column.

On reaching Anandpur, Diwan Moti Ram ordered his army soldiers to arrest Akali Ji, but every soldier grounded his arms and refused to advance further. Each one of them said that they will never disrespect such a great warrior as Akali Phoola Singh, even if they have to lose their life. At the same time, the British agent had written to Raja Jaswant Singh of Nabha and Nawab of Malerkotla to attack Akali Phoola Singh Ji with their army. They too did not agree to do any such thing. When Maharaja Sahib learnt about it, he ordered his army to return back to their barracks. He then asked Baba Sahib Singh Bedi who had great affection for Akali Ji, to go to Anandpur. Baba Sahib Singh Bedi explained the situation to Akali Ji and then brought him to Amritsar. Maharaja Sahib and a few elite Sikhs received them at Amritsar.

During the first battle of Kashmir, Agar Khan of Rajouri had betrayed the *Khalsa Raj*. In October 1813, Maharaja Sahib ordered Diwan Ram Dayal, S. Dal Singh, Akali Phoola Singh and S. Hari Singh Nalwa to capture all areas within Pir Panjal and annexe them with *Khalsa Raj*. Maharaja Sahib also came behind these forces, via Wazirabad and stationed himself at Bhimber. As soon as *Khalsa* army advanced, Agar Khan revolted and went into his fort at Rajouri. Hell' broke loose for next three days. Agar Khan vacated the fort and hid himself in the fort of Kotli. *Khalsa* army took over Rajouri fort and also won Kotli thereafter. The rulers of Rajouri and Bhimber were captured and presented at Lahore *Darbar*. Akali Baba Phoola Singh took a prominent part in this campaign.

In 1816, Maharaja Ranjit Singh came to Taran Taaran for *darshan* after completing his tasks in the mountains. He received the news that Mir Hafiz Khan had evicted Nawab Muhammad Khan of Bhakhar and Leehey and had occupied these places himself. A small army on a campaign for punishing the miscreants was immediately sent under Baba Phoola Singh Akali and S. Fateh Singh Ahluwalia. This army proceeded via river Sindh. He himself proceeded over land route and on reaching Khangarh, attacked Khangarh fort of Mir Hafiz Khan. After a short skirmish, Jahandar Khan, the nephew of the Mir put down his arms. As soon as this fort was won, Akali Ji attacked the fort of Ahmad Kot. This fort was much stronger than the Khangarh fort. The battle raged for three days. On 12th April 1816, a sidewall of the fort was blasted by a mine. The army of Akali Ji entered the fort and the fort was occupied. The Mir was also captured. After settling everything there, Akali Ji now headed towards Jhang. The population of the city was much in distress at the hands of its ruler Ahmad Khan. The *Khalsa* army besieged the fort as soon as it reached there. In a quick and decisive action, Ahmad Shah was arrested. On 22nd May 1816, they reached Lahore.

In 1816, Maharaja went on a tour of Pakpattan and Multan. After collecting tribute at Pakpattan and Bilawalpur, Maharaja Sahib came and camped at Harrappa Tulambha. Baba Phoola Singh was also with him at this time.

A *vakil* of Multan came with gifts and met Maharaja at Tulambha. Maharaja Sahib asked for the dues of one lakh and Twenty thousands. It became known then that Muzzafar Khan was only prepared to pay forty thousand rupees. Maharaja Sahib did not accept it. He ordered Misar Diwan

Chand and Baba Phoola Singh to launch a campaign against Multan. After capturing Ahmadabad, they encircled Multan. Maharaja Sahib also crossed river Chenab and camped at Salavervan. After a brief encounter, Baba Phoola Singh Ji occupied the city. Muzzafar Khan paid eighty thousand and reached an accord and agreed to pay off the balance amount in about two months time.

Ahmad Khan, the ruler of Hazara, refused to pay the revenue. During the last days of 1817, Maharaja Sahib placed a big army under Prince Sher Singh and Baba Phoola Singh Akali and sent them to settle a score with Ahmad Khan. A fierce battle took place there. Ahmad Khan was killed. His son agreed to pay 75,000 instead of 50,000 rupees. Therefore, he was appointed the ruler of Hazara.

In the beginning of 1817, Muzzafar Khan of Multan refused to pay the annual revenue to the *Khalsa Darbar*. A strong army was sent under the command of Diwan Moti Ram, Bhavani Das and Misar Diwan Chand. They laid a siege around Multan but could not achieve success for many days. The matter was investigated. The causes of failure were attributed to the carelessness of the army commanders of *Khalsa* army. All of them were taken to task for it.

To obliterate the stigma of failure, Maharaja Sahib sent a force of about 25,000 under the command of Prince Kharak Singh. Muzzafar Khan had also prepared himself well. He raised a flag of *Jehad* that brought thousands of Ghazis under the Nawab. He was fully prepared to protect the fort with his sons, 20,000 soldiers and countless Ghazis.

Khalsa army reached Multan on 5th February 1818. They camped in an open space. The Nawab let loose his arsenal to halt the advance of *Khalsa*, but could not check their advance. The *Khalsa* army pushed Nawab and his army back into the city. He closed all the entry points to the city. *Khalsa* army encircled the city and started shelling it with heavy artillery fire. The effort continued for six days but without any result. At last the walls were planned to be mine blasted. As soon as the pits were dug to fill them with explosives, it rained heavily filling the pits with water. The effort was renewed after rain. A part of the wall was badly shaken by the blast. Many artillery shells were fired repeatedly that created an opening in the wall. The horsemen were ordered to attack. After a fierce battle, the city fell into the hands of *Khalsa* army. Now came the turn of the fort which was very strong. It was also besieged and fired at repeatedly with heavy artillery but to no avail. The fort remained under siege for three months. Summer months were at its peak. Many animals had died and their foul stench was becoming nauseating. The soldiers health too was deteriorating due to heat, dust, stench and paucity of food. Many started dying.

Maharaja Ji was much disturbed when he heard about these developments. He went to Amritsar to meet Akali Ji. Akali Ji was explained all the developments. Akali Ji said, **“O sustainer of the Dogras, why didn’t you tell me earlier? Why have you put *khalsa* in such precarious position? All the same, the army is ready to go to the battlefield. Guru willing, we will return after unfurling the Akali flag on the fort of Multan”**. The war drum was beaten in the camp of *Nihangs*. Supplication seeking

permission to march against the enemy was made. Baba Ji took 500 leading warriors, the guns of Bhangis and set out towards Multan sometimes on 26th May 1818. They reached Multan on 18th Jun. He received briefing from Prince Kharak Singh about all that had happened so far, and marched towards the battlefield. The Zamzama gun was deployed in front of Khizri Darwaza and firing commenced. The door broke into two. Akali soldiers entered the fort at the shout of *Jaikaras*. Hand to hand fight took place. The *Ghazis* fought with determination and did not yield an inch. By chance Muzzafar Khan came face to face with Akali Ji. He fought bravely and fell dead on the ground after sometimes. His elder son Shah Nawaz attacked Baba Ji who suffered a big wound. In the meantime S. Dhanna Singh Malwae and S. Sham Singh Atari reached who killed Shah Nawaz there and then.

The condition of Ghazis became unstable. Singhs pressed home the advantage and it made the Ghazis run for their lives. More than 12,000 Muslims including Nawab Muzzafar Khan and his five sons were killed in this battle.

When Prince Kharak Singh, Akali Phoola Singh and other *Sardars* reached Amritsar after the battle, the Maharaja Sahib met Akali Ji and honoured him with the words **“Protector of Khalsa Raj.”** The honour of Multan victory rested on the head of Akali Phoola Singh. Some proofs of this fact are as under :

It is recorded in Calcutta Review, Volume 6, Page 279 printed in December 1886 that :

**“Ranjit Singh’s whole army would have been repulsed from Multan had not Phoola Singh, a brave**

**Akali borrowed from Baeuline the courage to lead a storming party against the breach.”**

This is what Peshawar Gazetteer (1823) says on its page 65 :

**In this action 1000 Pathans are said to have been slain. And with them fell that gallant old Sikh soldier Phoola Singh, the interpid leader of the Akali or immortal who five years before had led the way into the breach at Multan and was now on this occasion no less conspicuous for his gallantry.”**

In October/November 1818, Maharaja Sahib marched onto Peshawar along with a strong force and his renowned military Commanders. As soon as the army reached river Attock, a boat bridge was constructed. They made adequate provisions of their supplies and then proceeded further.

When the Khataks and Pathans across the river learnt about the advent of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, they collected their soldiers and took positions in the hills of Khairabad, thus blocking the way. A small patrolling party of *Khalsa* army went across the boat bridge to acquire information about the enemy. They had hardly gone a little farther from the bridge that they were ambushed by the Khataks. These Sikhs fought gallantly and achieved martyrdom.

Hearing the distressing news, Maharaja Sahib sent a strong contingent under the leadership of Akali Ji, Sardar Mehtab Singh Nakherian and S. Hari Singh Nalwa to pay back the Pathans in their own coin. As soon as Akali Ji reached across the river, Firoze Khan and Nasibulla Khan Khataks attacked the *Jatha* as they had done before. Being

a superb tactician, Akali Ji asked his men to withdraw so that the Pathans can come out of their field work. When the Pathans saw Sikhs retreating they came out of their dug ups in order to chase them. Akali Ji was just waiting for this opportunity. He ordered the Singhs to turn back quickly and encircle the enemy. The Pathans realised that they were in the death trap. Feroze Khan raised white flag of truce.

Next day, the remaining *Khalsa* army and Maharaja Sahib came across the river and camped there. Placing small contingents in the forts of Khairabad and Jahangir, they marched towards Peshawar. The army had hardly gone a little ahead of Naushehra when an informer brought the news that a big Muslim force is assembling at Chamkanian of Sheikh Umer. They were trying to block the passage. Akali Ji took a strong contingent and attacked Chamkanian before dawn. Ghazis were still asleep when they were encircled by *Khalsa* army. When they woke up with the hoof sound of the horses, they found themselves under the swords of the Sikhs. They ran helter skelter. The victory over Chamkanian had such a salutary effect in the area that Akali Phoola Singh occupied Peshawar on 20th November 1818 without a fight.

Yaar Muhammad Khan the ruler of Peshawar had already vacated the city and had run away to Ishatnagar. Akali Phoola Singh sent the news of Peshawar victory to Maharaja Sahib at Pabbi. When Maharaja Sahib came to Peshawar the next day, he found the *Khalsa* flag flying over Bala Hissar Fort. Maharaja Sahib entrusted the Governorship of Peshawar to Jahandad Khan and he set out towards Lahore. He had hardly reached Attock when Yaar Muhammad Khan occupied Peshawar with the help of Barkazae. He

knew that he was unable to compete with Maharaja Sahib. So he sent Diwan Damodar Mal and Hafiz Rooh-ullah with his tribute to the Maharaja and requested him to grant him the rulership of Peshawar. Maharaja Sahib consulted Akali Ji and agreed to the request of Yaar Muhammad Khan. Thus the Maharaja Sahib also acknowledged Akali Ji as an able administrator beside being a gallant warrior. Maharaja Sahib made a special mention of the yeoman's service rendered by Akali Phoola Singh during one of his special court session at Lahore.

In 1819 when Pandit Birbal came to Lahore *darbar* and explained the pitiable state of the people of Kashmir, Maharaja took a force of 30,000 *Khalsa* in April 1819 for the protection of the people there. On reaching Wazirabad, it was resolved that the *Khalsa* army be divided into three parts. One part to be under the command of Diwan Chand and S. Sham Singh Atari, the second was placed under Prince Kharak Singh and Akali Phoola Singh. This was to act as vanguard force. The third was kept under the Maharaja as a reserve contingent to be sent wherever needed to influence the battle.

On 1st May 1819, both contingents passed through Bhimbar and reached Rajouri. Agar Khan the ruler of Rajouri had totally violated the earlier treaty and had revolted against Maharaja Sahib. The Sikh army encircled his territory. Agar Khan escaped during the night realising that he had no strength to take on the might of the *Khalsa*. His brother Rahim-ullah Khan voluntarily joined the *Khalsa* army. He proved to be a big help in showing the ways and passages in the mountains. Akali Ji left many of his horsemen with Rahimullah Khan since the routes were not

conducive for the horses. Thus following the footpaths over the hills, they reached Behram Ralla by end of May 1819. This was much faster than had they taken the curving and undulating routes used by horses. Mir Muhammad Khan and Muhammad Ali Khan, the ruler of Sappan accepted the subservience of the *Khalsa* but Zabardast Khan mustered his army and prepared himself for a show down with *Khalsa*. Akali Ji launched an attack and after a short skirmish cleared all the blocks and took them under his control. Next day, he besieged the fort of Tarai and shelled it heavily. They created a breach in the wall with the help of mines, entered the fort and surrounded Zabardast Khan from all sides. The din lasted for long but Zabardast Khan and all his remaining men were captured ultimately. The *Khalsa* army occupied the fort and a garrison was left there for its protection. Now both columns headed towards Pir Panchal from different direction in order to occupy various checkpoints there. When Pathans learnt about it, they occupied the high ground on either sides of the check posts. When *Khalsa* army saw the road blocks and heavy fire from the high grounds on both sides, they returned the fire equally vigorously. But their fire was ineffective since they were firing upwards. At last Akali Ji ordered his men to climb up the mountains on either side from a different route and charge down on the Pathans. This proved to be a master stroke. A hand to hand fight took place. By the sunset, Ghazis acknowledged defeat and ran away from their positions.

On 26th June, *Khalsa* army reached Serai Illahi. An informer brought the news that Jabbar Khan had blocked the route at Supiya with 5000 Afghan soldiers and was determined to fight a battle. *Khalsa* army launched artillery

supported attack before dawn on 3rd Jul. Both sides exchanged heavy fire. Jabbar Khan had constructed strong field works that blunted the artillery fire of the *Khalsa* army. The Afghan army did not yield an inch. Diwan Chand wanted to move his artillery guns a little forward. He was busy preparing for it when a contingent of Afghan army seized the opportunity and attacked the gun position which was in disarray. As a result they succeeded in capturing two guns of Diwan Chand. When Akali Phoola Singh saw the enemy advancing, he attacked it from the right flank with his *Jatha*. A very close quarter battle took place with swords and daggers. Much blood got spilled, but the Afghani soldiers could not bear the zeal and fury of the Akalis. They started escaping here and there. Jabbar Khan was seriously wounded and he ran away saving his life. *Khalsa* army took over the fort of Shergarh and other checkpoints. Thus the province of Kashmir fell into the hands of *Khalsa Raj*.

*Khalsa* army entered the city of Srinagar with great pomp and show on 4th July 1819. There was no plundering or killing. When Prince Kharak Singh, Akali Phoola Singh, S. Hari Singh Nalwa and other generals reached Lahore, they were taken in a procession on elephants through the streets of Lahore. Maharaja Ji asked the details of the woes of people of Kashmir. He repeatedly asked him about the various battle episodes.

In January 1823, Muhammad Azeem Khan Barkza-ee who was the ruler of Kabul prepared himself with a large army and advanced towards Jalalabad with a view to capture Peshawar. Yaar Muhammad Khan who was his brother and Governor appointed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, succumbed to the desires of his brother and hid himself in

the hills of Yusafzaee after vacating Peshawar. He said that he was unable to defend the state against the onslaught of his brothers army. Thus Muhammad Azim Khan occupied Peshawar on 12th February 1823 without any opposition.

When the news reached Lahore, a strategy was drawn in consultation with S. Hari Singh Nalwa. He opined that it was very necessary for the Akalis to participate in this campaign. Thus the Maharaja Sahib requested Akali Phoola Singh to take part in the battle. On the other hand Muhammad Azim Khan sent a big army under his nephew Muhammad Zaman Khan and Khavas Khan son of Sammad Khan to Khatkan and Afridian. One part of the army besieged the fort while the other part took up positions on the Nag mountains. This way they closed all routes of ingress from river Attock side. They had planned this field work with the intentions of stopping Sikhs across river Attock. And if they succeed in crossing the river, they will be surprised with attack that they cannot escape alive. Muhammad Azim distributed munition and other war material freely amongst the Ghazis of Naushehra and Hishatnagar. To stop the Ghazis, Maharaja Ji met S. Hari Singh Nalwa. He took 25,000 soldiers alongwith Akali Phoola Singh, S. Desa Singh Majithia, S. Amir Singh Surya, S. Rattan Singh Gharjakhia and few others and reached his destination in five days time. Before the arrival of the Maharaja Sahib, both Prince Sher Singh and Hari Singh Nalwa crossed river Attock by the boat bridge and divided the army into two parts. A very fierce battle was fought. Muhammad Jahan Khan blew up the boat bridge on river Attock so as to cut of their route of re-inforcement. When Maharaja Sahib reached river Attock, there was no bridge

and a new bridge was difficult to make in such a short while. Sound of firing was reaching the ears of *Khalsa* army from across the river. Meanwhile an informer swam across the river and reported that the *Khalsa* army was badly surrounded by the Pathans from all sides. If they are not helped on time, they will suffer heavy casualties. Now the Singhs could not tolerate to hear this plight of their brethren. Akali Phoola Singh could not bear to stay away from his brother Sikhs who were on the edge of a major calamity. He jumped into the river alongwith his soldiers. The river was in spate. Maharaja Sahib and his chief Sardars followed suit behind Akali Ji along with the *Khalsa* army. As soon as the Ghazis heard the news of Maharaja Ranjit Singh crossing the river, they lost all hope and faced defeat. S. Hari Singh occupied the fort. The Afghan army beaten here went and joined the army at Naushehra and started preparing for the next battle. After consolidating gains in the forts of Khairabad and Jahangira, Maharaja Ranjit Singh went and camped in the plains of Akaorha. The entire army was re-organised here and the supplies re-couped. Many spies were sent together intelligence about the Ghazis.

### ***Redeeming of Pledge by Akali Phoola Singh***

The early morning congregation took place on 14th March 1823. The entire army and the generals attended the assembly. Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the generals had already discussed about the impending battle. The *Jathedars* opined that if they delayed the attack a little longer, it would enable the enemy to muster their army in large number. So it was decided to launch an attack immediately. Accordingly, supplication (Ardas) was made before the Guru and the victory drum sounded. Every contingent of *Khalsa* army

marched past Maharaja Ranjit Singh and proceeding further on the shouts of *Bole so nihal, Sat Sri Akal*. Maharaja Sahib motivated all of them to fight to win.

The band of Akalis had gone past and that of S. Desa Singh was crossing when a spy informed that ten thousand soldiers alongwith 40 guns have arrived from Kabul for the help of the enemy. Maharaja Sahib re-assessed the situation and felt, he should postpone the decision of attack to the next day, since the confrontation had now become tough and the *Khalsa* artillery was expected to join them next day.

When Akali Phoola Singh learnt that Maharaja Sahib was planning to change the morning decision made for attack on the army, he went to him and said very courageously. **“It is accepted that the enemy is in a stronger position today, but having resolved in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, it is against the principle of *Khalsa*. One may lose one’s head but never the respect of the decision made in the presence of Satguru Ji.”** Maharaja Ranjit Singh said, **“There is no harm in taking cognisance of the situation. The statesmanship advises that if this attack is launched a day later, what difference would it make? We are not shirking from fighting a battle and will reach the battle field, but keeping the situation in view, it is not advisable to hurry.”**

**“Maharaja Sahib! our supplication before Sri Guru Granth Sahib was our pledge made with our Guru and we are not prepared to break this pledge even if the strength of the enemy go up ten times and we are to**

die in the battlefield. *Kalghidhar pita* is with us and he will help us stand by our pledge.” Akali Ji replied with much confidence.

Maharaja Sahib was in a fix. He was not prepared to go to battle without his artillery support. Maharaja Sahib kept deliberating the created situation in his mind but Akali Phoola Singh felt that he was losing precious time. He said, **“You are the Emperor, You may do whatever you feel like. But I shall advance now to fulfil my vow. I am not bothered if I die in the battlefield, but I shall not let enemy step on even an inch of our territory. God alone knows how many sacrifices had been made by our elders to free it from the tyranny of the foreign invaders? We shall not let all their fallen blood go waste in our life time.”**

Before marching towards the battlefield, Akali Ji made an other *Ardas* (Supplication). Visualising the ten Guru’s and Sri Guru Granth Sahib before him, he said, **“Hey Satgur Ji, the strength of the enemy army is large. But this servant of your house is determined to attack the tyrannical and oppressive enemy who invades our land and take away the hard earned wealth of our people, their young wives, daughters and above all their respect. Hey Satguru Ji, grant us the strength that we may maintain the glory and grandeur of this *Khalsa Raj* even at the cost of our head. We had surrendered our head to you, the day we wore your apparel and took *Khande-ki-Pahul*. Losing my life is no worry for me but I shall never let your pious and holy name get tarnished even by a whisker and please do not let me live to see that day. So be kind and grant your *Khalsa* the boon**

**of fighting gallantly in the battlefield.”**

This *Ardas* made in the valiant mood had a miraculous effect on the Akali army. No sooner had the *Ardas* finished than the sky resounded with the shouts of ‘Sat Sri Akal’. The Akali army set out towards the battlefield to encounter the challenge of the enemy. Thirty thousand Ghazis blinded by the enthusiasm of *Jehad* let loose a volley of fire on the *Khalsa* army. Akalis kept advancing and wanted to take on the enemy in sword and lance battle. They were adept in their use and preferred it over the guns.

Seeing the Akalis advancing fearlessly in the rain of bullets, Maharaja Sahib could not keep himself aloof from the scene of action. He ordered his army to march to the help of Akali brethren. He himself marched with his army. The Maharaja army attacked the Ghazis who were trying to encircle the army of Akali Ji and were looking to be succeeding. Akali army marched and faced the enemy face to face.

The *Jehadis* were firing blindly. A bullet of the enemy penetrated the knee cap cover of Akali Phoola Singh Ji and entered into the body of the horse he was riding. The horse fell down. Akali Ji quickly mounted on his elephant. The Akalis now took the enemy in hand to hand combat. They used their swords to such an effect that the Ghazis forgot whether they were living or dead. Akali army was re-inforced by Maharaja. In the meantime, by an act of providence, the *Khalsa* artillery also reached the scene of action. The Pathans tried their best to gain a foot-hold but could not bear the sword of the Akalis. In the meantime, Prince Kharak Singh also reached there with his contingent. The battle

raged the whole day. By evening, Ghazis ran away saving their lives.

The setting of the Sun brought the sunset on the courage of the Pathans. Akalis were marching towards a memorable victory. The Akalis chased the enemy so that they do not look this way again. Just then a Pathan sniper fired from close quarter and hit Akali Phoola Singh with his bullet. Akali Mahan Singh located his position and cut him into two. At last the battlefield fell into the hands of *Khalsa* army.

The great martyr Baba Phoola Singh who strived to keep the desires of keeping the fair and just regime of *Khalsa* alive in the minds of the youth even at the cost of his own life and fulfilling the vow made before his Satguru will always be a lighthouse of sacrifice, bravery, faith, confidence and will to succeed for the coming generations. Our leaders should draw a leaf out of his life history and emulate his qualities of *Panthic* love, sympathy, unity and desire to achieve glory of the *Khalsa*.

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## Personality of Akali Phoola Singh

Before we delve into the personality traits of Akali Ji, we must understand that all those divine traits of Akali Phoola Singh had come to him from his love of *Gurbânî*. It was *Gurbânî* that had instilled fearlessness, stability, determination, gallantry, bravery etc. in his personality. Whether in the battlefield or in his seminary, he would abide by his routine of *Nitnem* and attending/singing of *Âsâ Kî Vaar*. He would always carry Sri Guru Granth Sahib on an elephant even to the battlefield. Before launching on a campaign he would always make an *Ardas* and take bidding from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. He spent all his life in preaching Sikhism, *Amrit Sanchar*, reforms of Gurudawaras and service *Khalsa Panth*.

**Bearing.** He had a very handsome and impressive bearings. He was so fit physically that even in old age no young man could compete with him. Looking at his radiant face and very healthy body, it was difficult to assess his age.

**Determination.** He remained optimistic and progressive through out his life. He never felt disturbed at the time of launching big campaign. This is obvious from his decision. He proceeded with the attack on Naushehra when Maharaja Sahib was a little disappointed at the developments. Akali Ji had full faith on his *Ardas* and he ensured to hold its sanctity high.

**Bravery.** The quality of bravery that he showed during various battles that he took part in was exceptional. His courage in the battle of Multan was unique and wonderful. Attacking Nawab Muzzafar Khan through blazing fire of guns and bullets could be done only by a rare person.

**Fearlessness.** He was very forthright in expressing what he felt so strongly about. When he saw Maharaja

Sahib falling victim to the guiles of Dogras, he expressed his anguish fearlessly and frankly. When the Maharaja decided to marry Moran a nautch girl of Lahore, Akali Ji summoned him to Akal Takht and announced a punishment of flogging him.

In 1806, When the coins minted on the name of Moran were brought to the Akal Takht for acceptance, he returned it saying that no coin can be accepted that does not bear the names of Gurus or their Sikhs.

**Sans Arrogance.** Despite being fearless and of tough nature, he behaved without any trace of arrogance. Whenever he saw a Sikh wounded in the battlefield, he would lift him on his shoulder and bring him to his camp. He would attend to his wounds. While proceeding to the battlefield, he would always go on a horse, although he had many elephants at his disposal.

**Missionary of Gurmat.** Whenever he would find some free time in between the battles, he would visit various villages and unite the people with the Guru. He would ensure that maximum Sikhs were baptised with *Amrit* and he had the necessary arrangements at hand. He would keep complete details of all the villages where he had been on the mission of *Amrit Sanchar*. It is a famous episode that once a Sikh who partook *Amrit* turned apostate. Akali Ji came to know and he reached his village. He was summoned before him. When the apostate Sikh tried to speak ill and harsh words, Akali Ji said that the boon of *Amrit* blessed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji cannot be permitted to go waste. Therefore the extract of the body of the Sikh that would come out in the form of blood when he is put through crushers will be drunk by him. As soon as he heard it, he fell on Akali Ji's feet and requested to be re-baptised.

Akali Ji made much effort in removing fake and spurious

rites that got introduced in the Gurudwaras.

**Impressive Personality.** When Prince Partap Singh of Jind took shelter under him at Anandpur Sahib, Maharaja Sahib on the coaxing of Dogras sent Diwan Moti Ram with an army to go and arrest Akali Phoola Singh. The Sikh army soldiers laid down their weapons without fighting. Similarly when the army of Nabha king, Maharaja Jaswant Singh came to capture Akali Ji, the army refused to encircle the place of abode of Akali Ji. All this was as a result of his Guru conscious life and very impressive bearing.

**Respect for Gurbânî.** Although reading *Gurbânî*, moulding his life accordingly and preaching it down to the common people was the aim of his life, very few devoted persons can extend the much deserved respect to the *Gurbânî*. When in 1808, British ambassador Mr. Metcaulfe came to Amritsar to lay down the boundary in consultations with Maharaja Sahib, the Sia Muslims of his contingent took out a procession close to Shri Akal Takht and did not stop creating disturbance in the *Kirtan*. Despite requests and explanations, they did not stop. Akali Ji was much annoyed. The way Sikhs sorted out this nuisance is a living example of his respect for *Gurbâni*.

**Administration.** He was a very successful administrator. When he took over the leadership of *Nihang Singhs*, no one dare show his dissent. It was not an easy task to keep the Akali Singhs in control. Beside this, the administration that he established in Peshawar after its victory is a fine example of Governance for the coming generations.

**Patriotism.** His love for his nation was beyond doubt and immense. He bore many hardships for the prosperity of the nation, so much so that he sacrificed his life for it.

The leaders of today should take directions from the life of Akali Phoola Singh Ji.

## A Shake Up

O Sikhs ! do what ever you like, your Guru shall never feel happy with you. I have read your history. I have also read translation of your *Gurbani* what ever I could lay my hands on. I have read much about your religion; as much as you perhaps have not yourself. I am telling you the truth, we spread our religion in the entire world on the strength of one Jesus Christ having been put on the cross. But your history is replete with thousands Christs. Which other religion of the world can claim to have its leaders martyred through torture of being boiled in hot water? Or made to sit on hot plates? Which lover of a religion had his joints cut one by one, and even sawed into two? The followers of which religion had raised their voice and arms to fight injustice, tyranny and oppression by forming small bands of fighters with virtually coffin on their heads? Is there any religion in the world whose leader had his two young ones buried alive in the walls? What a God's wrath! Only five hundred years old history and that too written in blood ! And imagine when *Gurbani* professes love and service of humanity and fellow beings, you sing the songs of love and do not shirk raising arms against cruelty and oppression. What a strange religion it is that to establish justice you don't even hesitate to lay down your life. You have hidden such an unparalleled and not to be found history in just 20 million hearts. Perhaps even less because I am sure the modern educated Sikhs do not even narrate these episodes to their children. And less informed rural elders may be inadvertently adding falsehood in it. The chasm between belief and blind faith is very wide.

O friend, belief demands a ray of knowledge. Outside knowledge is only blind faith, doubts and superstitions and

it keeps getting adulterated. What have you done to check and arrest it ?

We have distributed millions of copies of Bible free of cost or have charged very nominal cost. I have heard that SGPC, the governing and administrative body of your Gurudawaras has annual income running into many millions. You should use some money to translate *Gurbani* in various languages and distribute it. Translate your Sikh history in many languages and distribute its copies free to the world for others to know and realise what you are. Haven't we printed Bible in all Indian languages including Punjabi ? have heard that you people have not even reached your Sikh history in every house of your community. How ungrateful are you towards your Gurus and your martyrs ! An ungrateful person has no place other than hell. All you Sikhs will go to hell. O wretched people ! I worry that you will even make hell over crowded.

These are the words that a paster had said to a Sikh statesman in London. There is nothing false in what he has said. Our leadership, Shiromani Committee and Akali Dal is sleeping over their responsibility of spreading knowledge of Sikhism through literature. Sikhs have no press, no daily paper and no platform of their own. All of them have to depend upon those writings which are passed on to us with all their adulterations.

The entire leadership of the community has fallen so deep into the gorge and quagmire of politics that they have no time to think about preaching the truth.

SGPC has so far printed books which can be counted on finger tips. They do not seem to have paid any attention towards printing literature and distributing it free of cost. Perhaps they think that it is inappropriate and unreasonable

work that should be done by some other organisation.

Sikh Missionary College of Ludhiana has printed above 300 small tracts on various aspect of Sikh religion. These are reached to the people at very nominal cost through raising temporary stalls at various places during key functions. All workers of the College are volunteer preachers who earn their living through other professions and pursuits. They even give their *Daswandh* (one tenth of their earnings) to the college to enable it meet its essential expenditures. College has no fixed income by way of offerings in a Gurudawara, property or from any other source which can be used for printing literature for free distribution. We firmly believe that unless appropriate literature is reached to a common seeker, the Sikh community will not wake up. That hunger to know Sikh history, understand the invaluable sermons of *Gurbani* and right Code of Conduct cannot be created without reaching and motivating a Sikh. Today, a Sikh is ready to spend money on futile articles of the house, he can take out enough money from his budget for a bottle of liquor, he can throw lavish parties for his friends, but is not prepared to spend even a penny on Sikh literature, history books and even expositions of *Gurbani*. All the same a programme of free distribution of useful literature has been worked out by the college on order to generate hunger for knowledge.

Therefore, we place a humble request before liberal and charitable Sikhs to subscribe to the project with open heart. Every well wisher of the *Panth* should send at least ten rupees. This is the first appeal made by the organisers of Sikh Missionary College. We are highly hopeful of a good response. Sikhs who donate monetary help will also motivate others to do like wise. The monetary help extended will only be used for distribution of free literature and a

separate account will be maintained. Free literature for distribution will be sent whenever desired by *Sangat*. All those well wishers of the Sikh *Panth* who feels the inadequacy of preaching or wish to prove the London padre wrong, should send assistance for free literature on regular basis. All associates of Sikh Missionary College, circle incharge and independently operating well wishers of the *Panth* are strongly requested to collect money in the area of their influence and send it every month to '*Free Literature Fund*'.



Objectives of Sikh Missionary College, Ludhiana.

We are Sikhs. Therefore it is important for us to know the principles of Sikhism. We should know the deep meanings of Gurbani, be aware of the Sikh history, know the customs and traditions of Sikh society, have good knowledge of Sikh culture. How can we call ourselves Sikhs if we are not aware of these aspects of our life. We are reciting *Gurbani*, but if we are asked the meanings of a line or the theme of a hymn and we are unable to reply, we surely cut a sorry figure. We must know the life of our ten Gurus and other respectable Sikhs of our history. If we do not know about our unique history, how can we tell others that we are proud possessor of a rich heritage. We are totally ignorant of the Sikh Code of conduct. We are totally at sea when it comes to holding/organising a religious function or event in our homes. We have to run to Granthis or other knowledgeable persons and seek their help. But as a Sikh, isn't it our moral duty to be aware of all these rites, customs and traditions?

We have realised that all our weaknesses are primarily due to our gross ignorance of Sikh tenets, nor have we at anytime felt the need to acquire this most essential knowledge. If we are aware of our rich heritage, ideology and richness of our culture, we can at least educate our youth not to disrespect their hair, not to use intoxicants, wean them away from living Gurdoms. Our blood soaked history of sacrifices and extremely simple life style can surely be a very potent motivating force for them to come back into the fold of Sikh brotherhood. If Sikh youth is revolting against Sikhism, it is no fault of them. We are to blame. Our preachers are to blame. Our leaders too have failed who have not been able to instil greatness of Sikhism

into their mind.

We are neither getting the knowledge of Sikhism from our parents (because they too have gone far away from Sikhism) nor are we finding its propagation in Khalsa schools/colleges. Barring a few, a majority of them have not made adequate arrangement to pass on the knowledge of Sikhism to its students. And the sad part is that this awareness has not even dawned upon us. The involvement of Sikh institutions like traditional schools/colleges have virtually become zero. Sikhism should have been preached and propagated from Gurudwaras because it is one of their function. But the dissent among the management, desire to be at the helm of affairs, control of offerings, cliches and factions are all impediments in the path of effective spread of Sikh ideology. The youth is highly disappointed by the state of affairs and therefore are not prepared to be receptive. The preachers who are appointed in these places are illiterate mostly. If our preachers are bereft of worldly education, religious know how, practical aspects of life or the desire and involvement in the preaching, how can one expect that a sound impression would be created by them upon the young Sikhs. In reality, this field of preaching has more or less become a means of earning their livelihood. The real object of preaching in become extinct.

We most certainly feel surprised at the institutions of Christians and Islam who are responsible to produce missionaries of their religion. They have turned out lakhs of preachers after putting them through arduous training for eleven long years. In comparison, when we look at our own preachers, it dismays us no end. Our leaders have made no arrangements to train our missionaries. No college have been established for the purpose from where they can acquire much needed knowledge and training for propagation

of Sikhism. The non existence and non availability of well versed has impaired the spread of Sikhism which has all the potentials of becoming a Universal religion. What to speak of world over, it is not being propagated adequately in Panjab even.

Realising the foregoing shortcomings, Sikh Missionary College was commenced which organised a two year correspondence course for training missionaries. Well read and knowledgeable trained missionaries will work as elementary Sikh Missionaries. They will do their missionary assignment as part time preachers making themselves available from their professional occupation of earning livelihood. They will demand no fees and work in a voluntary capacity.