

# About the Sikh Shrines

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**Abstract – The Sikh Shrine is known as Gurudwara or a home of the Guru where the Guru himself lives. Its most important element is the presence of the Sikh mentors.**

**The Sikh believes that the prayers to God can be done anytime and anywhere. The main purpose of Gurudwara is congregational worship. Even a very small group of devotees inhabiting any place anywhere in world would generally build a temple for them to get together for religious or even for community purposes. The building of gurdwara can be simple which is decided by the local people of society. But the Sikhs would not stint in this matter and they have, therefore built many impressive Gurudwaras, which can accommodate thousands of devotees. Mostly important gurdwara are concerned with the ten Gurus or have other historical associations and are mammoth of pilgrimage.**

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The doors of Gurudwaras are open for all parts of the society; castes and creed do not matter in the gurdwara. In the house of the lord, all are equal, irrespective of their status in the world outside, on a visit to the temple. The covering of head is recognized as symbol of respect to the holy Granth Sahib and shoes are not allowed in the premises. Smoking is (taboo) and so also are (liquor) and other intoxicants.

There is no hereditary priestly section among the Sikhs. Anyone could work as a Granthi in a shrines or act as such on a given function; any person, who has knowledge the Granth Sahib, can conduct even the ceremonial function, such as on the function of a marriage. All Gurudwaras, however, employ priests, called (*Granthis*), so that someone can use all his time to the take care of the temple and to routine duties. The priest is expected to be well known with Granth sahib. Likewise, it is not compulsion that hereditary class of people for performing Gurbani kirtan in the temple. There are person who train themselves for *Gurbani kirtan* and are employed for the purpose but often enough even this duty is attended to by, any men and women from any, walks of life.

For the Sikh community, a Sikh shrines is not just a place of devotion; it is a also social institution. The gurdwara have donations at their disposal, which is offered by the people on special occasion or on daily bases. Some of the big Gurudwara have large, incomes and properties related to them which involve educational, medical and other institutions are funded by the gurdwaras. Some of the educational function on the shrines premises and often marriages and other ceremonies are performed in the Gurdwaras.

The fact is that the important Gurudwaras are either connected with one or the other striking incident in the lives of the Gurus themselves, or they have been

erected in memory of the numerous martyrs, who, gave up their lives under the trying circumstances, in defense of their faith, during the long period of persecution to which the Sikhs were subjected. Many of these martyrs are remembered in the daily prayers of the Sikhs.

Most of the historical Gurudwaras were built, towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> (century) and subsequently in the 19<sup>th</sup> (century). When the Sikhs had gained the political power in Punjab in 19<sup>th</sup> (century), they were built some beautiful Shrines. Some of these have been rebuilt in the last recent years with expensive use of marble for embellishment and durability.

Mostly the important historical Gurudwaras in Punjab are managed by the *Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak* Committee (SGPC), a statutory body elected from amongst the members of the Sikh community. The other Sikh Shrines generally have locally elected and registered the Sikh managing committees. The Sikh community had, however, to go through great suffering to acquire the management of these Gurudwaras in its own hands in the previous century. A hereditary group of '*Mahants*' had settled themselves in the Gurudwaras. They were dealing them as their personal right of property. The huge income from the rent of lands tender towards to the Gurudwara, and the donations of the devotees were used by the corrupt '*Mahants*' in pursuit of immoral rituals and in debauchery. A movement for the reform of the Sikh shrines and their management control was, therefore, launched. The colonial rulers backed the ('*Mahants*') for their, vested interest. The rescue of the Sikh Shrines from the hands of the '*Mahants*' was a matter of survival of the faith, believe and in this struggle they had to tolerate the wrath of both the strange rulers and the corrupt *Mahants* or priests. And then non-violent campaign

was established by the Sikhs in *Amritsar, Nankana Sahib* and where, thousands were beaten up very badly by the hired culprits of the '*Mahants*' and the police mans. A lot of people laid down their lives in the struggle, but the movement succeeded and eventually the management went into the hands of the community.

After the annexation of the (Punjab) to the British rulers in 1849 most of the management of the Gurdwaras had passed into the clutches of hereditary '*Mahants*' and the Government-elected managers. These '*Mahants*' had fallen prey to a number of social evils. No organized movement of reform could be launched against them for work of a general awakening among the Sikhs.[1] The Akali struggle for reform in the early twentieth century arose from such purely provincial movement as the Nirankari, the Namdhari and the Singh Sabha in conjunction with All-India movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, Dev Samaj and the Arya Samaj. The enhancing political consciousness and reaction to (nationalist) upsurge throughout, the country also played a big part. It was the increasing effect of these internal and external forces, which organizing an awakening among the Sikhs in the (Punjab) and also the desire among the Sikhs to reform their Gurdwaras.[2]

A socio-religious awakening brought about by the Singh Sabha movement made the Sikhs more conscious regarding their rights. The educated Sikh masses began to press gaining control of their Shrines. There were no rules for the administration of the Sikh Shrines.[3] The impatience generated by the Ghadr and Nationalist movement spurred the Sikh masses into jettisoning methods of petition and redress from courts of the law. There Akalis jathas, a militant order of ascetics, were Nihang or reckless soldiers of the Akal, or immortal, and played a significant role in the Sikh history. They ascribed their origin to the martial Guru Gobind Singh, and served as self-appointed guardians at the faith.[4]

The Sikh realized that any attempt at purification and improvement was not possible till the Shrines were freed from the control of '*Mahants*' and British Government. Hence they in the early decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century got awakened to this situation and resented against the increasing influence and interference of the '*Mahants*' and Government agencies in administering the Shrines with rise in the tempo of the struggle.[5]

The Akalis got strongly organized to reform the important Sikh Shrines even by force. The movement of Akalis gained impetus rapidly. The reformers did not have the patience to wait and they want to retrieve the important Shrines immediately from the clutches of the '*Mahants*'. Militant actions were started by the Akalis to restore the prominent or historical Shrines with their militant efforts they occupied the important Shrines one by one which were directly associated with the lives of the Gurus.[6]

## REFERENCE

1. Mohinder Singh, The Akali Movement, pp. 5-6
2. Ibid, p. 6
3. V. K. Gupta, The Sikhs and Gurudwara System, Anmol Publications Pvt. New Delhi, p. 47
4. 33 ibid, p. 47
5. V.K. Gupta, The Sikhs and Gurudwara System, p-48
6. Ibid, p. 48

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