



Akal Takht

For Prelims: [Akal Takht](#), [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee](#), [Guru Hargobind](#), [Guru Gobind Singh](#), [Maharaja Ranjit Singh](#), [Guru Granth Sahib](#)

For Mains: Governance and Autonomy of Religious Institutions, Interplay between Religion and Politics in India, Sikhism

Source: IE

Why in News?

The [Akal Takht](#), the supreme temporal and spiritual authority of the Sikh community, governed by the [Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee \(SGPC\)](#), has imposed religious punishment (**Tankha**) on Sukhbir Singh Badal, **President of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)**.

- This action comes as punishment for the alleged misgovernance during the SAD's tenure in Punjab (2007-2017).
- This has sparked discussions about the **Akal Takht's authority and its relationship with the SAD and the SGPC**.

What is the Akal Takht?

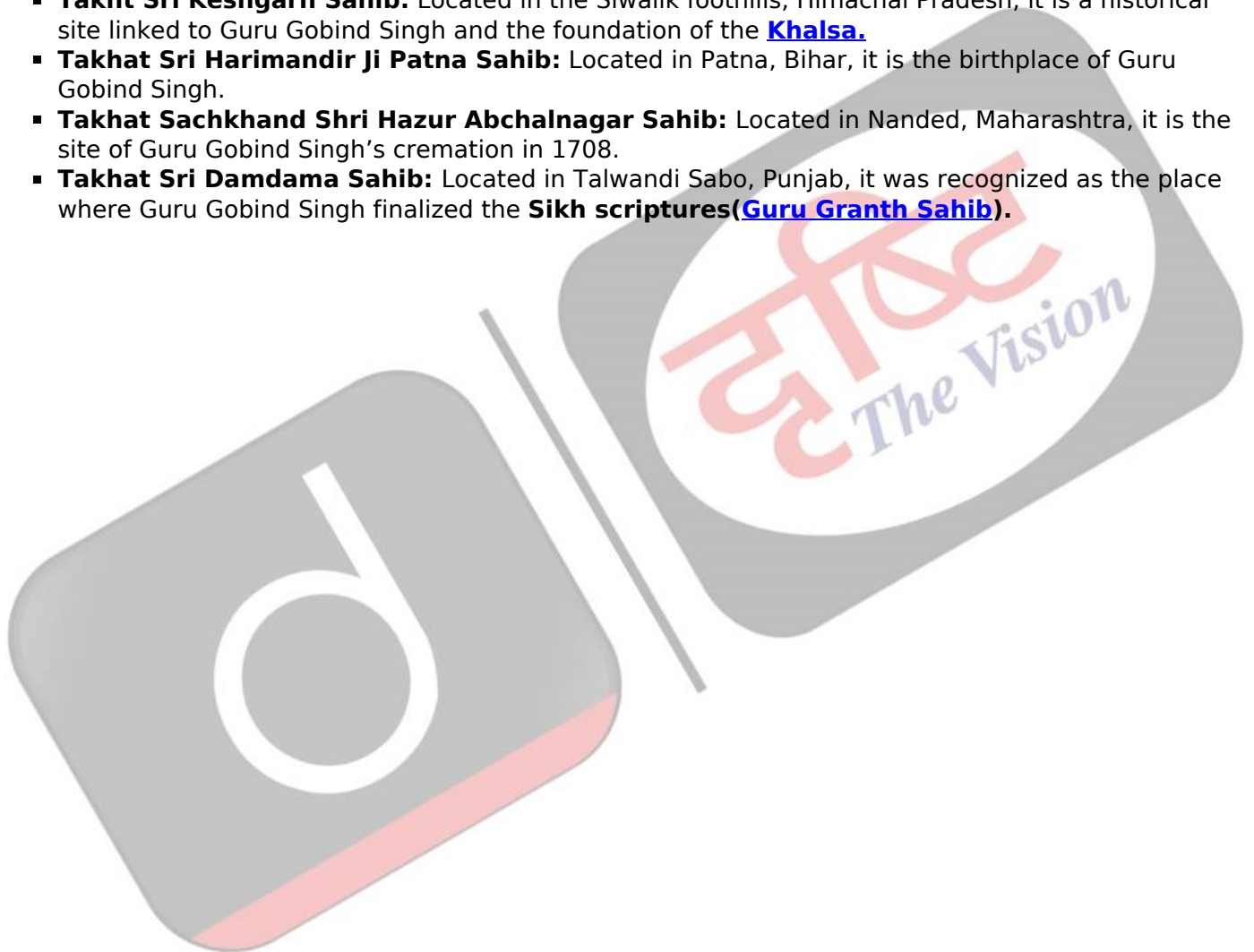
- **Historical Significance:** Akal Takht was established in 1606 by [Guru Hargobind](#), the **6th Sikh Guru**, in response to the execution of his father, **Guru Arjan Dev(5th Guru of the Sikhs)**, by the [Mughals](#).
 - Takht is a Persian word for **"imperial throne"**. Akal Takht is located in the **Golden Temple complex**, facing the Harmandir Sahib.
 - Created as a response to Mughal oppression, the **Akal Takht became a symbol of Sikh sovereignty and resistance**, serving as a platform for governance and justice.
- **Symbolism:** The Guru requested two swords, symbolizing **miri (temporal power) and piri (spirituality)**, with the miri sword shorter, signifying the primacy of spiritual authority.
 - **Akal Takht features a high throne**, three times taller than the maximum height allowed by **Mughal sovereignty**.
 - Its altitude surpasses that of the Mughal throne balcony in Delhi's Red Fort, **symbolizing defiance against Mughal rule** and asserting Sikh sovereignty.
- **Spiritual and Temporal Authority:** The Akal Takht is one of the **five Takhts** (seats of power) in Sikhism but holds the highest position due to its dual authority (spiritual guidance with temporal governance).
 - The tradition of issuing **Hukamnamas (edicts) began here**, symbolizing its supreme role in guiding the Sikh community.
- **Role After the 10th Guru:** The Akal Takht became a crucial center for Sikhs after the passing of [Guru Gobind Singh\(10th and last Guru\)](#).

- During turbulent times, such as the persecution of **Sikhs in the 18th century**, the Akal Takht became a rallying point for **Sarbat Khalsa** (general assembly of Sikhs) to **deliberate on critical issues**.
 - **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**, who ruled Punjab for almost four decades (1801-39), convened one of the **last Sarbat Khalsas in 1805**.
- **Role of the Akal Takht Jathedar:** The **Jathedar (head) of the Akal Takht** is empowered to summon Sikhs for moral and spiritual accountability and prescribe **punishment(Tankha)** to instill humility and discipline, this authority only applies to those who identify as a Sikh.
 - A Jathedar must be baptized, knowledgeable in Sikh scriptures, and maintain moral integrity. Initially appointed by **Sarbat Khalsa**, the Jathedar's appointment shifted to the **Darbar Sahib committee** under British influence. **Post-1925, the SGPC began appointing the Jathedar.**

Other 4 Sikh Takhts

- **Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib:** Located in the Siwalik foothills, Himachal Pradesh, it is a historical site linked to Guru Gobind Singh and the foundation of the **Khalsa**.
- **Takht Sri Harimandir Ji Patna Sahib:** Located in Patna, Bihar, it is the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh.
- **Takht Sachkhand Shri Hazur Abchnagar Sahib:** Located in Nanded, Maharashtra, it is the site of Guru Gobind Singh's cremation in 1708.
- **Takht Sri Damdama Sahib:** Located in Talwandi Sabo, Punjab, it was recognized as the place where Guru Gobind Singh finalized the **Sikh scriptures(Guru Granth Sahib)**.

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Ten Gurus of Sikh Religion

Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He was the first guru of Sikh and the founder of Sikh religion. ▪ He started the GURU KA LANGAR. ▪ He was the contemporary of Babur. ▪ Kartarpur corridor was commemorated on the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.
Guru Angad (1504-1552)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He invented the new script called Guru-Mukhi and popularized and expanded the system of Guru ka Langar.
Guru Amar Das (1479-1574)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He introduced the ceremony of the Anand Karaj Marriage. ▪ He abolished the custom of Sati and Purdah system among the Sikhs. ▪ He was a contemporary of Akbar.
Guru Ram Das (1534-1581)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He founded Amritsar in 1577 on the land granted by Akbar. ▪ He started the construction of Golden Temple/Swarna mandir at Amritsar.
Guru Arjun Dev (1563-1606)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He composed the Adi Granth in 1604. ▪ He led to the completion of construction of Golden temple. ▪ He was acclaimed as Shaheeden-de-Sartaj. ▪ He was executed by Jahangir on charges of helping prince Khusrau.
Guru Hargobind (1594-1644)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He led to the transformation of the Sikh Community into a Military community. He is known as "Soldier Saint". ▪ He led to the establishment of Akal Takht and fortified the Amritsar City. ▪ He waged wars against Jahangir and Shah Jahan.
Guru Har Rai (1630-1661)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He was a man of peace thus devoted most of his life in maintaining peace with Aurangzeb and doing missionary work.
Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He was the youngest guru of all and was given the title of Guru at a very early age of 5. ▪ He was summoned by Aurangzeb against anti-islamic blasphemy.
Guru Teg Bahadur (1621-1675)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He founded Anandpur Sahib.
Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ He founded a warrior community known as Khalsa in 1699. ▪ He introduced a new rite "Pahul". ▪ He joined Bahadur Shah's as a noble. ▪ He was the last Sikh Guru in human form and he passed the Guruship of Sikhs to the Guru Granth Sahib.



What is the Relationship Between the Akal Takht, SGPC, and SAD?

- **SGPC's Role in Sikh Governance:** Formed in **1920**, the SGPC was tasked with managing Sikh gurdwaras and upholding religious principles. Under the **Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925**, it gained **legal authority to appoint the Jathedar of the Akal Takht**.
 - The SGPC controls the finances and administration of major Sikh shrines in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Chandigarh.
- **SAD:** The SAD, established alongside the SGPC, initially functioned as its **political wing to mobilize Sikhs during the Gurdwara Reform Movement**.
- **Intertwined Relationship:** Control over the SGPC allows the SAD to influence appointments and decisions at the Akal Takht.
 - Critics argue that this relationship undermines the **independence of the Akal Takht's moral authority**, making it susceptible to political interference.

Gurdwara Reform Movement

- The Gurdwara Reform Movement, or Akali Movement, began in **1920 in Amritsar, Punjab**, led by Sikhs protesting against British control and corrupt mahants (priests) running Gurdwaras.
 - The movement sought to **reclaim Gurdwaras from British-backed mahants**, leading to the formation of the SGPC in November 1920.
- The Akali Movement was part of a larger wave of **religious reforms in colonial India**.
- It led to the **Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, which granted the Sikh community legal control over their Gurdwaras**, ending the hereditary control by mahants.

What Challenges Facing the Akal Takht and the SGPC?

- **Erosion of Autonomy:** Allegations of political interference in the Akal Takht's decisions have weakened its **moral standing within the Sikh community**.
 - The delayed SGPC elections have fostered perceptions of **nepotism and lack of transparency**.
- **Fragmentation of Sikh Leadership:** Disputes within the SGPC and between different factions of the Sikh community undermine the effectiveness and unity of these institutions.
 - Calls for reform and democratization within the SGPC and the Akal Takht are gaining momentum, particularly from the Sikh diaspora.
- **Relevance in a Changing World:** The Akal Takht faces the **challenge of asserting its authority within a globalized Sikh community**. This includes addressing social issues such as increasing drug addiction, and rising economic disparities, while upholding its core principles of justice, humility, and unity.

Way Forward

- **Independent Appointment of Jathedar:** Transitioning from SGPC-controlled appointments to a broader, community-driven process involving global Sikh representation.
 - Reinstating the practice of **Sarbat Khalsa assemblies** to ensure collective decision-making and minimize unilateral actions by political entities.
- **Democratic SGPC Elections:** Ensuring timely and transparent elections to prevent **long-term monopolization of power by any political party**.
- **Separation of Powers:** Establishing clear boundaries between the SGPC's administrative functions and the Akal Takht's spiritual and temporal authority.
- **Engagement with the Sikh Diaspora:** Leveraging the resources and perspectives of the global

Sikh community to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of Sikh governance.

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the significance of the Akal Takht in Sikh governance and its role in shaping the community and suggest measures to ensure its relevance in modern times.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following Bhakti Saints: (2013)

1. Dadu Dayal
2. Guru Nanak
3. Tyagaraja

Who among the above was/were preaching when the Lodi dynasty fell and Babur took over?

- (a) 1 and 3
(b) 2 only
(c) 2 and 3
(d) 1 and 2

Ans: (b)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/akal-takht>