

“the supremacy of the Akāl Takht”?

- The Akāl Takht is supreme for the following two reasons:
 - The Gurū Panth announces its decisions from there.
 - The *Jathedār* of Akāl Takht enforces the Gurū Panth’s decisions. While enforcing and implementing these decisions, the Akāl Takht *Jathedār* has the authority to stop their violation by all possible means. Thus, Akāl Takht is only the supreme authority to the extent that it has the power to implement the decisions of the Gurū Panth.

Is it possible to hold a Sarbat Khālsā in this day and age?

- This question should encourage discussion amongst class.

Sardār Raṇjīt Singh (ਸਰਦਾਰ ਰਣਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ), who ruled his people's hearts

During my visit to Pakistan, in 1983, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the people there regarded Raṇjīt Singh as “their” king in whose reign Pañjāb (ਪੰਜਾਬ) regained its lost glory. The guide at Lāhaur (ਲਾਹੌਰ) Fort described Raṇjīt Singh as the bravest and the most benevolent king of the 19th century. He said that the Pañjāb peasantry still remembered the king in whose rule the strong were just and the weak secure. A book entitled “The Real Raṇjīt Singh” by a Pākistānī historian, Sayad Fakīr Vāhedudīn (ਸਯਦ ਫਕੀਰ ਵਾਹੇਦੁਦੀਨ), the great grandson of Fakīr Azīzudīn (ਫਕੀਰ ਅਜੀਜ਼ੁਦੀਨ), Raṇjīt Singh's Foreign Minister, brings out the political character of Raṇjīt Singh, giving very intimate facts based on family records and archives. According to the book Raṇjīt Singh is fondly remembered by one and all, not only by people who once lived there but also by those who still reside there. Even during his conquests he was regarded more as a liberator than a conqueror, as at Peshāvar (ਪੇਸ਼ਾਵਰ), Multān (ਮੁਲਤਾਨ) or Kashmīr (ਕਸ਼ਮੀਰ). Wherever the soldiers of Raṇjīt Singh went they were treated as friends, not foes. Raṇjīt Singh's standing orders to his armies were that during their movement, no religious place, no religious book, no place of learning, no standing crop was to be destroyed and no woman dishonoured.

Capital punishment was abolished. “Never was so large an empire built with so little criminality”, says Henry T. Prinsep. Raṇjīt Singh is not known to have taken anybody's life although his own life was attempted at more than once. His special care for the *Kisān* (ਕਿਸਾਨ) (farmer) and the *Javān* (ਜਵਾਨ) (soldier) made Pañjāb a very liveable place. The result was that people from Dillī, UP and Rājsthān (ਰਾਜਸਥਾਨ) came and settled in Pañjāb. George Keene, a very keen observer of the Pañjāb scene, states: “In hundreds and in thousands the orderly crowds stream on. Not a bough is broken of a wayside tree, not a rude remark to a woman”. Writing sixty years after Raṇjīt Singh's death, Griffin said: “His name is a household word in the province. His portrait is preserved in the castle and in the cottage alike.” Jacquemont, the French botanist who came from Paris to Pañjāb in search of roses and who met Raṇjīt Singh, said, “His conversation is a nightmare. He passes from one subject to another with the speed of a tornado. He remembers by heart the names of all the villages of his empire, the village heads, the cash crops, the flora and the fauna.” He was a modern mind unfettered by nationalities, religion and faiths, an internationalist who looked much beyond his frontiers.

The French visitor called Raṇjīt Singh “the first inquisitive Indian” who completely identified himself with the joys and sorrows of his people. Magnanimous to the fallen foe and generous to the injured and the insulted, Raṇjīt Singh was the last Indian king in whose reign the common man felt real freedom. The repartee and the freedom of speech that existed in the court of Raṇjīt Singh could be the envy of any parliamentary forum.

Raṇjīt Singh was one of those rare rulers who remained humane even on the battlefield. He possessed an informal yet disciplined mind, with a hilarious yet an equable temperament, humorous yet not given to levity. A man of unusual presence of mind and exceptional balance, he could surprise even the wittiest Westerner. When Dr. Joseph Wolffe asked the Pañjāb ruler what was the easiest way to reach God, the shrewd king replied: “By immediately concluding an alliance with the East India Company!” His retorts were gentle, his humour pungent. A son of the soil, his humour was an integral part of the Pañjābī character. Like all Pañjābīs, he loved the banter and burlesque, yet suffered no fools.

When his Muslim wife, formerly a courtesan, asked him where he was when the God Almighty was distributing beauty, the Raṇjīt Singh twinkled his only eye and said: “I had gone in search of a kingdom.” And what a great kingdom he established. During his 40-year rule there was not a single

communal riot in his kingdom, no forced conversion, no second-class citizenry, no disrespect to a shrine or a mosque. On the other hand he donated several mounds of gold for the Vishvanāth (ਵਿਸ਼ਵਨਾਥ) Temple at Banāras (ਬਨਾਰਸ) and Sarasvatī Mandir (ਸਰਸਵਤੀ ਮੰਦਿਰ) at Kurukshetra (ਕੁਰੁਕਸ਼ੇਤ੍ਰ). He gave liberal grants to mosques and the Madrasās (ਮਦਰਸਾ) (Muslim schools). He was a far-sighted man who made many Pañjābīs learn English. He established the first printing press in Gurmukhī (Pañjābīs language script) at Lāhaur. He respected talent and asked the Pañjābīs traders to go abroad and trade with other nations. He, thus, freed Pañjāb from the slavery of eight centuries, brought peace and prosperity to the land of five rivers. The ravaged fields smiled once again, Pañjāb once again became the cherished “golden sparrow”.

Raṇjīt Singh had a tender heart. He released the young cub, which he had caged with care. Asked why, he said: “The lioness, the cub’s mother, had been crying and wailing throughout the night. I could not bear the cries of a mother.” Nobody could shoot a sailing swan or hurt a singing nightingale. With the onset of Monsoon he would order a 102-gun salute to the rising moon. No king anywhere had done it before or ever since.

The Indian Prince of Haidrābād (ਹੈਦਰਾਬਾਦ), the *Nizām* (ਨਿਜ਼ਾਮ), extended his hand of friendship to him and sent enormous gifts. The Kings of Nepāl, Burmā, the Czar of Russia and the Emperor of France wanted their embassies to be established at Lāhaur. When Fakīr Azīzudīn, Raṇjīt Singh emissary, was asked by Lord Auckland at Simlā (ਸਿਮਲਾ) which of the Raṇjīt Singh’s eyes was missing”, he replied: “The Raṇjīt Singh is like the Sun. The Sun has only one eye. The splendour and the luminosity of his single eye is so much that I have never dared to look at the other eye!” Lord Auckland was so pleased with the reply that he gave his wristwatch to Raṇjīt Singh’s emissary as a present.

No wonder that when he fell seriously ill in the summer of 1839, there were continuous prayers, non-stop recitations in the temples, the mosques and the *Gurduārās* for the recovery of their own Bādshāh (ਬਾਦਸ਼ਾਹ) (King).

On 27th June, 1839, he breathed his last. He died 159 years ago. But he is still the ruler of the mind of Pañjāb, nay the whole of India.

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Source: India Perspective

A Critical Analysis of Raṇjīt Singh and His Reign

The reign of Raṇjīt Singh is popularly considered the Golden Age of Sikh (ਸਿਖ) leadership and government. Sardār Raṇjīt Singh is often romanticized as the ideal Sikh leader and his reign is often nostalgically referred to as a peaceful and utopian *Khālsā Rāj* (ਖਾਲਸਾ ਰਾਜ). In fact, many sources, both scholarly and non-scholarly, are reluctant to mention Raṇjīt Singh’s shortcomings. Instead, these sources dwell upon the non-discriminatory nature of Raṇjīt Singh’s rule and the genius with which he was able to unite the Sikh principalities in Pañjāb. While Raṇjīt Singh was certainly a charismatic and intelligent ruler, he was not an ideal Sikh and his rule was, in fact, less favorable and more damaging to Sikhī (ਸਿਖੀ).

The four decades of kingdom under Raṇjīt Singh symbolised the crowning of the Sikh effort to seize power. It was the first time that an indigenous rule was established in the province which put Pañjāb on the map of the world. Raṇjīt Singh achieved his dominance in the Pañjāb through his shrewdness and pragmatism. By the time Raṇjīt Singh came into power, Sikhism had been heavily infiltrated by