

RESPONSE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TOWARD MORCHA OF JAITO

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Abstract:

History is the series of events. Since the beginning of mankind many historical events took place in the history. The *Morcha of Jaito* is one among of them. *Morcha*" means a peaceful agitation/demonstration, and "Jaito" refers to the place where this demonstration took place. The ruler of Nabha Maharaja Ripudman Singh had sympathy for the *Gurudwara* reform (or) *Akali* movement with the result the British Government forced him to abdicate on July, 1923. The *Akalis* launched an agitation in his favor which is known as '*Jaito Da Morcha*' on 9th September Nabha day was observed by the Sikh panth. The Sikhs started *Akhand Path* of '*Shri Guru Granth Sahib*' in the *Gurudwara* of *Gangsar, Jaito*. The British Govt. Proclaimed the S.G.P.C and *Akali Dal* unlawful bodies. on 21st February 1924 a *Jatha* of 500 Sikhs proceeded forward to Jaito while reciting *Gurbani*. In the government action, many Sikhs were martyred while many were injured. Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, K. Sathnam and Dr. Kitchlu also visited *Jaito* and participated in the *Morcha*. They were detained and kept custody for some time. (Pt Moti lal Nehru, AT Gidwani, Pandit madan mohan malaviya, Mian Fazal-i-Husain, Noor Muhmad nama Nigar, Amin Muhmed ,Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Mr. Jimand editor of new York times American newspaper,) The *Jathas* of Sikhs from outside also began to come. Sixteen *Jathas* of 500 Sikhs each took part in the *Morcha of Jaito*. The Government tried to stop that *Morcha* but Sikhs kept up their confidence and the efforts of William Birdwood as well as Government were failed. At last the Government was successful to get agreement of Sikhs and passed the *Gurdwaras* Reform Act 1925.

Methodology : Proposed study is based on the primary and secondary sources, those I collected all sources from many libraries of different Universities like as Bhai Kahan Singh Nabha Library of Punjabi University, Patiala, Bhai Gurdas Library of Guru Nanak University, Amritsar, Joshi Library of Punjab University, Chandigarh, Punjab State Archives of Patiala. I also visited these historical place of Jaito. I collected the relevant data from different sources analysing these fact to complete my research q

Conclusion: The *Morcha of Jaito* is an important event in the history which was took place in 1923 to 1925. This event plays an important role in changing the policies of British Government and to give a stable platform to Sikhs in form of *Gurudwara* Reform Act 1925 and S.G.P.C. which is working for Sikhs till now. After this event, The Sikhs were enable to get permanent law for themselves in the form of *Gurudwara* Act 1925. So it is very important to study this event.

Keywords: Gurudwara, Morcha of Jaito, Sikh, Jathas, Gurbani, Maharaja

Growing rise in the struggle to improve every day, a union representative with possession of reformers on the most sacred shrines of the Sikhs was the need to establish an organization that works to improve at various levels and keep pace. Requiring such organization as important as the Golden Temple at Amritsar and *Akal Takhat* came in possession of the *Akali* reformers. Emerging *Akali* Leaders saved the opportunities and Harimander Sahib and *Akal Takhat* came in the possession of *Akalis*. For the management of other *Gurudwaras*, a gathering including all local Sikhs were called before *Akal Takhat Sahib* to establish a local committee on 15 November, 1920.¹

According to basic plan *Akali Jathebandies* called a gathering at *Akal Takhat Sahib* on 15-16 November and about 10,000 Sikhs participated from the whole country.²

On the other hand, Punjab Government that was already in the contact of Viceroy and members of its council to get the supervision of their policy, had decided to stop the gathering of *Akalis* and they after consulting with Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala announced their own Dynamic Advisory Committee and already established a committee including 36 members.³

But *Akali* Leaders rejected the said 36 membered committee, they established a committee including 175 members. 36 members of the committee of Government also joined the Sikh committee. Sardar Sunder Singh Majithia was appointed as President of Committee, Sardar Harbans Singh Atari was appointed as Vice President and Sunder Singh as Secretary.⁴

Government had the satisfaction that Committee President and all its members were known because of their peaceful mind and they had the compromising behaviour towards *Akali Lahar*/movement. In new S.G.P.C. committee, there was a number of peace loving members and its new reform movement did not oppose the Government. But there was a new twist in the last days of year 1920, some bold leaders like Teja Singh Bhuchar and Kartar Singh Jhabbar started a new campaign to get the *Gurudwaras* free from the *Mahants*. *Diwan* that was conducting according to Non cooperation programme of Mahatama Gandhi, became a centre of religious and political preaching for the Sikh community. Government was upset due to that sudden changing.⁵

In the meeting held on 20th March, 1921, S.G.P.C. demanded a law to get all *Gurudwaras* free from the *Mahants* and to release all Sikh leaders who were arrested by the Government. They declared, if Government failed to do so, they would hold the way of non cooperation. Officials got upset from the said threat of the S.G.P.C., because earlier congress had been using Sikh leaders and soldiers as volunteers of Non-cooperation and *Khilafat* movement. Election of S.G.P.C. in July 1921 was done as per new constitution (There was a condition in new constitution that four members of total five members were chosen from Sikh communities from different places and further these chosen members had selected a member).⁶

During the poles, there were some issues like better management of *Gurudwaras* and bureaucracy of *Mahants*, *Saka of Nankana Sahib* and after that policy of suppression, arresting of supporters of *Akali Lahar*, supporting of *Mahants* and bureaucracy, all these facts motivated the Sikhs to get down the level of their combat.⁷

Khilafat Seminar, Muslim League and Sikh League also passed resolution in favour of *Akalis*. Whereas S.G.P.C. provided the *Akalis* an organized *Jathebandi*. On the other hand, *Shiromani Akali Dal*

provided their control to organize them in small *Jathas*/groups and they lead the Sikhs on every defense.⁸

Akali leaders and S.G.P.C. members to get the support and *sympathy* for the success of their Lahars/movements, published newspapers namely *Akali*, *The Tribune*, *Kesri*, *Milap*, *Jimidar*, *Bande Matram* etc. In the year 1924, *Akalis* started a newspaper *Hindustan Times* and they expressed their interest in *The Nation* newspaper of Lahore. Some main leaders of S.G.P.C. joined the newspaper. Mehtab Singh, Bawa Harikrishan, Mangal Singh, Teja Singh Samundari, Giani Sher Singh also joined the director's post of these newspapers. A new zeal was mounted as all news of incidents from various places started coming to *Akalis* and newspapers played their best role to unite the Sikhs.⁹

After successful demonstration of peaceful job of non cooperation the *Saka of Nankana Sahib*, and movement of *Guru Ka Bagh*, the lead of S.G.P.C. came in the hands of members of Non cooperation and *Garam Khialis* who wanted the aim of religious reforms as national freedom. Their aim was to possess their religious places and to fight against the British bureaucracy.¹⁰

It was the primary aim that *Garam Khialis* members of S.G.P.C. raised a question regarding reinstatement of king of Nabha, but some members of S.G.P.C. raised objection regarding that. They called it a political issue, but *Garam Khialis* members gave their advice that they would take up any issue to fight against the bureaucracy of foreigners and according to that a front known as *Jaito da Morcha* was started at Nabha.¹¹

Government got down Maharaja Ripudaman Singh from the throne and sent him to Dehradun and handed over the management of Nabha to Mr. Johnston. S.G.P.C. wanted the enquiry of this matter and raised a demand before the Government that they would have established a committee for enquiry and in which half of members were to be selected from S.G.P.C. When S.G.P.C. did not receive any answer to their letter, in the month of August 1923, S.G.P.C. passed a resolution before all the gathering that "Maharaja Nabha was forcibly brought down from the throne. S.G.P.C. declared that Government wrongly took advantage of dispute of Maharaja Patiala to snatch the throne of Nabha. Now S.G.P.C. fully came into knowledge that this act of Government was a blow on the face of Sikh state and its unity. S.G.P.C. sent a message against the act and conduct of Government and regarding Maharaja Sahib, his forefathers and his state for *sympathy*.¹²

S.G.P.C. gave its rights to Clerk committee to enquire the matter regarding Nabha and atrocities conducted with the Sikhs by the Government.¹³ S.G.P.C. sent a message to Sikh community to sympathise with Maharaja Nabha and to celebrate the Nabha Day. They organized *Akhand Path* at Jaito for protest, but police reached the spot and arrested the *Granthi* and *Sikhs* and disrupted the *Path* ceremonies and it forced the S.G.P.C. to plan a front. S.G.P.C. declared until Government did admit its guilt, the *Path* ceremonies would be played continuously. In the beginning, S.G.P.C. started sending *Jatha* of 20/25 *Sikhs* so that they may reinstate the religious freedom.¹⁴

On the other hand, Government stated that it was a political uprising. Whenever Sikhs reached Nabha front, police arrested them and left them a distant away or sent them into prison without any food. All movements and Front of Jaito upset the Government and it decided to take drastic action. But suddenly on 12 Oct. 1923 Government declared that S.G.P.C., *Akali Dal* and other Sikh *Jathebandies* were illegal, but *Akalis* sent the *Jathas* continuously and Government arrested all the powerful *Akali* leaders.¹⁵

Atrocities upon the *Akalis* at Nabha had become the main issue in India. Congress leaders had shown their interest in the *Akalis* from the beginning and at that time so many *Akalis* were the leaders of Congress. All India Congress Seminar was conducted at Delhi in the year 1923, where Congress leaders decided to support the *Akalis* in every way. Doctor Kichlu gave his report regarding this, and some Congress leaders reached the spot along with J.L. Nehru, Prof. Gidwani, K. Satnam, Darbara Singh Mallan, where Government arrested them.¹⁶

It is worth mentioning here that behavior of the Hindustan Government was in favour of the Sikhs. Government thought that powers given to the *Akalis* by the non cooperation wave of Congress would increase the movement of freedom in India. Congress leaders also had the faith that without helping the *Akalis*, their movement toward Northern India would be ended.¹⁷

On 26th February, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya made his statement regarding martyrdom of Jaito front in full detail at Legislative Assembly Delhi. He raised charge upon the Government that they had given freedom to Administrator to stop Sikhs to enter *Gurudwara Sahib*. The sikhs did not conduct any illegal Act and they stood before the enemy of Government bravely. Any officer did not say that man of Government had been martyred. According to report of those people who were present there, that minimum 21 Sikhs from the *Jatha* had died and about 150 Sikhs were injured. He stated that it has come to know that about 150 Sikhs were killed and some were buried in the ground and some Sikhs were left at some unknown place. Mr. Lenzubni Labbar, M.P. Jaito also submitted a work stopping resolution and he put a question regarding enquiry of Jaito Front. *He stated in his examination that " he heard from the under secretary of Punjab that gathering people were having weapons. As a result 21 had died and 31 got injured, but the unique thing was that there was crowd of people and the police but why any army man or policeman did not get injury?, Under Secretary of Punjab said that we did not hurt any Sikh, but how 21 people had died and 33 injured."*¹⁸

As per *Akali* newspaper, on 28 February 1924, All India Working Committee Seminar was held under the supervision of Maulana Muhhamad Ali in which a resolution regarding *sympathy* with Sikhs had been passed and were given promise to give every type of help. Maulana Shaukat Ali President of *Khilafat* Committee also expressed his *sympathy* with Sikhs. Maulana sent a call to S.G.P.C. that if they shoot *Akali Jatha*, it was not an attack on the honour of Sikhs, rather it was an attack on the honour of India.¹⁹

On 2nd March, there was a heavy gathering at Kolkata, in which Des Bandhu, C.R. Dass, Shiam Sunder, Kharakvarti, Santosh Babu, Hemant Kumar and Maulvi Nasirudin submitted their suggestions and submitted a resolution that, "joint gathering of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs of Kolkata showed its protest for shoot out of Sikhs who were going to *Gurudwara Sahib* for *Path* and they gave hearty congratulations to *Akali* sikhs who peacefully achieved martyrdom for the safety of religion."²⁰

British Government thought the unity of *Akali* and Congress as a danger. Congress and volunteers of *Khilafat Tehrik* were declared illegal by the Government. With that the S.G.P.C. and its presidents and staff members got arrested by the Government and were sent in to prison and planted false cases against them in U/S 120B/129A/124A/17A/17B etc. Police raided the office of S.G.P.C. took all documents in their possession. Sardar Harbans Singh Satnami a member of S.G.P.C. was arrested at Iran and brought back to Punjab. All arrested leaders convicted for the period of 2 ½ years and fined for Rs. 3000/- each.²¹

S.G.P.C. stated in its announcement that, all Sikhs should have to come in battle field for their religious freedom. On 23 February, Swami Onkar published true brief of front of Jaito in the paper of his son, and Government lodged a case against editor Swami Onkar Nand and Printer Durga Dass and both were convicted for the period of two years and fined of Rs. 500/- each²². At this, Maulana Zaffar Ali Khan published a Nazam in his paper that,

*“Kate Hai Jis Kadar Sir Gangsar De Gurdware Mein,
Hai Darj un Sabh Ki Kurbanī Saja ke Goshware Mein”²³*

Congress working committee released *Akali Sahayak Fund*. On 14th December 1923, Pandit Moti Lal Nehru came to Amritsar Sahib to meet the president of first S.G.P.C. *Jatha*, but Government did not allow him to meet with the leaders. On 29th December 1923, a seminar was conducted to express *sympathy* with *Akali Lahar*, in which Dr. Kichlu stated that Government challenged association and *Mazhab* by declaring S.G.P.C. against the law. *Akalis* started civil disobedience, so without which they couldnot achieve independence. Smt. Naidu stated that,

“History of Sikh Community was the history of a brave community and this community was made by sorrows and troubles.”

Earlier Mahatama Gandhi realised that Brave Sikhs would not remain peaceful. When other community raised disputes, then brave Sikhs faced all things in peaceful manner although they were having swords in their hand. Secret of the success of *Akali Lahar* was in their unity.²⁴

After the arrest of 6th *Jatha*, compromise talks began. Government established a committee under the supervision of Sir William Birdwood that he would talk with president of Sikhs, but due to some reasons matter was not compromised. Main reason was that there was so many atrocities on the Sikhs prisoners. Due to that, protest was increased rapidly in the Sikhs. Government sent all in the prisons. After sending 13th *Jatha*, the 14th *Jatha* was late and Government started rumours that S.G.P.C. did not have a man to send and coming of *Jatha* was ended and Government won the front with its power.²⁵

At that time, Government tried to divide the Sikhs. It established a fake *Jatha* and tried to start the *Path*, but they failed to do so. On 26th October, that *Jatha* walked from Amritsar and Sikhs raised heavy protest against it but under the protection of police, this *Jatha* reached Jaito and they started the *Path*. On the other hand, S.G.P.C. sent a special *Jatha* including 60 Sikhs to Jaito, they were arrested by the Government at arrival. In *Jatha* Government arrested Sikh men and also arrested Mai Chand Kaur and other Sikh ladies, therefore, this front became more powerful.²⁶

Sir Malkam Hally, Governor of Punjab, also sent some members from Central Assembly and Counsel of State to Jaito and tried to explain the Sikhs that some Sikhs might go to *Gurudwara Gangsar* and start the *Path*, then Government would withdraw all restrictions. Mr. Wilson Johnston also requested that *Jatha* including 50 Sikhs could go to *Gurudwara* and could perform *Akhand Path*, but no Akali was ready to do so.²⁷

On the one side, Government had trouble to keep increasing number of *Akalis* in prisons, on the other hand, there were some political troubles which forced Government to think about the issue of Jaito Front. Government proceedings of Jaito, Nabha State, arrest and custody of people in a big number without any case etc. gave benefit to nationalist members of legislative assembly of India and some others to disobey

the rules of Government. Finally, Government had to bow before the enthusiasm of *Akalis*, Congress, *Khilafat*, and Cooperation of Muslims. Pandit Mohan Malaviya was ready to talk through Jodh Singh and privately he was ready to submit Sikh *Bill* before the Assembly but Hally was not ready to lose that opportunity, so he ready William *Birdwood* to meet Sikhs, to win the confidence of Sikhs and to submit the proposal to end the front.²⁸

Whereas Government was ready to make compromise with the *Akali* leaders, their obstacle was of Nabha state. The *Akalis* and the British Government were ready to compromise the matter with fixed conditions. There in the matter of Nabha, Government was not ready to do so till *Akali* did not leave the question of reinstatement of Maharaja Nabha. Second trouble was that to end the *Path* at *Gurudwara* Sahib, there was less time and quantity of members who were sanctioned for entering in *Gurudwara*.²⁹

At that time, official of Nabha state and *Akali* leaders were busy in consulting about different issues and after submission of *Bill* of Sikh *Gurudwara* and religious places other issues were solved. After passing the *Bill*, Bhai Jodh Singh, Sardar Narain Singh and other Sikh members of Legislative Assembly met *Akali* leaders in the *Jails*. They started departing *Jatha* for passing of *Bill*. Bhai Jodh Singh along with Wilson Johnston arranged the material for Akhand *Path*. First *Jatha* departed from *Akal Takhat Sahib* under the supervision of Bhai Jodh Singh and on 21st July, 1925 arrived Jaito. One another *Jatha* arrived on the same day and on 27th July, 1925 other *Jathas* after being released from Jails arrived Jaito. On 6th August, 1925 matter of *Akali* and Government was ended at the time of 101 Akhand *Path* ceremonies.³⁰

The social and religious life of people could never be separated from the political life. In the development of the *Morcha of Jaito*, various organizations played an important role. *Akali Dal*, S.G.P.C. and the British government were the primary participants in the struggle but later Congress also joined the struggle and helped the Sikhs in one way or the other. It was generally agreed that S.G.P.C. and *Akali Dal* had their roots in the Sikh religion. Not only they get the financial help from the Sikhs but also contributed a lot to solve the problems of the Sikhs as well as to grant them power.

Akali Dal has been considered the political wing of the Sikhs while S.G.P.C. is considered a religious organisation of the Sikhs. Since the time of the formation of S.G.P.C. and *Akali Dal*, the Sikhs have obtained a proper direction as well as power. Both of these organizations have started many movements for the upliftment of the Sikhs.

The British government had always been against the Sikhs and it tried to create hurdles in the progress of the Sikhs. Consequently the British government tried its best that S.G.P.C. and *Akali Dal* might not be formed, but the struggle and sacrifice of the Sikhs compelled the government to be at backfoot.

The wrong policies of British Government were opposed by various organization in Punjab as well as in India. Leaders of *Akali Dal*, members of S.G.P.C. and the leaders of Indian National Congress revolted against the wrong policies regarding Sikhs and the Punjab. The formation of S.G.P.C. helped the Sikhs to create an atmosphere of revolution against the British Government. The role of various *Jathas* in the development of Sikhism can never be forgotten.

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