

## Political Aspects of Sikh State in Prem Sumarag

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Sikh religion is one of the important religions of the world, which is originated in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Punjab region of the Indian sub-continent. Nowadays, Sikhs are found in every corner of the world. Guru Nanak Devji, 1<sup>st</sup> Guru of the Sikhs, was the founder of Sikh religion. The Sikhism grew under the guidance of the successors of Guru Nanak Devji. The last and tenth Guru Gobind Singhji formalized the religious practices and declared some new obligations on Baisakhi of 1699 with the foundation of Khalsa and Sikhs got a distinct identity. Before his death in 1708, Guru Gobind Singhji bestowed the Guruship to Guru Granth Sahib (Holy Scripture of the Sikhs) and ordered the Khalsa to consider the Granth as Guru.

After the death of tenth guru, there was a period of continuous struggle for Sikhs with Mughals and Afghans. There was need of time to produce an accurate portrayal of Sikh code of conduct to demarcate the Khalsa from the rest of the society. So many Rahitnamas were written time to time. Rahitnama is a book which contains the provisions or rules which must be followed by a Sikh as an individual and also a member of the society. Prem Sumarag is one of these Rahitnamas, which deals with social, economic, religious as well as political aspects of the ideal Sikh community.

My present paper 'Political Aspects of Sikh State in Prem Sumarag', is based on the published version of 'Prem Sumarag', edited by Bhai Randhir Singh (Doomchheri) in 1965. The Prem Sumarag is regarded as detailed blueprint of norms of ideal Sikh State and also a comprehensive document that gives a lot of information on religious, social and political life of the Sikhs.<sup>i</sup> It gives a lot of information on political aspect of Sikh State. However, it has been written under the influence of Hindu sanatan philosophy which undoubtedly reflects in most of the Sikh literature. In Prem Sumarag the author gives a comprehensive model of administration of Sikh polity, in which he deals with the duties of a King, his living life style and his responsibilities towards his subjects. Furthermore, he gives details of the ministers and their ranks. Astonishingly, it seems that the author's administrative detail glimpses of his administrative background as well as his belonging to a Khatri family.

The author of Prem Sumarag wants that the political power was to be in the hands of the Sikhs and he advocates the monarchy. He uses Maharaja, Raja and Patishah words for the King. First of all, the author gives the reference of Raja Janak, Prahilad and Bibhichhan (the younger brother of Ravan) and says that such rulers will take birth and will get liberation (Sahaj yoga) and discover everything within and without his body.<sup>ii</sup> Obviously, the ruler should not indulge in worldly things. Whatever happens with him should happily be taken as sweet Will of God.<sup>iii</sup>

The author explains that the king should follow the fixed norms of justice and conduct faithfully. First of all, the ruler should have complete control over his functionaries and subjects. He should draw up his daily time table clearly specifying therein separate time for his each engagement he is to perform, namely taking meals, looking into previous day's financial transactions, listening to exposition of the Vedas, engaging to recreation, discussing state affairs with his nobles (umarao) and lastly attending his haram (zanana).<sup>iv</sup> It reveals that the author was quite aware as to how to utilize his day time efficiently and systematically. With regard to statesmanship, the King should treat his subordinates honorably, who dress well and discharge their duty justifiably. This is also an effective feature of statecraft.<sup>v</sup>

The author explains the epithets by which the royal women should be addressed. She who belongs to the palace of the Raja (zanana mahal), should be addressed as (maharani rajeshwari). If she belongs to Prince's palace, she should be called the prince's queen (kumar-rani) while wife of brother of king as (bhrant-rani) and palaces of the Prime Minister (wazir) and the commanders (balwantkarris) should be titled as the Singh-mahal. The mother of the Maharaja should be addressed as the royal mother Maharani (rajmata maharani).<sup>vi</sup>

It is incumbent upon the king that he should not keep the company of any other woman except with whom he was actually and initially married.<sup>vii</sup> He can remarry if his first wife produces no children or no son. The author emphasizes that the king should not keep a woman in the zanana mahal without her husband.<sup>viii</sup> The king should never go to a prostitute. Any woman and man should not remain unmarried. She should lead a life of chastity even she has not married. The king should maintain this kind of standard perpetuating in his kingdom.<sup>ix</sup>

Justice is another aspect that is considered as the sacred duty of a King. According to author of Prem Sumarag, the King should feel obliged to the Almighty who bestowed upon him the authority of deliverance of justice to all. The author mentions that the Almighty (sachche patshah) will call upon the king in His court to give total account of his good deeds and bad deeds which he has been extending to his subjects during the period of his kingship regardless of their status.<sup>x</sup> According to him, if a king is not able to deliver justice, then he will be severely punished in the end and will be reborn as pig or a dog.<sup>xi</sup>

The King should treat his officials in well manner. The Maharaja should do riding, holding court and dispensing court with his symbols of authority. He should establish diwan sarbang (court of every virtue) on the high place with a throne inlaid with jewels, where no one can approach. All his wazirs, vakils, commanders, princes and royal brothers should stand according to their symbol of authority.<sup>xii</sup>

When the Maharaja holds the court, the drums should beat, dancing girls should perform, hymns should be sung, scholars should read from the Vedas and all the retinue members should present there.<sup>xiii</sup> He should also patronage to artists and employ Kirtan singers. The Maharaja should also keep attractive and beautiful *Patran* (dancing girls).<sup>xiv</sup>

The Ruler should appoint *Niauwant* on the throne of justice and the seal of justice inscribed with 'The seal of justice, by the authority of 'Sri Guru Akal Purakh' should be handed over to him.<sup>xv</sup> Whosoever is summoned by *Niauwant* (the chief justice) must be present in the court whether he be the Maharaja or his relative or a powerful person.<sup>xvi</sup>

If any complaint should be brought against the *Niauwant*, then the Maharaja, *wazir* or *Disawant* should hear his complaint. Then the *Maharaja-Patshah* should initiate enquiry of the petition filed by the person who met out injustice.<sup>xvii</sup> The king should never spare even his close relations and retribution should be met out for the offence.<sup>xviii</sup> The author recommends that five witnesses should also be summoned and examined in the interest of justice. In the event, the statement of any witness is found incorrect; he will be penalized along with the complainant so that they cannot dare commit the crime or mislead the system of justice for their parochial interests in the future.<sup>xix</sup>

The author visualizes that the King is an institution around which state administration revolves and he maintains the record of his kingdom in a chosen language. The author's writing reveals that he is talking about the Sikh state and it should do its best to promote the use of Punjabi in Gurumukhi script in all spheres. All official records and correspondence (*kitab chhthi*) should also be done in Gurumukhi.<sup>xx</sup>

The author of *Prem Sumarag* explains as to how the order passed by the Maharaja should bear the seal (*muhar*) as well signature (*daskhat*) of the exalted Maharaja on which the order of the Maharaja (*mahahukam*) should specifically be inscribed.<sup>xxi</sup> If the letter is written under the wazir's seal that should also be signed by the Maharaja with remarks on it that it is a order of the Maharaja. The oral order of the Maharaja which in official parlance is called '*hasbulhukam*' (in accordance with order of Maharaja) should be handed over to the concerned person.<sup>xxii</sup> If any concerned person does not obey it then the Maharaja should punish him suitably. The defaulter should be dismissed from service and his property should be confiscated.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The author of *Prem Sumarag* cautions the king that he should remain vigilant whether his royal brothers (*raj bhrat*) and princes (*raj kumar*) are not conspiring to topple his authority.<sup>xxiv</sup> People should only be allowed to get together at funerals, fests and liturgical purposes.<sup>xxv</sup> For the stability and firmness of the authority, it is must that if anyone dares to resist should be hanged and his property be confiscated thereby ensuring peace in his realm.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The Maharaja should order to collect the data from the cities and villages regarding how many people have no clothes, foods, employment and poor unable to marry his daughter. An official (*mussadi*) of charitable department (*bakhsdaan*) should also be appointed authorizing him to meet the demands of such needy persons from the state exchequer.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The author of *Prem Sumarag* appears to have tremendous knowledge of administration of the king of his

times. He puts forward the long list of royal officials with the help of those, the king runs the affairs of his realm. Amongst them are; *Diwan*, *Bakhshi*, *Wazir*, *Samipi* (personal attendants), *Kotwal*, *Biskarmavanta* (public works minister), *Ahadiyas* or *Gurjbardar* (mace bearer), *Kamwant* (servant) and *Muharakhe* (stamp keeper), *Niauwant* (chief justice), *Jyotishi* (astrologer), *Kirtiniye* (hymn singers), *Paatran* (dancers), *Khufia Nawis* (intelligencer), *Khoje* etc. The procedure for the appointment of troopers (*sipah*), personal attendants (*samipwant*) and secretary (*mussadi*) by the Maharaja has specifically described in the *Prem Sumarag*.<sup>xxviii</sup>

The author recommends the *mansabdari* system of Mughal administration apparently for the Sikh ruler too though he does not directly refer to it in his work. He describes the details of a new appointee (*mansabdars*) with his status and salary that he will receive as per order of the Maharaja.<sup>xxix</sup> The Mansabdar should be warned of not getting more revenue than the officially sanctioned one. He should keep his peasantry (*rayat*) contented.<sup>xxx</sup> In addition to it, the author also explains the system of conferment of various types of symbols/insignia (*marbas*) by the Maharaja upon his commanders.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The author further writes that for the safety of army camp, strong military posts should be erected on the four corners of the campos around an army encampment. Apart from it, nine other guard posts should be established to guard prince; wazir; diwan; army chief and other eminent persons.<sup>xxxii</sup>

For provincial administration, twenty-one pargana should be grouped to form a taraf (district). The pargana assessment should be consolidated to provide the district assessment. Each *taraf* should be named after a city. Eleven *taraf* should be grouped to form a *disa* (a province).<sup>xxxiii</sup> The author also mentions administrative officials at different levels like Governor (*disavant*), intelligencer (*khavar likhata*), *faujdar*, *Niaunkar* (Judge), *diwan*, *kotwal*, city superintendent (*Nagardar*), Intelligence officer (*khavar navisinda*) and an accountant (*hisab-kar*) etc.

All collection of revenue should first be recorded in rupees (official currency) villagewise after making proper and justifiable assessment of trees, fields and produce of the village. Similar procedure should be adopted in case of jagir lands.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The revenue settlement determined for a pargana should be reviewed carefully and honestly after 10 years to know the difference between previous and current settlements. Accordingly, new settlement report should be prepared in such manner that the peasant should not be burdened with paying more revenue nor the state should be looser.<sup>xxxv</sup> Tax should not be collected in an oppressive manner.

The author in all probabilities refers to the Khalsa Sikh (*mard ka chela*) and expects that he will lead his life according to the wisdom ingrained in his work (*Prem Sumarag*). He also calls upon the people to follow the righteous path conspicuously defined in the book (*Granth*) and assures them that they will remain happy in this world and achieve the goal of salvation after that.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Therefore we can say that the author of *Prem Sumarag* describes very well about ideal Sikh state, the duties of a King, different officials at different levels of administration and land revenue. He advises that Justice to all without discrimination should be the foremost duty of a king.

**References**

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