
Role of Gurdwaras in the propagation of Sikh Education

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ABSTRACT

Gurdwaras are not only the spiritual centres of Sikhism, but also symbols of education and character building. From Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, all the Gurus considered education an integral part of life. The aim of spreading Gurmat-based education through Gurdwaras is not only to acquire knowledge, but also to instill a sense of morality, service and brotherhood. Sikh educational institutions like Khalsa schools, colleges and universities are contributing to Sikh history, language, Gurmat ideology and modern scientific and technical education. These institutions are proving to be helpful in maintaining the Sikh identity and are also preparing the new generation for the challenges of the modern era. Historically, Gurdwaras have been connecting the Sikh community with the principles of knowledge and equality through Pathshalas, Langar and Katha-Kirtan. Even in modern times, Gurdwaras play an important role in the management and financial support of Sikh educational institutions. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and other Sikh institutions have tried to connect students with modern education for the dissemination of education. This study has analyzed the educational role of Gurdwaras, their social service and contribution in building the new generation.

**Introduction:**

The Sikh teaching tradition began on the basis of the Gurdwara institution, where along with religious education, life values and social responsibilities are inspired. The first Guru, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, started institutions like Sangat, Pangat, Langar, Gurdwara etc. for spiritual and social development in Sikhism. Among these, Gurdwara is an important institution because Sangat, Pangat, Langar etc. are directly or indirectly related to the Gurdwara. From the beginning of Sikhism, this institution appeared in the form of Dharamshala. Wherever Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji bestowed spiritual knowledge to the people trapped in ignorance during and after his Udasis, Dharamshalas were established there, which later took the form of Gurdwaras. It is through the Guru's teachings received from the Gurdwara that the Sikh has to decide the path of spirituality and merge with the Eternal God. From the time of the Guru to the present time, the Sikh teaching curriculum has taken a long developmental journey. During the Guru period, the systems of Gurbani interpretation and Gurmat education were born, which became a strong foundation of Sikh religious ideology. During the Misl period and the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh education included the study of Hindu religious literature along with religious texts. During the Singh Sabha movement, a new direction came to the Sikh curriculum, through which the comparative study of Sikhism with other religions began. In the present era, Sikh educational institutions have modernized the education system by combining both their traditional and modern forms. Today, these institutions are mainly running under the management of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Apart from this, many educational institutions are also making valuable contributions in the dissemination of Sikh religious and modern education with the support of the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Kalgidhar Trust, Baru Sahib, Damdami Taksal, Punjab universities and various local sangats. There is a deep connection between the Gurdwara institution or Sikh institutions and Sikh educational institutions. If we look at the form of Gurmat College, Missionary College, Taksals etc. of the Sikhs, then these seem to be the present form of the Gurdwara institution. Gurdwara is an important institution of Sikhism. According to Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Gurdwara is the place which was built by the ten Gurus for the propagation of religion. From Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji to Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji, the name of this place remained Dharamshala and during the time of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, the word Dharamshala was changed to the name Gurdwara.

The Sikh Gurdwara is a school for students, a place of spiritual enlightenment for the aspirants, a toilet for the sick, a place of food for the hungry, an iron fortress for the protection of the female caste, and a resting place for travelers.¹ The Gurdwara has always been a sacred religious place for the Sikhs where Sri Guru Granth Sahib is enshrined with respect and which has been the center of the religious, social and



political activities of the Panth. It is a shelter for the destitute and a refuge for the needy. The beginning of the Gurdwara institution is as old as Sikhism. When the first Nanak-Jyot Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji went on Udasis or journeys to propagate Sikhism, he preached to the Sangat there and also urged them to be firm on the principles of Gurmat and to establish Dharamshalas. Thus, in its initial form, the Gurdwara institution came into existence in the form of Dharamshalas. This paper attempts to consider the history of some Sikh institutions or Gurdwara institutions in terms of their relationship with current Sikh educational institutions. When the first Guru, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, reached the village of Tulamba in Multan district (Pakistan) during his preaching tour (Udasiya), he met a man named Sajjan, who is known in Sikh history as Sajjan Thug. He used to serve the travelers who came to his Dharamshala (rest house). Whenever a traveler came to his rest house, he would serve him completely, give him good food, and when that traveler fell asleep, Sajjan and his companions would kill him and loot all his wealth. Sajjan wanted to serve Guru Sahib and Bhai Mardana Ji very much because according to him, he was a big official and was planning to do something similar to him. The gentleman asked the Guru to rest, but instead of putting him on the right path and tasting his precious food, the Guru recited this divine raga (word) and Bhai Mardana started playing the rabab. When the gentleman heard the divine words, he realized that the Guru knew his misdeeds well. He was moved to repentance and fell at the feet of the Guru. The Guru advised the gentleman to be virtuous, work hard and chant the name of God. According to the ancient Janam Sakhi, the first Gurdwara in the form of a Dharamshala was built by Guru Nanak (1469-1539 AD) Dev Ji in Tulamba Nagar when he borrowed money from the gentleman thief.² In Kamrup (Assam), the sorceress Noorshahi (Noor-Unis) was put on the right path through her Bani and her house also became a Dharamshala. With the teachings of Guru Sahib, Dharamsalas were built in many places which were the memorials of Guru Sahib's Udasis and the centers of propagation of Sikhism. Apart from this, the work of writing Gurbani was also done in them, because it is also known in the Janamsakhi literature that Bhai Sihan Chhimba, Hasu Lohar, Saido Gheho etc. were with some Sikhs to write the Bani recited by Guru Ji.³ Gurbani was preached in Dharamsala and the books of Bani composed by Guru Nanak Dev Ji were present here. This is confirmed by the Sakhi of Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji ordering a book named 'Pran Sangli' during the editing of Adi Granth. After completing his Udasis, in 1521 AD, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji founded a city called Kartarpur Sahib (Pakistan) on the banks of the Ravi River and Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji spent the last eighteen years of his life in Kartarpur Sahib. Here, institutions with 'Sangat' and 'Pangat' were established. Guru Sahib used to hold Sat Sang here every morning and evening in the Dharamsala and used to remove the Sangat from vain and routines and put it on the path of truth. He gave the Sangat the advice of Kirat, Naam Japo, Vand Chako. A center



of Sikh studies/teaching was established here. Now, here, the Gyan Gosti started flowing and the Bani recited by Guru Sahib was done in a system by scribes like Bhai Mansukh^{4,5} The responsibility of this work in the Gurdwara (Kartarpur) was of Bhai Lehna Ji (Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji)⁶ because he had made the letters of the Gurmukhi script while sitting at the feet of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji.⁷ With the assumption of the Guruship by Sri Guru Angad Dev Ji (1504-1552 AD), the center of the Gurdwara institution became Khadoor Sahib. Here Guru Sahib kept the book of Bani, 'Piu Dade da Khajana', which he received from Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. He institutionalized Sikh education and started the work of teaching children about child-knowledge in the classroom. ⁹. The wrestling arena is here to remind us of his attention to physical education. He laid the foundation of the tradition of writing history by preparing the Janamsakhi of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. ¹⁰ During the time of the third Guru Sahib, Sri Guru Amar Das Ji (1479-1574 AD), Goindwal Sahib became the center of Sikh education and 22 Manjis were established. The establishment of the Manji system made a valuable contribution to the development of Sikhism and the organization of the power of the Sikhs. The Manji system has a special place in Sikh history for the propagation and dissemination of Sikhism, which began with Sri Guru Nanak Sahib for the propagation and dissemination of Sikhism. Through this practice, Sikhism was spread far and wide. Manjis were such seats of Sikhism on which honored persons (Sikhs with holy thoughts) were appointed and they had the right to preach Sikhism as candidates for Guru Sahib. The head of each Manji was called Manjidar. The place where Sikhism was preached was called Dharamsal. The office bearers of the Manji used to collect regular funds from the Sangat and also gave Gurmat teachings by visiting their respective areas. The establishment of Dharamsal, the establishment of the kirtan, Katha and Langar etc. and the delivery of the offerings or money received in the name of the Guru to the Guru's house were their main responsibilities. They were a link between the Sangat of their area and the Guru through whom the orders and edicts issued by Guru Sahib were conveyed to the Sikhs far and wide. At this time, famous writers and scholars like Bhai Gurdas Ji, Baba Buddha Ji, Bhai Sansram, Panda Bula etc. were present at the feet of the Guru. During the time of the fourth Guru, Sri Guru Ramdas Ji (1534-1581 AD), Sri Amritsar Sahib became the center of Sikh education and the above works continued continuously. The most important gift of Guru Sahib was the establishment of Ramdaspora or Amritsar Sahib. During the time of Guru Ji, the Masand system also had a special place. The word Masand is derived from the Persian word Masnad, which means high place. This word was also used for throne. Sikh preachers were seated on a high seat or throne in the Sangat and they were called Masand or Masnad. These Masands were Sikh preachers. They preached the Sikh faith and collected money from the Sikhs in the form of tithes and brought it to the Guru and deposited it. During the time of the fifth Guru, Sri Guru Arjan Dev



Ji (1563-1606 AD), the complete source of Sikh knowledge, 'Adi Granth', was compiled, which led to a huge increase in Sikh literature. Schools of Gurbani interpretation, 'Sahaj Sansthan', 'Bhai Sansthan' and 'Chhote Mel Di Sansthan Sansthan'¹¹ etc. came into existence. During the time of Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji (1595-1644 AD), the plant of the combination of politics and religion, the seeds of which were sown in the scriptures of Guru Nanak, sprouted in this institution. The Gurdwara was established as Akal Takht. Guru Sahib (1606 AD-1609 AD) had the Akal Takht established in front of Sri Harmandir Sahib and combined power with devotion. Sikhs received education in arms and used the sword to make politics religious. During the reigns of Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib Ji (1630-1661 AD) and Sri Guru Harkrishan Sahib Ji (1656-1664 AD), the dispensary was connected to the Gurdwara and medical education was provided to the Sikhs. Not only this, medicines were given free of cost to the poor and needy from the dispensary. Dara Shikoh (son of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan) also recovered due to the medicines sent by Guru Sahib from the dispensary. Not only this, Sri Guru Har Rai Ji also helped Dara Shikoh when needed. Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib (1621-1675 AD) established Chak-Nanaki (Sri Anandpur Sahib) at Makhawal and gave his martyrdom against oppression. Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, like his predecessors, laid the foundation of many urban centers and developed many areas. Like his predecessors, he made a valuable contribution to the process of urbanization. He traveled to many places and removed the problems of the people living there. After assuming the throne, Guru Sahib first completed the development works of Anandpur Sahib. While the development works of Anandpur Sahib were still going on, Guru Sahib founded a new town under the name 'Paunta'. During the time of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji (1666-1708 AD), this institution became the patron of many poets and the birthplace of sects. At that time, apart from Sri Anandpur Sahib, many places like Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabo) were functioning as Gurdwara institutions and the institutional form of Sikh education had come to the fore.

During the Guru's time, Udasi, Nirmala, Sewapanthi and Nihang Singhs had already joined the propagation of Sikh education and they started studying and teaching by establishing Bungas within the boundaries of Gurdwaras at many places, like in the Bungas in Damdama Sahib (Talwandi Sabho), Singhs of Damdami Taksal, which started from Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, were active. The curriculum here taught Adi Granth, Dasam Granth, the works of Bhai Gurdas Ji, Ghazals of Bhai Nand Lal Ji, Gur Bilas, Janam Sakhis etc. For the information on Hindu religious philosophy, Hindu scriptures translated into Gurmukhi script like Bhagwat Puran, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Hanuman Natak, Adhyatam Ramayana, Mokh Panth, Panchadasi, Briti Prabhakar, Vichar Sagar etc. were also included in the curriculum. Apart from this, poetry, Vedanta, Ayurveda, Shashatra Vidya Katha, Kirtan etc. were also



taught here. In many Bungas, the arrangements for copying of scriptures, binding etc. were good.¹² In the eighteenth-nineteenth century, many Bungas were built within the boundaries of Darbar Sahib, out of which many Bungas made important contributions to Sikh education. Dr. Dharam Singh has mentioned, 'Five Gurmukhi schools associated with Akal Bunga are mentioned, which were very big institutions in themselves. Bunga Hukum Singh, Bunga Nurmahilian, Bunga Ahluwalian, Bunga Anandpurian and Bunga Brahm Buta were famous schools of Gurmukhi. Bunga Gianiyani and Bunga Granthiyan also held their special place for Gurmukhi education. Two Bungas of Udasis were famous by the names of Bawa Pritam Das and Bhai Wasti Ram. Bhai Wasti Ram's disciple was Bhai Ram Singh, who taught Prince Kharak Singh as a Gurmukhi. The Bunga of Malvaiya was famous for the teaching of Vedanta. The Bunga of Ahluwalia was a centre of Raga education. Japji, Asa di Var, Sohila and Sodar were especially taught here. First these banis were taught and then Raga training was given. That is why there was also a Gurmukhi Ipathshala with the Ahluwalia Bunga. The Kapurthala Bunga gave special training in commentary.'¹³ During the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, many Gurdwaras were named Jagirs. Apart from this, educational institutions also received financial assistance. Dr. Leitner mentions six Gurmukhi schools run by Bhai Jeeuna Singh, Bhai Lakhan Singh, Bhai Ram Singh, Bawa Amir Das Udasi and Budh Singh along with the subjects taught in them, all of which were run with the financial support of the Maharaja.¹⁴ In 1873 AD, the Singh Sabha movement began, which contributed greatly to the revival of Sikh religious, educational and national awakening. The main objective of the Singh Sabha movement was to create an educational awakening among the Sikhs. This movement was a Sikh movement that started in the Punjab in the 1870s as a reaction to the activities of Christians, Hindu reform movements such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj etc. This movement was established at a time when the Sikh Empire was dissolved and Punjab was annexed by the British, the Khalsa had lost its dignity etc. Two types of educational institutions came into existence at this time. One is Khalsa School, in which Sikhism is taught as a separate subject along with other subjects like science, Punjabi language etc. The other is Gurmat College, in which only Sikhism is taught. They impart education in both modern and traditional methods. Gurbani is taught in the traditional manner by sitting the students in rows. Students recite the Bani and recite their memorized/corrected text to the teacher. Lecture method is adopted to teach other subjects like Sikhism philosophy, Sikh history etc. A brief introduction of some such current Sikh educational institutions is as follows: Sant Atar Singh Gurmat College, Mastuana Sahib was established in June 2004 in the memory of Sant Atar Singh Mastuana by the Akal College Council Mastuana Sahib (Sangrur). Now this college is located on the upper floor of the Darshani Dudy of Gurdwara Gursagar Sahib, Mastuana. It conducts a two-year missionary course, for which the student's qualification is 10+2.



Guru Kashi Gurmat Institute, Talwandi Sabho was established by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee in 1991 at the site of Takht Sri Damdama Sahib, Talwandi Sabho. Three-year missionary, music and tabla courses are conducted here. The qualification of students for the course is 10+2 or B.A. Gurmat Gyan Missionary College, Jawdi was established in 1996 at Jawdi (Ludhiana). A three-year missionary course is conducted here. Admission here is in the month of July every year. Bhai Vir Singh Gurmat Vidyalaya, Sri Amritsar has been established near the Putlighar of Sri Amritsar Sahib since 1979. Its management is in the hands of the Chief Khalsa Diwan Amritsar. A three-year Gurmat missionary course is conducted here. Admissions are held in July every year and for this, the student should have passed 10+2. A two-year Sikh Dharam-Patra Vihar course is conducted by the Dharam Prachar Committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. A three-year Gurmat Degree course is conducted by the Central Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Chandigarh at Sri Guru Granth Sahib Vidya Kendra, Chandigarh. Its admissions are held from April 15 to 15 every year. The eligibility for admission here is 10th or 12th.

In short, it can be said that Guru and Gurdwara are one form. Sikhs receive the light of education from the Guru and the Gurdwara is the place to receive all kinds of education given by the Guru. The Sikh educational tradition began on the basis of the Gurdwara institution, where religious education as well as inspiration for life values and social responsibilities were given. From the time of the Gurus to the present time, the Sikh educational curriculum has taken a long developmental journey. During the Gurus' time, the systems of Gurbani interpretation and Gurmat education were born, which became the strong foundation of Sikh religious ideology. During the Misl period and the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh education also included the study of Hindu religious literature along with religious texts. During the Singh Sabha movement, a new direction came to the Sikh curriculum, through which the comparative study of Sikhism with other religions began. In the present era, Sikh educational institutions have modernized the education system by combining both their traditional and modern forms. Today, these institutions are mainly running under the management of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Apart from this, many educational institutions are also contributing to the spread of Sikh religious and modern education with the support of Chief Khalsa Diwan, Kalgidhar Trust Baru Sahib, Damdami Taksal, Punjab universities and various local Sangats.



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