

A CRITICAL STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF GURDWARAS:

PAST AND PRESENT

Dr. Meharban Singh

Assistant Professor, MGN College of Education, Jalandhar

meharban114@gmail.com

Man is one of The Animals who, through his intelligence, virtues and values has distinguished himself from the animal world and has become the master of the show. However he has retained some animal tendencies in him. Through the process of education, these tendencies are channelized into constructive actions and as a result he becomes a refined person.

Education is to give the answer of all these thought process and have been doing so since centuries. A good many solutions have been worked out. Some aspects are suitable to some culture, while other favour some other aspects.

“Education is a process by which society, through its different institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage to its young ones—it accumulated values, knowledge and skills from one generation to another for the betterment of the society.” Similarly as an institution Gurdwara occupies a central place to better the society because it is here that the congregation of the Sikhs meets wherein they read and reflect on the divine Word and seek guidance from it in their individual life and at all critical junctures of their community life and jointly they try to transmit their cultural heritage to their young ones.

Research gap

Gill. S.S. 2008, "Gurdwara & Its Politics: current debate on Sikh identity in Malaysia", discusses politics in gurdwaras in Malaysia. Singh M. 2009, "Sikh Model of Education for Complete Living: Role of Gurdwaras", minutely discusses the role of gurdwaras along with educational philosophy of Sikhism. Gallo Ester 2012, "Creating Gurdwaras, Narrating Histories: perspectives on the Sikh diaspora in Italy", explains creation of gurdwaras in Italy and their working. Singh M. 2020, "Guru Nanak's 4 'H' Theory & Role of Gurdwaras", discusses educational philosophy of Guru Nanak & role of gurdwaras for better living. So there is no such study which explains the educational role of gurdwaras in the past and present situation. The present study is the need of the hour.

Delimitation

In the present study the survey was delimited to the Gurdwaras located in the rural areas of Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur districts.

Objective

The present study has been designed with following objects.

1. To study the concept of Gurdwara establishment.
2. To study the educational role of Gurdwaras in the past.
3. To study the present role of Gurdwaras in the context of education.
4. To judge the economic feasibility in the educational role of Gurdwaras.

Sample of the Study

A sample is a good proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis.

A randomly selected sample of 87 Gurdwaras was taken from 57 villages Jalandha, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur districts.

Meaning of Education

Education is a comprehensive term; its implications are rich and varied. It deals with growing man in the developing society. Different philosophers, politicians, statesmen and educationists have defined education differently, according to their own point of view and circumstances.

Etymologically, the term education has been explained in a number of ways. It is said to have been derived from the Latin word *educare* which means to bring up. Thus, the aim of education is to bring up or to nurse.

It also said to have been derived from the Latin word *educatum*. This means to lead out or to draw out. Education draws out the best in the man. Thus, it is to draw out inner knowledge, virtues and power of the child.

So we can say, “Education is a process by which society, through its different institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage to its young ones—it accumulated values, knowledge and skills from one generation to another for the betterment of the society.”

Role of Education

Education played an important role in human life and it can be discussed as followed :

According to modern concept of education, education consists of the development of head, heart, hand and health.

1. **Head.** Education develops head or mind of the child so that his mental abilities like thinking, reasoning, concentration, understanding, memory, imagination, foresightedness, problem solving and creativity, may be developed.
2. **Heart.** Heart is related to feeling. We feel pity at the sight of a hungry beggar. We sympathise with him and show kindness towards him. Pity, sympathy and kindness are related to heart. Modern education helps in development of heart.
3. **Hand.** Education in the broader sense helps the educand in the development of manual skills so that he may stand on one's own feet and earn his livelihood when needed.
4. **Health.** Education also helps in development of physical, mental, emotional and social health of the learner.

Views of Guru Nanak Regarding Role of Education

As Gurdwara is a Sikh temple and Guru Nanak is the founder Guru of Sikhism so, let us examine the views of Guru Nanak in this respect so that we can ascertain Sikh philosophical attitude to Education. Dr. T.S. Sodhi has rightly said "if we want to fit the educational philosophy of Guru Nanak in some frame of philosophical thought of the west, it may not be possible to do so in an appropriate manner. However, for want of proper terminology, one can give it name of Idealism."

When we study the compositions of Guru Nanak we come to the conclusion that he did not approve such Idealism, which would be far from reality and would exist only in ideas. He preached a practical way of life and not a life of merely ideas. A life of ideas alone sans practicability would not be 'Idealism'. Guru Nanak's Idealism is different from the idealism of the most philosophers of the west, because their idealism is mostly based upon the ideas. They have more theory than practice whereas Guru Nanak believes that knowledge or theory be reduced to use an actual performance. He is different from the idealists of the Indian soil, like Swami Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi.

In his bani (sacred hymn) Guru Nanak touches almost all the important aspects of life. We can safely say that his idealism has its roots down into the realities of the world. As such one can term this as the practical type of idealism. His idealism is, to some extent, in line with the philosophy of Hindu scriptures, which believe that atma (soul) is a part of Parmatma (God) and the goal of human life is to ultimately get the atma united with Parmatma, so as to achieve moksha or mukti (salvation). But Guru Nanak's approach to get moksha is different from that of Hindu philosophy, which believes and proclaims that moksha can be achieved only by renunciation. The four ashram's of the Hindus are Brahmcharya (celibacy), Grahist (house holder), Vanprast (forest hermit) and Sanyas (wandering saint). In the third Vanprast Ashram one is in the process of renunciation, and in the fourth and last one becomes Sanyasi for which complete renunciation is required.

From this point of view these ideals are not in line with Guru Nanak's philosophy, who rejected renunciation and advocated practical household life and asked the people to live complete family life. But at the same time he laid stress on moral and ethical life. He considered it as the first step towards the higher stage of spiritual development. He was of this opinion that only in this way one can serve humanity and give positive contribution to the society. He was never in favor of isolation from the society, and preached to live in the world but not to be lost in it. In this respect following important and oft-quoted saying of Guru Nanak is notable: "A man can live in aloneness, enshrining the True Lord, without desire in the midst of desires, as a lotus flower remains unaffected in water, as a duck also swims against the streams current and not becomes wet."

Guru Nanak believes that 'realization of Truth', the ultimate Truth, can be by meditation. In this method of realizing the truth, practice of concentration is applied. For Guru Nanak there is a difference between learning and education. Learning may either be positive or negative and may be neutral even but education is, and should be taken in the affirmative sense only. In fact, education means positive learning. He is quite pertinent about the true concept of education. As such he does not confine it to literacy or learning, but extends it to the formation of desirable attitudes, modification of crude behavior into refined one and realization of Truth in practice. With Guru Nanak education, thus involves the transformation of the whole man from a manmukh (self-willed) to a gurmukh (Guru's disciple), an agiyani (ignorant) to a brahmgyani (the God Enlightened), a mayadhari (illusionist) to a parupkari (philanthropic). He says "True learning induces in the mind service of mankind."

Meaning of Gurdwara

Gurdwara is a place of worship for, Sikhs. In the Gurdwara no ritual is performed. Sikh form of worship, individual or congregational, consists of recitation or singing of Gurbani the scriptural texts on the name of God and Ardas, the supplication. Gurdwara is a place usually for congregational worship of God, and not of Guru, in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is an essential feature of Gurdwara. Another important feature of Gurdwara is its being a public place without any distinction of caste, class, status or sex.

Historically speaking this place of worship was known as Dharamsal, as initiated by Guru Nanak. BhaiKahan Singh Nabha a prominent and authoritative Sikh scholar writes the meaning of Gurdwara in Mahan Kosh (The Encyclopaedia of Sikh Literature) as noun i.e. Guru's house; a religious temple of Sikhs; the place constructed by any one of the ten Sikh gurus for the purpose of religious preaching or where Sri Guru Granth Sahib is installed. From Guru ArjunDev these religious temple were called Dharamsal.

Guru ArjunDev gave the new none i.e. Gurdwara in place of Dharamsal. BhaiGurdas also used the ward Gurdwara. Bhai Khan Singh Nabha while defining a Sikh Gurudwara writes, “A Sikh Gurdwarais : #A school for the disciple. #A spiritual preceptor for the seeker of self-realization. #A hospital for the patients or ill/sick people. #A free community kitchen for the needy/starved people. #A super strong fort for the protection of women dignity. #A tavern for the travelers or passenger.

Educational Role of Gurdwaras

Sikhism is a revelatory faith and begins with Guru Nanak (1469-1539) who received revelation from the Real One and took out long preaching journeys to share it with humankind in the form of *banior* hymns. Guru Nanak was succeeded by nine successive Gurus: all the ten Gurus are believed to be one in spirit though different in body. No other person however pious or enlightened, except the ten Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Sing, is accepted or revered as Guru. The versified hymns of the Gurus along with those of some other holy persons from both the Hindu and Muslim traditions are found included in the Sikh scripture. The Tenth Master bestowed office of Guru for all time to come on the divine Word as included in the scripture, now revered as the Guru Granth Sahib. Thus, the ten Gurus (Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh) and thereafter the Guru Granth Sahib (or more precisely the Word as contained therein) have been the focus of the Sikhs' veneration. The *Sikh RahitMaryada* also defines a Sikh as one who has faith only in the ten Gurus and their spirit-incarnate Guru Granth Sahib.

As it is, the Sikhs believe the Gurus to have become spirit-incarnate in the Word as contained in their scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib (popularly accepted as the Sabad-Guru). One must always keep in mind the subtle difference between the revelatory experience in the form of *sabador* Word and the Volume wherein this *sabadis* contained. Ever since the Guru-period, the Holy Volume has enjoyed a respectable place: there are examples in the Sikh tradition of the Gurus giving the Granth or the Word as contained therein high respect. There are references in the Holy Granth wherein Word has been equated with the Guru and the Volume itself has been called the abode of God. God (the source of revelation), Word/Sabad (the revelatory experience) _and Guru (the medium to share that revelatory experience with humankind at large) are also taken synonymously.

The Guru Granth Sahib is the sacred text of the Sikh faith but it is also much more. It is the living Guru for the followers who revere it as such. The Sikhs believe the scripture to contain in mundane language intelligible to common people in a particular socio-cultural context what was revealed to the Gurus and what they uttered without any addition or alteration on their part. It describes as well as prescribes the human ideal: the scripture as a whole also provides the general framework of structure in which the said ideal is to be realized. Thus, the Guru Granth Sahib becomes an article of faith with the Sikhs and guides

their individual as well as communal life. In other words, the Sikh way of life is determined and guided by the message contained in the scripture.

Gurdwara means the Guru's abode or its entrance: thus, presence of the Guru (Sabad-Guru in the form of the Guru Granth Sahib as of now) is a pre-requisite for a Gurdwara. Being the abode of the Guru which the devotees visit to pay their obeisance to the Guru is thus a venerable place for them: it is also by way of their expression of reverence that they must enter the place barefoot with covered heads. It is also perhaps because of this very reason that the people who run such institutions are expected to be persons of piety; that is also why such persons are shown a lot of love and respect by the entire community. It is generally believed that the word '*dharamsala*' got the new nomenclature of Gurdwara during the spiritual pontificate of Guru Hargobind. Installation of the Sabad-Guru (the Guru Granth Sahib) in the *sanctum sanctorum*, a congregation, reading/recitation/singing of the divine Word, community-kitchen (*langar*) and a fluttering Khalsa flag just outside the main building are definitive and visual manifestations of a Gurdwara.

Thus, as an institution Gurdwara occupies a central place because it is here that the congregation of the Sikhs meets wherein they read and reflect on the divine Word and seek guidance from it in their individual life and at all critical junctures of their community life. The devotees are expected to read/recite the divine Word or listen it to be recited and/or explained: they are supposed to comprehend their message and live their message in practical social life. Thus, it is in the Gurdwara that the devotees meet and try to learn to live the right way of life as recommended by the spiritual preceptors. Since Sikhism takes a holistic view of human life, it has influenced life in all its aspects. The role of the Gurdwara thus does not remain limited only to satiating the spiritual cravings of a divine seeker but has also remained pivotal in leading the Sikhs in their socio-political life as well.

In sum, the Gurdwara is medium for the communication of the scriptural truth to the society at large to make it manifest in the form of a way of life - a tangible social conduct. Being located in time and space, the institution of Gurdwara -like any other institution - is also tangible but it is supposed to keep alive our intangible heritage (the idea/truth) and keep trying to relate it to the present social situation. Gurdwara is the medium that tries to translate the message inherent in the divine Word in the way of life of the *sangat* :the *sangatis* not only at the basis of the Gurdwara institution but also determines the work culture and related activities of the Gurdwara. To attain this objective, the institution (the Gurdwara) has to grapple with local ground realities which it influences and also gets influenced in the process. This influence becomes visible in the form of various activities though the fundamental principles remain unaffected. In present times, the institutions of *sangat*, *pangat* (*langar*) and earlier institutions of *melis*, *manjis*, etc. have also been taken in by the institution of Gurdwara.

Education is directly concern with human beings. A Sikh by definition is a learner or disciple. He/she is also a republican in the matter of learning. During the 17th century the Dharamsal along with religious function was also the centre of learning. It can be described in other words as a Gurmukhi school corresponding to Maktbas/Madrasas attached to Muslim mosques or Pathshalas /Gurukuls attached to Hindu temples or Monastic schools attached to Buddhist Monasteries.

Gain Singh Giani writes in Twareekh Sri Amritsar that during 10th century there were about 215 Dharamals (Pathshalas) in the walled city of Amritsar. Those were by and large co- education in character, entered by the students at 5 year of age and had their curriculum based on 3R's supplemented by religious education i.e. skills of reading and reciting Sikh scriptures, music (GurmatSangeet) and art. These Dharamsals invariably enjoyed the patronage of the local community; the chief academic leadership in them was often in the hands of Udasis or Nirmala Sadhus. The medium of instruction was Punjabi in Gurmukhi script. This is not only freed the Sikhs and Hindus particularly peasantry and working class from the monopoly of Brahmin class but also these become centre of educational and sociology cultural activity of the Sikh community.

Findings

In the present study, the investigator collected the data, analyzed it scientifically and draw findings. In the light of the study, the investigator reached the following findings :

1. Out of total 87 Gurdwaras under survey only 2 Gurdwaras have attached schools.
2. Out of total 87 Gurdwaras under survey only 10 Gurdwaras have educational agenda.
3. Gurdwara at village NangalLubana of Kapurthala District record maximum annual income is Rs. 36,00,000 (approx.)
4. Gurdwara at village Narangpur of District Jaldnahr recorded minimum annual income is Rs. 10,800 (approx.)
5. Average annual income of 87 gurdwaras was computed as Rs. 2,12,160 (approx).
6. Gurdwara at NangalLubana of Kapurthala District recorded maximum annual expenditure Rs. 32,40,000 (approx.)
7. Gurdwara at village Narangpur District Jalandhar recorded minimum annual expenditures 4,800 (approx).
8. Average annual expenditure of 87 Gurdwaras was computed as Rs. 10,65,204 (approx.)

9. Gurdwara at Shahkot of Jalandhar District recorded maximum annual saving of Rs. 4,20,000 (approx).
10. Gurdwara at village Narangpur of Jalandhar District Record minimum annual saving of Rs. 6,000 (approx).
11. Average annual savings of 87 Gurdwaras was computed as Rs. 46,944 (approx).

Educational Implications

Gurdwara is a place of worship for Sikhs. In the Gurdwara no ritual is performed. Gurdwara is a place usually for congregational-worship of God, and not of Guru, in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Important feature of Gurdwara is its being a public place without any distinction of caste, class, status, sex or religion. Historically speaking this place was known as Dharamsal: as initiated by Guru Nanak. Guru ArjanDev gave the new noun i.e. Gurdwara in place of Dharamsal. BhaiKahan Singh Nabha a prominent/authoritative Sikh scholar while defining a Sikh Gurdwara writes, "A Sikh Gurdwara is a school for the disciple, a spiritual preceptor for the seeker of self-realisation, a hospital for the patients, ill/sick people, a free community-kitchen for the needy/starved people, a super-strong fort for the protection of women-dignity, a tavern for the travelers/passengers. During the 17th century the Dharamsal along with religious function, was also the centre of learning, corresponding to Maktabas/Madrasas attached to mosques or Pathshalas/Gurukuls attached to temples or Monastic-schools attached to monasteries.

In the walled city of Amritsar there were 215 Pathshalas during 19th century and had their curriculum based on 3R's supplemented by religious education i.e. skills of reading and reciting scriptures, music (gurnat-sangeet) and art. After the annexation of Punjab, whilst both building and teacher for these Pathshalas were available, there was a great decline in number of pupils, as the parents preferred that they should learn something which makes them fit to earn their livelihood. The British Government and Christian-missionaries, who were encouraged by it, had introduced a new system of education in India. Taking this as the deterioration of culture, the response of the Sikh Community rose in the form of Singh-Sabha Movement. As a result of this a number of Khalsa schools and colleges were established during 20th century in Punjab with the aim to promote new education, female education, Punjabi language and religious education.

In the post-independence era, though the growth of Sikh institutions had started declining, but the Sikh public schools were on the rising. This was a new phenomenon among Sikh institutions while the people were fond of the quality education imparted by the public schools run by the Christian-Missionaries. The Sikh intelligentsia was keen to overhaul the Sikh educational system. Dagshai Public School is said to be

the first of this kind but the movement gathered momentum after the setting up of Guru Harkrishan Public School by Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Managing Committee in 1965. Presently Chief Khalsa Diwanis running a chain of Guru Harkrishan Public Schools in and around Amritsar. SGPC, Amritsar is also running as many as over 65 schools, 16 degree colleges and 6 professional colleges in Punjab.

Here are few suggestions. If the community would not build any more Gurdwara buildings as in the future; and try to divert these would have been Gurdwara funds and properties for educational programmes. And if community would try to pool the savings of all 87 Gurdwaras of 57 villages for the purpose of educational programmes, amazing result could be achieved.

Let see the following statistics in Rupees :

1. Monthly Saving per Gurdwara = 3912/-
2. Annual Saving per Gurdwara = 46,944/-
Annual Saving 87 Gurdwaras = 40,84,128/-
3. If we assume the statics, saving for the coming ten years and pool all the savings of 87 Gurdwaras and fix deposit @ 7% annually for 10 years, on eleventh year onwards the above said Gurdwaras can arrange Rs. 38,90,213/- per year for the purpose of education

Gurdwaras can launch different type of programmes related to the upliftment of the society as a whole. Here are some suggestions: #Evening schools with part time teachers. #Guidance & Counseling for school students. #Career counseling cells. #Scholarships for school students. #Scholarships for higher education. #Helping orphans. #Book Bank Facility. #Skill Training Centres. #Mobile language lab. They can use the above mentioned amount for any of the different programmes suggested by the investigator.

Further, it may become a bigger pooling of savings if all the villages will be involved. As mentioned above through a pooling only by 57 villages can generate more than 38 lakhs per year and if gurdwara committees of all the 3012 villages of three districts pool their savings, imagine the amount. And all the educational programmes can be launched without any financial hurdle. A project may also be initiated in lines with gurdwara establishment philosophy and ideology.

Suggestions for Further Study

The following some of the suggested problem based on the findings of the study which need further investigation:-

1. Studies can be conducted on large sample covering more villages.
2. A comparative study can be conducted on urban and rural areas.

3. A case study can be prepared on the gurdwaras with educational agenda.

References

- Buch, M.B.(ED).(1974) A Survey of Research in Education, Centre of advance study in Education, M.S. University Brodra.
- Davinder, Deep.(1983). Guru Granth Sahib VichSenskalit Guru Nanak VichBhartiSabhvichar Da Chitrem, Language Deptt. Punajb, Patiala.
- Gill, Singh Pritam.(1975). Heritage of Singh Culture New Academic publication co, Jalandhar.
- Singh, Ravinder. (1983). G.B Singh.Indian Philosophical Tradition and Guru Nanak Publishing house. Patiala.
- Sago, HarbansKaur. (1992). Guru Nanak and Indian Society, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi.
- Sangha, Gurdev Singh, (2011), GurdwaraSankalpAiteSanstha, Singh Brothers, Amritsar.
- Singh Daljeet and Singh Khark (Edt.) (2008), Sikhism. Its Philosophy and History, IOSS, Chandigarh.
- Singh, Meharban (2009). Sikh Model Education for Complete Living (Role of Gurdwaras) Singh Brother, Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar-143006 S.C.O. 223-24 center, Amritsar-143001
- Taneja, V.R. (1979). Philosophical Approach to Education Atlantic publication, New Delhi.