

EDUCATIONAL CONTRIBUTION OF SHIROMANI GURUDWARA PRABANDHAK COMMITTEE

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ABSTRACT

The Shiromani *Gurudwara* Parbandhak Committee is a central, important and representative body of the *Sikh Panth*. As a result of the hard work of the entire *Panth*, this institution came into being in those times when many forces were engaged in suppressing the *Sikh Panth*. The *mahants* and priests sitting in the *Gurudwaras*, considered to be the glory and identity of the community, were engaged in destroying the image of the *Sikh* community. A committee was constituted to manage the *Gurudwaras* dedicated to *Sikh* Gurus and to represent the *Sikh* community, whose name was *Shiromani Gurudwara* Parbandhak Committee. One of the main functions of this committee was to work for improving the preach & level of *Sikhs* living in the world. Selecting *Sikhs* in the pursuit of other social welfare, giving new leadership time to time to the *Sikh* community and improving the image of the *Sikh* community. Of course at present time SGPC's scope is broad. By doing this, it has been called 'State in the State' and which is the extent of a State, it is impossible to identify all the tasks of the organization. Because, many rulers wanted to keep the *Sikh* nation under control. Even then, the opposition parties were misbehaving in the *Gurudwaras*, which were being opposed by every *Sikh*.

Keywords: Gurdwara, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Sikh Panth, Education.

Here it is necessary to know what is called the *Gurudwara*? *Gurudwara*, the temple of *Sikhs* or that place where Guru Granth Sahib is opened. Since the time of Guru Nanak, the places of pilgrimage to that place was called *Dharamshala*. Guru Arjan was the first to establish *Harimandar* institution of the *Dharam Mandir* of Amritsar and during the time of Guru Hargobind Singh *Gurudwara Sangya* of *Dharamshala*. *Gurudwara* was a school for students, knowledge for self-aware, education guru, patient care, *langer* for hunger, Lohmai institution for keeping female caste and a resting place for travelers.

From that it became clear that the British government never wanted that the arrangement of *Gurudwaras* would be in the hands of the *Sikhs*, because with the formation of that committee, *Sikh* community would become a huge force. That kind of power could prove to be a threat to the British government. At that time, the *Singh Sabha* movement had started. That movement paid more attention to the preservation of the *Sikh* culture. Mahant, priest and manager were going on according to their decision. Non-*Sikh* events were being implemented in *Gurudwaras*. The British Government was happy that there was adulteration in *Sikhism*. The propagation of *Sikhism* reduced, the condition of the *Gurudwaras* was bad. The loss of the *Sikhs* was in the benefit of the British government's Christian missionaries. The foundation of *Khalsa* College, Amritsar was laid on 5th March 1892 A.D. Students of that college and professors played a vital role in the leadership of the community. On 30 October, 1920 A.D., Chief *Khalsa Diwan* was established. That followed the program of *Singh Sabha* movement. In addition, the *Sikh* Educational Conference series also continued to play a role in educating the *Sikhs* about their rights and bringing them into a series. In 1912 A.D., *Jathedar* Kartar Singh Jhabbar started the basic work of *Gurudwara* reform by organizing the *Khalsa Diwan* kept *Khara Sauda Bar*. Later, its improved name was the *Akali Dal Khara Sauda Bar*. In 1914 A.D., Bhai Mahitab Singh Bir started the service established for *Khalsa* Baradari Jatha.

From 1857 to 1907 A.D., 50 years, *Sikhs* were stuck in the loyalty of the British. But later on it was time to change the policy. In 1908, the government took control of *Khalsa* College. *Kirpans* were imposed in 1913 AD. On 14th January, 1914, the British government demolished the wall of *Gurudwara* Rakab Ganj to build a direct road to the Viceroy's house. The anger against the British was born. From April 10 to 12, the *Sikh* Educational Conference which was going on, various newspapers contributed to vital role to fast that movement at Jalandhar. *Khalsa* Newspaper, *Khalsa* News, *Bir* Newspaper, *Sikh* soldiers, the News of *Gurudwaras* was being printed. The first paper was printed on May 21, 1920. Its moderator was Master Sundar Singh Lyallpur. This Newspaper communicated the message against the misdeeds of the *mahants* and the awareness of *Sikh* people created the new power. The activity of that newspaper had created the basic stone of the Akali movement. From the newspaper, the *Gurudwara* reform movement has been called Akali movement. Its first leaflet cleared its outline, in which the *Sikhs* were inspired to wake up from sleep. It was also narrated by a poem.

Aakhan Khol Dhillar Veero, Aa gaya pher Akali Je
Jhanda Pharia Hath Sach Da, Jott Mardi Lali Je...
Kitna Piya Haner Bharavo, Bagh Ujare Mali Je
Aakhan Khol Dhillar Veero.....

Every *Sikh* wanted freedom of the *Gurudwaras* and people started coming. Then local people got up and took possession of the *Gurudwaras*. The Government realized that zeal could not be suppressed anymore. To deal with the situation, the Punjab Government Secretariat and the Governor was working together to develop a policy. The Punjab Government had then created a new policy to take any action to keep in hands of the management of the *Gurudwaras*. The government, in consultation with Maharaja Patiala, presented a *Gurudwara* management committee of 36 men, there were also two reasons for the formation of that committee, one by splitting among the *Sikhs* and second keeping their hold on the *Gurudwaras*. But the *Gurudwara* management committee disrupted Government's plan. The Government, the Maharaja of Patiala and other newsier of Government were together and a committee was announced, but despite that, the gathering of the *Sarbat Khalsa* was held on 15th November, 1920 A.D. The admission was done through tickets in that gathering, upto 12 noon 742 tickets were issued. After that, action had been initiated in front of more than 8000 *sangat*. After the *ardas*, Principal Teja Singh was elected president of meeting. Charan Singh Shaheen read a poem about *Teeh Lakhe Wali Kavita*. After that, Bhai Jodh Singh and Nihal Singh told the situation of the 36-membered committee formed by the Governor. Discussion about the formation of the committee was in with the discussion. Bhai Chanda Singh, Shivdev Singh Rais Sialkot and Mangal Singh Namdhari presented their references. According to the reference of Principal Teja Singh, 179 members of the committee were formed. The next morning, at 9 O'clock, Chanda Singh appraised all the proceedings of the late night for the *Sangat*.

After considerable discussions the name of that committee was given *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.)*, along with the selection process for members of that committee started and about 150 members of the committee were elected. Some of those were members of the government committee. In order to deal with the government, the members of the government committee were included in it and the number of members was 175. Later, a 72-member committee was formed to draft rules for running *Gurudwara* system. After that, a committee of five members was formed, the committee which amended the elected members. That five membered committee's *Jathedar* included -Balwant Singh Dula, Harkrishan Singh, Master Mota Singh, *Jathedar* Teja Singh Bhuchar and Prof. Teja Singh Mastuana. Among them the objection was raised about Prof. Teja Singh that he called himself a saint and even established a worship. Prof. Teja Singh declared from *Akal Takht* that he would no longer call himself a saint nor would anybody bow down to him. On absence of Master Mota Singh, Bhai Jodh Singh was made the fifth member and Bhai Balwant Singh served as the *Granthi*. The members had been elected from *Akal Takht* Sahib. The *Dewan* was celebrated below, people were eager to hear the action taken on the people. People wanted to know that Majithia was punished for his sins. Then Sundar Singh stood in the field of Diwan and said that his mistakes had been forgiven.

It was also worth noting that according to that Act, any fifty *Sikhs* could submit a resolution to give a *Gurudwara* to this committee, and the strength of that Act was that the Central Board could have any name for it. 28th July, 1925 A.D., the Governor General of India gave formal approval to that bill. An Act 1925 after the passed of the bill, (The *Gurudwaras* Act 1925, Act No. of VIII of 1925) became Act 8. The Act came into force with the Gazette notification of November 1, 1925, by the Punjab Government.

A Central *Gurudwara* Board was created for the management and funding of all the *Gurudwaras*. It was passed as Government Act. Every year, the *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak* Committee conducts and passes the budget in accordance with the government of the state and the country to fulfill the objectives of the future. Like every year, a meeting of the S.G.P.C. would also be held on March 15, 2013, under the chairmanship of Avtar Singh Makkar, the Committee's General Secretary, Sukhdev Singh Bhaur presented the SGPC's annual budget which was passed by the General Committee from April 2013 to March 31, 2014. The budget of that time have been submitted and passed of 8 billion 62 thousand 402 rupees by extending up to 21.13 percent over last time.

If we look at the current budget of the *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak* Committee, the budget of 2017-18 year of the committee is 11 billion 6 crore, 59 lakhs, 98 thousand 439 rupees. This budget has been increased by Rs. 88 crores 10 lacs more than last time. Through this budget, the committee has taken many works in future.

The foundation of the *Shiromani Gurudwara Parbandhak* Committee, however, was laid for the management of religious services and *Gurudwaras*, but by recognizing the need of time, this excellent organization carried out considerable work in the field of education. Earlier, the educational arrangements and activities of the committee should be known, in which the educational system has emerged as a requirement. *Sikh* gurus have also shown the importance of education.

One day, after seeing the battles of Anandpur Sahib, Bhai Nand Lal, the great poet of Persian, bowed down on the feet of Guru Gobind Singh and started praying for him to wear the sword with his own hands and send him for battle. Guru Gobind Singh, hearing that, gave a pen to Bhai Nand Lal at the place of sword and said the sword wounds the physical body, the pen injures the heart. So the pen has a high grade, be might run the pen.

The *Sikh* Gurus had encouraged education from the beginning. Guru Gobind Singh used to give special attention to the writers. There was a lot of education at that time. After the times of Guru, *Sikhs* were busy in battles and could not pay attention to education. Which had reduced the number of educated *Sikhs* in comparison to other communities. After the formation of Singh

Sabha organizations, the presidents had made efforts for the spread of education. With the efforts of those, the *Sikhs* started getting education and then other social movements, trusts and committees started efforts to impart education. Many committees of *Gurudwaras* gave special attention to that. One day came in Punjab when the numbers of *Sikhs* being educated increased compared to other communities. SGPC, the supreme organization of *Sikhs*, came into existence in 1920 A.D., also took many important initiatives in that field. The committee opened many schools, colleges, which provided free education to poor students and meritorious students were given scholarships. The SGPC has retained the education movement run by the Gurus. The present status of educational complex in present of the SGPC is very vast.

Education had been given a different meaning according to *Sanskrit*. The meaning of the word education in *Sanskrit* is : to know, to stand, to understand, to learn, experience and education means: activities of life, knowledge, education, science, etc.

According to the Punjabi language in *Nirukt Kosh*, education means study, knowledge, education, science, knowing.

Gurudwaras have played an important role in the field of education. *Gurudwaras* were constructed at the places where Gurus resided, in which teaching of the *Guru Granth Sahib* was given alongwith training. The schools and libraries running in these *Gurudwaras* were the sources of knowledge. Whole humanity, those who were trapped in ignorance would be eliminated with the source of enlightenment.

Guru Nanak was the founder of this new education movement. The pioneer of *Sikhism*, Guru Nanak, was the master genius multifaceted. He was also a great philosopher and educational guide, who was the light in darkness in the human mind, he removed the darkness of ignorance and provided true education to the entire society. Guru Nanak was also a kind of teacher who gave much of his life to true education and guidance. His journeys were are part of curriculum lessons in present day schools. *Dharamshalas* were established wherever he went.

Guru Angad walked on the path of Guru Nanak and did many important works in the field of education. During the times of Guru Angad Dev, the Brahmins adopted Sanskrit and the Muslims adopted Arabic and Persian language. People of Punjab did not have knowledge of those languages, they had difficulty in studying and understanding anything deeply. In order to teach Punjabi language they prepared scripts for the complete writing of the Punjabi language by improving the scripts of popular scripts. Of course that script was already present.

Guru Sahib wrote the first lesson in Punjabi. Whatever letters he wrote on the basis of 35-letters, they became part of the psyche.

Education opened in the schools for the expansion of education and the education of the students was started in Punjabi language. Guru Angad Dev laid the foundation of first school on the land of Punjab. That school was started at Khadur Sahib, where the children of the village were trained.

During in the time of Guru Amar Das, religious texts were in Sanskrit, which were beyond the understanding of the common people. Guru Amar Das adopted Punjabi as a medium. When asked him why these languages *Sanskrit* have left and made Punjabi medium.

Guru Arjan Dev trained the people by giving them various kinds of education. Expressing the importance of education in life, Guru Arjan in devotion, edited that precious treasure by collecting the hymns. During the time of Guru Sahib, Baba Budha and Bhai Gurdas were present as two teachers, those who gave *Shashtra* Education to some Gurus and Sikh *Sangat*.

Guru Hargobind had made many efforts to educate the people. He used to spend his time with most of his colleagues while wrestling, horse riding, playing *gatka*, hunting, shooting arrows and swords. Guru Hargobind Singh spent much of his time in making the *Sikhs* soldiers. Guru Har Rai, Guru Har Krishan played many role of this tradition. Guru Har Krishan did not comprehend Gurbani. Therefore, the basis of giving education was made with events in his life. Guru Tegh Bahadur had a tremendous contribution in that educational movement.

Earlier, the names of the *madrassas* running before, they were also promoted by giving large property. In the city of Lahore, there was a famous *madrassa* named *Mian Wadda*, which we call school. The Maharaja thought of promoting that *madrassa*. Ranjit Singh made a lot of land in the name of that school. He made that school very large and gave many other facilities. The number of schools in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time increased considerably. The schools used to run in *Gurudwaras*, temples, mosques, church houses and many schools run in the halls of large bungalows. Maharaja Ranjit Singh used to arrange for the necessary facilities and other facilities for those schools. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was very close to Education. He would not be overlooked for the contributions making in the field of education.

After Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death, no one paid attention to the educational movement. *Sikhs* were engaged in the fight. The number of educated *Sikhs* in 1891 AD was higher than the other communities. The number of *Sikhs* who knew little English was only 1200, and only 5 of the *Sikh* women knew English. In 1849 AD, the British government liberated occupied Punjab and emphasized on the English language and started opening missionary schools.

Looking at the interest of the education among the *Sikhs*, Col. Sir John J.H. Gardon, in his book the *Sikhs*, (1904 A.D.), wrote that the *Sikhs* were no longer illiterate as they were in the old days, when the despaired the pen and looked on the swords as the one power in the land. Then they

saw that the pen was some times more powerful of the two and at least that education dis not awaken the hand that wields the Sewed.

For the promotion of *Sikh* religion by the *Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak* Committee, two other religious institutes namely *Dharam Parchar* Committee and *Gurmat* Literature House have been set up which inform the students who take education in the educational institutions in history. The working area of these two departments is different. Where the Literature House sheds only to publish and distribute historical literature, the religious campaign committee is making important contributions in the field of *Sikh* history. SGPC has established a separate department for the spread of knowledge and religion of *Sikh* history and culture, which who is well known along with the religious campaign committee. This committee has started many colleges to prepare *Dhadhi*, *Kavishar*, *Pracharak* and *Ragi*, explaining the correct pronunciation of *Gurbani* and understanding its meaning, where after learning, all the *ragi* and preachers are produced. The SGPC also publishes *Gurmat* Literature for giving knowledge to the *Sangat*, and to make it available to the *Sangat*, the Committee has opened *Gurmat* Literature House in Punjab and outside Punjab, where this *Gurmat* Literature can be obtained on a fixed offer. This is a good initiative of SGPC to provide Gurmat knowledge.

After the formation of the SGPC, the committee managed the educational movement and contributed in it and proceeded to arrange many educational institutions. Many educational colleges, technical colleges, medical colleges, missionary colleges and many other schools came into existence through the initiative of SGPC. The majority of these are indicative of the vast educational aspect of this committee, and due to this vast expanse, it boasts of the largest organization contributing in the field of education. Apart from the educational institutions under the management of the SGPC, there are many other institutions which provide historical teachers to the SGPC. All the institutions that have opened till now and have been running under their care for promotion of education.

Like many other religions, preachers of *Sikh* religion to train the Ragi, Pathi and Singhs, some of the centers being trained are some of like *Sikh* Missionary Colleges. Name of these colleges' purpose is to clarify that the *Sikh* missionary colleges have been opened for the purpose of educating the missionaries. But here it is to be assumed who are the missionaries.

The dictionary meaning of the missionary word is preached. Missionary word is the word from Latin language *Missionem* the meaning of which the Act of sending or to send.

This college is dedicated to the martyrs of Nankana Sahib, centers for generating preachers for the *Sikh* community, in which one centre is *Shaheed Sikh* Missionary College which a *Shiromani*

Sikh preacher, which is a railway station at Amritsar from the middle of the road to the college is located in Ranjit Pura.

If the history of this college, it is known that the scholars of this college have relieved the grievances of many distressed people. While this college has created calm chants, it has also given many zealous leaders to the country and the nation. Among them, Giani Zail Singh, former President of India, was one. The college is not only the birthplace of Ajit Newspaper but also generated editors like the editor of this newspaper Sadhu Singh Hamdard. Not only this, monthly magazine which originally came from Tarn Taran, later this newspaper started coming out of the house of Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary Master Tara Singh, but it was prepared in the missionary college. The address of *Sikh* Missionary College is also on journal's front page. So this is a great gift to the *Sikh* Community from this college. The college is running in the memory of the Nankana Sahib martyrs, now it is a proud place in the *Sikh* community. Now this college, established educational institutions from the Shiromani *Gurudwara* Parbandhak Committee, is a first proudly educational institution. The main reason for the existence of *Shaheed Sikh* Missionary College is the conditions of the Guru Houses at that time. In the holy shrine houses, the *mahant* and priests were spoiling the image of the *Sikh* community, then ongoing movement for this reform was the *Saka Nankana Sahib*. Immediately after the painful execution at Nankana Sahib, the *Sikh* thinkers asked for advice to set up a memorial related to that massacre. The entire *Sikh* community felt that there should be such institution in the memory of martyrs, which could take care of the holy shrines. In view of this need, Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary Society and Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College were established in memory of the martyrs.

Shortly after discussions about the needs of the preachers, the SGPC issued their declaration No. 53, passed the *gurmata* and announced that 'Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College' is open from 2 October. On 4th September, 1927 the work of college was published in the weekly newspaper '*Asli Kaumi Dard*' (Real National Pain) related to the admission of this college, as well as a request for financial help. He wrote that *Sangat* would remember that in 1923, the Shiromani *Gurudwara* Parbandhak Committee had decided that a college should be opened at Amritsar in memory of Nankana Sahib martyrs. The house was also purchased for that college. But many leaders of the SGPC were soon caught up in that time, due to that the work was held. There were plans to open this college since last year. But due to lack of money it could not be completed. Now it is felt that the work was required and should make permanent arrangement for the *Sikh* preachers done by doing this shortage as well as possible. This work has been taken in hands on the hope of *sangat's* donation. The college's office would open from 10th September and the formal ceremony of the college would be held on October 2 by Kharak Singh. Would pay his respects and students would be admitted that same day. The college is named as 'Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College, Amritsar. Principal Ganga Singh Senior Professor from Tarn Taran has been

decided of that college. Giani Sher Singh, Prof. Teja Singh M.A., Jodh Singh M.A. of Khalsa College, Amritsar should teach in this college. Master Tara Singh, member of that college would be from the Shiromani *Gurudwara* Parbandhak Committee. It was also announced that the applications for admission in the college could be sent on September 28, by the name of Principal Sahib, Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College, Amritsar. That year a total of 10 students would be admitted who will be given stipend of monthly 20 rupees and a job would be given according to the scheme drawn on passing the 2 year course. Besides that, those students who would be reading in this college without scholarship entered, Prospectus of Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College can meet in the office.

After the selection of students, the preliminary rituals of the college were opened on October 2, 1927, in which, on Morning October 2 the Akhand Paath Sahib was completed. By 10 o'clock, the *Kirtan Jathas* continued to perform *kirtan*. Explanation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib was performed after the *Shabad Kirtan*. Then Prof. Teja Singh of Khalsa College and S. Kharak Singh initiated the ceremonial ceremony of Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College and after that the proceedings ended.

Out of the feelings of the whole *Sikh* community, this contribution of college can not be ignored, in the history. All the activities of this great organisation SGPC, especially its educational work, Shaheed *Sikh* Missionary College (Amritsar), a unique educational institution is sitting in a lot of history. This College, which proves *Sikh* sentiments, can do more important work during the time cycle. The SGPC is not only the managing committee for managing the *Gurudwaras* of the *Sikh Panth* but the whole movement whose educational contribution in its multiracial contribution is invaluable.

History repeats itself. Whenever the *Sikhs* are forced to the oppression, they compete with the opposing forces and overtake the forces of the opposite. Even now the time is the same. *Panthic* zeal and embarrassment did not cool even in a double battle with priest and brutal government. The *Sikh Panth* has always been in Chardikala, thanks to the grace of the Gurus, the *Sikhs* defeating both powers, restored the decline of the *Sikh* community.

God kept his eyes on it, so that it always kept trying in the service of the *Sikh* community. SGPC, following this map step is leading the entire *Sikh* community and is working diligently with its dedication. *Waheguru* always accompanied the side of the *Sikh Panth* and kept it in *Chardikala*.

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