



Al-Azhār

Volume 6, Issue 1 (Jan-June, 2020)

ISSN (Print): 2519-6707



Issue: <http://al-azhaar.org/ojs/index.php/rj/issue/view/12>

URL: <http://al-azhaar.org/ojs/index.php/rj/article/view/254/193>

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46896/alazhr.v6i01.254>

Title History of Sikh Educational system

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Received on: 29 June, 2019

Accepted on: 29 May, 2020

Published on: 25 June, 2020

Citation: Zahoor Alam, Maria Mann and Dr. Muhammad Ayaz, "History of Sikh Educational system ," Al-Azhār: 6 no, 1 (2020): 224-230.

Publisher: The University of Agriculture Peshawar



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History of Sikh Educational system

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ABSTRACT

According to Guru Nanak, real education enables a man to gain self-realization and self-manifestation in a spontaneous way. He says emphatically that a really educated man is one who enlightens his mind with the divine knowledge and realizes himself. Education is always given importance in all religions especially in Islam as well as Sikhism. The history of Sikh education is really rich and shows the true teachings of Nanak that emphasize on the importance of education. Even in modern times Sikhs have tried to preserve their tradition of gaining education and knowledge by following the footsteps of their elders and by opening educational institutions for their younger generations. This dissertation is an attempt to know about the Sikh religious education in general. It has been found that the Sikh education to certain extent reflects the teachings of their Holy book (SGGS) and Sikh can get religious education irrespective of cast.

Key words: *Sikhism, Guru Nanak, Education, Guru Granth, Guidelines.*

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Sikh education

1. Origination of education:

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. **Educational** methods include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion and directed research.

2. Importance of education in religion:

Education always had importance in all the religions. Education is provided by religious organizations or scholars, for instruction in doctrine and faith, or for education in various aspects of religion, with explicitly religious or moral aims.

Education and Islam:

Education has been the focus point in Islam. The first verse of the Quran revealed on the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) points out importance of education in Islam, the verse starts with the word "IQRA". It is a command that means read in Arabic, and that implies the notion of learning and looking for enlightenment. Like Allah says in the Holy Quran:

"اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (1) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (2) اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ (3) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (4) عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ" (5)¹

"Declare! Or read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created (1) Created man, out of a clot of congealed blood: (2) Proclaim! And thy lord is most bountiful (3) He who thought (the use of) the pen (4) taught man that which he knew not (5)"²

"Who taught by the Pen"

can be rendered in two ways.

The first is that: Allah taught writing and the book to Man and it is He Who is able to do this portent; to establish the origin of all sciences, knowledge and civilizations in him.

The second meaning is that through this way and by this means Man is taught all of the sciences and knowledge.

The Quran urges the mankind to think, ponder, reflect and acquire knowledge that would bring them closer to God and his creation. Like Allah says:

"وَيْسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي"³

"Oh! my Lord, Open for me my chest."

This verse is a pledge to fill one's heart with the courage that may enable one to perform the obligations connected with the great mission of a Messenger, and give one the confidence for its fulfillment. Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) prayed for this because he realized the grave responsibilities of the great mission.

The prophet Muhammad (SAW) commanded knowledge upon all Muslims, and urged them to seek knowledge as far they could reach, and also to seek it all times.

Anas narrated "I will narrate to you a Hadith that no one after me will tell you about. I heard Allah's apostle's (PBUH) saying "among the signs of Doomsday" are:

Religious knowledge will decrease (by the death of religious learned man).

Religious ignorance will appear be widespread.

The instance of fornication will be very high.

Women will be in majority and men will be in such a minority that one-man will be caretaker of fifty women⁴.

Education and Sikhism:

The word education has its root in the Latin word 'educatio' which means 'to bring out'. The purpose of education is to bring out the best that is already there in man and brings him to the point of perfection that is his natural destiny.

Guru Nanak taught three Hs, the **knowledge of the Hand, Knowledge of Head and knowledge of the Heart**. The education of the hand means the self-respect of labor, and serves the humanity. The education of head implies an appreciation of the wonder of nature. An understanding of the mysteries of the universe and a search for truth.

The deplorable state of society at the time of the advent of Guru Nanak compelled him to think of the ways to correct the situation in all respects. He thought deeply and reached the conclusion that the root cause of the sad state of affairs was the vacuum caused by the absence of any true teacher who could guide the masses to the right path. The so called teachers and religious leaders themselves were steeped in corruption and greed. A dynamic personality as he was, Guru Nanak could not accept the things as they were. He decided to take the lead so as to rectify the situation. For this purpose, he undertook four journeys around the world to reach out to the people and guide and educate them to the right path. Bhai Gurdas, the great laureate testifies:

ਬਾਬਾ ਦੇਖੇ ਧਯਾਨ ਧਰ ਜਲਤੀ ਸਕ ਪਿਥਮੀ ਸਿਸ ਆਈ।
 ਬਾਝਰ ਗਰ ਗਬਾਰ ਹੈ ਹੈਰੈ ਕਰਜੀ ਸਣੀ ਲਕਾਈ।
 ਬਾਬੇ ਭੇਖ ਬਣਾਇਆ ਉਦਾਸੀ ਕੀ ਰੀਤ ਚਲਾਈ।
 ਚੜ੍ਹਿਆ ਸੇਧਨ ਧਰਤ ਲੁਕਾਈ।⁵)

Education in Sikhism means, continuous development and combination of human personality. Education is treated as the third eye through which an individual can see in and outside. Education aims at widening the wisdom possibility of a person for the development of spiritual tendencies. It aims at making a person wise, academically and spiritually:

Guru Nanak Dev says:

"Contemplate spiritual knowledge; read it and study it, and you shall be honored."⁶

Guru Nanak believed that a **true teacher** is one who has the capacity to come down to the level of his students. Wherever he went during his travels, he talked to the people in their language and their idiom. While talking to a farmer, a trader or an artisan, he would use their respective terminology and gave examples that were closer to their daily life, making it easy for them to understand the message being given by him. He went to the extent of dressing up the way the people of the area being visited by him dressed themselves up, so that they identified themselves with him and developed an instant rapport with him. Proper communication between the teacher and the taught was very important to him. This made him a very popular and beloved teacher.

The concept of education in Sikhism is summarized as,

*"He is learned indeed who is benefactor of others."*⁷

In the times of the Gurus, Gurdwaras were used as Pathshalas⁸ to teach Gurmukhi to the Sikh youths. All the Sikh Gurus tried to teach Gurmukhi to their followers so that they could read and understand Gurbani enshrined in holy Granth Sahib.

3. history of Sikh education:

Eighteenth century was a test period for the Sikhs when more than two hundred thousand Sikhs were killed in less than fifty years on the altar of religious bigotry. Many a times, the Sikhs had to flee to Jungles where education facility was not available. They could not find time to give attention towards education of their new generation. The period from cross to crown of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was thus not favorable to the Sikhs education wise. After consolidation of his empire, the Maharaja

started few of the schools. Soon after his death, the times were again not favorable. The British rulers tried to impose the system of education as suited to them.

After the fall of the Sikh Empire and with the advent of Macaulay's English Education, the Sikhs felt real threat to their religion and identity. Sikh boys and girls were weaned away from the Sikh way of life and they felt attracted towards the glamorous cultures of foreign countries. They were drifting away from their roots. There arose a feeling of recovery in the Sikh thought during the **nineteenth century** to save its youth from the cultural attack.

The Sikh Educational institutions were founded with this mission in mind to bring their youth to the original teachings of the Guru.

The **Singh Sabha movement** took its birth to provide an answer to the educational problems of the Sikhs. The Sikh organizations started taking keen interest in promoting education among the Sikhs. The first idea was to open **Khalsa College** at Lahore to give education to the Sikh youth according to Sikh philosophy. On insistence of some Sikhs, it was agreed to by the government to open the Khalsa College at Amritsar. Thereafter many Khalsa schools were opened in Punjab. The main motto was,

"The true aim of education should be to call forth that which is essential to the social, economic and spiritual development of an individual and society."⁹

Twentieth century played a significant role in the Sikh learning. There are few of the missionary institutions to teach Sikhism in and outside India. There was a flux of Khalsa Schools and Colleges in Punjab. Guru Nanak Dev University and Punjabi University were opened at Amritsar and Patiala respectively. Punjabi language and Sikh literature had given opportunity to flourish.

The real objective of establishing the educational institutions was not merely teaching the prescribed curriculum but to develop the personality of the Sikh youth as a whole so that the youth might become proud of their culture and live the honorable Sikh way of life. The ultimate objective was search of the truth. It was to inculcate the sense of knowing the cardinal principles of Sikhism so that the youth could contribute meaningfully to the growth of Sikh society.

"According to Sikhism, man may read cartloads of books or carry loads of them, he may read for years together but he alone is the learned who has attained God."¹⁰

4: Concept of education (vidiaa) in Guru Granth:

The concept of education (vidiaa) in Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a very important subject because the Sikh educational tradition is deep-rooted in Sikh beliefs and shapes the Sikh way of life. After all, the very word, Sikh means a learner, a disciple, a follower and a student, who discovers the truth from the hymns of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (gurbani), the Living Guru and a treasure of divine knowledge. Sri Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, declared Sri Guru Granth Sahib as the "shabad guru" of the Sikhs. In the Siddh Goshti, Sri Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikhism affirms: The shabad is the guru and the surati attuned to it is the disciple.¹¹

In Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the importance of education (vidiaa) is recognized. Vidiaa is light and avidiaa is darkness. Uneducated person always stumbles in darkness because he is unable to differentiate between good and evil, truth and untruth, right and wrong, virtue and vice, etc. Therefore, Sri Guru Granth Sahib inspires a person to

enlighten himself and help others in acquiring knowledge with the purpose of propagating education (vidiaa). Lack of knowledge is a spiritual bondage. Without wisdom a person is unable to carry out all his duties (individual and social) success fully. In gurbani, it is affirmed:

"Wisdom leads us to serve our Lord and Master; through wisdom, honor is obtained. Wisdom does not come by reading text books; wisdom inspires us to give in charity".¹²

Guru Nanak Dev had associated education with kindness and an instrument of moral and spiritual development. He recommended the model for a worldwide society where every individual must engage in honest reproductive labor, followed by sharing fruits of his labor with his neighbors.

It is established truth that Guru Nanak was a born teacher, who started opening the flood gates of Divine Wisdom by uttering wonderful hymns from his very tender age. The Teacher of the Teachers, this Child World Teacher illumined the hearts of the Pandit and the Maulvi with true spirituality when taken to the school for education.... Divine wisdom, the true education then imparted by Sri Guru Nanak Sahib at that tender age delights the soul, illumines the heart, is the basis of all morality, is the foundation of all truthful living, and is the source of true character building.

5. Heritage of Sikh education:

Guru Nanak supports the idea of a discussion where everybody can ask questions and his questions must be answered in a spirit of helping and everyone should learn it as an important way to improve knowledge.¹³

According to Guru Nanak knowledge force on practical life is unnecessary. Once got works like a sword that cuts through the cobwebs created by human natures diverting human attention away from the goal of life.¹⁴

Guru Nanak has frequently referred to the role of education in human life, although his views are scattered in his works and one is apt to believe that he has not propounded any philosophy of education. It is true that a systematic philosophy of education as such was not developed and discussed by him in the modern sense. He did not sit down to theorize as a modern educationist would do. Nor did he carry on any experimentation in any laboratory school, nevertheless, his many thoughts on education provide rich material on the philosophy of education. After going through his educational ideas lying here and there in his works, especially in the Japuji, Patti, Asa-di-Var and Onkar, it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that he had definite views on education.

The educational philosophy of Guru has to be inferred from his diverse as well as methodical utterances. All through his thoughts on education, one finds intimate relations between his educational views and general philosophy. Guru Nanak's conception of education encompasses the entire vista of man's life on earth. The highest education, according to him; is that which develops the whole man in a way that he realizes God's existence and gets in tune with Him. Says Guru Nanak:

That Teacher alone is educated, Who enlightens his mind with divine knowledge,
Through right reflection in a spontaneous way, Who sublimates his education into
right understanding of life, And cultivates devotional love for Ram Naam¹⁵

In about a century, after the death of Guru Nanak's death, Sikh educational heritage included the revealed compositions protected in the scriptural text their translation and the stories about the Gurus and their courts. This heritage is normally clear in a manuscript that is supposed to have been prepared for Bibi Rup Kunvar, the daughter of Guru Harirai. The opening section of the text contained Sikh liturgical compositions, and the second part included stories built around Sikh moral values and events from the lives of the Gurus.¹⁶

Sikh literary heritage also expanded in the late 1670s, we see poets and singers from the distant Sikh congregations as well as the courts of the local chiefs in the hills seeking Sikh patronage at Chak Nanaki, Paunta, and Anandpur.¹⁷

Also, the writings of Bhai Gurdas, the exegesis of the compositions in the Guru Granth and the ideas enshrined in them, served as the core of interpretive literature.

6: Modern times and Sikh education:

The schools attached to the village gurdwaras, came under pressure from the British educational system and were eventually phased out during the early decades of the twentieth century. Government schools were opened to impart secular education and teach subjects such as English, science, and mathematics, which were expected to prepare young people to obtain jobs in the administration.

In the decades when British came in the Punjab, Sikh leadership responded to the new developments in several ways ranging from complete rejection of Baba Ram Singh, 1816-1885 to extreme fascination with modernity Dayal Singh Majithia, 1849-1898. The mainstream Sikh leadership floated a middle alternative that had profound impact on Sikh education.¹⁸

Guru Nanak differentiates education from mere information contrary to the concept in modern day; one may read innumerable books and still may not be rightly educated person. Once, Guru Nanak met an eminent Kashmiri Pandit, Dharam Dass, by name. He was profound scholar of Sanskrit literature, and often carried cartloads of books where-ever he went to display his learning. He came to Guru Nanak also for the sake of scholarly discussions. Guru Nanak explained to him that the store of information or knowledge did not constitute real education:

We may read books endlessly By cart loads, And assemble caravans with their loads, And stuff boats, and hollows with their loads, Through all the years and months which are at our command. Throughout the life and for all the breaths at our disposal Yet, says Nanak, That all our education will be a mere prattle of ego. Unless we realize the philosophy of unity of God-head through it, To make our destiny divine
The Sikhs founded "Sikh educational Society" (SES) in the Pre-Independence days in Lahore when the three main communities of Punjab were engaged in the competitive efforts to modernize their educational, cultural and social environment; and to promote their respective religion - socio - economic interests. The Sikh leaders of the day felt the need of establishing a Sikh College at Lahore.¹⁹

Conclusion:

Other religions people don't get knowledge of that religion which they preach but they get knowledge to secure their religion. One is Sikhism it's believers also don't preach and don't accept non Sikh people in their religion but they learn and get knowledge to keep their religion alive, integrate the human personality and culture for coming generation. According to Sikh people, if a person gets knowledge, he comes

with the mercy of the Lord. Sikh educational program seeks to create an environment through education where Sikhs may freely practice faith and where people appreciate the presence of Sikhs in the community. They practically fight bias and inequity by spreading awareness about Sikhs. The meaning of education is to prepare man intellectual, visual and his emotional background in such a way that the individual development is harmonious. They should follow Dharma in its wide features and Nanak made sure of it through his teachings.

Biobloghraphy

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³ Surah Al-Taha (25)

⁴ Abu Abdullah Al-Bukhari, 81,43 (1407)

⁵ (*Bhai Gurdas, Var 1 Pauri 24*)

⁶ 2nd edition Arizona USA Singh Sahib Sant Singh Khalsa, English Translation of Siri Guru Granth Sahib.3 (1978)P:1329.

⁷ Ibid.P:356

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¹¹ Sri Guru Granth Sahib p. 943

¹² (SGGS 1245)

¹³ GGP:938,

¹⁴ 1022.38 . Gian kharhgule man siu lujhe

¹⁵ Ved parhahi te ved vakhanhai GG P638

¹⁶ The manuscript was extant at Kiratpur

¹⁷ Chaupa Singh mentions that the Guru sent letters asking scribes to reach the Sikh court.

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