

Gurdwara

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1. Etymology of the term 'Gurdwara'

Gurdwara means guru's abode. The term 'Gurdwara' is the completion of two single terms Guru+dwara = Gurdwara means the door of true teacher. The Sikh religion believes in true teacher i.e Sabad Guru, the door of Sabad Guru is Gurdwara. The term Gurdwara is synonymous to the term Dharamsal i.e the place of worship. During the time of sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib the Dharamsals came to be known as Gurdwara. The Sikh religion is the youngest of all world religions as founded by Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. Guru Nanak stressed on the unity of one Ultimate Reality in the form of sabad. It is because of this that the philosophy or metaphysics of Sikhism can't be realized without the understanding of 'Sabad'. The Sabad is the Eternal Guru of Sikh religion. The followers of Sikh religion believed in the unity of God, the God who is creator, formless, eternal, transcendent and all-pervasive. Beliefs in Gods and Goddesses, idol-worship and superstitious religious ceremonies are directly rejected in Sikh religion.

2. History of Dharamsal and Gurdwara

In Sikh religion, there are various institutions which are serving only for the welfare of humanity. These institutions can be said the independent doctrines of Sikh religion. These can be named as Dharamsal or Gurdwara. The institution of Dharamsal or Gurdwara is one of most important institution among them. The term 'Dharamsala' or 'Dharamsal' is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Dharamsala' which means court of justice, tribunal, charitable asylum, religious asylum.

In Sikh religion the term 'Dharamsal' is used for the place of worship. In other words, it can be said that the place for practicing Dharma or religion is known as Dharamsal. The first Dharamsal was set up by first Guru, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji. According to Harbans Singh, "they were first set up by Guru Nanak wherever he went for the devotees to meet regularly to sing praises of Lord and to discuss matters of common concern." This first Dharamsal was established at Kartarpur by Guru Nanak where he settled down at the end of his extensive preaching tours (Udasis). the term Gurdwara is said to be the recent name of Dharamsal.

It is well known fact that Guru Nanak established the first Dharamsal or Gurdwara only for the purpose of humanity. The tradition of setting up of Dharamsalas was followed by other proceeding Gurus. In the same lane Guru Angad Dev developed Khadur Sahib as the religious centre of the Sikhs

in the form of Dharamsal. In addition the continuing to process of Dharamsals, Guru Amar Das established the twenty two Manjis, Baoli at Goindwal. Fourth master Guru Ram Das founded the Ramdaspur and got the Amrit Srowar dug there. Guru Arjan Dev founded the Dharamsala as Tarantarn, Kartarpur and Gobindpur. He added one other feature to Dharamsals with the compilation of Guru Granth Sahib. Infact, he finalized the necessary presence of Guru Granth Sahib in the Dharamsals. The Miri-Piri Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib constructed The Akal Takhat, developed Kartarpur and founded Kiratpur. Seventh Guru, Guru Har Rai strengthened the Sikh centers in Malwa corners. The second martyr Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur founded the city of Anandpur as a new religious place for The Sikhs. He toured with the northern and eastern various Dharamsals. Guru Tegh Bhadur developed Patna as another religious centre for the Sikh Sangats. The tenth master, Guru Gobind Singh strengthened the Sikhs with the formulation of new concept as Saint-Sepahi. He built five forts, one at Paonta Sahib and remaining four in Anandpur Sahib. he transformed the new spirit if the Sikhs by designating The Sabad- Guru as their Eternal Guru in the form of Guru Granth Sahib. "This institutionalizing process was carried forward by the nine successors of Guru Nanak; compilation of the Adi Granth; building up Sri Harmandir Sahib, erection of Sri Akal Takhat being some of the most significant aspects of the intrinsic development of institutional Sikhism. The correlative process of normalization in the form of Sikh rites, ceremonies, ethical codes of conduct, modes of worship, conception of the sacred and profane, distinct commensality, etc. also continued side by side. this was not intended to be competitively parallel or alternative to the Hindu or the Muslim cosmos. Guru Nanak exhorts a Hindu to be a true Hindu and a Muslim to be a true Muslim. Guru Gobind Singh describes Hindu temple and Muslim mosque to be both contextually valid modes of worship."

3. Main features of Gurdwara Institution

The Sikh religion strictly commands on worshipping the God in the form of Sabad i.e Sabad Guru. Sardul Singh Caveeshar defined that the worshippers are of two types: one of the subjective and other is objective type. The subjective devotees mostly offer with their sacred heart and soul. While the objective worshippers always demands for the worldly materials. The second objective category of the worshippers are the selfish persons these are called Manmukh in Sikh religion. A true believer of Sikh religion is called a Gursikh and for a Gursikh the best way of worshipping is with the

offering of mind and heart. Such kind of idealistic worship can be attained only in the Gurdwaras i.e. Guru's abode.

The Gurdwara is the place for the performance of all Sikh ceremonies like the naming ceremony (Naam Karan Sanskar), marriage ceremony (Anand Karj), death ceremony (Antim Ardas Sanskar) etc. it also serves as the place of worship for the devotees. People attain peace of mind among the Gurdwara." He further said that the service in free kitchen and worshipping is equally practiced in the Gurdwaras. The Gurdwara is open for the people of all communities.

If we analyze the Gurdwara institution in a broader sense, we notice that many sub institutions are actively under the institutions for example it works as an educational institution, residential institution, providing help to the poor and needy, first aid to sick etc. Apart from these it also functions as an institution for the learning and the correct pronunciation of the Bani. The overall aim of this institution is to serve the society with ever kind of help.

4. Gurdwara Institutions and Langar

Gurdwara Institutions has a deep relation with the Langar system. As religion place an important role in society, similarly Langar tradition place important role in Gurdwara. Every needy irrespective of country, cast, creed and color is served free food in the Langar institutions. The Beginning of this tradition was started by Guru Nanak. Wherever the Dharamsals were established the facility for providing free food to the needy was also provided. It is worth mentioning that the whole Langar used to be cooked in one kitchen and ever person be it a King or a beggar used to partake Langar sitting together in one queue. This principle was acted to finish all the discriminations based on caste and creed.

The successor gurus after Guru Nanak also maintained this tradition. There is no doubt that the tradition of service to humanity in the form of Langar was established by Guru Nanak but the Sikh mother's (Womens, who closely related with Gurudwaras) performed a remarkable role in the establishment as well as the development of Langar. For example the role of Mata Khivi Ji can't be ignored in the service of Langar.

5. Gurdwara: A Spiritual and Social Combination

Guru Nanak Dev Ji established the Sikh religion as a spiritual and social combination. Therefore as an example to the ancient Dharamsal the Gurdwara. The Gurdwara in the present day has developed in the form of huge institution. It would not be Wrong to some up this institution as a combination of spirituality and power, Miri and Piri, saint and soldier, spirituality and being social. The political and social activities being performed in Gurdwaras these days can well justify this statement. All the rights from birth to death, in a Sikh's life are performed in Gurdwara Only.

After the establishment of the law called the Gurdwara Act, 1925, the control and management of the Sikh shrines was transferred in the hands of the Sikh's. It is noteworthy that

the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Sri Amritsar is now charged with the overall responsibility and control over the Gurdwaras.

In the concluding lines it can be said that the Gurdwara is the central institute of the Sikhs. Sikhism has no room for symbolism or ritualism, Sikhs have neither idol nor alters in their Gurdwara. People of any racial, social, political, religious or non-religious belief are always welcomed at any Gurdwara.

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