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## Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji And Guru Ki Kashi, Damdama Sahib

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### Abstract

This research paper presents an informative, authentic and comprehensive document for the promotion of the place Talwandi Sabo as a centre of education, scholarship, learning and research as was the sacred blessings originally by the tenth and last Guru of the Sikh, Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. He had started his mission to obtain an honour and standard for this place like that of Kashi, the most reputed centre of education and learning in India. He had chosen this place, Damdama Sahib for his learning pursuits. He had congregated the galaxy of scholars here who had acquired education and knowledge of almost all the available subjects of his time and thus named the place as Guru Ki Kashi. The most remarkable fact about this place is that the final version of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, which is accepted and respected all over the world, was compiled by Guru Ji here only in 1706 during his stay for about 9 months. His vision was to make a parallel Kashi here.

**Keywords:** Guru ki Kashi, Talwandi Sabo, Damdama Sahib, Guru Gobind Singh, educational institutes, Khalsa,

### Introduction

This research paper is based on the researcher's study of the relevant and related books on the subject, visits to the places mentioned, interactions, talks and interview of related persons in Talwandi Sabo. Guru Gobind Singh Ji had started his mission and a number of scholars had congregated at Damdama Sahib. Keeping in view the dream and blessings of Guru Ji, many governmental and non-governmental organisations have started their work regarding the promotion of the place by founding several educational institutions having the potential to cater to the needs of contemporary society.

The present paper gives a brief account of the educational contribution of the Guru Sahib to the humanity, the role of the blessed place Talwandi Sabo in this regard and the attempts of the Sikh Community to revive the educational importance of this place that it enjoyed during the stay of the Guru Sahib here. With these objectives in mind the paper has been presented under the following heads:

### Guru Gobind Singh Ji as a Scholar and an Educationist

Much has been written about Guru Gobind Singh from religious and warfare point of view. His educational, linguistic, and literary greatness and contribution has comparatively drawn less attention and focus of the scholars. The aim of this paper is also to present nothing that is unwarranted but to say with evidence on the basis of reliable sources.

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The father of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Guru Teg Bahadur had studied History, Arithmetic, Metaphysics, Logic, Theology, Six Philosophical systems, and classics like Bhagvat Gita, Mahabhart, Ramayana and the basic principles of Islamic philosophy (Singh 1967: 7). As Guru Gobind Singh crossed the age of infancy he was also exposed to the literary and religious discussions and debates that were often held at Patna at the behest of the Sangat of Patna in which scholars/theologians/ thinkers of diverse religious and literary traditions took part. His childhood was spent in the company of the River Ganges. Normally a vast concourse of people comprising different classes, faiths, ethnicities, ideologies and economic interests visited Patna to have a dip in the Ganges or to conduct business. In the process they interacted with one another. The Guru, being witness to all those, must have learnt a lot which in his later years helped him mature his plans. He picked Bihari, a dialect of Hindi, in the company of his Bihari friends, and Gurmukhi script from his dear mother. He lisped in Bihari Hindi, acquired a taste for that language which found poetic expressions in his compositions in later years (Gandhi, 76). Since many scholars, thinkers, poets and artists visited Patna to pay respects to the family of Guru Tegh Bahadur, he (Guru Gobind Singh) found a chance to mix and interact with them. As a result, he not only grew mature but also developed interest in languages as well as in the art of versification.

### **Kashi and Guru Gobind Singh Ji**

From the time immemorial Kashi, known as Banaras or Varanasi also, had been the centre of learning and scholarship as well as the abode of greatest scholars and saints of the time. During the life time of Guruji also Kashi had the same repute.

A European writer has aptly described:

“It is one of the oldest cities in the world, and one of the wealthiest cities of India. Benares was famous before Rome was known, and for many centuries has claimed and gained the homage of every devout Hindu. It is the Oxford and Mecca of Hinduism. Its river, its temples, its banks, are known and revered throughout India. Its very air and soil are counted holy. Residence in the city ensures salvation, death there makes salvation doubly sure” (Cape, 15).

Guru Nanak had visited Kashi. But he didn't approve the false idea that a person died in Kashi was sure to attain salvation. According to him the only way of salvation lay in giving up worldly desires and sinful life (Tewari, 33). Guru Teg Bahadur also visited this city where stands a Sikh temple to commemorate his visit (Singh 1908: 25). He had stayed there for seven months. On his way to Anandpur from Patna Guru Gobind Singh Ji also had stayed, though for brief, at Kashi. This first and probably last physical contact with Kashi must have left unforgettable intellectual impression on the mind of the Guru Sahib. He invited new entrants to his literary Darbar already enriched with the return of the Sikhs who had been sent to Benaras in 1686. He encouraged them to translate the episodes of the Ramayan and the Mahabharat (Gandhi, 178). Therefore, he wanted to develop the locality of Damdama Sahib on the model of that of Kashi.

## **Guru Ki Kashi: Talwandi Sabo**

The word 'Talwandi' gives a historical and sacred sense. It was the village Rai Bhoi Ki Talwandi (now famous as Nankana Sahib), Pakistan where the most revered soul of the Sikhism Guru Nanak Dev Ji was born. Pakistan government has laid the foundation stone on 28.10.2019 of Baba Guru Nanak University (BGNU) on Sikh religion and culture at Nankana Sahib with the help of the Sikh Community worldwide (Gulf News 20.10.2019).

The Sikh historians have propounded that Talwandi Sabo was visited by Guru Nanak, Guru Hargobind, Guru Har Rai and Guru Teg Bahadur (Bajwa 3-4). Guru Gibind Singh Ji came to Talwandi Sabo, now famous as Takhta Damdama Sahib, on 17 January, 1707 and remained here till 30 October 1707. Chaudhari Dalla, Zamindar of Talwandi, welcomed him extending every kind of support. Mata Sundri and Mata Sahib Deva joined him here. It is the place where the Guru Granth Sahib, which is recited all over the world, and has shown the right path to the humanity, was compiled. Knowledge disseminated from here to the whole world.

This is the land where Guruji had announced, at the enquiry of Mata Sundri about her four sons: "The four sons have been offered as a sacrifice over the heads of these sons. What does it matter if we have lost four sons, while thousands like them are alive and are in thy lap and mine?" Such was the fascinating atmosphere of Talwandi, that the Guru called it Kashi of the Sikhs, the Beneres, for here poets, philosophers and mystics had flocked in hundreds to the feet of the Master (Singh 1933: 32).

This was the centre from where preachers were sent to different parts of India to spread the Khalsa Panth. Guru appointed preachers like Bhai Pheru, Punjab Singh, and Rocha Singh having been baptised to disseminate Sikhism in the areas of Pothohar, Kaslunir, district of Hazara and Muzaffrabad. They and their successors strove hard to awaken the people to the Khalsa way of life. The Guru also made efforts to organise preaching work in Sind and Rajasthan. Bhai Kanahiya and his associates did commendable work in Sind, presently a province in Pakistan (Gandhi, 305).

It is the place where Guru Sahib, in the discourses to various Sangats, dwelt at length on the futility of totems, esoteric practices, caste-distinctions as well as caste considerations, superstitions, grave-worship and many other social and religious prejudices. The Guru did all this to persuade the people to attach themselves at mental level with better cultural roots (Gandhi, 305).

This is the place where the Guru interpreted the scriptures himself and asked some of his devoted disciples to understand its true meaning and impact. Sixty persons acquired mastery over the subject. The most important out of them was Bhai Mani Singh. Besides this, the Guru created two Orders, one of the Nirmalas and the other of the Gyanies. No doubt, the Guru, while at Paonta, sent eleven members to Benaras to learn Sanskrit and acquire knowledge in Hindu Philosophical systems. These men were named Nirmal meaning pure, yet the Nirmala order was set afloat at Talwandi Sabo. The purpose was to interpret Indian religious thought and history in terms of the world-view of Sikhism (Gandhi, 306). The place in Kashi where the scholars sent by Guru Gobind Singh for the

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study of Indian scriptures had stayed remained in the possession of the Nirmals (Veniprasad, 41).

The order of the Gyanies also came into being under the direct inspiration of the Guru and that too at Talwandi Sabo. The underlying objective was to raise a group of persons competent enough to interpret Gurbani correctly. Guru Gobind Singh interpreted the verses enshrined in Sri Adi Granth and took steps so that a number of persons might acquire proficiency to do the same. Bhai Mani Singh was the first person who received this training from him. Later, while compiling the Guru Granth Sahib, as the Guru dictated, so recorded Bhai Mani Singh. The project was completed in several months. A new volume of the original Granth was prepared in this way. This is how that volume came to be known as Damdami Bir.

The finalisation of Sri Adi Granth was celebrated with appropriate ceremony and thanksgivings. The ink and reeds used in transcribing the Granth was cast by the Guru into the pool close to the tent under which the work had been in progress. "As a poet, and as a mystic as well as a scholar of philosophy who studied some of the basic works of Hindudom, Guru Gobind brought out his own edition of the Guru Granth, and that shows his interest in giving to the followers of the Panth or the Sikh Way an authoritative edition of their basic scriptures which were for ever to act as their teacher in all matters of faith and life" (Chatterji, 28-9).

ਏ ਹੈ ਪ੍ਰਗਟ ਹਮਾਰੀ ਕਾਸ਼ੀ<sup>੧੪</sup> | ਪੜ੍ਹ ਹੈ ਯਾਹਿ ਢੇਰ ਮਤਿ ਨਾਮੀ ॥੧੭॥ [੪੬॥]

(Singh 1968: 213).

The Guru said that Damdama would be 'Kashi of the Sikhs' and become famous as a seat of learning. He foretold that many would study here and become learned. Guru Sahib had an ardent desire to educate the masses of this area. It is against this background that the Guru aspired to see 'Talwandi Sabo Ki' emerge as a great centre of learning like Kashi (Benaras). 'New Kashi' of the Guru would symbolise aspirations of the new generation.

The Guru invited a number of scholars, poets and men of learning at the place. Once again, literature began to be created to inspire the people to be awake to new realities. Arrangements were also made to impart education to the people. The Guru Sahib encouraged the people to study at the working academy there. Damdama Sahib is the place where the Guru Sahib received royal messenger conveying Aurangzeb's last wish for personal meeting with the Guruji (Grewal and Bal, 147).

Even after the martyrdom of Bhai Deep Singh in 1937-8, Damdama Sahib was considered to be the highest seat of learning for the Sikhs. The Sardar of Sahzadpur (now in Ambala district) had usurped the Takht of Talwandi by forgery in around 1868. The Gurdwaras and the property attached to them became the Zagirs of the Sardars of Sahzadpur. Various mal practices started there. But after the SGPC took over its management in 1963, it started getting the same importance as it had during the period of Guru Gobind Singh. It was approved as the fourth Takht by SGPC in November 1966.

## **Contemporary Educational Institutions at Talwandi Sabo and Prospects**

The acts, the talks and magical aura of Guru Gobind Singh Ji may be felt and witnessed at Talwandi Sabo. The great anthropologists of the Sikh community have tried to explore for the possibility in the field of education, scholarship and learning. The government also has played its part well in the direction. Several educational institutions of repute have been established in this area.

The first ever educational organisation here was established by Guru Gobind Singh as Damdami Taksal in 1706. This is, probably, the first formal educational academy in the history of Punjab; it is still alive. This has been a "school" of fundamentalist Sikh theology that today exists as a formal organization or sect. It was originally intended for studying the Sikh scriptures. One of its first students was Deep Singh, who subsequently converted the school into the Damdami Taksal (Mint of Damdama). It was better known as Damdama school of Sikh exegesis. It was sometimes referred as the "moving university" of the Sikhs (Mahmood, 17). Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was unimportant. Under Sant Sunder Singh (d. 1930), however, it attracted attention for its having strictly traditionalist approach, and it achieved prominence as a powerful fundamentalist force in Sikh politics under the militant leadership of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale during the 1970s and early 1980s. This institution in Talwandi Sabo continues, with diminished strength, to this day.

After the independence of India government paid attention to the educational need of the area and established Guru Kashi College in Talwandi Sabo reviving the Guru Gobind Singh's vision of Kashi. Guru Kashi College, established in 1960, is an important constituent college of Punjabi University, Patiala. Punjabi University, Patiala set up its campus as Guru Kashi Campus in Talwandi Sabo in 1988 for transforming the professional education scene in the heart of Malwa region. Under this campus run famous colleges like Yadavindra College of Engineering, the University School of Business Studies. The Directorate of Education, SGPC also has been running Mata Sahib Kaur ji Girls College and Guru Kashi College of Sikh Studies in Talwandi Sabo.

The Kalgidhar Trust Baru Sahib, which has done tremendous service in the field of education by establishing 129 schools in various states of India and a university in Baru Sahib, Sirmour, Himachal Pradesh, has set up a university Akal University here in 2015 to pay homage to Guru Gobind Singh. The university intends to promote Comparative Religious Studies, Sikh Studies specially the Teachings of Guru Gobind Singh and the translation of Guru Granth Sahib in original ragas in different languages of the world. It also intends to "develop collaborative academic programs with domestic and foreign universities for new and novel technologies and co-operative programs with local, national and international industries and develop program to train manpower to fulfill the needs of Punjab and India" (Singh 2018).

However, Guru Kashi University is the biggest educational organisation of the area. This is the most dynamic and the widest in nature and scope. The university was established by the Balaji Educational Trust in 2011 according to the Act of the Legislature of the state of Punjab, under the "Guru Kashi University Act 2011" (Punjab Act No 37 of 2011). The university has almost all the courses of study that are the requirements of the time in the

field of particularly science and technology, management, arts, law, education, paramedical etc. Besides, it has all the relevant courses related to Sikh Studies.

All the above higher educational institutions have been playing their respective role well in imparting various types of education, training and research. There is no such rural area in Punjab with enough space and pollution free, calm and quiet surrounding accommodating such a big number of higher educational organisations.

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