



Trade Legacy Of Guru Ram Das Ji In The Present Scenario

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Abstract:

The trade and economic foundations laid by Shri Guru Ram Das Ji have evolved over centuries even their relevance continues in the present scenario and he offered profound teachings on trade and life through a spiritual lens in the Guru Granth Sahib. Shri Guru Ram Das Ji, the fourth Sikh Guru, played a fundamental role in the development of trade and business especially through the founding of the city of Amritsar and also creating an environment conducive to economic growth. His deliberate initiative not only laid the foundation for Amritsar's future prosperity but also ensured that it became a remarkable center of trade, commerce, and spirituality. The principles of commerce and community development established by Guru Ram Das Ji remain vital to the region's economy and beyond. His references to trade often use it as a metaphor for the spiritual journey, emphasizing ethical living, the importance of devotion, and the pursuit of true "profit"—which, in his view, is the union with God. He laid the foundation for the city of Amritsar, which later became a hub of economic, spiritual, and cultural activity. Therefore, I try to describe some key elements of the importance of trade legacy of Guru Ram Das Ji in today's context.

Keywords: Amritsar, Guru Ram Das Ji, Spiritual, Business, Region, Trade,

Here are the key aspects that make Amritsar an exemplary trade hub.

I. The importance of the trade legacy of Guru Ram Das Ji in today's context:

Guru Ram Das Ji's strategic vision for Amritsar laid the foundation for a thriving trade center that combined spiritual significance with economic prosperity. The economic model that Guru Ram Das Ji established in Amritsar became a blueprint for other Sikh towns. It not only ensured the prosperity of the city but also set an example of how religious, cultural, and economic activities could thrive together. The city's cultural and religious significance, particularly due to the presence of the Golden Temple, attracts millions of tourists from around the world. This not only boosts local businesses in sectors like hospitality, retail, and food services but also fosters cultural exchange and trade connections. Guru Ram Das Ji's teachings emphasized honest work (Kirat Karo) and ethical trade practices. He promoted values such as fair dealings, honesty, and integrity in businesses, which were essential for building trust among traders and consumers. Over time,

Amritsar grew to become one of the major cities in Punjab, known for its vibrant markets, diverse industries, and as a key trading post between India and neighboring regions. Amritsar has a strong industrial base, particularly in textiles, food processing, handicrafts, and tourism and these produced goods are demanded internationally. The region is also known for its agricultural products which are exported to different countries and Amritsar's role as a hub for food processing allows it to export processed foods and spices. Moreover, the inclusive environment of Amritsar, where people from various backgrounds could engage in trade, helped foster an economy that was open, diverse, and supportive of growth.

Amritsar remains a significant economic center due to its historical and religious importance, particularly because of the Golden Temple, which draws millions of pilgrims and tourists annually. As Pilgrims and tourists visiting the city needed food, lodging, and other services, which creates substantial trade opportunities for local businesses and traders include hotels, restaurants, and transportation services. This has made the service industry one of the key sectors in Amritsar's economy. Therefore, Guru Ram Das Ji encouraged the establishment of markets and bazaars around the area of the Golden Temple which became bustling centers for trade and also invited artisans, merchants, and farmers from various regions to settle and set up their businesses. These markets became a source of livelihood for many and also became famous for trading goods such as textiles, spices, handicrafts, jewelry, and everyday necessities. As Hall Bazaar and Katra Jaimal Singh Market, are still vibrant centers for trade. They offer a wide range of goods like textiles, handicrafts, jewelry, and traditional garments, contributing to Amritsar's status as a commercial hub in Punjab. Hence, by promoting equality and encouraging all to participate in trade, Guru Ram Das Ji broke the barriers of caste-based occupations. This inclusivity allowed people from various backgrounds to engage in business and craft-based professions, enhancing the economic diversity of the city also. The historical significance of places like Jallianwala Bagh and the Partition Museum attract both domestic and international tourists, further boosting the local economy. In this way by fostering trade, he created an economic ecosystem that supported the growth of the city and the tradition of promoting business and trade set by Guru Ram Das Ji is still visible in the region's economic growth.

Guru Ram Das Ji's era saw the rise of small businesses, local artisans and Amritsar has grown into an important center for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly in the textile, agricultural, and food processing sectors. This focus on supporting local industries is significant today as small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are crucial to economic development, providing employment opportunities and promoting sustainable growth. The legacy of trade and openness to new businesses that was fostered by Guru Ram Das Ji is reflected in the entrepreneurial spirit of the city today. Handicrafts and traditional products, such as Amritsari juttis (footwear), carpets, and phulkari (traditional embroidery), are still in demand, supporting artisans and boosting trade both domestically and internationally. Due to its geographical proximity to the India-Pakistan border, Amritsar has become a focal point for cross-border trade.

The Wagah-Attari border serves as a key transit point for goods traded between India and Pakistan, especially in times of improved diplomatic relations. Despite political tensions, Amritsar's border trade highlights the strategic importance of the city's location, which has its roots in the trade routes established during Guru Ram Das Ji's time. Amritsar region also play a significant role in India's agricultural economy. Trade in grains, particularly wheat and rice, along with fruits and vegetables, continues to be an economic backbone of the region. The farming communities around Amritsar benefit from trade infrastructure that was historically cultivated by leaders like Guru Ram Das Ji.

Amritsar's economic growth has also been tied to sustainable practices, particularly in agriculture and traditional crafts. By promoting organic farming, water conservation, and ethical trade practices, the city has shown how sustainable approaches can be integrated into the trade economy. The local emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices serves as a model for other regions looking to balance economic growth with environmental and social responsibility.

The location of Amritsar was strategically chosen by Guru Ram Das Ji as it lay along significant trade routes that connected the rest of India with Central Asia and beyond. The strategic position allowed Amritsar to become a hub for regional and long-distance trade, connecting it to cities like Lahore, Delhi, and Kabul. The connectivity of the city by rail and road networks even Sri Guru Ram Dass Ji International Airport enhance its international trade and tourism which also making Amritsar a key distribution center in North India. This airport, named after the Guru, not only enhances its connectivity to various global destinations, including the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America but also makes it easier for businesses in the region to export goods directly, bypassing major hubs like Delhi. The city's success in connecting to global markets,

fostering cross-border ties, and promoting sustainable trade practices serves as an example for other trade centers in India and beyond.

Moreover, the construction of sarais (rest houses) provided accommodation for visitors which encouraging trade by facilitating the movement of people and goods. Therefore, the development of key infrastructure made it easier for traders and merchants to travel from different regions and stay in the city for enable the smooth exchange of goods. Moreover, by establishing trade routes and marketplaces, Guru Ram Das Ji facilitated economic development, which in turn supported the prosperity of the local community. This concept is still relevant as modern economies thrive when communities invest in infrastructure that supports business growth.

To boost trade and for enhancing economic activity, Guru Ram Das Ji encouraged the organization of trade fairs and gatherings around the Amrit Sarovar, where people could not only participate in religious activities but merchants also from distant places to bring and sell their products. The combination of religious significance and thriving markets turned Amritsar into a bustling center where spiritual and economic activities coexisted and supported each other.

Beside this, for creating a diverse economic base Guru Ram Das Ji also encouraging Migration of Traders, Artisans, Craftsmen and Agriculturists from neighboring regions to settle in the newly founded city by providing land and other facilities. This migration not only increased the population but also brought a variety of skills and crafts to the region, making Amritsar a vibrant center for trade and production.

Guru Ram Das Ji's emphasis on equality and community welfare is still relevant today in the form of inclusive economic policies in the region. The Langar system (community kitchen) provided free food to all visitors, irrespective of their background, which not only embodied the values of equality and service but also indirectly supported local agriculture and trade by creating a demand for food supplies. Similarly, the practice of Dasvandh (donating a tenth of one's earnings to the community) encouraged financial contributions that were used for the welfare and betterment of the society. Guru Ram Das Ji emphasized self-reliance, sharing and hard work which encouraged to create a self-sustaining economic model. Hence, The Guru's vision of a self-reliant community that could sustain itself through trade and agriculture continues to inspire modern initiatives focused on self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship. This approach is particularly relevant for promoting rural development and reducing economic disparities.

Amritsar continues to be a cultural and religious bridge between communities, fostering trade relationships even in challenging times. Its role in promoting peace and cultural exchange has economic implications, as it often facilitates people-to-people trade and diplomatic relations, especially in the context of India-Pakistan dynamics. Through these efforts, Guru Ram Das Ji laid the foundation for a thriving economic center that would benefit not only the Sikh community but also people of all backgrounds.

In the nut shell, Guru Ji not only founded the Amritsar city but strived to ensure the commercial and all-around development of the city through different trade ventures. Guru Ram Das Ji played a significant role in establishing trade practices that are still relevant in the present scenario and Amritsar plays a model role as a trade center for other countries by leveraging its strategic location, historical significance, and diverse economic activities.

II. Profound Teachings on trade offered by Guru Ram Das Ji:

Guru Ram Das Ji offered profound teachings on trade and life through a spiritual lens in the Guru Granth Sahib. His references to trade often use it as a metaphor for the spiritual journey, emphasizing ethical living, the importance of devotion, and the pursuit of true "profit"—which, in his view, is the union with God.

Here is one of Guru Ram Das Ji's verses that discuss trade in a spiritual context:

2.1 Spiritual Trade and True Profit:

Guru Ram Das Ji speaks about the true trade being the pursuit of God's virtues. He describes the real profit as spiritual wealth, specifically the Naam (Name of God). This highlights that worldly trade or material wealth is temporary, while the profit earned through devotion to God brings eternal peace. Moreover, Sikhism emphasizes ethical and fair business practices, which were upheld by Guru Ram Das Ji. This ethical approach to trade is essential in today's business world, where integrity and responsibility are increasingly valued by consumers.

2.2 Earning the Wealth of Naam:

Guru Ram Das Ji advises that the ultimate trade one should focus on is the pursuit of the Naam, or the divine Name of God. Just as traders seek profits, Guru Ji encourages spiritual seekers to engage in the trade of remembering and meditating on God's Name, which yields the highest reward.

2.3 Conducting Honest Trade:

Guru Ram Das Ji also touches upon how worldly trade should be conducted ethically, with an understanding that material wealth is temporary and should not lead to attachment or unethical behavior. Although these principles are implied throughout his teachings, the emphasis is always on conducting life—including trade—with truth, integrity, and spiritual awareness.

In essence, Guru Ram Das Ji, like other Sikh Gurus, used the metaphor of trade to teach that the most important “business” one can engage in is the pursuit of spiritual growth and ethical living. His teachings stress that the true profit in life is not material wealth but the connection with God, which can only be earned through honest, righteous actions, and devotion.

III. Profound Spiritual and Ethical Guidance on Trade by Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji:

Shri Guru Granth Sahib, the central religious scripture of Sikhism, does not focus on trade and commerce in a material sense, but it does offer profound spiritual and ethical guidance that can be applied to economic activities, including trade. Trade, in the Guru Granth Sahib, is often used metaphorically to illustrate spiritual principles and values like honesty, fairness, contentment, and the pursuit of righteous living. Here's how trade is depicted in the Guru Granth Sahib and its importance:

3.1. Metaphor of Trade as Spiritual Practice:

In the Guru Granth Sahib, trade or business often serves as a metaphor for the soul's relationship with God. The true “business” of life, according to the scripture, is to earn the wealth of God's Name (Naam) and divine virtues.

In one shabad (hymn), Guru Nanak Dev Ji also says: “Practice righteousness, and make good deeds your business. Deal in truth, and you shall profit. By this trade, you shall obtain the treasure of the Ambrosial Name of the Lord; let your mind be absorbed in this trade.” This teaches that spiritual wealth and connection to God are more valuable than material profits.

3.2. Ethical Conduct in Trade:

While the Guru Granth Sahib emphasizes spiritual wealth, it also encourages ethical behavior in all aspects of life, including trade and commerce. Sikh teachings urge individuals to be honest, fair, and just in their dealings. In this context, truthfulness (Sat) and honesty are key virtues. Guru Nanak Dev Ji in the Guru Granth Sahib says:

“Sachho orai sabh ko upar sach aachaar.” (SGGS, 62)

ਸਚਹੁ ਓਰੈ ਸਭੁ ਕੇ ਉਪਰਿ ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ ॥੫॥

ਓਰੈ = ਉਰੇ ਉਰੇ, ਘਟੀਆ। ਉਪਰਿ = (ਸਦ ਕਿਸਮ ਦੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਾਂਡ ਤੋਂ) ਉਤਾਂਹ ਵਧੀਆ। ਸਚੁ ਆਚਾਰੁ = ਸਦਾ-ਥਿਰ ਪ੍ਰਭੂ ਦਾ ਨਾਮ ਸਿਮਰਨ-ਰੂਪ ਕਰਮ। ਆਚਾਰੁ = ਕਰਮ।⁵

Means that “Truth is higher than everything; but higher still is truthful living.”

This suggests that while trade and material pursuits are natural, they must be conducted with integrity, without cheating or exploiting others.

Guru Nanak believes that those who are fair and honest in their business dealings won't suffer losses.

ਲਾਹਾ ਸਾਚੁ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਤੋਟਾ ॥ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਣ ਠਾਕੁਰੁ ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮੁ ਮੋਟਾ ॥੨੮॥ ੧ ੯੩੩

If we aim at honest profits there will never be loss; the laws of the master of the universe (and the land) are powerful (M: 1, SGGS, p 933).

To explain this more clearly, when someone is honest in their actions, they don't have to worry about losing or trying to avoid anything.

ਸਚਾ ਸਉਦਾ ਸਚੁ ਵਾਪਾਰਾ ॥ ਨ ਤਿਥੈ ਭਰਮੁ ਨ ਦੂਜਾ ਪਸਾਰਾ ॥

ਸਚਾ ਧਨੁ ਖਟਿਆ ਕਦੇ ਤੋਟਿ ਨ ਆਵੈ ਬੁਝੈ ਕੇ ਵੀਚਾਰੀ ਹੇ ॥੨॥ ੩ ੧੦੫੦

Have genuine merchandise and clean dealings; there will then be no doubt or extraneous considerations; a discerning person knows that there can be no loss when money is earned honestly (M: 3, SGGS, p 1050).

3.3. Fair Trade and Contentment:

The concept of contentment (Santokh) is also stressed in the Guru Granth Sahib, which is important for how one approaches trade and business. The scripture advises against greed and excessive desire for wealth, advocating for fairness and satisfaction with what one earns through honest means. Guru Nanak Dev Ji states:

“Lobhee kaaraj raas naa aavei, jamkaal sang ghaal khaavae.”

Means: “The greedy person does not succeed in his work; the Messenger of Death punishes him.”

This suggests that trading with greed leads to moral and spiritual degradation, warning against unethical practices for personal gain.

3.4. Charity and Community Welfare (Dasvandh):

One of the fundamental teachings of Sikhism, which also applies to trade, is the practice of Dasvandh—the principle of giving a tenth of one’s earnings to the community or for charitable purposes. This ensures that wealth generated through trade or any other means is shared for the betterment of society.

The Guru Granth Sahib promotes the idea of Seva (selfless service), which encourages Sikhs to use their earnings not only for personal gain but also for the welfare of others, reinforcing ethical trade.

3.5. Equality in Trade:

The Guru Granth Sahib advocates for equality and opposes discrimination based on caste, class, or gender, which extends to economic practices. It discourages any form of exploitation or hierarchical structures in trade, promoting inclusivity and fairness. Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s message of egalitarianism applies to all aspects of life, including commerce, encouraging an environment where all can participate and benefit from trade without bias.

3.6. Maya and Detachment from Materialism:

Maya, or material attachment, is often cautioned against in the Guru Granth Sahib. While trade and earning a livelihood are necessary, the scripture warns against becoming overly attached to wealth and material possessions. The Guru Granth Sahib reminds people that wealth is temporary, and one should focus on spiritual growth: the greedy person gathers wealth, but he does not find peace; he longs for more.

3.7. Wealth of Divine Knowledge:

In our daily lives, we often chase material comfort, wealth, and status — but Gurbani reminds us that Maya (illusion) can cloud our inner vision. The concept of “wealth” in the Guru Granth Sahib often refers to spiritual wealth—Naam, or the Name of God. Sikhs are encouraged to pursue this “wealth” above all, treating the pursuit of divine knowledge and virtues as their true trade or business. Guru Arjan Dev Ji mentions: “Trading in the true wealth of God’s virtues is the greatest profit, and brings lasting peace.”

This highlights that the most meaningful “profit” is not material but spiritual—achieved through devotion to God. Hence, when we get lost in attachment, we forget the purpose of life: spiritual growth, remembrance of Waheguru, and inner peace. therefore, Guru Nanak Dev Ji teaches us to live in the world but not become entangled in it — to stay centered in Giaan (divine wisdom) and Dhiaan (meditation).

3.8. Balancing Material and Spiritual Life:

While the Guru Granth Sahib promotes spiritual focus, it does not deny the importance of earning a living. The scripture supports Kirat Karo—honest labor—as one of the key tenets of Sikhism, urging Sikhs to earn an honest livelihood while remaining grounded in spiritual principles.

In the nutshell, Guru Ram Das Ji played a significant role in establishing trade practices that are still relevant in the present scenario. The trade and economic activities established by Guru Ram Das Ji in Amritsar have still grown and making the city a significant economic, cultural, and religious hub. The city was strategically located along important trade routes, attracting a diverse range of merchants and traders, fostering commerce. The principles of inclusivity, entrepreneurship, and community welfare that Guru Ram Das Ji championed remain at the heart of Amritsar’s trade practices today. Hence, the strategic vision of Guru Ram Das Ji

through the establishment of markets, infrastructure development and ethical trading practices ensured that Amritsar would become a key economic hub in North India, a legacy that continues to this day.

Moreover, the Guru Granth Sahib portrayed trade in metaphorical terms, emphasizing spiritual wealth over material gain. The teachings encourage ethical conduct, honesty, contentment, and fairness in all economic activities. Sikhs are advised to balance their material pursuits with their spiritual responsibilities, ensuring that their trade practices align with moral values, benefit society, and serve a higher purpose.

Guru Ram Das Ji invited 52 artisans and traders from various professions to settle in the town and contribute to its development. These settlers included carpenters, masons, woodcutters, and goldsmiths, among others. By welcoming people from diverse backgrounds and trades, Guru Ram Das Ji laid the foundation for Amritsar to become not only a spiritual hub but also a thriving center of economic and communal life. The inclusive nature of this city reflected Sikh principles of equality and community service.

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