CANADIAN PUNJABI PHILATHROPY IN PUNJAB
CASE STUDIES OF INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Introduction

Of the several hundred projects undertaken by Canadian Punjabis listed in the previous two chapters, the predominant characteristic of these is the fact that most are undertaken by individuals. This was certainly true until the 1990s, when a new kind of welfare oriented activities also appeared on the scene. Then we began to see ventures undertaken by some associations or trusts also, and the direction of such activities was also significantly changed. In order to bring out the sharp contrast between the projects undertaken by individuals and those chosen by associations of like-minded individuals, this chapter and the next chapter are devoted to an analysis of these two different categories. The current chapter focuses on two of the individually-inspired philanthropic projects, while the next chapter examines some collective philanthropic projects. Besides the collection of data presented in the previous two chapters, these two chapters constitute the main empirical work of this study.

This chapter then examines several philanthropists’ biographies trying to locate their motives to invest, funds raised and chronicle particular projects how these were conceived and materialised. This chapter draws on extensive interviews with leading philanthropists, while also taking note of published material, news coverage, and other related sources in Punjab and Canada. Some comments are also offered on how the project has benefited the local community while the overall impact and policy implications of Canadian Punjabi diasporic intervention in Punjab is discussed in Chapter 8.
Selection of Individual Projects

Canadian Punjabi philanthropic projects vary in size and are situated in diverse locations. Choosing a particular project for in-depth investigation was not easy as there is a great diversity of projects which can be broadly categorised as: Educational Facilities, Medical and Welfare Services, addition to Religious Institutions, Arts and Sports, and finally as Developmental and Environmental projects. There are no typical projects which can bring out all common features of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy. For case studies, the following two projects were chosen; first is a well-known institution for health and education facilities with several general characteristics highlighting the essentials of CPP; second is a sports facility that marks somewhat of a new experiment and raises interesting questions regarding the future direction of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy, as also illustrating new tendencies in diasporic ventures.

The first project is situated at Dhahan-Kaleran in Nawanshahr district in the Doaba region. It is formally known as Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust (GNMMET), Dhahan-Kaleran. It is a well-known project with much news appearing in the local media, and more significantly it has been the subject of two small academic studies by social scientists (Walton-Roberts 2009; Kelly 2004). The second project is at Jassowal village of Ludhiana district in the Malwa region. This is known as Harvest Tennis Academy and was started in 2005. Its contrast with the Dhahan-Kaleran project brings out some sharp differences of Canadian Punjabi philanthropy.

Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust

Location, Establishment and Facilities

Dhahan and Kaleran are two small neighbouring villages in Banga subdivision of district Nawanshahr in the Doaba region of Punjab on the Phagwara-Chandigarh road. Dhahan is a
typical Punjabi village, two-thirds Jat Sikh and one third scheduled castes. The total population is 1262, with 612 males and 650 females living in 229 households. Kaleran, with a total population of 1234 (male to female ratio 663 to 571 in 223 households) has almost half of its population of scheduled castes, which is quite typical of Nawanshahr rural villages.\footnote{1} The total area of both the villages is nearly the same, about 275 hectares each. The two villages have no common history and have separate government schools. Dhahan has a historic gurdwara administered by SGPC; while Kaleran has two gurdwaras, the second used predominantly by Chamars or Ravidasia community. Dhahan and Kaleran share a co-operative society at Kaleran. A major partnership between the two villages began with the establishment of Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust initiated by S. Budh Singh Dhahan as he returned from Canada.

Budh Singh was born in Dhahan village on 5 December 1925 into a peasant family owning just eight acres of land. His education was erratic. He was first enrolled in the nearby Khalsa Middle School, Khankhana, but his studies were interrupted when he joined his father on the farm. He later passed the Giani examination. His family was involved in the Ghadar, the Babbar, and the Akali movements that swept throughout the Doaba region and widely in Punjab from the 1920s. This was largely due to the influence of Partap Singh of Kot Fatuhi village in Hoshiarpur district. Partap Singh played a very active role in the Ghadar Party during his stay in Canada, and on his return he continued to play key role in the post-Ghadarite developments, the Babbar movement and later on in the Akali Dal. Ajit Kaur, the elder sister of Budh Singh, was married to Partap Singh’s son. As a result, Budh Singh was influenced by Partap Singh and deeply involved in contemporary political movement from early age. Between 1944 and 1959, Budh Singh held numerous positions in various local organisations, including being President of the Shiromani Akali Dal branch of Jalandhar.
district and serving as its Secretary on several occasions. Over time, Budh Singh came to earn a reputation for being a tireless social worker and loyal Akali Party worker through his active participation and involvement in the Akali Dal political rallies. Budh Singh built several contacts with major political figures and leaders, including Master Tara Singh, Giani Kartar Singh, and Ajit Singh Sarhadi. In the early 1950s, on his recommendation, a friend, Master Dalip Singh was elected MLA from this area.

His family’s precarious economic position also forced Budh Singh to arrange his two brothers’ migration to England in the early 1950s. Later, to improve family’s economic fortune, Budh Singh also accepted a sponsorship from his sister Ajit Kaur and her husband, who had earlier settled in Canada. Budh Singh left for Canada on 12 January 1960 and reached Port Alberni, British Columbia, on 22 January 1960 via England staying en-route with his brothers in the UK. In Port Alberni, Budh Singh was unemployed for the first six months, so he volunteered to teach Punjabi to second generation Punjabi Canadian children. Parents eagerly appreciated his services and eventually he found a job as a labourer by a local sawmill.

In 1967, he called his family - his wife, three daughters and a son – to join him in Canada. For the further education of his daughters, the family moved in 1970 to Vancouver, where Budh Singh worked in another sawmill. However, the flying dust started to affect his health, and he sought another occupation. On the advice of a friend, he bought plot of land and started constructing new houses. Finding it highly profitable business, he plunged fully into this new occupation, in a short time set up a firm, Dhahan Construction Ltd, followed by a bigger firm of B. J. K. Holdings.
Despite his busy life, first as an employee and then as a self-employed businessman, Budh Singh was heavily involved in Canadian Sikh affairs. He was active in building several community institutions and activities – first as a Punjabi teacher in Port Alberni, then as chief campaigner to construct a gurdwara in Port Alberni. For a time he was elected General Secretary of Khalsa Diwan Society, Gurdwara Ross Street - the largest religious shrine in Vancouver. During this period he was witness to an active participant in dislodging Punjabi communists’ hold on another Vancouver gurdwara besides leading a campaign to establish a Punjabi teaching school at the gurdwara. For some years Budh Singh also edited *Western Sikh Samachar* published by a gurdwara in Vancouver.

While in Canada, Budh Singh kept in touch with his kin at home. His first visit in 1969 was prompted due to his mother’s illness. He returned again in 1976 for finding suitable grooms for his daughters and faced difficulty in finding well-qualified professionals of good family backgrounds. This set him thinking about the lack of educational opportunities in Punjab; and, in a sense, this ‘groom hunting’ trip spurred his philanthropy mission.\(^2\) From 1976 to 1979, Budh Singh began talking to his family regarding his intention to return to Punjab. In addition there was a further issue – although Budh Singh is very sensitive to talk about it in detail. This was the marriage of his only son to a Canadian white girl of Christian denomination who was a fellow student of his son at the University of British Columbia. This left him in a profoundly sad mood as head of a household of firm Sikh convictions. Seeing his determination to return to Punjab, his friends and supporters whom he consulted and somewhat reluctantly the case of his family, all agreed to his proposition.

Budh Singh returned to Dhahan in 1979 and called a meeting of his local friends to see how he could help the region around his native village, covering at least four districts – Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Kapurthala and Ludhiana. He settled for a hospital where poor could avail of
medical services. He also thought of providing educational opportunities of professional kind which would provide useful employment to young men and women. With this kind of vision and with a firm commitment to do something, Budh Singh formed a trust under the name of Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust, Dhahan-Kaleran, district Nawanshahr. It was registered in 1979 under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. Soon his vision of a hospital, and a dream of a nursing college and more institutions, started to become reality with all its attending problems. The first issue was the acquisition of a suitable piece of land. Luckily, after several rounds of talks, Budh Singh was able to persuade Dhahan panchayat to offer twenty three acres while Kaleran village donated further seven acres of land. The legal proceedings for official acquisition of this land under the Punjab Panchayat Manual Act were started in 1979, but only in 1981 permission came after numerous rounds to government officials in Jalandhar to speed up the matter. Budh Singh remembers of his rounds saying, ‘one cannot imagine how officialdom works here to obstruct any initiative – while sitting in Chandigarh, Jalandhar, or even in this little town of Nawanshahr.’

Then a long story of Budh Singh’s struggle to raise funds ensues. Starting from scratch, Budh Singh initially raised Rs 1,50,000 from his relatives while adding his personal savings amounting to Rs 2,50,000. Then, for additional funds, he travelled to Guhati and met Kabal Singh Bindra, an old acquaintance and businessperson from Kaleran village. With his help, Budh Singh was able to collect Rs 4,65,00 and started construction on an empty site. As more funds were needed, he proceeded to England to mobilise funds through his long settled brother, Jai Singh there. Finally, on 27 September, 1981, Bhagat Puran Singh a renown philanthropist and social worker who had singlehandedly established Pingalwara at Amritsar was called to lay the foundation stone of hospital building at Dhahan Kaleran complex. Three
years later, Punjab governor, Mr. B. D. Pande came down to inaugurate small building of the hospital on 17 April 1984.

Figure 6.1: Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust, Dhahan-Kaleran (Nawanshahr): Building Blocks

Between 1979 and 2008, Budh Singh made thirty-eight rounds to overseas Punjabis seeking funds for GNMMET. His itinerary has included almost all of European countries, North America and several Far Eastern countries including Fiji, raising Rs 50 crore from NRPs and NRIs. During his visits he personally went to his friends and relatives and spread appeals through Punjabi media as well as going to gurdwaras to appeal for funds from the sangat. He would invite prominent members of Punjabi communities to the hospital site during their visits to motivate them further. Many NRI families donated money to the further expansion of the hospital after such impressive visits through sponsoring wings and rooms. Roughly, Rs 55 crore has been invested so far in these institutions, including not only the hospital but
also the subsequent gurdwara, school, nursing school, trauma centre, etc. Of this, the share from NRIs is about 80 percent.\(^7\)

Local input in terms of 30 acres of land donated by Dhahan and Kaleran at the initial stage should not be ignored, and the response of local donors from neighbouring villages has been very warm and supportive. However, Punjab’s local institutions and bodies’ help is nominal.\(^8\)

The trust has formed societies in three major countries of the West – the International Akal Mission UK in England, the Canada-India Education Society in Canada, and the Guru Nanak Mission Education Charitable Society in the United States. For maintaining relation with donors Budh Singh said in his interview, ‘we publish a magazine, *Jeevan Seva*, and this is sent to them. We phone them and, of course, keep up through personal visits. During their visit to Punjab, we welcome them at Dhahan as our guests.’\(^9\) His methods for collecting funds includes all possible means – appeals through the media, personal appeals at local gurdwaras and above all talking and persuading friends and undertaking door to door collections from overseas Punjabis who might be able to give.

As of 2009, when he stepped down as President, GNMMET was administering a 250 bed hospital with eleven medical divisions, employing over two dozen qualified doctors offering facilities for X-rays, several diagnostic services and testing on the premises. Many patients unable to pay full costs are subsidised. All in-patients are offered a nutritious meal three times a day. Since 1992, a drug de-addiction centre has been established in cooperation with the Red Cross Society of Punjab. This is now expanded to 20-bed Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation facility. In collaboration with its partner Canada-India Education Society (and with support from the Canadian International Development Agency), GNMMET set up a primary health care unit which ran two projects ‘Primary Health Care Support in Rural Punjab’ from December, 2000 to July, 2002 and ‘Building Capacity for Primary Health Care
in Rural Punjab’ from January, 2002 to February, 2005. Its primary aim was to make people aware of health issues in the region. For the two projects CIDA provided funds of $47,150 and $2,20,000 respectively. These projects helped to extend health education to 70 villages of Aur and Banga blocks of Nawanshahr district.  

Table 6.1: Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust
Annual Outlay in Rs: 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Fixed assets</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Balance (Income-Expenditure)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guru Nanak Mission Hospital</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>23,764,259</td>
<td>-50,10,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru Nanak Mission Institute of Nursing</td>
<td>102,408</td>
<td>7,354,350</td>
<td>13,56,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru Nanak Mission College of Nursing</td>
<td>118,866</td>
<td>10,361,009</td>
<td>2,908,194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru Nanak Mission Public Senior</td>
<td>2,589,317</td>
<td>14,093,259</td>
<td>1,928,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,522,996</td>
<td>2,030,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust (Trauma Centre + Hospital + Others *)</td>
<td>9,472,608+</td>
<td>18,859,563</td>
<td>-270,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11,931,725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: * Includes working items Purchase of hardware e.g. coolers, fans, fax machine, Furniture, generators, telephone sets, water filters, computers etc. for the trust, Books for the Trust’s library, addition to the drug and alcohol de-addiction Centre, maintenance of Residential accommodation for the staff, gurdwara, UBC Canada House, utensils for langar etc.

Table 6.2: Donations to Guru Nanak Mission Medical and Educational Trust in Rs: 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Currency Donations</th>
<th>45,877,739.61</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guru Nanak Mission Education Charitable Society Inc. USA</td>
<td>35,975,150.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building and Guest House Endowment Fund</td>
<td>9,405,921.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Akal Mission UK</td>
<td>31,499,383.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations for Trauma Centre</td>
<td>10,870,919.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bursary and scholarship Endowment Fund</td>
<td>841,934.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada India Education Society</td>
<td>2,300,113.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Endowment Fund</td>
<td>7,475,198.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charitable Endowment Fund Dr. Gurmel Singh</td>
<td>340,621.00</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The North American Sikh Medical and Dental Association (NASMDA) also adopted the hospital and is providing the latest healthcare equipment and the voluntary services of super-specialist doctors.\textsuperscript{11} The Trust adopted Banga town and 100 villages in the vicinity of the hospital to issue ‘Golden Health Cards’ to over 6000 families comprising 38,000 people residing there. Any member of the family whose name is on the card can use this for health facilities with 25 percent concessionary rate.\textsuperscript{12} From 2006 to 2008, Rs 12,49,784 deduction was given through Golden Health Scheme and another Rs 8,55,549 were deducted from bills of poor patients. The Trust also runs a Mobile Hospital service on daily basis in remote areas included five centres serving 80 villages.

The first step towards expanding into the education sector was taken in 1987 when the Trust established a secondary school within the hospital building. In 1992 a separate building was ready for the school. Currently, this school has 1400 pupils and offers a range of curricula with commerce, medical, and non-medical courses, and its results have been cited as one of the best in the region. The school offers regular prizes and scholarships and charges almost no fees from needy and deserving students. The family with two or more pupils attending gets the additional benefit of half fees. Keeping in view the problems faced by these students, the school started a coaching centre at Dhahan at nominal charges. It also planned to offer counselling and coaching for students appearing in P.M.T, P.P.M.E.T and C.E.T competitive examinations. The coaching centre was opened from 1 April 2002 at Guru Nanak Mission Public Senior Secondary School. Religious education and \textit{kirtan} training is also available to school pupils.

A nursing school was established in 1993. The nursing school is affiliated to Baba Farid University of Health Sciences Faridkot, and the School is recognised by Indian Nursing Council, New Delhi. Currently its annual intake is 50 students, with 350 on its rolls. It runs
three courses: a 3-year diploma in nursing, a 4-year degree in nursing, and post-secondary basic training in nursing. When the diploma course was started by GNMMET, in Punjab only Christian Medical College, Ludhiana, offered a B.Sc. (Nursing) degree course, with preference given to Christian pupils only. Budh Singh decided to start a similar degree course in 1998 and took steps to form a partnership with the University of British Columbia in 1999. This partnership allowed exchange of students, as well as staff with the University of British Columbia. The first batch of students, which started in 1999 had graduated in 2002, bagging top positions with a result better than PGI Chandigarh. As a result, the Nursing College has emerged as one of Punjab’s eminent colleges.

GNMMET then resolved to establish a trauma centre as part of its medical facilities. Budh Singh envisages the completion of Trauma centre as the foundation for a Medical College. The Trust operates a fleet of 17 buses, 6-7 cars, three ambulances and has much valuable imported medical equipment as part of its modern facilities. With foresight and meticulous planning, Budh Singh, the founder president GNMMET, has succeeded in transforming his dream into a viable, large complex offering medical and educational facilities for this region – and, in terms of students in its Nursing College much beyond.

However the institutions built by Budh Singh have run into administrative problems as differences among trust members gradually widened; members were split into two factions. Then Budh Singh was replaced through orders of district additional judge Nawanshahr when two-third majority of trust members elected Amarjit Singh Kaler as the new president. Since then, there have been several legal wrangles among trustees; issues such as the expansion of the Trust, addition or exclusion of certain members were contested while two of North American societies (Canada India Education Society and Guru Nanak Mission Education Charitable Society Inc. USA) have also added to the turmoil by supporting
factional fighting. Although Budh Singh retains nominal membership as a Trustee of the GNMMET, for all practical purposes he has been forced to dissociate from its daily functioning. Indeed the GNMMET website homepage omits his name saying just ‘24 dedicated individuals who came together to form this trust,’ thus ignoring the pioneering role of Budh Singh as the sole creator of a vision that materialised as GNMMET at Dhahan-Kaleran.

In the extensive interviews, Budh Singh has much to say about the role of his fellow trustees and his ‘big mistake’ in trusting ‘good intentions’ of fellow Punjabis – who have dislodged him. He sees as mere ‘power hungry’ individuals. He believes Dhahan-Kaleran institutions are unsafe in the hands of new administrators. It is premature to speculate whether the quality of services offered by these institutions especially at the hospital, are ‘beginning to suffer’ as is being claimed by supporters of Budh Singh. The worst scenario is suggested that institutions may follow some other overseas ventures in the Doaba region – starved of funds, losing direction through Punjabi-style factional disputes, and eventually closing their doors.

As to his future, Budh Singh sees no role in GNMMET institutions and was planning for a new venture. Indeed, on 12 December 2010, he registered a new trust Guru Nanak Mission International Charitable Trust at Nawan Gran-Kulpur in Hoshiarpur district to build Guru Nanak Mission Charitable Hospital there. A piece of 18 acres land was donated by Nawan Gran village with further seven acres by the neighbouring village of Kulpur while Budh Singh purchased 10 acres of private land. On 13 March 2011, a foundation stone for hospital building at this site was laid down by Avtar Singh Makkar, President of SGPC, among distinguished gathering including Sant Baba Labh Singh; Bibi Inderjit Kaur, President All Indian Pingalwara Society Amritsar; Sarup Singh Alag and Harjinder Kaur, Ex-Mayor of Chandigarh. Planning eventually a 50-bed hospital, Budh Singh has attracted a number of
donors—whose names appear characteristically in Trust’s new magazine *Seva Mission* launched in April 2011.

**Evaluation of the Project**

The Dhahan-Kaleran project as founded by Budh Singh and now being administered by a rival faction of trustees, offers abundance of data for academic analysis of diaspora Punjabi philanthropy. There are several elements and angles in any evaluation of such voluntary projects by individuals. First concerns the motivation of a particular individual in undertaking such a philanthropic activity. Why do particular individuals like Budh Singh consider undertaking welfare projects for their fellow beings in their native places of birth as hundreds of other Punjabis from abroad have done for almost a century now? In some ways, Budh Singh is unique, as he decided to return to Punjab more or less permanently, while most overseas Punjabis usually have sent money or taken short, frequent trips to offer such charitable activities. As noted in Chapter 4, much of the earlier philanthropic donations were meant either for religious or educational causes, and indeed education was seen as part of Sikh religious tradition too in many cases. The question now is how far the new projects from the 1970s or indeed from the 1990s—when, as we have argued, there is discernible direction towards health, arts/sports, and developmental projects—continue to be inspired by same sort of religious understanding of its donors.

Budh Singh as a person, has a deep belief in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, and he finds Sikh ethics basically are *naam japna, kirt karna* and *vand chhakna* (recite the divine Name, work honesty, and share with others). These principles of serving others are guiding principles of Budh Singh and in his words:

> In my life I have found inspiration from Sikh teachings. Honest work creates healthy family and community. Sharing with others, caring for the poor and needy, seeking
justice, living with gratitude to God and working together in community are the things that bring health, peace and prosperity for all. While living in Canada, the needs of rural Punjab remained in my heart. I found encouragement in seeing Canadians involved in charitable endeavours. I decided that after my youngest daughter would finish her high school, I would like to establish a medical college in Punjab.\textsuperscript{14}

For daily administration and running of various institutions, he believes in devolving responsibilities to various people who look after the institutions; thus, the school principal more or less takes full care of school affairs, while the principal of nursing college manages its daily routines. He is also wary of government interference. According to Budh Singh:

My experience is that government politicians and officers promise a lot but deliver little. Dealing with bureaucracy creates severe problems for a voluntary institution of the kind I have been running. Even as ordinary matter seeking a ‘No Objection Certificate,’ officials create numerous hurdles and delays.\textsuperscript{15}

His determination and dedication has gained him wide public respect. In recognition of his services, the Punjab government and several voluntary sector organisations have honoured him at various functions within Punjab and beyond. In 2004, Kwantlen University College in British Columbia, Canada, conferred an honorary Doctor of Laws degree (Honoris Causa) in recognition of S. Budh Singh Dhahan’s services.\textsuperscript{16}

His eminent position as president of GNMMET for almost 30 years period gave him a long stint of power and building contacts across large segment of the Punjabi elite when he could call upon local district administrators and had access to the chief minister of Punjab. But a number of his fellow trustees have accused him of being autocratic and in particular object
to the promotion of a particular employee – a woman hired to run publicity for the GNMMET activities and edit the house magazine who assumed considerable power due to her close relationship with him. Differences among trustees eventually led to a new management team replacing Budh Singh by Amarjit Singh Kaler as chief administrator? Budh Singh, in what seems his final farewell to GNMMET has issued a pamphlet stating his position clearly on matters arising over the years. These developments at GNMMET -a premier health and education institution established by a Canadian Punjabi, raises some fundamental questions regarding the management of such projects; transfer of authority, management style and rules and regulations of trusts governing them, while in this case hinting at the complex issue of Punjabi patriarchy in an all-male dominated administration. Some of these issues will be taken up later in Chapter 8.

The Dhahan-Kaleran project is a large on-going concern constantly drawing on overseas Punjabis. Hence it is necessary to evaluate its future viability unlike many individually sponsored one-off investments. For this, one needs to examine the management style developed by Budh Singh, his working methods and kind of leadership. This task is necessarily problematic as it involves gathering extensive data relating to the project, as also familiarity with the internal working of the trust. While such an assessment is attempted in Chapter 8, it is important to underline such analysis is required in many such projects.

Finally, we need to see what has been the impact of this project on local population. These institutions serve a large number of people in this region as beneficiaries of its medical services, as pupils and students of its two schools, and as young women in its nursing school. This assessment is based on number of interviews with local people around Dhahan-Kaleran. Leaving aside these issues on Dhahan-Kaleran project, we turn to another individually
inspired project which provides an interesting contrast of administration, kind of services it provides, and its impact upon the locality.

**Harvest Tennis Academy**

**Location, Establishment and Facilities**

Harvest Tennis Academy (HTA) is a major project established by a Punjabi Canadian, Harvinder (more popularly known as ‘Harvey’) Singh Saran, at Jassowal, his native village in Ludhiana district of Punjab. Established in 2005, the project provides modern facilities in the field of tennis training for players. It offers high professional training and the centre is staffed with experienced coaches, features several flood-lit courts, and maintains residential facilities for trainees. This effectively is a novel experiment of providing facilities for a sport which was not popular in Punjab. The province has its hockey or even cricket players now, but none has made a name in tennis. It is also a novel investment as far as diasporic philanthropic projects in sports are concerned. The usual pattern has been either expansion of existing facilities, promotion of some games, or construction of a few stadiums in the last decade. Kabaddi has consumed the largest philanthropic resources. A second noteworthy feature of HTA is that it is run as a commercial venture with some philanthropic elements, such as offering some provision for village kids encouraging them to participate in its training sessions. This taxes the traditional notion of philanthropy.

The guiding spirit of HTA is Harvinder Saran, who hails from Jassowal and has been living in Canada for the past 40 years. Asserts Harvinder Saran, ‘I am alone on my own; indeed, all my life, it was always like that working on my own initiative, never involving anyone else.’ ‘Harvey’ has a passion for sports, particularly, tennis and dreams of turning boys and girls from this region and across the country to emerge triumphant at international level. He is
supported by his daughter, Simmy Saran, as HTA’s Vice-President; and she is a ranked player qualified as a Level I Coach. She helps her father in managing the HTA.

Jassowal is a small village in Ludhiana district some 30 kilometres away from Ludhiana on Ludhiana-Ferozepur Road. Situated on the northeast edge of the village, Harvest Tennis Academy is spread over a large campus, its courts laid out in open space equipped with the ‘latest technology and equipment,’ as its brochure claims. The Academy provides eleven synthetic courts (9 layers) and three clay courts.

The Academy is gearing up to be a ‘World Class Tennis Academy’ in India with top coaches and trainers; thus Gurvarinder Sahota, Director of Coaching at the Academy has worked for Australian Open Tennis Academy. Similarly Todd Clark has come from Australia where he
was Chief Coach in Sydney. With two foreign coaches at the Academy, HTA is negotiating with US expert, Bolton Buckley. Currently 7-8 coaches are from India, two of them at Level II. This is a high standard, as just 14 coaches are working at this level in India. Other experts have come from all over India, a few from South India. HTA in recent past has arranged high level tournaments for visiting players from Pakistan, Australia, USA and England. The Academy has eight young players from Punjab, of which five have qualified for the ‘Nationals.’

The Academy charges competitive fee for its training facilities and the following chart lists the fees structure for 2008 session. The trainees are recruited from as far as away as Bombay and other parts of the country. Several of them currently are from Hyderabad. They are charged competitive rates, with the fee starting from twenty thousand rupees per month. The reason they are attracted to this place is that the Academy offers facilities of the highest quality. A one day session costs Rs 2000, including assessment for Tennis and Fitness Test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Non-Resident</th>
<th>Resident</th>
<th>Foreign Nationals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginners</td>
<td>Rs 20,000/-</td>
<td>Rs 50,000/-</td>
<td>$2500 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Rs 25,000/-</td>
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<td>$2500 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Rs 35,000/-</td>
<td>Rs 50,000/-</td>
<td>$2500 USD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: www.harvesttennisacademy.com*

Although Saran planned to expand and build 36 units in Sheikhupura village not far from Jassowal, he has shelved this plan in favour of a public school. He has built a residential school where he hopes ‘among one thousand kids, we might discover just one talented player.’

The Harvest International School was established in 2009 and got accreditation from University of Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) including International General
Comprehensive Secondary Examination (IGSCE) for Advanced Secondary/Advanced (As/A) Level examinations. This is the first of its kind in Punjab. The School provides a fully Wi-fi Campus and issues a monthly newsletter, *The Pinnacle*. The School offers other usual elite facilities of gymnasium, swimming pool, and soccer and hockey fields, with a fleet of buses for transport. The registration fee for pupils at this school is Rs 5000, with admission fees of Rs 50,000 for Indians and One lakh Rupees for foreign domiciled pupils.

**Evaluation of the Project**

The academy offers time for local kids, and one or two have taken on who showed promise. But others are allowed to go on to courts and have free practice. Whether they get the same kind of treatment and attention from expert coaches is a matter which is not clear. Talking to residents of Jassowal did not clarify the matter either. Some were impressed by the range of facilities and grand building, others were sceptical, saying it is all for ‘profit’ nothing to do with the village. ‘Like rich companies from Delhi and beyond buying land all over in Punjab and doing their businesses at our cost,’ as one person said.

As far its philanthropic side is concerned, the Academy charges no fee from the poor or deserving young players in the village or surrounding villages who can commute to it. Saran is on record saying:

> I was building it for benefit of local people. This academy now offers students first class facilities where they can stay. I have no desire to make money out of this project. I am happy doing that in Canada. My interest is to provide for those who have never heard about tennis, especially the village kids who cannot afford it. It’s very expensive game. Even rich persons cannot afford it. Even Chandigarh or other places have small facilities. Individuals have to put up Rs 3000 for leather shoes alone.
He also explains further the philanthropic element in the Academy as follows:

I have more than 100 kids from this village getting training. These kids are starting from the age of five years onwards. Due to poor standards they are used to, their expectations are also low; that is part of the problem. When they play against city players, some of our players are really so good, they are winning. Then they have a complex, and start losing. A day before yesterday, out of my kids, a girl was playing such a splendid match. She won the sixes in first set, in the second set she was leading thirty. But as she was playing at no. 14 in India, she lost the game, she lost the third set. It was mainly because she was not mentally prepared to win, not used to play for big events. They are not mentally prepared yet, that they can be of that level, so that’s problem I am facing now.

In 2008, he estimated the total investment for HTA at about Rs 10 crore, which includes an air conditioned residential building that forms part of the Saran family’s own lodging too. The current monthly outlay is around Rs 12 lakh. The proprietor rolls out this money from his own resources; and Saran wants a safe future for his investment, as he says, ‘if I want to run this project on a regular basis, I need to make some money, not for myself but for the project. The money so generated could be spent here within the project.’ He also insists that he is not interested in making money from this project, rather, the project needs to self-financing ultimately, so that ‘after my death, it should still be a going concern.’

This particular project seems on the borderline of philanthropy and raises several issues in a pertinent way. While Saran emerges a shrewd businessman who acknowledges openly that his aim is to generate sufficient income and profit to invest in the future plans for the Academy. The project generates money from a commercial part of its operation to support the good works – which is only small part of it. If it truly does not enrich the Saran’s or other
shareholders and it does provide a public good, then it meets the definition of social entrepreneurship – as the term is being defined in recent literature. As far as classifying Punjabi diaspora philanthropy in Punjab, no scholar as yet has attempted to distinguish various projects on a scale of ‘pure’ to ‘commercial’ enterprises.

However, to situate Saran as a philanthropist in any of the above hypotheses is perplexing. He is certainly not motivated by common Sikh religious ethics. On asking about the role of Sikh ethics of seva or dasvandh in his motivation to undertake this project or a more general question regarding the role of religion played in his philanthropic inspiration, he answered:

On the surface, every religion has ethics. Christianity has its ethics, Muslims have their own, Sikhs do as also Hindus. But do Sikhs follow their ethics? Nobody follows it. Suppose as a Sikh I have learnt my religion; as a Sikh I have learnt we are all equal, but who believes that as we talk of lower castes, scheduled castes in the village, they are considered lower. All men are equal, but Sikhs do not consider them part of their community. Even the cremation place is separate for Jats and Scheduled Castes. Gurdwaras are separate while we believe in same guru. So it is hypocrisy. Same goes for Muslims, Hindus also.

Saran seems agnostic in his attitude towards religion. He emphasised that religion divides people; he provided a version of his understanding of Sikh history and offered a range of other thoughts as follows:

As far as teachings are concerned they (all prophets) are absolutely right. Guru Nanak was the great guru, but he did not know that he was founding a different religion. Guru Nanak only pointed towards weaknesses of Hindu and Muslims, but later Sikhs developed different ways of thinking. They started fighting with Mughals and it changed them completely. I think religion is a problem; among Sikhs, it’s same
with Muslims, Hindus and Christians also. It brings disaster in the world. In the name of religion they misuse the power of religious feelings. I requested many times the local gurdwara not to start loudspeaker before 6AM. But they did not stop and no government officer wants to intervene as they are scared. They do not understand that the kids have to work for education. Some kids wake up early for study. This is not just with Sikhs; Hindus and Muslims are doing the same. I went to several countries, for example, Uzbekistan has the same stories. Religion is hurting the country very badly, especially India, with its four religions; millions of Hindus walk to the Ganges aimlessly, not only Hindus, all religions do like that.

Asked him about the location of this project in choosing his ancestral village and if he has special feelings for Punjab or Punjabis? Saran replied:

I have no interest in nationalism, no interest for Punjab in particular. I welcome anyone who has potential. He can come from Tamil Nadu or anywhere. It’s poverty that I want to do away in a small way. I know I cannot change the whole country. I can be effective in my own way, but I have no interest in Sikhism or Punjab as such.

Nor does Saran seemed to be swayed by Punjabi cultural values that emphasise izzat or raising prestige through ‘impressive acts of giving’ or seeking publicity to be among ‘counted’ as proud Jats or whatever. In fact, during the interview, Saran was quite critical of some leading Canadian philanthropists who had invited ministers and other officials to their places to gain such publicity or ‘izzat.’ That does not look like the whole story of HTA which presents a new kind of investment and motivation that calls for better understanding.

Saran, the founder of HTA, seems a secular person having little belief in Sikhism or showing any attachment for religion; for him, ‘they are all the same.’ A second factor is how far the
two projects discussed in this chapter carry the spirit of philanthropy. It seems a rather more difficult issue to settle in case of HTA than of Dhahan-Kaleran, when the former is run like a commercial venture with an element of patronage for local boys and girls. What proportion of total investment is meant for local charitable cause while the rest is treated as commercial investment cannot be a straightforward calculation. As a shrewd businessman, Saran is looking at the project as self-financing at some stage; that could mean many different things from a commercial viewpoint alone. If all the profits are ploughed back into the project to expand and to sustain its future then it is probably fair to emphasise its philanthropic and charitable components. Still, it problematizes the notion of philanthropy as it seems a case of commercial-cum-philanthropic motive. It is well-known how some ‘social entrepreneurs’ end up living a high life off their social investments by paying themselves a fancy salary and benefits. In Saran’s case, it is too soon to know how things will turn out.

Moreover Saran’s denial of any religious motivation or attachment to Punjab in terms of location does not end the matter there. His decision to establish the Academy at his ancestral village then probably means commemoration of his family’s linkage there. Does he perhaps want to rehabilitate his family’s name within the village’s memory, where by his own account the family had rather an ambiguous relationship with the village hierarchy?

If one probes a little further, it is apparent that his family had intimate connections with Ludhiana city, which is now Punjab’s largest urban metropolitan (over three million population) and is emerging rapidly as Punjab’s hub of industrial activities. This project could have better prospects in that city and even more logically, with his brother settled in Delhi, its location could have been the metropolitan Delhi with many enthusiastic tennis players easily found. So, why did he decide to locate HTA in his native village, where he seems to have little connection even after establishing the HTA except offering patronage to
some young men and women for training at the academy? These are some questions that will need probing to evaluate donor’s intentions and its philanthropic status. Generally, if diaspora philanthropy means private finances that flow from a particular diaspora community for public good in one’s homeland or country of origin, then HTA’s philanthropic component seems very little given the few non-fee paying local Punjabi youth. And for the more recent International School at Jassowal, there seems little provision for local pupils. The published brochure lists scholarships for deserving candidates, with no mention of quota or other provision for local or Punjabi pupils. This School also raises issue of its philanthropic intentions, like many other English-medium schools that have been set by Canadian and other Punjabis from overseas.

Several of NRP funded private schools claim to provide free education for poor pupils. Surely this is a philanthropic intent; but as these schools charge commercial fee from a majority of pupils or from those who can afford to pay, it means one has to look at a particular case in detail as to know how much of philanthropic elements constitute a particular venture. Perhaps like Saran’s HTA and School, the sheer location of such highly competitive provision is thought to be philanthropic activity on the part of such social entrepreneurs which would lead to higher standards in education generally, and in terms of HTA’s new venture in tennis – to make a new game popular in a particular region. Thus local kids, even if not enrolled, just by walking around might feel encouraged to take up such sport activities in the future. After all, the import of new ideas is taken to be very much a part of globalisation and an aspect of diaspora philanthropy.

In any case, for HTA, evaluation and assessment will need to wait as the project turns out in the near future. The prevailing atmosphere of competitive ethos and local people having no say in the project, or its implementation suggests it more of a mixed philanthropy. As the
plans are taking shape to expand the school facilities, perhaps the picture will emerge more clearly in the near future.

**Conclusion**

Focusing upon two projects financed by Canadian Punjabis, this chapter has portrayed an historical outline of these projects and their current status in terms of services provided. The chapter has also tried to evaluate two projects in terms of motivation of two philanthropists – contrasting their attitudes towards philanthropy, seeing in their backgrounds influence of such factors as of religion, culture and their respective socialisation in Canada. In terms of motivation Harvest Tennis Academy as a philanthropic project presents a sharp contrast to Budh Singh’s venture at Dhahan-Kaleran the former’s philanthropic element is small and problematic while the latter is almost pure variety of philanthropy. Although both men were born into Sikh families, in Saran’s case religion has played little part in his considerations for such investment; while, for Budh Singh, his belief in Sikhism has been fundamental to his decision to launch those projects. Another sharp contrast is in the management of two projects, HTA is solely managed by one man; while Dhahan Kaleran was managed by a board of trustees, which has led to a major crisis which led to the departure of its pioneer philanthropist and may have consequences for the very survival of these institutions in the foreseeable future. Thus these two projects established by Canadian Punjabis offer several interesting features worthy of further sociological investigation. The next chapter takes up the more recent developments in Canadian Punjabi philanthropy – namely, collaborative philanthropic ventures in Punjab.

**Notes**

1 Based on 2001 Census data.

3 Interview with S. Budh Singh at Banga dated 27 October 2009.

4 This account follows a recorded interview with Budh Singh.

5 *The Tribune*, 6 February 2006: Mr. Michael De Jong, Minister of Labour, British Columbia visited GNMMET and promised to motivate NRIs residing Canada to donate for the completion of trauma centre.

6 *The Tribune*, 11 February 2004 reported donations to Intensive care unit and operation theatre by NRI Gill family.

7 For full list of donors see *Jeevan Seva* – a quarterly magazine brought out by GNMMET. *The Tribune*, 12 January 2006: During one of his visits in January 2006 to USA, he collected $6 lakh (three crore Rupees) for setting up an ultra-modern trauma centre.

8 *The Tribune*, 7 February 2005: The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee donated five lakh Rupees. Then the Punjab government headed by Parkash Singh Badal donated five lakh Rupees on silver jubilee celebration of the trust.

9 Interview with S. Budh Singh at Banga dated 29 October 2009. *Jeevan Seva* is no longer published.

10 Information via email dated 17 July 2009 from Toorpan, CIDA and CIES website/Project.

11 *The Tribune*, 12 April 2006.

12 *The Tribune*, 12 April 2006.


14 From Dr. Dhahan’s Convocation Address at Kwantlen University College.

15 Interview with S. Budh Singh at Banga dated 7 November 2009.


17 Interview with S. Kulwinder Singh and Malkit Singh at GNMMET dated 8 November 2009.

18 Interview with S. Budh Singh by S. Sarup Singh Alag published in 2009.

19 The above account of HTA is based upon two long recorded interviews conducted with Harvinder Singh Saran – the founder, proprietor and manager of Harvey Tennis Academy at Jassowal on 1 and 24 October 2008 and another similar interview on 17 December 2009 with his brother Hardeepak S. Saran who talked about the school.

20 During the interview, this question was asked regarding benefits to the local community and village young boys and girls being trained at HTA. Question: ‘So, five players are going to national team from here while eight are going from the whole of Punjab, does it give you satisfaction?’ Saran replied: ‘Yes, that gives me some satisfaction. And out of five, four are from the village, from this village.’