CHAPTER – 5

SEECEWAL’S ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE

Environmental pollution and the global warming have already assumed dreadful dimensions. It is posing a great threat to existence of life on this planet.¹ These environmental problems have spawned a large number of self-organized organizations and NGOs’ initiatives, which have been fairly affective in managing the environment through the participation of local people. Punjab the land of five rivers today faces many environmental problems. Apart from governmental organizations (boards), which are responsible for implementing environmental legislations; various Non-Governmental Organizations and religious bodies are also working for the protection of environment in Punjab. Sant Seechewal’s initiative in this direction is an outstanding and noteworthy effort. His campaign against environmental pollution embodies the feelings of the common people. His initiatives are drawing unique and unparalleled response from masses and enjoy immense public support.

Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal has been recognized as Punjab’s famous eco-activist, spearheading an anti-river pollution campaign. He is not an environmentalist of the conventional type. Fifty one years old Sant Seechewal can be described as a “Karam Yogi”, who has proved that determination and honest efforts always lead to constructive and encouraging results. The recent example of his endeavor is that the Kali Bein, a rivulet with historical and religious significance, is no longer remained polluted and impure.²

The Seechewal’s initiative has multi-faceted components ranging from the construction of roads and bridges in remote areas, establishment of schools and colleges to promotion of education among the poor and needy, planting trees in waste lands, installation of underground sewage

². www.sikhiwiki.net.
systems in villages and towns and efforts to control environmental pollution. Fragrance of the unique thinking of this great man ‘the sentinel of the society’ has inspired people with positive thinking all over the world. National and international media have published reports praising these welfare activities. President APJ Abdul Kalam’s visit to Sultanpur Lodhi to laud the achievements of the Sant also went a long way in encouraging people to take greater interest in the welfare of society.

In order to know the views of people of villages and towns about his initiative an open discussion was held and many interviews have been conducted with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal and Sant Sukhjeet Singh (second in command of Nirmal Kutiya).

**The Life of Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal**

A great social reformer, great environmentalist, supporter of the cause of the downtrodden, true to his word, owner of a lively personality, Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal was born on Feb. 2, 1962, in Mata Chanan Kaur and S. Chanan Singh’s house in Seechewal, a small village in Shahkot Tehsil of Jalandhar district. He was very hardworking, honest and religious-minded from the outset, although there was no such atmosphere in the family. He got primary education from Seechewal. After passing matriculation from Govt. High School Nihaluwal, he joined D.A.V. College Nakodar (Jalandhar) for getting higher education. He came in contact with Sant Avtar Singh in 1981, whose influence led to detachment from all worldliness. Not only did he leave the college without completing the study of graduation but also renounced his family and dedicated himself to the service of Sant Avtar Singh. Sant Balbir Singh began to look upon the whole universe as his family and its well-being has become his major concern. His parents and relatives were upset about losing their efficient and hardworking son. However, he did not look back. By means of his devotion and with the grace of the Guru and God, he became a favorite and choicest disciple of Sant Avtar Singh. After Sant Avtar Singh’s
departure for Sach Khand (death) on May 27th 1988, as desired by Sant Avtar Singh. Sant Balbir Singh took over as the Mahant of Nirmal Kuteya on 6 June, 1988. In accordance with the tradition of Nirmal Kuteya so far, Sant Balbir Singh never married, although it is not necessary for a Nirmal Sant to strictly observe celibacy.³

Sant Seechewal defines religion in terms of service to humanity. For him, the real meaning of religion is to think of everyone’s welfare, to rise above the selfish motives, to share the sorrows and sufferings of people and to help the needy. When Sant Avtar Singh came to settle at Nirmal Kuteya Seechewal in 1981, he had deep knowledge of religious philosophy, which he had gained during his stay in Haridwar and a spirit to do well to others, which he had acquired from Sant Darbara Singh of Lopon. Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal also inherited both of these qualities from Sant Avtar Singh. These are the basic tenets of Sikhism⁴

Personally, Sant Seechewal is a simple, straightforward, clear-hearted, transparent personality, who has nothing to hide. He is the spiritual leader of common people. People, in large numbers, congregate around him daily to pay their respects to him and get his blessings. He is always ready to share their sorrows and sufferings and give them solace. He is beloved of the Sikhs and Hindus alike. In order to carry forward his welfare services, he established Ek Onkar Charitable Trust, Seechewal on 27 June, 1995. Under his chairmanship, the trust has made remarkable achievements in various fields of social development, public welfare and environmental protection. He became a member of Punjab Pollution Control Board in 2009. Many international, national, state level organizations, Punjab Govt., Punjab Pollution Control Board, Colleges, Universities and many other Non-governmental organizations have

³. www.santseechewal.net
⁴. Ibid.
honored him. He has been working continuously day and night to realize his welfare goals.5

**Seechewal’s Environmental Initiative**

The Seechewal’s initiative is different from other such initiatives because in this movement people have come out to participate irrespective of the differences of age, gender, casts, creed and religion. It is an initiative of social, religious and environmental nature. It originally started in Jalandhar district and with time spread to adjoining districts of Punjab. This initiative has many aspects associated with it and includes the following activities:

1. Constructions of roads
2. Cleaning of the Kali Bein River
3. Tree plantation
4. Construction of sewerage systems, water treatment plant and efforts to promote organic farming
5. Contribution to promote education
6. Contribution to promote sports
7. Efforts to control flood
8. Efforts to control pollution of Kala Sanghia Drain (Jalandhar District)
9. Other social activities

**Construction of Roads**

Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal is popularly known as ‘Sarkan Wala Baba’ (the Saint of the roads) because he has been constructing roads in different areas of the state of Punjab, which generally have remained neglected by the state agencies. The history of construction of roads dates back to the time when the celebration of the birthday of Shri Guru Nanak Dev was being organized in 1991. A Nagar Kirtan (large religious procession) had been organized to mark the religious occasion. Seechewal

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5. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjit Singh.
found that it was difficult for the people to pass over paths and roads, which were covered with mounds of sand and garbage dumps. So it was decided that the mounds would be leveled and the paths would be prepared. Thus, the great task of constructing, smoothing and cleaning of the roads began.

Sant Seechwal propagates a very practical world view of social welfare through self-help and social work. Sant Seechewal believes that if people keep their houses clean, they should also clean the roads, which connect to their houses. He further argues that when they keep their temples, gurudwaras, mosques, churches and offices neat and clean, it is also their duty to keep their roads clean and when the farmers remove the weeds from the fields, they should not throw wastage on the roadsides. By taking these precautions, people can keep the roads of the whole world neat and clean. People can also beautify the roads by planting flowers and fruit trees alongside the roads. This was his philosophical orientation which promptly made him make up his mind and once he had embarked upon the task of preparation of roads, he never looked back. Improvements of the roads started immediately with scores of people joining in and helping with machinery and other equipment. Till date, large networks of roads have been constructed in the whole area resulting in great facility for the public.

**Photograph 6.1:** Road Construction on the Bank of Kali Bein and in the Remote area of Jalandhar District.

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6. *Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.*
7. *Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.*
As a result of Seechwal’s initiatives, the remote areas in the districts of Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur, are experiencing faster economic development and agricultural growth after the construction of roads. Apart from these, roads of villages and towns, roads on the banks of the Kali Bein were also prepared. Beautification of these roads was carried out by planting flowers and fruit trees and installing lights along them on both sides.  

Photograph 6.2: Sant Seechewal Himself on Road Construction Work.  

Photograph 6.3: A Bridge Constructed by Sant Seechewa on Kali Bein. 

In addition to roads, some bridges have also been built in the area. For example, a bridge was constructed over white Bein on Jalandhar Khurd–Lohian Khas road. Another bridge was built over the Holy Bein near Nirmal Kuteya Sultanpur Lodhi for the facility of the public. Many incomplete link roads of the villages were also prepared. The task of building roads involved many difficulties, as: 

1. It was not easy to get the clear-cut demarcation of the area of the concerned roads from the revenue records. 
2. The selfish and narrow-minded people with adjoining lands opposed the initiative.

8. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.  
9. Interview with the People of Sultanpur Lodhi and Seechwal Village.
3. The opposition was politicized. Some political people interfered, not supporting Sant Balbir Singh, but opposing him. However finally, the difficulties were won with the grace of God. The self-styled opponents stood exposed and vanquished. Gradually, more and more people came forward to join his mission. Panches and Sarpanches of the area played an active role in motivating and mobilizing people.¹⁰

**Cleaning of the Kali Bein: Main Project**

**History of Kali Bein:** The Kali Bein is a religious river of Punjab. Its source, which dates back to hundreds of years lies near village Dhanoa (Terkiana Marshland) in the Hoshiarpur district of Punjab. It emerges from river Beas like a fountain from the earth and falling waters take the shape of a river. It covers a distance of 160 kilometers via – Dasuya, Begowal, Bhullath, Subhanpur and Sultanpur Lodhi etc. It ends in Beas Doab, which is formed by the river Beas and Satluj at ‘Hari-Ke-Pattan’.

**Map 6.1: The Map of Kali Bein**

¹⁰. *Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.*
The Punjabi word “Bein” or “Vein” seems to be derived from Sanskrit word “Veni”, which as per Punjabi-Hindi Kosh, means “a water body,” or “a particular stream”. The practical Sanskrit-English dictionary defines “Veni” as “continuous flow of current stream”.\(^{11}\) It is named as “Kali” because the hue of its surface (bed) is blackish.\(^{12}\) In view of the geographical location and behaviour of Beins in the Punjab, it seems that Bein is a stream, which moves in an intricately zigzag way. The physical feature of the Kali Bein includes its catchment area which extends over 945 square km and its average slope is 13.5 feet per mile. Geographically Kali Bein is located at latitude 31°10′60 N and longitude 75°2′60 E. Its source is the underground water that surfaces at numerous places. In the ancient times the Bein was directly linked to the river Beas but since the river Beas has changed its course and moved westward by a few hundred meters, the Bein has been taking water from water logged areas and marshes of Terkiana near the Beas. Here small quantities of water ooze out at different places such as Dhanoa, Himmatpura and Terkiana and moves downwards in narrow waterways and joins together to form a small brook in the marshland of Terkiana. Beginning its journey from Terkiana

\(^{11}\) www.kalibein.net.  
\(^{12}\) Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
marshland in the Mukerian sub-division of Hoshiarpur, the Kali Bein moves in a south-western direction recoiling like a snake.13

The Kali Bein also known as the Kali Beiri, a river in the Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala districts of Punjab, which holds a very sacred place in every Sikh’s heart, has been given a new life by a more than 6 year-long efforts begun by Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.14 The Holy Kali Bein, which is the main tributary of the Beas River, is so important for the land of Doaba from geographic, economic, cultural and religious point of view that it would not be an exaggeration to call it the life-line of this central region of Punjab. It is a rivulet which is sacred for the reason that Guru Nanak Dev Ji meditated on its banks at Sultanpur Lodhi for 14 years, 9 months and 13 days. He used to take his daily bath in its holy water. One day he took a dip in its water and did not come out for three days. Guru ji was taken to presence of the Almighty and came back to the world blessed with divine verses and with a mission to preach the Mool Mantra of Gurbani:

है मंडिलम ब्रह्म पुतं विविति विवितैः अब्राह मुदिनि अनुली मैं गुज भूमिति ||

This idea of oneness of God is like whiff of fresh air in the Indian religious traditions and stood for ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity embracing the whole of humanity. So the Holy Bein becomes birth place of a new revolutionary philosophy and the first pilgrimage of the Sikh religion. Guru Nanak Dev ji also uttered the slogan: ‘Neither we are Hindu, nor Muslims’, for the first time at the bank of this river.

Apart from its religious-philosophical significance, the Kali Bein is also closely linked with the religious and cultural life of the Doaba region. Many historical Gurudwaras, such as Gurudwara Pul Pukhta, Gurudwara Sant Ghat, Gurudwara Ber Sahib, Gurudwara Rababsar at Bharoana are situated on the banks of the river Kali Bein. Since old times, people used

to take bath in its water on Puranmashi, Vaisakhi, and Amavasya etc. The Kali Bein is related to common people’s daily life from birth to death.\textsuperscript{15} It has the same significance for the Sikhs, as is the \textit{Bodh} tree of Gaya for the \textit{Buddhists}. With the onset of development, the passage of generations and changing values and traditions, the Bein lost its original glory and the existence of the river faced numerous problems.

\textbf{The Problem of Pollution of Kali Bein}

Like other streams and rivers of Punjab, the Kali Bein has lost its old glory and purity. Falling prey to urbanization, commercialization and industrialization of Doaba, the river had turned into a virtual sewer with several drains pouring into it from adjoining townships (Dasuya, Tanda, Begowal) as well as effluents from the Railway Coach Factory in Kapurthala.\textsuperscript{16} The Government was busy celebrating growth of industry but ignorant of evils, which it was bringing in its train. This ignorance amounted to a criminal negligence.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image66.png}
\caption{Photograph 6.6: Inflow of Dirty Waters in Kali Bein before Seechwal’s Initiative}
\end{figure}

The dirty sewage water of 43 villages and 7 towns situated on the bank of the Bein was constantly polluting the purity of the Holy Bein. The sewerage systems in most of these villages and towns were designed to

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\textsuperscript{16} Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
\end{flushright}
discharge dirty water into the river. In many villages, the Government even sanctioned grants for such projects to install sewerage systems as conveyed their dirty waters directly into the Bein. As a result, the Bein had turned a dirty drain with extremely dirty and stinking water flowing into it. Apart from this, the Bein had become a dustbin for the dirty water and wastage of villages and towns. When the kar sewa began, corpses of cattle were found lying there. The Bein had become a garbage disposal facility for people who did not have any other place to dispose of their trash.\textsuperscript{17} This constant pollution of the Bein had affected the life in this region in more than one way. A number of industrial by-products, oils and chemicals are being discharged in this river everyday. The polluted effluents which included highly toxic chemicals were seeping into the underground water and polluting it. It was a permanent and irreparable damage to drinking water. It was also affecting the health of the people who lived on the banks of the Bein. However, they were forced to consume this water from hand pumps and became victims of a variety of deadly diseases. Various types of mosquitoes and insects have infested the areas around the river. During monsoon the situation becomes even worse.\textsuperscript{18}

Due to inflow of dirty effluents, the Bein water became very fertile for the fast growth of hyacinth plants, which grew so thick that it completely blocked the passage of the Bein. Apart from this, the silt that had flowed into the Bein along with these dirty waters settled over the bed of the Bein to make a thick layer and blocked the pores of the earth putting an end to natural process of recharging of water table. As a result, underground water in Kapurthala district began to deplete fast and this area of Doaba was turning into a desert.\textsuperscript{19} On the other hand, Dasuya-Mukerian area in Hoshiarpur district was water logged due to the non-availability of outlet of excess water. The polluted water of the Bein was

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{18} Harbans Singh Chahal, “Kar Sewa of Holy Bein–Towards New Horizons”, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 9.  
\textsuperscript{19} Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
seeping into underground water stores of pure water. It also affected the harvest and the fertility of the soil was going down. Farmers were frustrated and angry with the Government for not taking preventive measures in time. They went from pillar to post, time and again but nothing really happened. They kept on sending applications to various departments but of no avail.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Photograph 6.7:} Condition of Kali Bein before Seechewal's Initiative

Thus, due to miserable condition of the Bein, rich Doaba area of Punjab, known as the Granary of India, was on the brink of annihilation and its condition from all points of view—economic, health, cultural, religious etc. had become extremely pitiable.

\textbf{Problem of Encroachments}

Equally grave was the problem of encroachment on the Bein area. The first type of encroachment came from the builders of houses and other institutions. Due to a steep growth of population in the Doaba area, there has been a boom in real estate and construction had proceeded at an alarming rate. The area on the bank of the Bein, which generally lies vacant and unused, seemed to be an ideal place for constructing houses and other buildings. Thus unauthorized colonies and houses were being built on the bank of the Bein.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20}. \textit{Interview with the People of Dhanoa, Budhobarket, Galowal and Himatpur Villages.}
\textsuperscript{21}. \textit{Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal and Snat Sukhjeet Singh.}
A second type of encroachment was by the farmers, who own lands adjoining to the Bein. The need and greed for more crop yield and the absence of any legal impositions led the farmers to hunt for more land. This meant more illegal occupation of vacant land on the banks of the Bein and as a result of this, the Bein area was shrinking. One of the reasons that this process continued without any checks was the absence of Revenue records. At places where revenue record was available, there too, some revenue authorities registered illegal sale deeds of encroachments. The passage of the Bein had narrowed down, leaving no space for the flow of water in it.22

**Scarcity of Water**

The problem of water scarcity was very peculiar to the Kali Bein. There were many reasons for this. Firstly, the river Beas, which is the main source of Kali Bein has shifted from its place of origin with the passage of time. After this the Bein got water from underground sources but with the establishment of Pong dam on the river, the water level went down and could not supply sufficient quantities of water. Second, the water level in the Terkiana marshland, which also used to feed the Bein, went down. Lack of sufficient water in Kali Bein worsened its already miserable condition. Over time, the flow in Bein came to a virtual standstill; the polluted water got mixed with stagnant water and started emitting foul smell, which polluted the environment. This led to favorable conditions for the growth of water hyacinth plant.23 Thus, it was turned into a dustbin for dumping dirt and wastage of towns and villages.

**The Reasons for Kar Sewa**

Although due to above mentioned reasons, the Kali Bein was on its way to death; a number of people came forward to make people understand the problem and urged them to do something about the rising pollution in this river. However, nothing concrete really happened. Some

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22. *Ibid*
NGOs like *Dharat Suhavi, Chowgirda Bachao Committee* and *Punjabi Sath Lambra* etc. also became active to protect the Kali Bein in particular and to save the environment in general. However their work was more theoretical or intellectual rather than practical.24

On 15 July, 2000, A NGO named *Dharat Suhavi* called for a meeting of intellectuals and social workers, to discuss the issue of rising pollution in ‘Kali Bein’, at Jalandhar. The intellectuals presented their views on the rising menace of pollutants in the ‘Kali Bein’. People expressed great concern over the prevailing conditions and the ugly face of development around the banks of ‘Kali Bein’. Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal also participated in this meeting of intellectuals. Sant Balbir Singh, after listening to the views of all those present over there, in his lecture, said that the situation was really very serious and they should not indulge in empty talk. Rather it was important do something practically.25 He made an announcement of his decision to start kar sewa on the ‘Kali’ Bein and called upon the intellectuals who were present there, to join him. It was the devotion of Gurus, Saints and Peers (piers) of staying pure and clean, which inspired Sant Seechewal. Secondly, it was a lesson for the coming generation to learn from such acts of keeping their surroundings clean and to instill a sense of purity and cleanliness. A number of people expressed their doubts about the practicality of such a big mission started by Sant Seechewal. They were not convinced at all that a person like Sant Seehewal could handle it all alone.26

The next day on 16 July, 2000, Sankranti of Sawan, a prayer was offered at the historical Gurudwara Ber Sahib at Sultanpur Lodhi. In the beginning, the roads leading to the holy town were repaired and prepared for the facility of the kar sewaks to come to Sultanpur to take part in the kar sewa. After that a tent was set up near Gurudwara Sant Ghat Sahib at

24. *Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.*
Grain Market (Anaj Mandi or Dana Mandi), and the great kar sewa of restoration of the purity of the Kali Bein was started.27

**Kar Sewa of the Holy Bein: Initial Challenges**

The cleaning of the Bein was an extremely risky task. However, the people accepted the challenges bravely. It involved the following challenges:

1) It is such a monumental work as is beyond even the imagination of the common man. Even the Governments are hesitant of taking up such huge projects. This type of work is usually of huge dimensions and incurs heavy expenses.28

2) At the beginning, nobody had any experience of such work and did not know what was to be done and how it was to be done.29

3) Removal of Hyacinth plants which had almost completely covered and blocked the Bein, was a great challenge for the kar sewaks.

4) Deposits of silt on the bed of the Bein had also blocked the flow of the water in it. It required a lot of machinery apart from manual labour.30

5) Farmers who owned lands adjoining the Bein area gradually expanded their lands to encroach upon the Bein Area, as a result of which, the bed of the Bein went on shrinking. Such illegal encroachers opposed the kar sewa work ignorantly believing that they would have to vacate illegal possession if the kar sewa continued.

6) Demarcation of the area of the Bein was also a great problem because of non-availability of revenue records. Many time, the revenue authorities also preferred to be non-cooperative.

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28, *Personal Interview with Snat Balbir Singh Seechewal.*
29, *Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.*
7) Restoration of flow of fresh water in the Bein also posed a great problem. Due to the retirement of the Beas River away from the sources of the Bein, quantity of its natural water fell too low.

8) Problem of sewage water of villages and towns that illegally flowed into the holy Bein was greater and more challenging than other problems.\(^{31}\)

Such was Bein’s condition, when the kar sewa was started here.

**Cleaning of the Kali Bein**

The cleaning of ‘Kali Bein’ was done in four phases.

**First Phase (2000 to 2003):** The actual work of kar sewa on the Holy Bein began in July, 2000. Apart from the people of Seechewal area, the people from Sultanpur Lodhi and neighboring villages took part in the kar sewa to remove Hyacinth plants from the Bein at Sultanpur Lodhi and to draw out silt that had accumulated on its bed. The same soil was used to prepare high and wide banks on both the sides and establish pucca roads on them and build beautiful bathing ghats. Apart from all this, banks of the Bein were beautified and fragranced by planting trees and flowers. Moreover, permanent water supply system was installed for the irrigation of plants. The whole length of Bein from Gurudwara Sant Ghat to Talwandi Chowdharian Bridge, road was illumined with electric lights. The whole of this work took less than two and a half years.\(^{32}\)

During kar sewa at Sultanpur Lodhi, it was felt that two important tasks would have to be done for restoring the holiness of Kali Bein. Firstly, the dirty sewage waters flowing into the Bein were to be stopped, and secondly, the flow of fresh water in the Holy Bein was to be augmented. For stopping dirty water flowing into the Bein, it was necessary to educate people of villages and towns on the banks of the Bein about its significance and convince them to make alternative arrangements of disposal of sewage waters. For this purpose, Sant Seechewal held many

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\(^{31}\) *Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.*

\(^{32}\) *Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.*
public meetings of intellectuals, writers, journalists, religious and political leaders. Under this project, a public expedition was organized from 30/03/2003 to 01/04/2003 to convince the people of villages on the banks of the Bein to stop letting their untreated waste water flow into the Bein. Common public warmly responded to this campaign and wherever alternative arrangements could be made, they stopped their dirty waters from flowing into the Holy Bein.33

Photograph 6.8: Sant Seechewal Shows the Silt on the Bed of Kali Bein.

Photograph 6.9: Silt Removed by Sant Seechewal from the Bed of Kali Bein.

Second Phase (2003 to 2004): It was felt in the first phase that problem of shortage of fresh water in the Holy Bein was also as serious as that of dirty waters. The alternative arrangement made to deal with this problem was that some fresh water was siphoned into the Bein from Mukerian Hydel Channel. The main problem in this regard was that the water released from Mukerian Hydal Channel was in too small quantity. So the natural flow of water could not be restored. When Sant Seechewal approached this area in search of the origins of the Kali Bein, he came to know about the main problem of the area. He realized if the Bein was cleaned from its origin to Sultanpur Lodhi, then the whole area could be reclaimed. With this in mind, he made a plan to begin the campaign for

cleaning of the Holy Bein.\textsuperscript{34} Then on May 6, 2003, a tent was set up to shelter the Gursangat near Budho-Barkat-Gallowal Bridge upward Mukerian Hydel Channel. Then after completing the cleaning of the Bein up to Dhanoa, the kar sewa was resumed downward.\textsuperscript{35} Residents of villages situated near the Bein, such as Gallowal, Budho Barkat, Dhanoa, Terkiana, Pul Pukhta, Proze Rollian, Prempur, Thakuri, Bahadurpur, Talwandi Daddian, Meerapur, Bagwanpur, Awana etc., played very active part in the kar sewa. Cooperation of people from far off areas was also equally remarkable.

\textbf{Photograph 6.10}: Sant Seechewal with the People during Work to Clean Kali Bein.

Sant Seechewal’s work on the Bein was estimated at about Rs. 50 Crores before June 16, 2003 according to a survey of the Punjab Government.\textsuperscript{36}

In the second phase Hyacinth and silt were cleared out of the Kali Bein from Dhanoa in Hoshiarpur district to Kanjali in Kapurthla District, and a Kutcha road was prepared from Dhanoa to Kanjali, measuring about 110 kms along the Bein.\textsuperscript{37}

In January 2004, Bathing Ghats were built on the Bein at Gallowal. With this, construction of a series of Ghats began. In April 13, 2004, the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{34} Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Personal Interview with Kuldeep Singh, Resident of Village Budho-Barkat. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal. \\
\textsuperscript{37} Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
\end{flushright}
polluted waters of Bhulath flowing into Bein were stopped and beautiful Bathing Ghats at that place were made. The construction of Bathing Ghats at Sultanpur was completed on April 13, 2004. For the first time in the history of the new Bein, the festival of Vaisakhi was celebrated on a large scale on the banks of the Bein. Next day after Vaisakhi, the people started cleaning the Bein at Kanjali. After completing it, beautiful Ghats were constructed there in May 2004, changing the place into a real picnic spot.38

Photograph 6.11: Bathing Ghat Constructed by Sant Seechewal at Gallowal Village on Kali Bein.

Photograph 6.12: Bathing Ghats at Sultanpur Lodhi on Kali Bein.

The kar sewa which was being performed by common people under the guidance of Sant Seechewal got national level recognition, when the great intellectual, thinker and scientist President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam counted the kar sewa of the Holy Bein among the nine greatest achievements of the nation in his address on the eve of Technology Day on May 11, 2004.39

Third Phase (2004 to 2005): In the third phase, work on the Kali Bein to the west of Talwandi Bridge at Sultanpur Lodhi, which was suspended for some time to clean the Holy Bein in Dirtrict Hoshiarpur and construct bathing ghats at Gallowal, Bhulath, Subhanpur and Kanjali, was resumed

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
in June 2004. Working with full zeal, the people completed construction of Ghats on the north-western side of the Bein from Talwandi Chowdharian Bridge up to ancient Mughlai Bridge near Gurudwara Ber Sahib. But work on the south-eastern side of the Bein still remains incomplete due to the illegal sale of Bein land. The road on the bank was also prepared and bricked, flower beds were prepared and plants were sown.

In July 2005, Sant Seechewal started an expedition to make holy city of Sultanpur green. Thousands of Boucerosia edulsis, Ficus benghalensis, and Azadirachta indica trees were planted in the same month. A movement was launched to ban the hunting of fish and other aquatic creatures in the Holy Bein. On 29/07/2005, people met Swaran Singh; Commissioner, Jalandhar division and gave a memorandum to him in this regard. In October 2006, the government had to yield before the will of the people and declare the Kali Bein as “Holy Bein” and clamping of complete ban on killing of creatures in Holy Bein was a necessary outcome.\textsuperscript{40} Work was also extended to the residential area of Sultanpur Lodhi, installing sewerage systems. In this phase, a memorandum was given to the Deputy Commissioner Kapurthala, demanding immediate stopping of the flow of dirty waters in the Bein. He assured the people to take necessary steps but no action was taken. On 29/11/05 Sant Seechewal called a press conference at press club Kapurthala and made an appeal to all the concerned people to work together for stopping the dirty waters flowing into the Bein.\textsuperscript{41}

**Fourth Phase (2006-2007):** In the fourth phase, the kar sewa entered a new stage, which surprised many. In January, 2006 beautiful boats were arranged for boating in the Bein. S. Harjinder Singh from UK was kind enough to finance these three boats with the cooperation of people.

\textsuperscript{40} Harbans Singh Chahal, “Kar Sewa of Holy Bein–Towards New Horizons”, op. cit., Vol. 28, pp. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 18.
Photograph 6.13: Boats in Kali Bein.

In January 2006, the work of cleaning the Bein was started from Gurudwara Ber Sahib downward. During this campaign, the people, using spades, tractors, trolleys, and cranes began cleaning and deepening the bed of the Bein towards the place of its confluence with the river Beas. In May 2006, the Bein was cleared and hurdles were removed. As a result, water of the Beas River rose upward from Hari-ke-Pattan to Sultanpur Lodhi. This process has promoted recharging of water table in Sultanpur Lodhi area and the water table has started rising.42

In spite of all appeals and requests dirty sewage water of many villages and towns continued to pollute the Bein. The administration also showed reluctance in implementing the rules constituted to control pollution of water resources. In February 2006, some mischievous elements tried to illegally release the sewage water of Sultanpur Lodhi town in the Bein. But their efforts were foiled.43

On April 21, 2006 Sant Seechewal held a meeting with the President of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi and discussed with him the problem of dirty waters polluting the Holy Kali Bein. It is to be remembered that beginning with his radio address on May 11, 2004, the President has so far praised the kar sewa of the Holy Bein in about 25 of his national and international speeches. Expressing his

43. Ibid.
concern, he directed the administration to take necessary steps immediately. He also accepted Seechewal’s invitation to come to see the Holy Bein. After this event, coming into action, the administration and the Punjab Government decided to cooperate with Sant Seechewal and the people in the kar sewa and made a secretary level committee to work for this purpose. Sant Seechewal went to see the C.M. of Punjab, Captain Amrinder Singh on his invitation. C.M. gave approval to D.C. Kapurthala’s project report and announced release of Rs. 9 crores for the temporary alternative arrangement of dirty waters flowing into the Bein. Mr. P. Ram was made the coordinator of Baba Nanak Holy Kali Bein project committee constituted by the state government. Supervision of work on the Bein was handed over to Kapurthala Development Board, which started holding meetings with different technical experts. However, work practically done in this regard was just nothing.44 Another important event of this phase was the visit of the Honorable President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to the historic town of Sultanpur Lodhi on 17/08/2006 for paying homage to the Kali Bein. With his visit to this place, the morale of the people that had been engaged in the kar sewa was boosted and they got further inspired to serve with greater enthusiasm. The Holy Bein rose from a small area of Doaba and spread over the map of the world.

PEDA declared that before Vaisakhi of 2007, a permanent regulator would be stalled at Mukerian Hydel Channel and 400 cusecs of water would be released into the Bein on the historic day of Vaisakhi. But up to now, till the time of writing of these lines, nothing was done in this direction. The work of demarcation of the Bein area and fixing of pillars was deliberately delayed by the administration without any reason but this work was completed with the efforts of Sant Seechewal.

In this phase, the North- Western bank of the Bein to the West of Talwandi Chowdharian Bridge road was prepared. It was bricked too.

44 Ibid, pp.36-37.
Flower beds were prepared and flower plants planted to decorate the banks of the Bein. Permanent lighting and water arrangements were made.45

During this phase, the dirty sewage water of the villages and towns was collected in common ponds and after treating those waters in indigenous manner, arrangements were made to supply them to the farmers through pipelines for irrigation of their fields.46

In August 2007, Sant Seechewal started work of fixing stones for the protection of the springs of pure water in village Himmatpur (in district Hoshiarpur). The beautiful Bathing Ghats were constructed. These water springs become the source of the Holy Kali Bein. Due to the thick layer of muddy silt the pores of the earth had got blocked and the quantity of water sprouting from these springs had started decreasing. But now the water of these springs has again started increasing. That is why, in spite of the irregular supply of water from Mukerian Hydel Channel in to the Holy Bein, the flow of the water in the Bein is improving. This increase in the Bein’s water is only due to the increase of its natural water. With the increase in the flow of water, the growth of Hyacinth weeds in the Bein has also slowed down.47 In 2013 the pucca bathing ghat of stones was prepared by Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal and Gursangat at the back side of Gurudwara Ber Sahib on Kali Bein.

In this manner, the holy Bein is now fast advancing towards achievement of complete purity. But the dirty water of many villages and towns continues to flow into the Bein. Sant Seechewal is working continually to stop inflow of polluted water. In this regard, he met with Parkash Singh Badal, Chief Minister of Punjab. He promised Seechewal

45. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
46. Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
that as soon as possible solution of this problem will be discovered and possible action would be taken immediately.\textsuperscript{48}

Thus, the kar sewa was initiated near Gurudwara Sant Ghat with the help of people from all walks of life staying in the town. It was in fact a great work in its own right. Even the governmental officials could not dare to take such an initiative in that part, leave alone the common folks. There were in fact a lot of dimensions to the work, e.g. to clean and pave the road to the river, to construct a dam, to plant trees and plants, to put tiles and stones on the dam sides, to measure and pinpoint the area. There were also a lot of different problems and challenges in starting this work. At the level of Government, as well as private level a lot of difficulties were to be faced. Some problems were of severe technical nature, like officers were just not willing to cooperate to make the records available to measure and point out the marks in the area. There were a lot of farmers, who were criticizing the development work being undertaken by Sant Seechewal, the reason for which was that they were afraid of losing their property, near the bank of the river, which they had acquired illegally.

Sant Seechewal had to explain to every one about the historic value of this pious river and why it was necessary to clean it and prevent it from getting polluted in future. If they put up a united front people could overcome the problems, posed by the political leadership on their own. It is almost six years that Sant Seechewal and his followers have been working day and night to make this project a success. At times, Sant Seechewal himself enters in the river and pulls out shrubs. When asked about such acts, he replied smilingly, “If I myself won’t engage in this act of bravery, how can I ask others to risk their lives.” There are a number of dangers present in this work. One can even lose his or her life during the kar sewa. There are snakes, poisonous reptiles, insects and leeches. The leeches suck the blood of kar sewaks, snake bite and stones pierce their

\textsuperscript{48} Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
feet but kar sewaks remain undeterred and brave. They don’t believe in mere talk but in doing work. There are people from all walks of life and of all age groups. Children and women are also working day and night. Some political leaders are also working in tandem with Sant Seechewal with a good intention of doing real service to the people. As far as generating funds is concerned, Sant Seechewal has received a lot of money from his followers. People are contributing whole heartedly for this noble act. Punjabi community has also contributed a lot. Sant Seechewal has also visited Philippines, Canada and U.K. for this project of river cleaning.

Hundreds and thousands of people were engaged in kar sewa. They come far from villages also. Daily people from fifty villages come to work in their own trolleys with their own arrangement of milk and langar. In this kar sewa, modern equipment and technology have also been made use of. In all, this project has proved it to be one of its own kinds in the whole world, in the sense that it reflects unity in diversity, a caring attitude towards environment and solidarity with the pure and clean life. Sant Seechewal has also informed that Kali Bein has already emerged as a tourist spot and entire area is converted into a green spot. Sant Seechewal has also states that he will soon take up the proposal of building a green belt on the both sides of the river kali Bein.
Thus, the kar sewa of Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Holy Kali Bein is the unique kar sewa in the history of mankind that presents a rare blend of religion, generosity, environment protection, mutual cooperation and positive thinking. Sant Seechewal and the kar sewaks have proved that collective efforts can work wonders to solve permanently, the problems humanity is faced with today. This great kar sewa has not only provided with manifold benefits and opened new vistas for economic developments but also spread awareness for preserving the natural water resources and environment. The Holy Kali Bein is not an ordinary rivulet; it is also the birth place of revolutionary philosophy of the Gurbani. Thus, on one side, kar sewa of the Kali Bein is a work of conservation of a water resource, 160 Km long river and on the other; it is a quest for the Mool Mantra of the Gurbani and an effort to highlight again the Guru’s message of common brotherhood of all. Drawing inspiration from the Guru’s great
saying, such as, “Let us do our work with our own hands” Sant Seechewal and sewaks have sincerely been doing their duty towards environment.

**Tree Plantation**

Human life cannot be imagined without trees. They are the very basis of our life. But today man has become so selfish that instead of planting more trees, he is rather cutting them down, thus disturbing the balance of nature. Sant Seechewal has initiated many projects for planting trees for tackling this problem. At all the branches of Nirmal Kuteya, high quality of horticulture nurseries have been established, where fruit and flower saplings are prepared and distributed among the people free of cost.\(^{49}\)

Sant Seechewal has executed large scale programmes for planting trees on the roadsides and river banks and in other waste lands, such as cremation grounds and even in the courtyards of the houses of people. In many villages ponds of dirty water have been transformed into beautiful parks. At Sultanpur Lodhi, both the banks of the Holy Kali Bein River have been made beautiful with floral and fruit trees. On all important occasions, he distributes saplings as Prasad (grace) of God to his devotees with an advice not only to plant them but also to take care of them till they are grown up. Sant Seechewal prepared a tree nursery at Seechewal village, where every year one lakh trees are distributed free of cost.

**Photograph 6.15:** Tree nursery at Seechewal village

\(^{49}\) www.nirmalkuteya.com.
Sant Seechewal has not only planted thousands of trees along the Holy Bein but also made attempts to turn the holy city of Sultanpur Lodhi into a green city by planting trees within the city. A beautiful garden has been planted in the cremation ground of village Seechewal. On the land belonging to the Trust, the Orchards of Plum trees and Guava trees have been grown. In these gardens, turmeric crop is grown through natural farming. Inspiration is given to the sewadar families for planting more trees on their private lands.\textsuperscript{50} Harike Pattan is a big wetland and bird century of the state of Punjab. Every year many birds from all over the world come here. But due to over deforestation of this area, there is no shelter for these migrant birds. Therefore keeping in mind this factor, Sant Seechewal started plantation of trees at Harike Pattan. He and his kar sewaks have planted \textit{Safeda} trees in 10 acres of wetland. He has also planted 2 acres \textit{Nakh} trees garden, Bans, \textit{Safeda}, and \textit{Papular} trees near Harike wetland at Fatewal Dera.\textsuperscript{51}


\textbf{Construction of Sewerage Systems and Water Treatment Plants and Efforts to Promote Organic Farming}

The inflow of polluted sewage waters in rivers is a big problem for developing and under developing countries. Various methods have been

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{50}. \textit{Interview with the Residents of Village Seechewal and SultanpurLodhi.} \\
\textsuperscript{51}. \textit{Personal Interview with Gurdev Singh (Fauji), Resident of Village Fauji Colony.}
\end{flushleft}
discovered for the positive and prominent solution of this problem. But, these methods to clean dirty waters are too expensive for the poor nations. Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal solved this problem with the natural cycle and developed a unique technique. According to this method the sewage water of each town or village is stored at the proper place as per the availability of the space and other facilities. After treating the water in indigenous manner, arrangements are made to supply to the water to the farmers through pipelines for irrigation of their fields. With this method of Sant Seechewal, the polluted water has become a boon from a menace.

The first treatment plant and underground sewerage system was installed in his own village Seechewal. The problem of pollution caused by sewerage has been permanently solved. Seeing that this experiment can be successfully applied to other villages and towns on the banks of the Bein, Sant Seechewal decided to make similar alternative arrangements in other villages and towns of Punjab. Working on these lines, the people and Sant Seechewal have completed these arrangements in 54 villages and 3 towns up till date.

Photograph 6.18: Sewerage System Installation Work in a Village by Sant Seechewal

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52. Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
53. Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal and Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
54. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
Sewerage water treatment plant and 8 kilometer long pipeline was installed at Sultanpur Lodhi town. This pipeline passes through the land of five villages– Sadduwala, Bhago Arain, Shahwala Andrissa, Sherpur Sadha and Wantanwali upward from Sultanpur Lodhi. It irrigates about 500 acres of the land of these villages and town. 350 farmers of Sultanpur Lodhi are using treated water for organic farming. Treated sewage water of Kapurthala town is also being supplied for use in agriculture on the same pattern. Dirty sewage water of Dasuya town in Hoshiarpur district, which had been contaminating the Holy Bein, is now being used for bringing prosperity in 5 Kms of agricultural land after treatment.

**Photograph 6.19:** Sewage Water Treatment Plant and Organic Farming in Seechewal Village

**Contribution to Promotion of Education**

Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal’s views about education are also praiseworthy. His views are modern and scientific. He is an advocate of the concept that humans should change with the times and thus use

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55. *Ibid.*
modern techniques and new types of education for the benefit of humanity.\textsuperscript{57}

With a view to eradicate illiteracy, Sant Seechewal started teaching poor children every evening after he took over the charge, as the chief of Nirmal Kuteya Seechewal.\textsuperscript{58} He began this process by donating some money to Sant Sukhjeet Singh, who also involved in this initiative. This money is used to purchase books and other stationery items. More and more children from different parts of the area started coming to Nirmal Kuteya, Seechewal for free education.\textsuperscript{59}

In April 1999, a school was established in Nirmal Kuteya, Seechewal and was inaugurated on May 27, 1999, on the occasion of the Death Anniversary of Sant Avtar Singh Ji. The name of the school is Shri Maan Avtar Singh Ji Yadgari Mahavidyalya, Seechewal. The school is now affiliated to Punjab School Education Board. The number of students went on increasing gradually. At first 100 students were admitted and now the number of students is about 400. The school caters to the needs of the poor and needy students, who cannot afford to attend private schools. The orphans are provided boarding and lodging facilities.\textsuperscript{60} Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal, who is the chief patron, gives inspiration and directions to the students and teachers.\textsuperscript{61} In the morning assembly, the students recite \textit{Mool Mantra} and after that they are taught \textit{Santhya} of \textit{Gurbani}. Most of the students are Akhand Pathis. Many students can recite \textit{kirtan}.

In 2001, computer education was introduced in this institution. After one year (2002) a big computer lab was established. In 2005 Sant Avtar Singh Ji Memorial College at Seechewal was started for the purpose of imparting higher and technical education to the students of this

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[57] www.nirmalkuteya.net.
\item[58] Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal and People of Village Seechewal.
\item[59] Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
\item[60] Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
\item[61] Interview with the people.
\end{footnotesize}
The college has introduced technical courses such as PGDCA, DCA, BCA, Diploma in stitching and tailoring, B.Sc (Eco) for the poor and backward students of this area in order to make them self-reliant and economically empowered. M.A. Punjabi has also been started in this college. An Environment Research Centre was also established in the college. This college has got the affiliation with Guru Nanak Dev University from the academic session of 2006-2007. Besides academic activities, students are encouraged to participate in sports and other activities. The students are also obtaining knowledge and training about Ayurvedic (herbal) medicines. Apart from these activities, students often go along to volunteer. This voluntary work motivates the children to participate in conservation activities under Seechewal’s initiative.

Another school named “Nawan Nanakana School” has been opened on the bank of the Kali Bein in Sultanpur Lodhi for the education of poor children living in slums. In this school, the students are provided with free clothing, soap, food, syllabus books, notebooks and stationery. No fee is taken from the students.

Photograph: 6.20: Sant Seechewal Teach Poor Students at Sultanpur Lodhi.


63. Interview with Staff of Sant Avtar Singh Ji Memorial College, Seechewal.
64. Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
65. Personal Interview with Bhajan Singh the Principle of Nawan Nanakana School, Sultanpur Lodhi.
Sant Seechewal has also made efforts to promote literacy among the dropouts and the illiterate grown-ups of the area. In this regard, “Sant Avtar Singh Yaadgari Open School” has also been started in Seechewal. He also opened a school at Village Galowal (district Hoshiarpur).66

In March 2005, at Nirmal Kuteya Sultanpur Lodhi, Sant Avtar Singh ji Technical Research Centre was opened, in which new machines are inventing innovative methods for the kar sewa of Holy Bein and the unemployed youth are taking training to use advanced technology.67 In recognition to his contribution in education field, the administration honored him in the year 2004.


Sant Seechewal also holds meetings with the parents, students, teachers and prominent people of the area to discuss how to further improve the standards of education. The students are making their futures bright by studying in these educational institutions, organized by Ek Onkar Charitable Trust Seechewal.

67. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
Contribution to Promotion of Sports

Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal believes that a comprehensive personality is a necessary precondition for man’s communion with the Almighty. It is well said that a sound mind can live only in a sound body. While Seechewal has done a lot for creating mental and spiritual health of the people, efforts have also been made for the improvement of their physical health. According to him, sports can play a vital role in this regard. It is not only makes man physically stronger but also strengthens his mind and soul. Sports are an important means of creating harmony between the mind and the body. They bring spiritual satisfaction to man by releasing his mental tensions. Thus, sports are a kind of devotion of God. That is why Sant Seechewal has special penchant for sports.68

Photograph 6.24: Sports Stadium and Health Club at Seechewal Village

There is no religious ceremony at Nirmal Kuteya Seechewal, which goes without the accompaniment of sports functions. At almost every important occasion, akhand paths, kirtan darbars, sant sammelans, and other kind of religious preaching are held, the same day is exclusively reserved for sports tournaments. Sports tournaments are part and parcel of celebrations of Gurpuarb of Guru Nanak Dev ji, Barsis (Death Anniversary) of Sant Lal Singh and Sant Avtar Singh. Teams from far and near, arrive to take part in these tournaments. The number of girl

participants is also growing incessantly. In order to facilitate these sports tournaments, a sports stadium covering 42500 Sq ft. was established in 2001 at Seechewal village. It remains a busy place throughout the year. Apart from it, a hockey Astroturf field is also established at Seechewal, where Hockey players are trained by the coaches.

With a view to free the participants from petty rivalries and to create a spirit of sportsmanship in them, some changes have been made in the rules governing certain sports events. For example, in Kabaddi, the raider does not say “Kabadii-Kabaddi” as usual but would utter ‘Waheguru-Waheguru’, while raiding the opposite side. In this manner, the players get associated with naam simran. A permanent platform has been erected on one side of the stadium. There is a constant flow of divine music of kirtan interspersed with commentaries on the sports events in progress. Promotion of sports by Sant Seechewal has transformed the youth of the area. Now they have stopped feeling frustrated and do not become an easy prey to bad habits, such as drug addiction. They have rather started attending to the positive programmes of Sant Seechewal and are developing a clean and healthy thinking.69

In recognition of his contribution to sports, Sant Seechewal has been nominated, the Chairman of Punjab Tug-of-War Association, the Patron of PEPSU Tug-of-War Association and the Patron of Kapurthala district Amateur Body Building Association.

**Efforts to Control Pollution of Kala Sanghia Drain**

Kala Sanghia Drain was a drain, which carries the monsoon water of the Jalandhar area. It starts (origin) from village Raowali near Pathankot road. This drain travels 45 km through the Doaba belt, before falling in to the Chitti Bein.70 But at present, it has become highly polluted because it receives domestic and industrial discharge of Jalandhar and

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69. Interview with the People of Village Seechewal.
adjoining areas. The source of domestic discharge is due to falling of various disposal points without any sewage treatment facilities. As regards industrial sources, it receives effluents from focal point, industrial area, industrial estate, surgical complex and leather complex. This drain is a big source of pollution of the river Sutlej and various canals flowing to the Malwa region of Punjab and Rajasthan. The people of these areas have been suffering from respiratory, skin, kidney and cancer related ailments for over 20 years but government and administration has not taken any action against these industrial units.

Therefore Sant Seechewal and villagers of these areas blocked the polluted Kala Sanghian Drain three times in 2008, 2009 and 2011. After this movement, government also took some initiative to control pollution of this drain but it was not sufficient because there was lot of work to do, in order to fully control the pollution in it.

**Efforts to Flood Control:**

Apart from other works, Sant Seechewal always helps the people in their various problems. When, anywhere floods hit the area, he joins

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hands with people and the administration to protect people’s lives and crops. On 16/08/2008, as a result of 250 ft-long and 50 ft-deep breach in Sutlej river bund near villages of Mundi Kalu and Mandala, 25 villages were submerged, 70-80 thousand acres of paddy crop was destroyed and a large number of houses collapsed. Immediately on receiving information of flood, Sant Sukhjeet Singh, sewadar of Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal (who had just left for his journey to U.K) reached on the spot to take stock of the situation. Sant Sukhjeet Singh and people worked day and night for 40 hours continuously and they were able to complete the work on August 22, 2008. Such miracle could be made possible only by the united efforts of people. Another thing that emerged out of this relief work is that apart from Sant Seechewal, other religious people of the area came forward with a helping hand in the time of crisis. Sant Jagjit Singh Lopon, Sant Daya Singh Tahli Sahib, Sant Gurcharan Singh Damdama Sahib, Nawan Thatta, Sant Amrik Singh Rajewal and Baba Gurcharan Singh Jalal (Bathinda) along with their followers contributed to the relief work. This was a beginning of a new important trend in the Punjabi society.

On 20 July, 2009 Sant Seechwal started the work to fill the gap in Dhusi Bandh on Sutlej near Madarpur (district Moga). The work was completed with the cooperation of all, in the mid of September 2009 with the expenditure of only 34 lakhs, which was estimated by the administration as 1 crore and 9 lakhs. On Sep 25, 2010 as a result of 200 ft-wide breach in Sutlej bund near village Gadre Bhode (district Jalandhar), the paddy crop of nearby area was submerged under flood water completely. Seechewal organized a mass campaign and after concerted efforts of 40 hours established a ring-bund. On Sep. 2011 Sutlej water started changing its course due to sand deposits near village Baupur in Shahkot tehsil. When the administration’s halfhearted efforts

74. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
76. Ibid.
bore no fruit, Sant Seechewal had to take over the command of the campaign and with the cooperation of people silt was cleared and water course was set right, saving thousands of acres of paddy crop. On 2012, with the help of people, Sant Seechewal constructed 11 km long bund on the Beas River in the Mand area and save many lives and crops of 25 villages. Thus, Sant Seechewal motivated the people to work together for resolving their problems.

Photograph 6.27: 11 km Long Bundh on the Beas River Constructed with the Help of Sant Seechewal.

Sant Seechewal’s flood relief activities have also proved that a lot is to be done on the ground level for the permanent solution to the flood problem. Rather it means that river water be kept under constant observation, detailed report of the behaviour of flowing water in every season be prepared and regular record be maintained for the same. Flood management plans should be prepared according to them. The measures that need to be taken for controlling floods include repairing of river bunds regularly and in time, increasing capacity of rivers by cleaning the beds, installing efficient drainage systems for the excess water in villages.

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77 Interview with the People of Ahli Kala, Ahli Khurd, Saroopwal, Shekh Manga and Mand Husainpur Villages of District Kapurthala.
and towns, prohibiting the flow of polluted water in rivers, drains, streams, choes and beins, preparing proper bridges and culverts under high roads and railway lines and so on. For all this, people, leaders and governments must make conscious and collective efforts.\textsuperscript{78}

**Other Social Welfare Activities**

Sant Seechewal believes in uplifting the poor and has undertaken many activities in this direction. Besides providing education and other basic amenities, people who have been ill-treated by society come to Sant Seecewal to get help in resolving family matters and other disputes concerning land and property. Generally there has been a change in the mind set of the people of this area. Many have gotten off drugs after getting involved in this initiative.\textsuperscript{79}

The caste system is still very rigid in rural areas and small towns of Punjab. Thus the residential areas in Seechewal are demarcated according to the caste system. People from specific castes live in clusters of houses. Although the villagers recognize the existence of the caste system, they do not view it as an impediment to the growth of the Seechewal initiative. This has been proven by facilities being provided equally in every residential area, which has resulted in more social cohesion between all villagers.\textsuperscript{80}

Ek Onkar Charitable Trust of Seechewal also publishes a monthly magazine “Nirmal Noor” since 2001. The purpose of this magazine is to promote healthy moral values in society and promote the teachings of the great Gurus. Sant Seechewal’s activities, being done with the cooperation of the people and make every possible effort to build a pollution free environment and healthy society in the world.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{78}. Personal Interview with Sant Balbir Singh Seechewal.
\textsuperscript{79}. Interviews with the People.
\textsuperscript{80}. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81}. Personal Interview with Sant Sukhjeet Singh.
In 2012, while Sant Seechewal’s environmental and social welfare activities went on at a fast speed; great achievements were also made in promotion of awareness. Avtar Community Radio (90.4FM), Punjab’s first community radio was established at Seechewal. It is dedicated to environmental conservation. This medium will be used not only to give a clarion call for environmental conservation but also provide opportunity to public for sharing their common problems with the authorities. It is managed by the common people. They are preparing and presenting the programs. In this manner, common masses are managing this advanced media for common good. It is a new pro-people, revolutionary beginning.82

Apart from these inspiring initiatives or activities direct efforts to spread awareness have also been made. Therefore, a large number of people from different caste, religion and fields participated in his initiative. In 1991 the Seechewal initiative started with the goal of constructing and clearing the roads in the Dona area of Kapurthala and Jalandhar districts of Punjab. This initiative paved the way for other development, environmental and social welfare projects like underground sewerage system, supply of treated water for agricultural purpose to promote natural farming, piped water supply, tree plantation, construction of educational institutes, promotion of sports, health, literature and art etc... The most important and unique work done by this initiative was the cleaning of Kali Bein. The cleaning of the Bein, not only leads to the removal of water logging from upstream area of Hoshiarpur district but also provided water for irrigation to the downstream areas of Jalandhar and Kapurthala districts, which has improved the agricultural production in the both areas. With the restoration of natural flow of Bein, the underground water level has also risen, which has led to more efficient irrigation facilities. Drawing inspiration from the Guru’s great saying,

82. Personal Interview with Harpreet Singh Kahlon, Head Officer of Avtar Radio, Seechewal.
such as ‘Let us do our work with our own hands’ the Sant Seechewal and kar sewaks have sincerely been doing their duty towards humanity and making efforts for creating awareness among the people.