

Vernacular school, set up with NRP money in 1917-18, the villagers set up a Guru Hargobind Educational Council, named after the sixth Sikh guru who is believed to have visited this village in 16th century.

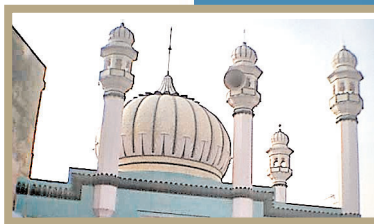
The synergy between the Polytechnic Institute, the panchayat, the National Rural Development Society and each individual villager is like an organic live wire connection. Take this little example. While village ponds are fast disappearing in Punjab, Palahi's panchayat decided that a pond is a must and should be used for water harvesting. Environment conservation is high on the agenda of the villagers anyway.

So, rain water is harvested, and water drained out from the near-by gurdwara's pool is diverted to this pond. Into this, fish seed has been introduced. Now the panchayat has a regular income, a preserved pond, good use of drained out water from pool, and environment conservation. Now, street lights have come up around this pond, soft music plays during the morning and evening hours and the place is a jogging track.

Encouraging men to visit the village library – the stocks would impress you – posed a new problem as the women seemed less interested. When NRP sons got to know, they sent money to open a ladies-special gym next to the library within the same premises. Since children also started dropping in with their moms, the library was quick to add more children titles. NRP sons and daughters were, of course, never late with their cheque books, but what helped was thrifty management of funds.

Seeing all this, the British Council Division (BCD) gave a grant of Rs 3 lakh for computers and library. Good management shows. Of the nearly 300 plus community biogas plants in Punjab, Palahi's the only one functioning.

As you drive out of Palahi, you notice a huge supermart department store – “This is the only one in any Punjab village,” says the owner – and three beauty parlours. A new culture is gradually creeping in, Palahi's salwar-kameez culture is giving way to jeans-clad lasses, and soon Gurmit's band will have to think anew, but there is no doubt that they will keep pace. Scholars from abroad have expressed a wish to take up case studies of Palahi for doctoral thesis. Wait till Palahi is a subject. The village damsel may welcome you in jeans, but she would know that preserving the pond is important. For where else would you return from New York to celebrate Teej? ■



Palahi is these days in a different kind of fix. It wants to adopt a few villages, but is spoiled for a choice. Too many want to be adopted, but Palahi has shortlisted just 20. Surprisingly, Gurmit Palahi is still a rather worried man. “Some 50 girls from the village have dropped out from colleges. On top of that, we have identified a few boys addicted to drugs. I am worried because this drift towards drugs is a rejection of the playground. We must think in new terms about the youth,” he said.



*Photos: The imposing panchayat ghar, the ATM and the departmental store in the village and the mosque for the sole Muslim family speak loudly for Palahi's NRPs*