

Challenge & Opportunity: Agenda for SGPC

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WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN studying at school, the teacher gave us an essay to write titled "If I were the". To my mind it was an excellent way to help students develop their imagination and then be able to communicate about it by putting it on paper.

So, here I am trying to do the same again, after retirement and in the last years of my life.

Why have I chosen this topic? Because this the most important post for the Sikhs today but which unfortunately is not doing or is unable to do, what it should be doing.

SGPC was established in 1925 with the specific object of managing the Sikh Gurdwaras efficiently as per Sikh Rehat and propagation of Sikhism. Sharomni Akali Dal (SAD) was formed to be its political wing to safe guard the interests of the Panth Khalsa. How things have changed is well known to everyone. Today the President of SGPC is picked up by President of SAD and SAD has forsaken the Panthic interests in return for political power. Let SGPC resume the responsibility towards long range protection of the Khalsa Panth, and concentrate on:

1. Role Model Sikhs as staff and make education in Sikh Dharma compulsory for students.
2. Establish teachers training colleges for training of teachers (including Granthis across the Punjab villages and towns and a Gurmat Sangeet training Academy, for training of Kirtani Jathas who can sing Gurbani as per specified Ragas.
3. Adopt tenure system for selection and appointment of Jathedars of Takhts, to replace today's arbitrary methodology. Also, stop the mercenary practice of *Akhand Paths in absentia*, and introduce audio visual Gurmat education.
4. Establish a "Sikh History Research Centre," for credible research into the Sikh history.
5. Establish intensive training courses for Sewadars of historical Gurdwaras in basic Sikh ethos, lives of Gurus and Sikh history. It should place special emphasis on humility, politeness, service with a smile and communication skills. Some must also be trained to speak fluently in English.

Education:

The learning process in childhood is dependent on four sources: viz. (a) Parents, (b) School, (c) Observation of surroundings – Role models, and (d) other Institutions.

Unfortunately, the Sikh child today is deprived of all of the above stated sources for information on the religion he/she is born in. Parents have no time in to day's busy life and themselves know nothing about it except supporting beards and turbans. More so in the villages where 70 percent of Sikh population lives. They do occasionally some Karam kands. Some of them also trim their beards and mothers have cut / bobbed their hair.

The Khalsa schools offer little help. There is no systematic teaching of in-depth Sikhism, or Sikh history for the child to know or feel proud about. Ignorance, both at the staff and students level is the order of the day.

There are No Role Models. Majority of the Sants / Sadhs are self-serving, if not fake with money as a one point programme. Sikh leadership including that of important religious institutions has been relentlessly pursuing their political and personal ambitions and in the process has not hesitated to cast aside all and everything what Sikhism is about.

Our last hope is the Sikh religious center, the Gurdwara. Here, again, the Granthi is unfortunately of no help. He picked up this job because he could do nothing better and was a failure all around, exceptions apart. No wonder Sikh children are going away in hordes from the religion they were fortunate enough to have been born in, and which by all accounts is the most modern, logical and universal religion.

Parents:

It is too late and difficult to do anything at the parent level today. What they should have been helped to learn when they were children, was denied to them. Circumstances also played their part. The community was badly mauled by the Partition in 1947, and remains busy setting itself economically and socially. Sikh leaders neglected the Sikh Values Education.

They were rightly busy finding a place for the community in the new order where old promises made had been betrayed and the community had been asked to find a place in whatever little was offered or they could pick up by their own efforts.

Khalsa Schools:

The first and foremost item is education of Sikh children. There are many so called Khalsa Schools being run by SGPC today. When I was a student at the Khalsa High School at Nankana Sahib, our teachers were *Sabat Surat* Sikhs who set personal example of religious and ethical living.

Prithipal Singh, Olympian Hockey player (son of master Wadhawa Singh Ji), Air marshal M.S.Bawa (his father was the Civil surgeon) and Brig Virk were my class fellows. The school started with a morning prayer (Shabad singing by students by turn followed by Ardas again by students)

In addition to the normal education, we also had a compulsory period daily in Sikhism, consisting of Gurbani recitation (we were made to remember it by heart as you advanced to higher classes) lives of Sikh Gurus and their teachings and Sikh history. For Sikh students it was necessary to pass in the subject. What I want to emphasize is that religious education was part and parcel of the school's daily program. Lest any one should think that the educational results were not satisfactory, our school students mostly stood first in the district in the Punjab University Matric examination.

Look around the so called Khalsa schools today. Most of the staff (in some cases the principal) are the reverse of role models. There is no compulsory period of Sikh religion and in some cases there is no teaching at all. The need of the hour is to reconstruct these schools into proper Khalsa Schools. If need be, make them minority private schools. Forget about the Government grant. Forgo it and make Sikh religious education an integral part of all Khalsa schools.

We may have to recruit new teachers (*sabat surat*) with commitment and under today's circumstances all teachers, both old and new, should be given 3-6 months paid exposure to Sikhism, Sikh ethics and Sikh history. Specially trained "scholars" would be required for each school.

The concentrated effort should be at the Primary/ High/ Higher secondary school levels.

When the SGPC was formed only a part of the Golak offerings were for the SGPC. Half was to be kept and spent locally for education, medical and Dharam parchar. Every historical Gurudwara should have a Khalsa High School attached to it. Every village should have a Khalsa Primary School, a cluster of villages a Khalsa High School and every important town a Khalsa Higher Secondary School.

Even at the College level, I remember Khalsa College, Amritsar in 1948 (Bhai Jodh Singh was the Principal and Prof. Narinjan Singh and Joginder Singh taught Chemistry) had a period on Sikhism, though passing the subject was not compulsory in the University Exam. The point I am trying to make is that we have to reintroduce Sikh religious education at the school level.

Khalsa Colleges for professional education are important. The few professional colleges we have, should be run as private colleges, where Sikhi Sarup is compulsory for teachers, and students for their admission and through their stay at the college. There should be no let up in this basic requirement.

