

Youth's Sexual Behavior and the Sikh Ethics

Some Suggestions for Parents, Teachers and Preachers

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The Problem:

The permissive sexual behavior increasingly being adopted by our youth, in sheer imitation of the western style of living, needs to be carefully examined along with its implications. The social fabric in the western civilization, under the insatiable pursuit of materialism and individualistic enrichment, has begun to decay – high incidence of divorce, mental disorders and sexually transmitted diseases can be partially related to high insecurity in relationships attributed to sexual liberalization. In the USA, in recent period, individuals vowing to maintain chastity has increased and child pregnancies have dropped to the levels of 1940s – implying that after two generations of practicing sexual liberalism, these societies have reached the conclusion that life has many more attractions to offer and there are many more objectives to be fulfilled in a short human span. It is necessary that this conclusion is imparted to our youth: that as human beings they are required to achieve a higher social ideal, above the objective of physical pleasures – which animals generally pursue.

The formation of the sub-conscious mind is a complex phenomenon and the influence of audio/video media in a country where school attendance is low can never be over-emphasized. Therefore, individually as parents and within our social groups we may have to take some initiatives if we do not wish to lose our coming generations, as is the case in experimentation with sexual liberalism in the west - we would need to carefully educate and nurture our youth.

Vigilance is Desirable:

The advancement in medical science has helped to overcome the fears of *physical sickness* originating in free sexual interactions, though not completely successfully. The invention of condoms has helped in partially containing the risk of transmitting diseases and, along with the pill, has also helped in segregating the sexual act from responsibility of child bearing. The media, in increasingly projecting free sexual behavior has helped in reducing the *social stigma* attached to promiscuous behavior, though again not very successfully.

But larger still is another fear

But the most important fear that is not addressed by the inventive cures of medicine and media is the *feeling of guilt* that depreciates the inner self. The human being, with the soul gathering its strength from its source, uncorrupted from the influence of blazing media does not let the human mind rest in peace after sexual escapades. **No antidote has yet been discovered or invented for the feeling of guilt and the individual has to live and die with it – so very haunting.**

Present-day Style of Sex-Education - Easy but Ineffective Method

The distribution of condoms and pills in the schools and conducting classes on sex education is an easy way that would give a feeling of action to planners, teachers and sociologists. But it would be limited, and even counterproductive. Limited because, a very small percentage of children in India reach the schools. **Counterproductive, because it will make the children aware of the sexual playfulness, and the seductive assurance of the safety cover provided by condoms/pills.** To illustrate, it would be like giving the child some Swiss chocolates but restraining them from eating them.

Looking for Guidance in Sikh Ethics

The Sikh religion, which is the youngest of the major world religions and stakes claim to be modern and secular in its philosophy, has a special role to play in projecting an ideal youth and an adult human being. In Sikh religion, four of the ten Gurus were blessed with *Guruship* before they had completed their teens. In its short history, the contribution of the youth is illustriously dominant.

The philosophy of Sikhism, which lays emphasis on long-term vision, captured in the formula – *work, share and meditate* – could help to provide guidance to our youth suffering from *abundance of idle time, individualistic approach and lack of activity*. In its emphasis on psychology and the complete development of the child, Sikhism can help to plan an ideal daily curriculum to be followed. Therefore, we discuss the Sikh approach that can be adopted towards the youth in terms of moral, physical and intellectual behavior.

Moral Dimension

In the Sikh way of life, there are clear instructions on sexual behavior to be followed, which is useful for the individual and the society. In Sikh philosophy, sexual urge has been conceded to be one of the two major weaknesses of human beings, the other being anger. Both these urges weaken the body, and therefore have to be carefully channeled, if one has to enjoy a lifetime of healthy body. Therefore, Sikhs are expected to have sexual relation strictly with their wedded partner, and not outside the marriage. There are numerous historical instances where this principle has been stressed and exemplified by the Sikhs.

The important question is: how can the strict discipline to avoid such temptation be practiced by our young children. **The role model has to be parents, teachers and preachers.** The role of baptism, imparted to all Sikhs, irrespective of sex and caste, is important in this context. In the conditions of *amrit* the following two specifications can help the young child to resist the sexual temptation – compulsory daily prayer routine and explicit ban on use of tobacco, drugs, alcohol and sex outside marriage. The daily prayer routine helps in two ways. **First, it requires the child to spare some time for meditation, which also improves the concentration power of the mind. Secondly, the time that is required to do the prayers leaves the child with less number of hours to waste on unwanted activities, thus reducing the probability to spend time on polluting material.** Many a times, a child who spends some time in daily prayers would also prefer to visit a *Gurdwara* where again the will to resist the sexual temptations, as well as others, would be strengthened. **The explicit ban on drugs also helps to strengthen the body and mind of the child to resist temptations.** The use of tobacco, drugs and alcohol numbs the senses and gives rise to irrational behavior. A moment of irrational behavior can ruin the psychology and the long future of any young child. **The explicit ban on sex outside marriage, administered under an oath in front of the *Panj Pyaras* (five beloved elders of the community) has a very strong impact on the human mind. Such social promises made in highly charged religious environment can help the young mind to avoid any irrational spur-of-the-moment behavior.**

The parents can confidently discharge their duties while sending their children to school and college when they have helped the child to connect to the wider society through promises made to their religious elders. In modern times and at a young age, when peer pressure to trespass the rules is very strong, such commitment would help in ensuring responsible behavior from our young children. The correct age of initiation through *amrit* baptism may be any time before puberty sets in – even among the Hindus, depending on the caste, males are initiated with the thread ceremony before puberty. **As parents, we have a responsibility of providing our children with healthy advice and ensuring a healthy**

future for their adulthood.

Physical Dimension

A Sikh is expected to develop a strong, wholesome body that shall be able to serve the weak and downtrodden. In numerous instances in history, the Gurus personally led expeditions to various parts of the world to spread the gospel of religion and help the needy in times of famines and natural disasters. In other instances, Sikhs have fought valiantly against oppression. All this was possible because the Sikhs insisted on healthy bodies. Therefore, in Sikh diet, drugs and other substances that numb one's senses and arouse one's passion are totally prohibited.

Social Dimension:

A Sikh is taught to be socially useful to the community – with emphasis on service or *sewa*. Therefore, in *Gurdwaras* where all activities are performed on voluntary basis, Sikhs perform all type of *sewa* – *langar*, footwear, floor sweeping, dusting, etc. In a *nagar-kirtan*, the young people again perform *sewa* on a large scale by either cleaning, doing *kirtan* or distribution of *prasad*. Thus, our teaching to attend the *Gurdwara* twice daily also helps us to build our body, while helping us to spend time in a socially productive manner. A Sikh is expected to actively participate in community work and therefore young Sikhs should join the Scouts and Cubs, National Social Service and National Cadet Corps. Sikh schools and colleges should encourage enrolling large number of their students in these nationally organized bodies for healthy social development. In sport activity, India is lacking good representation at the international level. Given the lessons from Sikh history, Sikhs should be able to richly contribute in this aspect. The Sikh Schools, Colleges and *Gurdwara* complexes, generally with large areas, should promote feasible sport activities in the premises amongst their children. Generally, in early mornings and before the time for evening prayers, the open grounds in these premises should be made available to our children to spend time to exercise and play. Remember the times of the Gurus, when young men would spend time in exercises after *Asa-di-Vaar* and before *Rehras*, and the Sikh Gurus used to take keen interest in these activities. Incidentally, Sikhs were well known, in times of the Gurus, in wrestling, swimming, horse - pegging, horse – racing, horse - polo and sword-fighting – many of which are Olympic events. In modern times, our children, especially girls, should be exposed to defensive sports like karate and Aikido.

Intellectual Dimension

The Gurus used to encourage intellectual activities amongst the *sangat*. The historical incidents of Gurus teaching alphabets to students, encouraging ballad singers and musicians, and maintaining a team of poets is known to all Sikhs. The Gurus, history mentions, used to organize competitions for these activities and handsomely reward the winners / performers. Therefore, in the schools and colleges run by Sikh organizations, intellectual activities pertaining to essay-writing, poem-composition, and fine arts like painting, and music of traditional and modern instruments, should be strongly encouraged. These competitions with themes relating to Sikh values can also be organized in *Gurdwaras* to stimulate the young mind.

In many educational institutions and in many Sikh *sangats*, some children are not privileged as the others. In such situations, our young students should be able to devote time and energy to help the weaker students in completing their school assignments or assisting in intellectual activities – another form of *sewa*.

In management of our educational, religious and social institutions, the involvement of youth should be encouraged compulsorily. This will help in the following ways – **First**, a feeling of responsibility would be inculcated in our youth. **Secondly**, the social relevance of the ideas

from the aspect of the youth would come to the mainstream. In addition, the youth would understand the rationale/logic of the decisions taken by the elders in the community. **Thirdly**, the youth would feel involved in the decision making process that encourages adherence to the rules. Finally, such a process would ensure continuity in social progress.

Sex-Education in Sikh way of Life - A Difficult but Effective Method

The most important method is to accept the child as a young curious mind, which is capable of understanding the complexity of the issue. This is the method which has been successfully practiced in our civilization for thousands of years. The method is to explain and help to train the young mind, of the available wisdom, by parents, teachers and preachers with the following understanding.

(a) Human beings consist of mind and body. Human beings only, amongst the whole creation, have a choice to either evolve to a higher plan of self-realization or fall back in the trap of death cycle. Therefore, life in human body is no fun thing but a serious business and most importantly, it is many more lives after this life that are also at stake. Mind travels through various bodies, but supreme is the human body which is received after many efforts in the *continuum* of so many lives. Finally, now in human body, if the choice of lofty spiritual life is made as against the base physical life, is this life-death cycle broken.

(b) Sexual urge, like other urges is transient and consumes life energy for satisfaction, but unlike other urges, needs interaction between two bodies to be satisfied. This implies additional responsibility as it impacts the society.

(c) Limited and permissible use of this urge has led to civilizations and family units surviving thousands of years. **Unlimited and irresponsible use of this urge leads to physical (exhaustion, sexually transmitted diseases), mental (psycho medical problems) and social (break-up of family, single parenthood, child pregnancies) ailments.** A few seconds of pleasure from irresponsible exercise of this urge can lead to a lifetime of pain, suffering and guilt.

(d) In the formation of human body and average span of human life, appropriate age for each activity and the role of prioritization in life is recognized. In the young age, humans are expected to learn the skills and in the later age earn a livelihood from the practice of those skills. Similarly, responsible sexual life needs a certain amount of maturity of mind and body. In scriptures of all religions, sexual activity has been restricted exclusively within marriage.

(e) An unfettered sexual urge in youth distracts the concentration of mind and affects the performance in other activities (school, career) too. To command your sensual activities, consumption from all sources need to be noted – eyes, ears, mouth, nose and touch. A careful intake through any of these inlets helps to restrain your sexual urges.

(f) Even a free human is a slave to its mind and the feelings emerging therein. Nothing is hidden from your own mind and no behavior, even done behind sealed doors, is unaccounted. There is no escape from your own mind. Judgement, pain, happiness comes from your own mind, as does the feeling of guilt. The negative feelings emerging from the mind impact the physical body too. Drugs and counseling can suppress or numb the feelings of guilt to a tolerable level for a short-term but not eliminate it. Therefore, each human has to carefully watch his feelings and actions.

(g) Heady youthfulness can color the vision and thoughtfulness. But a healthy human has to plan and optimize his /her potential in the long-term – as long as can the vision perceive.

(h) The mind can be trained, as has successfully been done by many humans before

us. The training of the mind has to begin from conception. And like toilet and food training of the child, and education, the mind too has to be trained from a very early stage, say from primary school onwards, to think in a certain fashion especially on issues pertaining to social relations. This has not to be taught as sex-education *per se* but as general moral science with the value systems of our heritage and civilization. In the case of a child, parents, preachers and teachers also play important role models that settles in the subconscious mind.

(i) The sexual behavior shown in the movies/videos/print media is unreal, even perverse and weird, which need not be imitated.

(j) **There is no free lunch here on Earth. Yes, the human body is a gift of a most sophisticated type to the mind, but then it has additional responsibilities. If mind is trained properly it emits happiness and if not, then only unhappiness.** The rule of 'as you sow so shall you reap' is applicable in all spheres of life – physical, mental and spiritual. Upanishads, revealed several thousand years ago, clearly mention that **in this deceptive-to-eye world, two path-ways are there – sweet-looking, with focus on the sensualities, but poisonous in the long-run and simple looking with focus on spirituality, but fruitful in the long-run. The humans are responsible for the choice and its implications.**

(k) The objective of every human being is to attain ultimate spiritual bliss, something that is attainable only in a human body and can help to break the cycle of life and death. **The bliss is attained by meditation, prayer and continuing to live in human body but not yielding to its desires – Lord Krishna calls it 'Sacrifice Supreme' in *Bhagavad Gita* and Guru Ji calls it 'Jeevan-Mukt'. This is the goal for all human beings – unless they attain it, they keep appearing in the same examination-cycle of life and death.**

(l) Meditation is any activity that helps self-realization. It could be repetitive utterance of a *mantra*, *sewa* or daily *nitnem*. Even praying for wisdom, health and active social life is meditation.

(m) Once having planted a seed, the tree continues to flower and fruit. What is the seed that we are planning to plant in our youth?

Teach our Children Sikh Values – How and When

As Sikhs we are ordained to attend the *sangat* twice a day – many of us due to our work environment are only able to make it once a week to the *Gurdwara*. The time spent in *Gurdwara* can be most optimally used to impart Sikh values to the young child. In addition, in those *Gurdwaras*, where children have yet not learnt Punjabi, efforts should be made to teach them Sikh values in any language that they can understand. It may be necessary to advise the speaker, or *Ragi Jatha*, to explain in simple words meaning of the crucial lines that they sing, may be before they start to do *kirtan*, or illustrate their discourse with simple illustrations that a child can understand. The child, as also the elders, can only benefit from the *Gurdwara*, if they are able to understand the meaning of what has been sung/discussed. Therefore, the community may need to focus on this aspect of *Gurdwara* too. One easy solution could be to follow the practice prevalent in the *Gurdwaras/Ashrams* run by the American Sikh Yogis, where English translation of the *shabad* being sung is distributed in the *sangat*, similar to the practice followed in India of keeping a copy of the *Amrit Kirtan Pothi* in front during *Kirtan* – may be a similar *Pothi* in English can be provided in every *Gurdwara* in Western Countries. The other could be the installation of the electronic display screen in the *Gurdwara*. **It needs to be emphasized that if children do not understand *Gurbani Kirtan*, they will never understand the rich Sikh philosophy and may not**

benefit adequately from the time spent in *Gurdwara* – how can then we expect them to become a Sikh?

The most important event of the time at *Gurdwara* is the *Hukam* – of which our children generally do not understand a word. Can we read them just a translation, and not *katha*, please, from a standard accepted book of meanings (this minimizes the scope of dilution by the speaker) – say for English from S. Manmohan Singh (eight volumes are available world-wide) and for Punjabi from Prof. Sahib Singh (ten volumes). **This would hardly take additional few minutes of the *sangat*, but make our children aware of the content of the *Hukam*.**

Recognize the Role of woman - a neglected aspect in our *Prachar*

The most important and distinguishing characteristic of Sikh religion is the equality in religious practice by both man and woman. After all, only in Sikh religion, woman can take *Amrit*, wear the *Kakkars*, and go to sit in the sanctum sanctorum any day of her life – unlike in any other religion. Also, the Sikh Gurus give sole credit to a woman in successfully bringing up the child as a *bhagat*, or hero. And the historians as well as *pracharaks*, all males, seem to have underplayed the roles of mothers of the Gurus, *sahibzadas* and the leading learned Sikhs.

How many of us know the name of the mothers of the Gurus, Baba Budha, Bhai Gurdas, Bhai Nand Lal, *Panj Pyaras* or even Sant Attar Singh, Bhai Randhir Singh and Bhai Veer Singh? Can the role of wives of the Gurus and in some cases the daughters too, be considered less important? How can the *Gurpurab* celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Guru Gobind Singh Ji and *Sahibzadas* be complete without reference to their mothers and/or wives – and we never even heard their names. **It seems something has gone wrong in the *Prachar* of our religion and value system. And it is the most neglected component in *Prachar* – one can spend hours in a *Gurdwara* and listen to history but no reference to the role of woman is mentioned while the speaker would reel out many *Sakhis*.** And we expect to gift to the society young Sikh children when we practice hypocrisy with Gurus teachings. To impart a healthy psychology to our children, equal emphasis would need to be given to the role of the two sexes in Sikh religion, following sincerely the directions and spirit in the teachings of the Guru.

Therefore, we should request our *Pracharaks* and *Prabhandaks* that they should bring forth the contribution of our woman in formation of our Sikh history when they narrate *sakhis* or when they speak on occasions of *Gurpurabs*.

Baptize the Couple – Gift of Faith

In Sikh religion, the sexual act inspires spiritual union with God. In many *shabads* (hymns) in SGGGS, based on the examples of worldly marriage and sexual union, the Guru guides the disciple to seek the love of God. Therefore in Sikhism, unlike other religions, marriage is considered to be a respectable practice to be adopted. And, in the Sikh way of life baptism is important. The injunction in Sikh *rehat maryada* that a baptized Sikh cannot cohabit with any other person than the spouse helps in imposing an additional amount of discipline and commitment in the relationship. It would be so secure a feeling for the two spouses that they are entering a union where each partner has socially promised, in a religious ceremony to the *Panj Pyaras*, that they shall not cheat on each other. **In modern days, when surveys repeatedly point out the heavy incidence of cheating in marriages by partners, such a promise made in the presence of the Guru, would provide additional sweetness and faith in the relationship.** The feeling of insecurity in

marriage is a cause of many a problems in long-term relationships, as indicated by numerous surveys conducted in western countries.

Conclusion

Our future rests with our youth – so do we all say all the time, *but* the important question is - what have we done to secure it? Probably, not much – actually never focussed on this issue. However, the recent media revelations do indicate a disturbing trend amongst our youth. Therefore, it is very important that the right direction and environment is provided to our youth. **If the print and video media can successfully lure our youth in directions that are visibly harmful for their future then we have to analyze why we cannot lure back our youth into useful activity.**

Therefore, all of us have to ensure a coordinated approach whereby our youth are provided the environment that is healthy for their minds and body not only at present but also in the future. The objective should be to gainfully benefit from the abundant energy of our youth – the need is to channelize it for long-term health of the individual and for the benefit of the society.

The youth need to be increasingly engaged in social and religious activities. In fact, *amrit* baptism is one all-important solution – a young Sikh spends the morning and evening hours listening to the melodious hymns soothing to the body, mind and soul. A baptized Sikh engages the mind in meditation and involves the body in *sewa*. The promise made in the social setting to the religious Guru helps to refrain from all temptations – nay, the routine leaves no time to watch lewd programs. The energy of a young Sikh needs to be diverted into socially beneficial activities – community work involving physical and intellectual contribution. The consciousness of such a Sikh operates not at the physical level, distinct from that of an animal, but at a higher plane of the mind and soul. Such an individual optimizes the benefits over the life-long period and is useful for the society. **If, as parents and social groups, we can multiply such individuals, then we would have succeeded in increasing human welfare – the younger such individuals longer would be the benefits to the society.**

In the pursuit of cheap imitation of the western culture, which may not be the correct approach, we may lose a whole generation before realizing the sad impact, already noted by the western countries. As in economic reforms, liberalization has been cautious; a similar approach needs to be adopted in social globalization. In many western countries, cable TV as it exists in India, does not operate even today. As we do not have similar divorce laws, medical and psychological facilities, we may have to very cautious in treading the theory path.

It needs to be recognized that the spread of literacy is still limited but the reach of movies/serials/videos through Television and of audio programs through radios and cassettes is very large. Therefore, the media moguls have to be taken into confidence - Parliamentarians from Bollywood and Union Minister for Youth Affairs, hopefully recognizing their broader social responsibility can be helpful in this case. The media can be requested to deploy their creative instincts, from present use of popularizing pornography, **to pure and healthy entertainment.** The Censor Board probably needs to be aware that the overall welfare of the population is far more important than the financial success of few directors/producers residing in Mumbai. The process of formation of the sub-conscious mind is subtle and slow, but when a murder/rape has been committed, or when a girl child has become pregnant, the impact is stinging and irreversible.

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