

Gurpreet - The Camper of the Year

A Report of the Australian Sikh Youth Camp, Sydney

from 10-16 January 2006

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Dya Singh (18 January 2006) (from 'Dya Singh's Diaries in www.sikhpoint.com/dyasingh)

Gurpreet Singh Sidhu suffers from 'down syndrome'. He is not able to speak too clearly and stutters though his '*Bolay So Nihal*' is one of the loudest we have ever heard. He is about 20. He joined every activity with great enthusiasm and the rest of the campers encouraged him and included him in all their activities and made him feel fully welcome. He also learnt how to tie the *dastar*. It was surprising how quickly he learnt to tie the *dastar* and, by the second day, he was helping the younger participants to tie their *dastars* too.

The camp was divided into four 'jathas' with a fifth *jatha* made up of parents and other adults. Gurpreet was in *Jatha 4* and participated in all the sports. He was right in front for 'Bhangrarobics' every night. He played on second tabla for his jatha in the kirtan competition and on the last day we allowed him to sit on the main vaja to lead us in '*Satnaam Waheguru*' *simran*. He also duly attended every gurmatt class session and kept his folder of books, papers and a pen in a very tidy condition. He sang in his loudest, not able to form the words of the shabads being sung but at the top of his voice anyway and everyone allowed him and smiled with him. He also served the 'degh' every day. He was one of the Panj Pyaray on the last day escorting the Sri Guru Granth Sahib in It's ceremonial departure from the campsite and the lowering of the Nishan Sahib. He wielded his Sri Sahib with composure and let out the loudest jekara the camp has ever heard.

On the last day, Gurpreet was named 'Camper of the Year' by the organisers, to full approval and thunderous applause from all present and he received a trophy and a couple of our cd's. He was the happiest person on earth that day and everyone in the camp was very happy for him.

For me this '*samelan*' or 'youth camp' was the culmination of five years in an attempt to cover all the salient points of Sikhi in my humble and very limited knowledge. I was backed by a group of organisers I am very proud to be associated with. Thank you, Ajmer Singh Gill (who also took amrit this year!), Sukhvinder Singh (former President of the Revesby Gurdwara), Satwant Singh Calais, Jasvinder Singh, Vickram Singh, S.Gurpreet Singh of Revesby (in charge of the juniors) and Jorawar Singh, besides a host of other dedicated sewadhars.

I was backed by one of the strongest 'delivery teams' I have had the honour of working with – all from Malaysia. Giani Sukhdaiv Singh Ji (of "*Gurpuri*" – an orphanage he runs in Kuala Lumpur) with his able tablist – Jessi (who was main tabla player at camp and accompanied me every morning for *Asa Di Var*); Sukhinderpal Singh of Penang (hajuri duty); Harcharanjit Singh 'Rajah' (Inspirational sessions); Sukhdev Singh 'Success' (Self Motivational course) and D'AA'ljit Singh (bhangrarobics). All of them also gave talks, held dialogues and addressed the sangat in 'divans' dealing with various subjects keeping in mind that the theme this year was 'Sikh to Khalsa' and 'Amrit'.

As mentioned earlier, the juniors (below 13 years of age) were capably looked after and given lessons by Sardar Gurpreet Singh, Amarjeet Singh and a team of teachers.

The day started early with the 'amrit-vela devotees' starting well before 4am. With 'parkash' of dhan dhan Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Formal Nitnam of JapJi, Jaap and Sawaiyay began at 4am. Followed by Asa-Di-Var till 6.15am. The programs from 4am. Were on speakers in all dormitories as participants were waking up to a new day. They came into darbar at 6am.

For the last '*shloka*' of Asa Di Var followed by 15 minutes of Waheguru simran. All narrated JapJi from 6.30 followed by Ardaas, *Hukamnama*, explanation and announcements for the day. Breakfast at 7.30am followed by Nishan Sahib Selaami at 8.45am followed by 'Divan' from 9am to 10am. After a half hour break the participants were given discourses by the 'delivery team' from 10.30 to 12.30 followed by Lunch. Various activities took place in the afternoon including preparation by jathas for their shabads rendition in the evening; sports including canoeing, absailing, rock climbing, swimming and other activities; self-improvement courses for anyone interested, by S. Sukhdev Singh 'Success'.

The evening program after dinner started at 7pm. With *Rehras* by jathas followed by a short Inspirational session culminating in one shabad being sung by each jatha. Divan concluded by 9pm to 9.30 pm, followed by 'bhangrarobics' by D'AA'Ijit Singh Ji. The day concluded by further physical activities including an indoor soccer competition leading to Lights Out by latest 11.30pm.

The camp culminated in the first ever Amrit Sanchar ceremony at which three participants partook of 'amrit'. The other highlight was a dramatised rendition of four 'dohras' of 'Khalsa mero roop hai khas' by all jathas. This competition proved to be of as high a quality as the three shabad kirtan competition. Parents were spell bound by the shabad renditions from their children - children who could barely do kirtan on their own. The Under 10's gave us a rendition of Mool Mantr on their own in choir form and the 10 to 13 year olds sang a lovely dharmic kaveta on the '*Char Sahibzaday*'

It was not the intention of the camp to measure its success with the number of participants partaking of amrit but introducing the important topic of Khalsa and 'amrit' in a frank and responsible way – not as the cultish ceremony, that it is generally portrayed these days. In my day it was portrayed as a step from adolescence into responsible adulthood and introduced at about the age of 14. These days, it is portrayed more as a graduation from 'Sikh to Khalsa' after one has been practising to be a Khalsa for some time. We, the organisers do know that at least half of the participants this year are contemplating 'amrit' in the near future.

This was also the first time that first generation 'Indian' Sikh parents cautiously sent their youngsters to this camp. They are at best wary about the seemingly liberal attitudes of us Malaysian/Singaporean and Kenyan Sikhs. We were also honoured to have a Sikh couple (both from the medical field) from Varanasi (India) with their two teenage sons. I believe they felt fully justified in coming and had a great time including great benefit for their sons. There were also participants from New Zealand. It was also gratifying to note the presence of children from mixed backgrounds learning about the faith of one of their parents. There were representatives from Adelaide and Melbourne and a strong showing of parents and youth from Newcastle.

Parents and adults also attended classes. This year it was decided that all attendees would be considered as participants and adults too greatly benefited from the experience, rather than sit around and drink 'cha' all day!

We had our controversial moments due to cultural and religious/spiritual practices and differences between Indian Sikhs and others who are born overseas, but I believe we were able to overcome them amicably and perhaps learned to understand each other better – a giant step forward. I had a first hand lesson on the differences in outlook of Indian Sikhs and Sikhs who have lived for some generations outside India – an interesting topic to be elaborated at some other time.

The camp was over three full days and four nights and culminated with a three hour youth kirtan divan on Sunday 16 January. It was held at the Myuna Bay Sports and Recreation

Centre north of Sydney close to Newcastle in the state of New South Wales, Australia. The camp was attended by over 350 over a four day period with 120 full term youth.

A week earlier, Melbourne had a similar camp attended by about 200 over also a five day period. This camp too was a tremendous success though not as organised as the Sydney camp. One must remember though, that however well you are organised everything happens as Waheguru Ji wills it... and Waheguru Ji smiled upon us and our children.

There is interest in holding a third such consecutive camp in Adelaide next year, in January. All main youth camps on the east coast of Australia are held in January.

From a personal point of view, I noticed the dramatic impact both these camps had on my two little grandchildren. I believe such camps are very important for the early development of Sikh children. I urge more Panthic sewadhars to conduct such camps worldwide if you want your children to gain a love for Sikhi and a sense of belonging from a young age.

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Sports: England pick ‘doosra’ turbanator

This March will see a never before sight - a turbaned English cricker turning out against India. On Friday, 23 year-old left arm spinner Monty Singh Panesar became the 6th member of the Test squad for the tour of India. He is set to be the first Sikh to make his England Test debut.

Panesar, whose parents moved to England from Ludhiana in the 1970s, last visited India three years ago. He is fluent in Punjabi, watches Bollywood movies, listens to Hindi music and Bhangra and looks up to his Northants teammates Matt Hayden and Mike Hussey.

“But right from when I was a kid, my role model has been Tendulkar,” Panesar told HT from Lord’s. He also counts Phil Tuffnell and Bishen Singh Bedi among his inspirations.

He said he was extremely proud of being a Sikh and an Englishman but his focus was firmly on cricket. “I follow the principles of Sikhism but I’m very involved in English culture; this is my home,” he said.

The questions about Panesar’s dual identity (he says they coexist) are inevitable but David Capel, Academy director at Northamptonshire and someone who’s watched Panesar grow up, said there was no conflict. “Obviously, he’s always had a keen interest in India’s matches, but he’s completely English,” said Capel. “He has always fitted in beautifully.”

Panesar was in Delhi sometime ago to see Bedi. “He’s a lovely boy,” Bedi said. “He comes from a humble background, his father does masonry and Monty himself is a very spiritual, quiet person.”

Bedi said he thought Panesar’s bowling had a natural flow. “He has a beautiful action but is just a bit on the quicker side. He’s committed but needs to work on his athleticism, fielding and batting.”

[Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*]

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