

Are Sikhs being targeted for conversion?

Holding fierce pride in their identity, Sikhs have, for decades, been seen as "off-limits by the missionary machine but not anymore. In a alarming trend, evangelism has begun to tread on the Sikh faith as well.

Every aspect of Punjabi society is being overwhelmed with this new wave of assertive Christianity. Besides nationwide programmes in Hindi, Punjabi television channels have been deluged by Christian programmes even though the Christian population of Punjab is less than 1%. Taking aim at Sikh youth, animated films and children's books on Christianity are freely distributed by missionaries.

Because of the strong adherence to tradition by Sikhs, missionaries have attempted to 'repackage' Christianity. Jesus is called "Satguru", church is referred to as "Satsang" and choir singing is called "Kirtan". Choir boys in Punjabi churches wear turbans to attempt to minimize the variation between Sikhism and Christianity as a version of Sikhism, missionaries still cannot hide their intent: to destroy the Sikh faith.

Sikhs often complain that missionaries are using extortive practices such as bribing them with material possessions to change their religion. A young boy whose friends had converted to Christianity explained, "When I asked the boys as to why they have converted to Christianity, they said they had been given cash and free education. In our village alone, 5 to 6 people have converted and, of course, their generations to come would also be Christians."

Gurbachan Singh Bachan, former Secretary of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and a proud Sikh, says "people who are converting from Hinduism and Sikhism to Christianity are those who have lost understanding of their own religion... Khalsa [Sikh] institutions and the Government need to educate the people about the values of a religion, and tell them that all religions are equal and no religion teaches us to fight with each other."

The Open Door Church run by Pastor Harbhajan Singh, a landlord who converted to Christianity from Sikhism, has aggressively converted over 2,800 members of the Khojewala village community. In February of 2004, Singh made derogatory remarks against several Sikh Gurus including Guru Granth Sahib. This led to several protests by Sikh youths in front Singh's church. The conflict was ultimately resolved by police intervention and an unconditional apology by Harbhajan Singh. Meanwhile, Christian media painted this incident as an example of "Christian persecution."

SikhGiving, a small Sikh charitable organization was helping a Sikh patient Jaswinder Singh and his family to cope with their medical costs of approx \$500 a month. "At first we didn't take up the case as we could not afford to support the case for a long period of 3 years", said Vicky Singh, a volunteer of the California based non-profit organization.

The family went to the point where Jaswinder's dad, Sohan Singh had to sell his cycle in order to cover a day's medicine cost. Somehow this news spread out in the public that a Sikh organization is helping Sohan Singh's family. After that, their local Christian group came with an offer to Sohan Singh's family that they can cover his child's entire medical expenses for 2 to 3 years. They were asked to visit the church to receive the money. Sohan Singh went to the Church feeling that he will be given the money as goodwill by the church.

When he went inside, he was taken by the church officials to attend a special ceremony

which was to adopt Christianity as his religion. Sohan Singh and his family are from a deeply religious Sikh background. He was given instructions by them that if they want to get the financial support then he has to follow the ceremony which indirectly was to leave Sikhism and adopt their religion. Sohan Singh left the church immediately after he found that in their instructions he was told to eat Parshad (religious offering) of Christ (which was meat).

"I never thought that this would be happening to someone in Punjab who is in need of help. Instead of helping a needy person, they are making him to do something which he and his family doesn't want to do. It was a direct hit at us showing that Sikhs in Punjab can't help each other and others are lending a hand to help them but with strings attached", said Satnam Singh, the director of SikhGiving.

A recent study showed that at least 800,000 are converted to Christianity every year throughout India. In the coming years, this number can significantly increase with attacks on the Sikh faith.

[Courtesy: Hindu Voice]



A Delegation of Christian Brothers visits Gurdwara Jagat Sudhar

A Report by

Avtar Singh



Last February witnessed an inter-faith communion in Calcutta. An International fraternity: "Congregation of Christian Brothers", with headquarters in Rome, made a surprise visit to Calcutta's premier Sikh Gurdwara Jagat Sudhar, to have an

Inter-active session with local Sangat, and to witness the Kirtan, Ardas (Prayer) and partake of (a) Prasad, (b) Langar.

The delegation, consisting of 27 devout Christians, belonging to North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Ireland, Philippines and India, was warmly welcomed on arrival by the managing board and a fair gathering of local Sangat, guiding the guests to the main hall. Sardar Arvinder Pal Singh, a Chartered Accountant, Lions Club's Director and a dynamic member of the Sikh Community briefly introduced the guests to the audience, before leading them to Diwan Hall to join Shabd Kirtan session. In an hour long solemn programme, Hazuri Ragi Jatha recited Gurbani Kirtan followed with a brief speech by Sardarni Kamal Preet Kaur (ex-Principal – Khalsa English High School, Kolkata) on the importance of singing hymns from Holy Guru

Granth. Sardar Saran Singh [Editor, ***The Sikh Review***] spoke of universal philosophy of Sri Guru Granth Sahib that formed the core of Sikhism. Members of the delegation cheerfully and solemnly joined the Sangat in Ardas, listened to 'Hukum' of Guru Granth, with a short explanation - in English – of Order of the Day, while *Karha Prasad* was served to the Sangat.

Then followed an informal session, at the ground floor hall, where members reassembled for open discussion on various issues related to the Sikh vision in the fast changing scenario of the world communities, in the present days context, its relevance for the upcoming generation.

Questions on religion, in general, and the Sikh code of conduct, in particular, were suitably - and elaborately - answered by Sardar Saran Singh and Sardar Arvinder Pal Singh, [a former member of All India Sikh Federation] who currently holds the post of International Director, Lions Club. The question-answer session turned out to be focussed and intense right upto the end, concluding in a very impressive manner, which made the Inter-faith exercise hugely successful. Members of the delegation were all praise for the kind of welcome and the candour in answers to their questions. They later recorded their experience and valuable comments in the Gurdwara Visitor's Book.

As per the tradition of Sikh Faith, the Gurdwara President, Sardar Chetan Singh presented each member of the Brotherhood with a shawl and a set of books (in English) on Sikhism and its humanitarian philosophy. While expressing gratitude to the Gurdwara Committee, the leader of the group, Br. Mark DaCosta was all praise for Sardar Dilbir Singh, General Secretary, for co-ordination and the meticulous arrangements made for their day-long experience.

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