

Gurdwara: As Multipurpose Institution

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THE TRADITION OF GURBANI KIRTAN has achieved peaks of spirituality within the precincts of our Gurdwaras.

Over these past centuries, gurdwaras have also been a refuge for the distressed and sanctuary for the homeless. Indeed, be it the celebration of a weddings, or mourning the death of loved ones, we assemble in the Gurdwara precincts, in august presence of SGGS.

In so far as our gurdwaras have the potential to become centres of excellence, and help the community achieve great heights, they must be fashioned as the focal point for the community, and be sensitive to their needs in these rapidly changing times that we live in today. The main gurdwara in Calcutta, for example, has closed circuit TV, to carry the message across the premises.

So our youth – both girls and boys – need to be guided – to follow the basic service since they are quite unaware of their rich heritage and the great spiritual wealth of Sikhism. Earlier generations learnt the sakhis of the Gurus, and tales of gallantry of 18th century heroes – sitting on the laps of their grandmothers and aunts. With the advent of the nuclear families – and the pressure of modern life – this no longer holds true. The youth of today are exposed to a different fast changing modern world. They need to be activated and their interest rekindled, and focused.

The gurdwara managing committees must quit pettifogging debates, and come forward to organize youth camps where, along with fun activities, the basic questions that arise in the minds of young people are met head-on, answered with care and understanding – by competent and knowledgeable scholars.

Teenage Psyche:

More and more committees running our gurdwaras in India and abroad (more so, abroad) are realising that they must bring our youth back into the fold – by choice, and not by force. If programmes are held in gurdwaras for our teenagers, and organized by persons who know how to turn occasions into events, the young boys and girls will be attracted to them. We need to create a buzz and organize events, such as quizzes, panel discussions, e.g. on topics that need clarification by our younger generation. We need to move with the times. And gurdwara committees are beginning to realize this.

To organize and conduct such events the premises of the gurdwaras must have community halls, or large rooms where such events can be held, preferably with large TV screens.

Heritage on Sundays:

The west has the concept of Sunday schools. This can be adopted as considered appropriate. Most parents would welcome organized activities on Sundays for their children. They can be acquainted with the history and the teachings of the great Gurus, and encouraged to take part in other activities as mentioned above.

Teaching must be interactive, and the fun aspect must always be kept in mind. Children dislike preaching – as they see too much around them that does not fit into what is being

said by the elders. We must galvanise our youth who will be the leaders and torch bearers of the new generation. Our children are our greatest wealth and we need to nurture them with love and understanding. Their world view is certainly different from ours – as it should be. We need to understand them and be supportive of their ideals. Let us try to see the world through their eyes.

Mobilising Funds:

Our gurdwaras have funds which can be utilized by the committees to help our Sikh schools become first rate centres of learning. We do not lack dedicated young men and women who can turn these schools around through the use of modern methods and new infrastructure. Gurdwara committees may, employ professionals to run these schools without undue interference. A master plan can be drawn up so that these schools can become centres of excellence.

Gurdwara committees must find out the needs of their communities. There should be programmes for our senior citizens. We need to assess their needs by interacting with senior citizen groups. Why cannot gurdwara act as a hub for this age group by providing space and facilities, for example, for making them computer literate? Even basic medical facilities, in camps or otherwise, can be provided by using the services of volunteer doctors for those who cannot afford them.

Some other areas to be explored are vocational training camps and guidance centres for making correct career choices. Each gurdwara can – and must – have a library for both the young ones and senior citizens. Books on Sikh history, interpretation of the gurbani and biographies and other books could be stocked. New books are expensive and making these available in gurdwaras will fulfill a vital need.

Finally, the committees can organize pilgrimages to historic shrines. Some – like Mumbai, Bhopal, Kanpur and Kolkata – do this. These trips can be arranged during vacations. These are only some suggestions and the potential is vast. There may be many more areas where gurdwara management can have a vital role to play in the life of the community.

