

Resolving Disputes in Gurdwara Management

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Gurdwaras are places where Gurbani is recited (Keertan), discussed (Katha) and heard: 'Gurdwarae har keertan suniye', and people find a treasure of wisdom: ਨਾਨਕ ਸਬਦੁ ਵੀਚਾਰੀਐ ਪਾਈਐ ਗੁਣੀ ਨਿਧਾਨੁ ॥ [SGGS: 59]. They become enlightened 'ਗੁਰੂ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਹੋਇ ਸੋਝੀ ਪਾਇਸੀ ॥ [SGGS: 730] leading to the state of equipoise (sahaj). Ek Oankar(God) is the subject of meditation: ਸਤਸੰਗਤਿ ਕੈਸੀ ਜਾਣੀਐ ॥ ਜਿਥੈ ਏਕੋ ਨਾਮੁ ਵਖਾਣੀਐ ॥ [SGGS: 72] **Gurdwaras are living symbols of moral, spiritual and historic Sikh values and traditions that should be preserved and used by following the established moral standards, ultimately culminating in the eventual Lofty Spirit (Chardi Kala).**

Guru Nanak established the first Gurdwara - Dharamsal - for all people - at Kartarpur. Historically, Gurdwaras were managed by *massands* and *meenans*. Guru Gobind Singh removed massands and appointed Bhai Mani Singh as Head Granthi, in the summer of 1699, at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. He started **Gurmata** and **Sarbat Khalsa** concept for the management of Sikh religious matters. Maharaja Ranjit Singh transferred Gurdwaras to his government; the British appointed Mahants, and then came SGPC, which is continuing until today. Thus, the Gurdwara management has been taken over by successive governments. Traditionally, Executive Council (Panj Piara) and General Assembly(Sadh Sangat) are the democratic institutions of Khalsa Panth, having power and responsibility to decide on all tasks. **The western management model for charities is the same in nature, involving laws to prevent litigation and liabilities. Dispute resolution has top priority in Gurdwara management for the same purpose.**

I remember people going to village elders to solve any problem in the village. They always listened to the concerns, identified the problem, and articulated possible solutions acceptable to both parties. Such meetings also provided time for sharing, socializing and meeting old friends and making new ones. **The meetings always acknowledged the wisdom of elders which empowered our youth who always valued and honored the views of elders, especially on Punjabi culture, Sikh Religion, and accompanying responsibilities.** However, the time has changed and the respect for the elders has eroded to some extent. Gurdwaras, as nonprofit organizations, should follow systematic management to avoid liabilities. Gurdwaras are known to have different ways to manage and to solve problems and conflicts, depending upon controlling people. Large Gurdwaras hire a manager, small Gurdwaras are run by sangat; others hire only a Granthi, depending upon need. Several disagreements can be solved by hiring and channelling CEO and Granthi in the right direction.

Decision to hire a Manager/CEO: When businesses become too big for the owner, they are converted to corporations run by outside managers, administrators, or CEOs. In addition, the owners get out of personal liability, conflict, debts, sins and failure. In certain cases, these monied corporations challenge governments. As a CEO, I know from my experience, CEOs having responsibility, power and money to make decisions solely, following the policies and procedures. Employees and groups of people compete for a such

person's attention and approval. A CEO sets the management tone for its corporation with the help of board members. However, such a person is not the supreme as the board of directors has the power to fire. The board members of a charitable organization evaluate and pass judgement on the decisions of a Manager/CEO.

Executives are required to tackle very complex problems involving overall responsibility of day to day business, as well as managing long term plans for an organization. Executives have to push for a solution the people may not like, as a CEO has undisputed authority over the company as a boss. However, in case of Gurdwaras, such a person has to be a Gurmukh: a firm believer.

A CEO should be selected by matching job description, education, forward and outward thinking. Such a person should have a lot of capacity to learn, think forward and implement new techniques in all matters related to Gurdwaras. Verification of CEO qualities is important to avoid conflict. The interest of the candidate in the following: *Gurmat*, reading and writing, attending meetings, speech, knowledge of world and religious affairs, etc. should be verified. Straight thinking and expressing ideas is highly required to solve disagreements. A Gurdwara CEO must understand that, in essence of Gurmat, one is first a *sevadar* and then a CEO.

A Granthi should be a teacher and a preacher, with at least a Bachelor's degree from a Khalsa College or a Diploma from a Sikh Missionary College, Amritsar or Gurmat Gian Missionary College, Ludhiana. **A Granthi must also be a Gurmukh, following Sikh tenets, supporting Rahit Maryada, Amrit Parchar, Keertan, Bani and Bana and must spread the Sikh religion. A Granthi should have good physical appearance. In addition to being fair to all people, honest, ethical and a role model, he should be a keeper of Sikh values and traditions** and willing to root out bad behavior at the Gurdwaras. A Granthi or teacher must be a man of piety, who meditates and teaches God's Name, i.e. '*Jo app jape avra naam japawe*' as well as Naam Simran should be in his each breath, i.e. ਜੋ ਆਪਿ ਜਪੈ ਅਵਰਹ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਾਵੈ ॥ ਜੋ ਸਾਸਿ ਗਿਰਾਸਿ ਧਿਆਏ ਮੇਰਾ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸੋ ਗੁਰਸਿਖੁ ਗੁਰੂ ਮਨਿ ਭਾਵੈ

॥ [SGGS: 305] Sadh Sangat wants a Gurdwara which is run by a sincere, holy person. God, provide me a place (Dharmshala or Gurdwara) which is managed by a saint, i.e. ਮੋਹਿ ਨਿਰਗੁਣ ਦਿਚੈ ਬਾਉ ਸੰਤ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲੀਐ ॥ [SGGS: 518]

Current Management Situation: Sikhs must appreciate the management of appropriately managed Gurdwaras. Generally, the Gurdwaras' management sleeps on the problem and tries to ignore it, thinking the complaint might disappear after some time. However, it does not happen. Then, some people, who have a personal interest, go on convincing others silently away from sangat. Then inform the victim! Community problems can't be solved by staying silent and away from the sangat. SGPC has done such acts in delaying SGPC elections, the appointment of SGPC President and Akhal Takht Jathedar. In the real sense, a special meeting should be arranged after giving enough time to all members. The meeting should be open to the public. The nomination must be made, seconded, allowing time for discussion and then voting if necessary. **Procedures should be followed strictly. Straightforward decisions are respected more and help to maintain harmony.**

Personal Traits for Leadership: A CEO who generally knows how to make the other person feel very important by saying 'Sat Sri Akal', shaking his hand vigorously, appealing smile and pleasant eye contact involving *bani* and *bana*. A CEO must have magnificent personal and communication skills, develop personal leadership for board members and

staff. He needs to devote time to talk about the interest of another person and show respect for others' opinions with a smiling face and relaxing tone, these are the key to a most rewarding conversation. Sometimes, such events become everlasting memories, culminating in friendliness and solving several disagreements. Gurdwara board, staff and Granthi can learn such modern techniques to solve disagreements.

Conflict of interest: No nepotism should exist at any level of management of Gurdwaras. Board members or their families and friends, should not use the office for personal gains or compensation. No board member or his family members, can work for the Gurdwaras for any gains. Such board member should first resign from the board. A person who has worked for the Gurdwara in the past 12 months should be nominated for the board again. Board members should not be related to one another, have no personal business deals, no personal financial ties and should not be in collusion. A member cannot delegate his authority to any family member. Only a substitute can serve in that capacity. The board members can listen to anybody to solve a problem, as all Sikhs are together in solving community problems. Above all, justice exists in the eye of God.

Dispute Resolution: Disputes are actually disagreements with the moral code of conduct, policies, procedure and well established traditions. Several Gurdwaras have problems related to ownership and funds collected. As soon as a Gurdwara building is all paid off, some people try to grab the building and funds. Before starting a gurdwara, it is better to go through an attorney and an accountant to preserve the ownership and integrity of a gurdwara. The names of people contributing original funds for land and building should be in the Grand Deed (registry) to avoid future conflict. The courts know all about nonprofit organizations, and in case of litigation, they will divide the assets of a gurdwara between contributing parties.

Negotiation or mediation can be beneficial to solve problems. A solution of the Sangat, in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib, is generally practiced in Sikh religion. However, four stages of problem solving are: defining and exploring the problem, examining the consequences and creating a conducive atmosphere. Handling emotions, exploring interests, pushing for new ideas require skillful staff and board. **The meetings are conducted for collaboration to reach a solution and not for confrontation. It is always better to wait, listen, and realize the need of the followers. Find common ground and be a problem solver. Ask lots of questions.** The answers will show a window to other person's point of view which is an indispensable tool in the act of persuasion. Give something to get something, and solve problems unanimously by consensus, as far as possible. However, if voting is needed, write all the options on paper, stick them to the wall and ask people to mark on them for yes or no, and declare the result after counting in front of the congregation. Currently, people are following wrong personal methods of pleasing friends and doing

favours to get favours. Practice of morality, with parameters of rules of conduct, can solve all disputes. Still, it is known that *God will decide once and for all* i.e. ਪੁਰਾ ਨਿਆਉ ਕਰੇ ਕਰਤਾਰੁ ॥ [SGGS: 199] However, God may settle only in the end.

It is sinful to deceive, cheat or steal from Gurdwara funds. When holy places become corrupt, the world is ruined. There should be consequences for any misuse of funds, greed, over-consumption and selfish economic behavior.

Let us remember the postulates of the Sikh religion:

The wave of greed is like a mad dog. It ruins everything. (SGGS: 983)

Renounce greed and possessiveness and become carefree. (SGGS: 1062)

Above all, no one is satisfied without contentment. (SGGS: 279)
Don't do anything for which you regret in the end. (SGGS: 918)
Nanak says the only pure deed is to live truthfully. (SGGS: 1299)

The mansions are not useful where people forget God's Name i.e. ਕਿਤ ਹੀ ਕਾਮਿ ਨ ਧਉਲਹਰ
ਜਿਤੁ ਹਰਿ ਬਿਸਰਾਏ ॥ [SGGS: 745]

Forgiveness is the corner-stone in Sikh religion. Grace breeds grace, leading to accommodation, tolerance, decency, elegance and above all fairness towards all people related to the Gurdwara. Such etiquette prevent belittling and sabotage. Thus, the whole group of people, or a family, having different ideas cannot be rejected and thrown out. **Gudwaras have always been all inclusive without any rejection. Proper and quick conflict resolution stabilizes Gurdwaras.**

Personal self-restraint is the key in Gurdwara management. The sins of commissions and omission should not be allowed to escape detection and punishment. If the board values are undemanding, the Gurdwaras will be unstable. A very sound loyalty and ethical compass involving Sikh values should be followed by CEO, Granthi and board members. Such values will enable them to decide correctly. The people always expect more from the board and sometimes they have to stand up for what is right in the face of a threat. **The strength of an organization is in unity. Number of happy people in the Gurdwaras is the most important measure of success.** The board cannot lead if they don't command the respect of its followers. Gurdwara management should greet and introduce all new members and bring disconnected people together, so they may feel at home and may help in solving disagreements. The board, along with the Granthi, sets the religious tone at the top, according to Sikh religion code of conduct which requires us to be fair and have the high moral standard to mend the broken rules at once. Risk taking requires good information and advice from co-workers and sangat as well. Correction of mistakes, sometimes, requires tough decision to take the Gurdwara toward a sensible direction. Admitting mistakes and fixing the wrong-doing are high virtues. It takes courage to find a way out of bad decisions. Above all, the essence of life is to practice truth, contentment and mercy, i.e. ਸਤੁ ਸੰਤੋਖੁ ਦਇਆ ਕਮਾਵੈ ਏਹ ਕਰਣੀ ਸਾਰ ॥ [SGGS: 51]



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