

Why Sikh youth are going away from Gurdwaras

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Instilling core values into the next Generation**

Instilling religious and cultural Core values into the future generations is a crucial issue not before the Sikh community alone. It is a topic being widely discussed within almost all communities. But the million-dollar question is how core values can be instilled in younger generation and motivate them to join main stream of religion? In case of Sikhism, I think It needs a critical reflective assessment and chronological approach which starts by analysing the current situation, identifying the obstacles, modifying the existing methodology to achieve the identified outcome.

Before, we even begin this process of instilling core values of Sikhism in to the next generation, we ourselves must have clear understanding about subject to make sure we are all on the same page. We can discuss it under three different heads:

- What are the core values of Sikhism!
- Why Sikh youth getting disconnected from religious practices and
- How youth can be motivated to join mainstream Sikhism?

Sikhism is a rich vibrant monotheistic religion with a distinct set of beliefs, values and traditions which deserve to be instilled or passed on to the next generations. Sikhism is the religion by choice and not an imposition. “ਜਿਨਕੋ ਲਗੀ ਪਿਆਸ, ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤ ਸੇਈ ਖਾਇ”। In 1699, when Khalsa was initiated, whosoever 5 Sikhs from the congregation raised their hands, was purely out of their personal choice and not imposed by Guru Sahib.

Sikhism serves as a spiritual institution where individuals continually enrol themselves, in order to become their own better version. But to provide healthy environment to the new entrants as well as the youth and hold them within the mainstream of Sikhism is the foremost duty of the people holding realm or at the helm of affairs of the religion. But it is being observed that younger generation has been losing enthusiasm gradually in religious activities which is and should be concerning to all of us.

**** This paper was first read at ‘SIKH FORUM’ on 30th March 2024 at Comets Function Room Ellis Park Adelaide during 36th Sikh Games to share views why Sikh youth are showing indifferent behaviour towards religion.**

To revive the active participation of youth in religious activities, it is imperative to make them acquainted with the basic principles of Sikhism, which all adherent need to follow. We must not forget that teachings of each Shabad of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is a core value for Sikhs in itself but at large we can enlist certain basic principles to be followed like;

- Believing in monotheism (ੴ) doctrine.
- Sharing
- Pluralism
- Equality and tolerance
- No to monasticism, mendicancy or grave worship
- War of righteousness
- Charity as a love for mankind and
- Partaking Amrit/Pahul

These are a few basic principles of Sikhism to practice in life and needed to be passed on to the next generation who are currently least interested in attending congregations or taking any active part in religious activities.

Now, question arises why youth has disconnected itself from a vibrant monotheistic religion with its principles of universality? Interestingly, this behaviour has no common answer and everyone has his own argument. It has Diverse answers and Diverse reasons. When we analyse this behaviour on a wider spectrum, we find that under changed socio-religious position Sikhism is not alone but almost every religion is facing the situation of apostasy or disconnection of youth from their religious centres. But for this they have certain philosophical issues. Our case situation is different. In our case disconnection of youth has no philosophical concerns. Apart from other reasons, **here major issue is of non-inclusiveness, lack of space and acceptance of youth in existing established institutionalised religious practices.**

Currently Sikh community is in disarray and in the state of confusion on the issue of youth and their indifferent attitude towards religion. But only we can solve this problem provided we reorientate our outlook and actions. If Sikhs don't work for Sikhi, who else will come to our rescue! Sikh Gurus' spiritual wisdom and message is universal regardless of caste, creed, colour, age or gender. But as matter of fact, we have compartmentalised it in Punjabi Sikh and non-Punjabi Sikhs,

Amritdhari and non-Amritdhari Sikhs and despite being a casteless religion here exists strong casteism. This mindset has also been damaging the inclusiveness image of the religion and keeping youth away from the mainstream Sikhi.

It is a fact that most of the youth born overseas know very little or nothing about their religion which must be a cause of concern for the community. For them going to the Gurdwara as a child consists of bowing before Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the living Guru, which they have never read and understood, being forced to sit and listen to Kirtan and discourses which they don't understand. Under such state of confusion many youth leave Gurdwara with is a strong view point of never to return.

Sikh youth getting disconnected from religion is more of a psychological in nature and less of apostasy. At the adolescence age, one faces number of changes not just physically but also psychologically. This is a delicate transitional phase of their life in which they come across various changes and challenges, they are prone to socio religious exposure more than ever before. At this stage they start developing their own ideology. This is the time when elders should pay more attention to youth, develop intimacy and grant space for them. But sometimes due to non-inclusive behaviour of elders, they do not find anything convincing reason to remain connected to the religious centres.

Question is, are only youth responsible for their indifferent behaviour towards religion? Answer is No! Youth alone cannot be held responsible for their apostasy. We, the elders also need to re-orient our outlook towards youth and analyse our responsibility, whether we are putting our sincere efforts to motivate and giving space to them to solve this problem! When we look around, we find that there is absolute lack of inclusiveness for youth in any socio-religious celebrations. They are not getting proper space and acknowledgment for their presence.

The young ones who tamper with the Sikh identity still needs to be persuaded and guided very carefully by us "the adults" else, we will defeat the purpose by being nothing but stubborn. When parents decide to be ignorant of their children's deviating attitude towards Sikhi, put those parents in the grey area and the Guru-given identity begins to fade away. It is very interesting that we propagate gurdwara as a school where we come to learn Gurmat and spirituality but

surprisingly, this is the only school where Ph D holder and a nursery student sit in same class. However, in this school programmes are planned to focus on elders and not the youth. Elders and preachers are supposed to be ideal and role model for the youth. But regular confrontation among elders within the gurdwara premises or taking the Gurdwara issues to the court has also been a contributing factor to discourage youth.

Also it is observed that we are in a regular process of building more and more gurdwaras but must not forget if our youth stays disconnected, we will have more and more empty and abandoned buildings in the coming times. Hence participation of youth is of utmost necessity. For this introduction of Sikh culture among the younger generation, through art and literature can play important role. Gurdwaras must have Multi-media museum, depicting Sikh history and Sikh way of life. This will encourage their inclusivity to explore the principle of equality, Service and compassion and create a bridge between younger and older generations.

Lastly, having youth wing in each Gurdwara, Holding debates on religious topic, interfaith harmony and organising Sikh youth Day or youth conference will definitely motivate youth to study Sikh philosophy. Hence, there exists a pressing need to address the scarcity of effective Parchar within our own home. If Sikhi is to survive in overseas countries, the Sikhs born there must be the ones to carry the flag of their faith forward.

Bikram Singh Majhail

New Zealand- Mobile +642102894649. E.mail- singh.siwach@yahoo.co.nz

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