

## On Nurturing Sikh Values Among Young People

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Sikh Gurus' spiritual wisdom is universal. It is applicable to all, regardless of caste, creed, colour, gender, age, and religion. But it is sad to note that a large numbers of Sikh children are not motivated enough to follow Sikhi values. Many young people are addicted to alcohol, drugs, substance abuse and social media due to prevalent societal fashion or peer pressure. Unfortunately, Sikhs are ignoring this facet of their community life. However, there is no shortage of available opportunities that can help Sikh youth to avoid this awful situation. The only condition is that we must reorient our outlook and actions. Let us have a look at the available options.

### Current Scenario : The Prevalent Problem

Sikh Guru's philosophy is based on logic, facts, purpose, truth, practicality, and a scientific way of life. It detests idol worship, rituals, miracles, and superstitions. However, many of our Sikh preachers' sermons are based on *janam-sakhi* (mythical story) tradition, which don't pass the test of logic. This practice fails to motivate the younger generation to the Sikh values. There is an underlying impression that most of them don't learn or understand anything when they visit a holy congregation of Sikhs in a Gurdwara or elsewhere.

Only a few Gurdwaras are proactive in community affairs, trying to improve the community's image, but most are only interested in financial gains. During the Sikh Gurus' period, Dharamsals were epicenters of community services, e.g., holy congregation, healthcare, sports activities, family guidance, livelihood, co-creation, and collaboration. During contemporary times, most of our Gurdwaras, with their magnificent structures, cater to worshipping, ritual, or act as social centers only. The lack of providing community services is glaring. Though funded by the community, Gurdwaras' prime objective must be to work toward the community's improvement or betterment. It is sad to note that with millions of dollars spent annually on Gurdwaras' infrastructure and its upkeep, these institutions have turned into an industry worldwide, with no accountability or transparency to the stakeholders. The current Gurdwara organizational structure has failed to provide

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proper guidance and services as per Gurmat. With the emphasis on ritualism, belief in miracles, and superstitions (Sangrad, Punyea, Masyea celebrations etc.), by the Sikh clergy, these institutions have become the negation-centers to the core Sikh doctrines.

### **The Way Forward: Reorientation**

Gurdwaras are the apex center of Sikh religious life and culture. There is a dire need to make necessary changes in their set-up to cater to the current and emerging problems of the community. Gurdwara must be turned into a "Sikh place of learning." Sikh diaspora is spread not only in the whole of India but also all over the globe, where the language of learning and communication of the Sikh children is not Punjabi. There is a dire lack of Sikh literature in different languages, be it Hindi, Urdu, English etc. Sikh families living in other states of India or Western countries are facing a challenging situation to motivate their children. The need for Gurmat based educational tools is at an all-time high. Gurdwara managements must take conscious initiatives to fill this gap by creating authentic Gurmat literature in local languages. When Katha discourse, Var singing or Kirtan is performed in the Gurdwaras, authentic translations of Gurbani hymns/verses in the local language must be displayed on a screen. It can help enhance the interest of young people in such activities, as it will help them understand what is being recited.

A well-equipped library with modern facilities (e.g., computer and internet services, audio-visual equipment etc.) must be a part of each Gurdwara. It can help the children learn about their topics of interest concerning Gurmat, Sikh History etc., using the latest technological marvels. In addition, some Gurdwaras with sound financial backing must establish Multimedia museums catering to Sikh history, Sikh practices etc., as many children are good visual learners.

Each Gurdwara management must have a youth wing. This wing must actively encourage youth to participate in Gurdwara's various religious and philanthropic activities. The establishment of **Gurmat Vichar Kender** for organizing activities related to

- (i) Sikh History and Philosophy
- (ii) Exchange of ideas on Community issues and Youth Concerns
- (iii) Learning Sikh Doctrines and Reflection
- (iv) Interfaith Interactions etc.

can help in achieving this purpose. Young people's feedback and new initiatives for the betterment of Gurdwara/community services must be welcomed, and appropriate action should be taken so that they feel valued.

In addition to Gurdwaras' regular religious activities, the establishment of

- (a) **Sports Center** for providing
  - (i) training in Marital arts and other sports
  - (ii) awareness about Healthy Active Living etc.
- (b) **Health Care Center** for providing
  - (i) good Mental / Physical Health awareness
  - (ii) awareness against Drug / Alcohol addiction
  - (iii) Free dispensary etc.

and **Community Guidance Centre** for providing help:

- (i) in Domestic Conflict Resolution
- (ii) in Anger Management
- (iii) to new Immigrants / international students for orientation/settlement etc.

and **Liaison Center** for liaison among:

- (i) Gurdwara centers
- (ii) Community
- (iii) Other stakeholders

can help bolster the constructive role of Gurudwara among our young people and community.

Gurdwaras should encourage Sikh youth to participate in sports and sponsor teams and talented individual players. At least once a year, "**Sikh Youth Day**" be celebrated in Gurudwaras. On this day, Sikh Youth with outstanding accomplishments in academics, sports, community services be honoured and rewarded so that they can act as role models for other Sikh children. The services of the professional and senior members of the community be solicited to mentor Sikh Children / Youth in their respective fields of expertise/experience.

There are no extra expenses involved to implement such changes. Instead, this is achievable with minor modifications in the current set-up. The Liaison Center must encourage parents and youth to participate in various programs taken up by Gurudwara management through its multiple centers. The managing committee must perform reviews of the activities of its wings/centers at suitable intervals and make changes as required.

