

A SURVEY ABOUT THE UNDERSTANDING OF SIKHISM AMONG THE SIKH YOUTH

Anjan Kaur Sohi and Reena Kudhail
Lasalle and Laval, Quebec, Canada

Anjan: 1. What constitutes a Sikh, what makes us different from other world religions?

In our experience, individuals are not quite clear on what makes us different from other religions. The third college edition of Webster's New World Dictionary has defined a Sikh as a Hindu disciple, a member of a Hindu religious sect founded in northern India and based on belief in one God and on rejection of the caste system and of idolatry. Considering our religion, as a sect of Hinduism is a common misconception, nevertheless, there surely must be some other unifying factors other than being monotheist and rejection of the caste system. With this question we were trying to determine how our fellow youth defined Sikhism because perhaps the outside world's ignorance lies in ours.

Anjan: 2. What is it you would like to get a better understanding of about Sikhism?

Like many things in life, we never really analyze a situation until we are posed a question. With this inquiry we were trying to get the youth to think about what aspects of Sikhism they did not understand. If a certain pattern emerges, perhaps we could create a forum to better educate them.

It is apparent that there is still a lot that the Sikh youth do not understand. Some of these issues are considered to be the basics; however, it is clear from the responses that some of these concepts have not been comprehended. Too many times, the older generation may overlook the fact that as youth in Canada, we are constantly receiving information for multiple sources, thus the responses for different questions are extremely diverse, thus confusing us further.

Anjan: 3. Do you believe you understand the basic principles of Sikhism? If so, where did your principle learning come from? If not, would you like to learn more?

Thanks to the relatives, books and the Internet, answers are more readily available. However, as was also mentioned

earlier, these sources all have different answers. It would be nice to find a way to ensure that we get similar information from all of these sources. And while there are many questions and answer forums on the Internet, as a community within Montreal, creating a central source of information rather than a large number of heterogeneous ones would make things a lot less complicated.

Anjan: 4. How often do you go to the Gurdwara? If often, what do you enjoy most?

If not often at all, what is it that turns you off from going, lack of time, lack of understanding, generation gap?

Reena: Gurdwara attendance is not only a youth issue, nevertheless, it is an important one because the Gurdwara is a source of invaluable information and perhaps a lack of knowledge or interest is due to lack of Sunday morning service attendance.

Anjan: A few of the other responses which we got in the questionnaires were that too many times, spending the day at Gurdwara can sometimes be too intense for the youth. This can be attributed to the fact that, there is a lack of devotion as most people are more interested in talk and gossip than prayer. Finally, there is a general lack in comprehension during *katha* (commentary), which leaves many youth uninterested. Although the Sikh youth of today are seen sometimes as irresponsible for lack of attendance at Gurdwara, the overall atmosphere should be re-evaluated. Many times, Sikh youth go to Gurdwara and upon seeing young children running around the *diwan* hall laughing and screaming, while their parents are carrying on conversation about the latest hot topic in the community, it gets extremely tiring and impossible to sit there and concentrate on breaking down the language barrier enough to understand what the topic of *katha* is for that afternoon. It would be easier if there were more of an emphasis on a quieter environment during the *diwan* in addition to finding a way to make it easier for youth to understand what is going on.

Editorial Note: *Miss Sohi and Miss Kudhail were requested to conduct a survey about the understanding of Sikhism among the Sikh youth. They took a lot of pains to formulate questionnaire and to contact the youth to collect the data. Their data and their conclusions drawn are being reported as such without any editing and without influencing them to modify their conclusions.*

Reena: 5. Is Sikhism suited to the conditions of modern society?

Growing up, we have attended many *Gurmat* Camps during the summer holidays, and we always seem to learn about Sikhism being a Universal way of life, etc. In addition, we have been taught by an older generation, most of whom were raised and educated in India. This may give them a different perspective, thus a different method of teaching us. For this reason, many of us picked up information differently from different teachers. But in schools, we only learn about Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, thus we wanted to find out whether, after learning about these religions, do Sikh youth feel that Sikhism fits in with society today?

Anjan: 6. Do you discuss Sikhism with others in your social group (Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike)?

While we went to camp and learned all the philosophy and the ideas that are attached to this way of life, to us, none of it was very relevant until we reached a point in our lives where we were mature enough to have intellectually stimulating discussions with each other as well as with non-Sikhs. These discussions were under our own initiative, and for this reason, we were able to deliberate, discuss, share our own opinions, and thus, attain a better understanding of Sikhism. For this reason, we wanted to know whether other Sikh youth discuss Sikhism amongst their peers.

Reena: So, in general, Sikh youth do discuss Sikhism amongst themselves. This is always a good thing because it proves that we do not take our heritage for granted, nor do we just accept it as extra baggage. We know we are Sikh, and through discussions with friends, we understand what it's about and how important it is as a part of our lives. In addition, while we may not be spreading the word on a massive scale level, we are definitely interested in making sure that our friends know what we're about. Marketing studies have shown that if you tell one person something verbally, provided that the information is relayed in a positive and effective manner, then that person in turn will also share this information multiple times.

Anjan: 7. What can we do to help others understand Sikhism, from a youth perspective?

We asked this because, with the changing times in the International World, religion has become one of the hot topics. Sikhism, although is now one of the largest religions, is still not understood by many. Often in our discussions, our conclusion when talking about current affairs is that no one really knows about Sikhism. This applies especially to North America. However, rather than complain, maybe it is better to figure out how to change this, and so we asked other Sikh youth what they would do to increase Sikh awareness.

Anjan: As is apparent, throughout the survey, all the individuals have a variety of views. If you really think about it though, it seems that it all comes up to the same thing; Sikh youth need some sort of a symposium in order to discuss concepts and ideas. There is a generation gap between those in taking initiative to organize events and the youth target. For this reason, it is now more important than ever to find a way to reconcile.

Reena: To conclude, it is evident that although there are many resources out there, and many youth are well informed about Sikhism, there are still many needs that need to be addressed. However, the same responses can be given for all; as above mentioned, there are many resources out there, but perhaps one of the best solutions would be to create some sort of a central source of information. This can be anything from a general weekly/monthly newsletter, a conference, or maybe even monthly afternoon sessions.