

INCREASING SIKH IMAGE AND AWARENESS WORLDWIDE.
Blueprint for SIKHs for this millenium. Presented at WSC-2004, Sydney by HS Walia.

ਨਾਨਕ ਸੋਭਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਦੇਇ ਪ੍ਰਭੁ ਆਪੇ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਦੇ ਵਡਿਆਈ ॥੪॥੧੫॥੪੮॥

O Nanak ! God alone bestows blessings, knowledge and honour on the
Guru-minded, faithful ones, who acquire true Greatness thereby.
[Siri Raag Mahla 3 – Guru Granth Sahib, Page Page 32]

Despite our massive contributions and struggles in our host societies, in world wars and UN peace missions, we have not been adept at informing the world community about who we are? A hundred years ago, the Sikhs were addressed as Hindus and now as followers of Taliban !

To answer these questions we need to ask these questions:

1. Why are we in this pitiable situation?
2. Are we doing anything to address this? And is there anything that is wrong and what can be improved?
3. Where do we want to be by year 2010?

My objective is not to address these questions but simulate thought amongst participants regarding second question as what we can do to increase our political awareness and image. Also I will like to stress the need to maintain and safeguard our heritage, culture, language and religion for future generations.

Overseas we started as Singh Sabhas a century back and held weekly congregations to act as support network for fellow Sikhs and even in some case fellow Indians. But somehow we have not progressed beyond that. We have failed miserably in building the spiritual side and failed to interact properly with communities where we live. Real or imaginary discriminations are the main causes for Sikhs to confine ourselves to Gurdwaras. Lack of progress into management at work due to perceived or real "Glass Ceilings" makes us fight out in Gurdwara management committees. Very few of us have non-Sikh acquaintances outside of our work environments.

In India Sikhs were perceived to be marginalized after the partition of 1947 and we presented our grievances as the Anandpur Sahib Resolution to the central government. A resolution like Anandpur Sahib Resolution should not have been just for Punjab or Sikhs but all regional parties should have been asked to contribute to it. So we had failed to take all regional parties along with us to achieve decentralisation because we did not go and mix with them. Not getting into argument I will like to stress the need for participation in wider communities. Also in India our premier organisation SGPC is very insular and cannot serve the purpose of the worldwide Sikh communities. For the last twenty years we are groping in dark !

In spite of all discussions Sikhs have been unable to set up world bodies. Even in Australia we do not have all encompassing bodies. So keeping this in mind, I would like to propose that as a start we set-up bodies formulated by taking up GurSikhs in each country and there 25 tasks as a start would just be philanthropic as listed below:

1. Dissemination of information related to Sikhism to public and government bodies. Good example is SIKH KHALSA MISSION, INC, which tirelessly disseminates information related to the Sikhism to migration, police and other ethnic bodies.
2. Countering anti-SIKH news items in the media.
3. Promoting sporting and educational activities within Sikh community overseas.
4. Champion human rights issues impacting Sikhs and other ethnic bodies.
5. Proper management of historic Gurdwaras in Pakistan/Bangladesh by splitting their maintenance and daily running amongst Gurdwaras in Australia, USA, UK, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, East Africa and New Zealand on a ongoing basis. Apart from day to day running and maintenance costs, members of the Gurdwaras worldwide can be present around the clock with Sikh Sangat at these Gurdwaras.
6. Setting up of 100 good quality schools. One for every 400 square kilometre in Punjab and splitting up their upkeep and maintenance amongst Gurdwaras worldwide. Initial amount of US\$2,00,000.00 can be used to set them up. Later on an endowment of US \$2000 can be set up on a monthly basis. These schools will cater for rural SIKH population including the poor. As a start class 5 to Class 8 students from poor and deserving families can be coached in 15 schools set in each district of Punjab. Certainly not a tall order if 5 Gurdwaras worldwide get together to support a school each. Thus contributing US\$100.00 each on a weekly basis.
7. Programs to address concerns of second generation SIKHs. Apart from training them to excel in traditional fields of medicine, engineering and science. Young SIKHs should be encouraged

- via scholarships in areas like movie making, media so our viewpoint can be presented to wider communities. Also young Sikhs should be encouraged to inculcate leadership qualities to participate in political bodies of the countries. Participate in relief activities like fire fighting volunteers and act as Emergency services volunteers.
8. Development of Punjabi language and culture. Tours for youth and elderly Sikhs should be organised to visit Sikh heritage sites worldwide especially Punjab.
 9. Setting up of Punjabi schools. All this will lead to the youth trying to define their identity and pride as Sikhs not through their elder's eyes but more by walking a path of discovery. It also provides them with a means to interact with others who have walked the same path before them and dealt with similar social and religious pressures.
 10. Sikh youth have done yeoman job in setting up nascent organisation like United Sikhs, Sikh Secretariat, SCORE and Khalsa Brothers, etc have been taking up worthwhile causes like action against racial profiling and gender discriminations as at Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. Replicas should be built worldwide of these successful organisations.
 11. Strong SIKH media in print, TV and radio. Broadcasting station. Effective thing and role in political. This I speak from personal experience as a radio presenter.
 12. Teach skills to professionals to climb the career ladder at work. For this purpose set up Sikh professional support groups worldwide.
 13. Increased political participation particularly by practising Sikh men and women.
 14. Strive for Government funding for Sikh organisations for Punjabi youth and old age projects.
 15. Recognition and separate monitoring by public authorities - this assists in obtaining fair treatment as regards employment and the provision of public services to the Sikh community.
 16. Strive for removal of all restrictions on Sikh articles of faith e.g. Turban, kirpan, Sikh Identity, etc.
 17. Increased awareness of Sikhism in schools through the provision of school assemblies about Sikhism, recognition of the right of Sikh children to take religious holidays without being penalised and the provision of suitable food reflecting the specific needs of Sikhs.
 18. Strive for State funded Sikh schools.
 19. Starting up of Sikh e-groups like SikhsSydney Cyber Group.
 20. Encouraging high IQ individuals to lead such organisations. These people should have knowledge of all issues concerning Sikhs overseas.
 21. Encourage donation to Sikh charities like Pingalwara, Guru Aasra trust, etc.
 22. All Sikh movements should be advocated with great intellectual passion and moral fervour and with a very high level of theoretical sophistication. All of these movements should have access to prestigious mainstream media sources. All of these movements should be strongly represented at prestigious universities, and their work published in prestigious mainstream academic and commercial publishers.
 23. Talented Sikh lawyers should be encouraged to initiate legal proceedings regarding human rights violations worldwide. This way Sikhs will get positive image.
 24. Supporting political parties that liberalize immigration.
 25. Intelligent lobbying of politicians to further Sikh issues.

Sikhs need to come together and pool their resources to achieve cohesion to ensure increased awareness related to Sikhism. Youth need to set their eyes on long term community planning, development of viable leadership and create broad based support within the community. When we can look at the pioneers; their sacrifices and achievements and their resolve to succeed despite all odds. They were not welcomed with open arms; nor did they have the best of opportunities available to them. Yet they persevered and believed in the Charhdi Kalaa of the Guru Panth. They absorbed the good values of the West and yet did not forgo their religion and traditions or get assimilated due to economic reasons. Instead they persisted and succeeded in the social, cultural, economic, scientific and political fields in which they ventured, allowing today's Sikhs to enjoy the fruits of their success.

To be proud of who are we? We need to know where have we come from. The knowledge of our roots and the lessons that we can learn from the past can help nurture our future. That is why it is important to maintain our heritage sites worldwide. Also it is imperative to get our populace in India educated in spiritual and worldly affairs. The living discipline of the Sikh implicitly states that spiritual awareness carries with it a social responsibility. Where a human uses fear and manipulation to dominate and exploit another, the spiritually conscious person has a duty to step in and set the example of how to behave. If you dare to be different, if you take the risk and live your values in the face of all social pressure, you will heal the people around you just by your presence.

ਸੇਭਾ ਸੁਰਤਿ ਨਾਮਿ ਭਗਵੰਤੁ ॥

The Honour and Intuitive awareness are acquired through the meditation and practicing the Hukam of the True Lord, the Almighty God. {Gauri Mahla 5 – Guru Granth Sahib, [Page 197](#)}