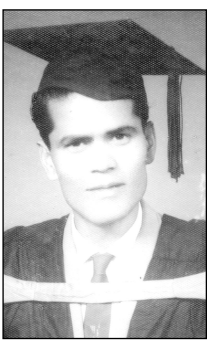


Blind Faith

HOW SGPC BREAKS THE HEART OF A MAN ON A MISSION?

Years ago, well-known Punjabi writer Santokh Singh Dhir wrote how it was very important to play the a snake charmer's flute ('Been') before a buffalo, because only then will the bovine character of the cattle will come out. Are we doing exactly that by telling you how the SGPC scraps a measly \$37 monthly pension granted to a man who has made it his life's mission to spread the word of the Guru among those who cannot read! Who, may we ask in all humility, is blind?



Kunwar Singh Negi of yesteryear in his earlier avatar before he became a Khalsa.

WSN Bureau

The world recognises his significant work, the heads of state and prime ministers regularly write to him, awards are showered to him as a matter of fact every year, and the man himself is hailed in the region as a missionary par excellence. For good measure, he has also been conferred with Padamshri and then a Padambhushan by the President of India in recognition for his work.

Dr Kunwar Singh Negi works for the blind, but also has significant experience of a few decades to realise that the blind come in many forms, and those who are deprived merely of sight are only one kind he can help. There is little he can do about the others. An English adage goes that there are none so blind as those who won't see. Today, Dr Negi knows that it is difficult to find someone in the ruling Akali Dal or the cash-rich SGPC who can see, who can judge the importance of his mission and reach out to help.

But the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee has its own way of judging things. After men like Sikhism scholar Dr Kharak Singh and many others badgered the SGPC to extend a helping hand to Dr Negi's mission and Dr Kharak Singh recommended that he be provided with Rs Five lakh to buy computers and some other infrastructural equipment, the SGPC took a few years to move and finally wrote to Dr Negi that its Dharam Parchar Committee has approved a Rs 1500 (approximately \$37) per month financial aid to him for the rest of his life. "Now after a written demand from you reaches us to ask for this aid amount, it will be sent to you," said the wise old men of SGPC in writing through a communication on January 3, 2002. Clearly, it was telling the missionary that while the amount will be given to him, he will have to beg for it.

Dr Negi begged. He has no shame in begging. If he had not begged for aid from wherever he could get some, his mission would have come to a stop long ago.

But the SGPC never stops thinking, the cerebral body that it is. For months, Dr Negi did not get the princely sum of Rs 1500 per month and was in correspondence with the premier Sikh organisation, called mini-Parliament of the Sikhs, over this \$37 financial aid. Now, he has been told that in January 2006, a decision was taken to scrap the aid.

Reason: "Based on several official reports, the approved financial aid is stopped herewith." No more reason required.

Padamshri and Padambhushan awardee Dr Kunwar Singh Negi is a noted Braille expert. He is a pioneer in Gurmukhi literature for the blind in India and abroad. He has removed spiritual illiteracy from amongst the blind Punjabi knowing people. The books that he has done in Braille have helped students in Punjab to learn the three R's and are responsible for the spread of education amongst the blind in Punjab.

"Shri Negi has contributed useful articles about the culture of Punjab in the Braille journals like 'Navan Rashmi' and 'Shishu Alok'. He has also edited and Brailled the text books in Bengali, Gujarati and



Oriya. He is a unique example of serving the deaf, the dumb and the blind simultaneously. In the Nanhi Duniya Badhir Vidyalaya, Dehra Dun, he is looking after the welfare and advancement of the deaf and dumb. He has a large number of publications to his credit." (*The above lines have been excerpted from the Brochure published on the occasion of Investiture Ceremony at Rashtrapathi Bhawan, New Delhi, celebrated on the 28th March, "The International Disabled Year 1981."*)

Negi's life has been one of total devotion to the welfare and uplift of the blind. He started taking interest in his chosen mission of serving the blind at the early age of twenty. He has Braille-edited, Braille-transcribed and Braille-published many text-books and distributed them amongst the blind students free of cost. He has also transcribed examination notes in Braille for blind students.

Negi has written articles, short stories and poem etc in Braille journals *Nayanrashmi* and *Shishu Alok* with a view to develop the education of blinds. To educate the blinds in all branches of literature and journalism, he started a new column *Nai-Lekhni* on Braille journals which has added a new dimension to Indian Braille journalism. He has also established a Braille Press Society at Dehra Dun in order to meet the requirement of Braille text books and other literature for the 10 million blinds in the country.

Negi is also closely associated with Bharat Netrahin Sewak Samaj Punjab; National Federation for the Blind, Delhi; Nanhi Duniya Badhir Vidyalaya,

Dehradun and many other organisations for welfare of the blind, deaf and dumb.

Among the notable books edited in Braille by Negi are 'Sukhmani Sahib', 'Bani Shri Guru Teg Bahadur ji', 'Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ki Mahanta' etc., besides several research articles.

The number of individuals and organisations which have recognised the services rendered by Dr Negi to the cause of Indian Braille Literature and Braille journalism for the blind and deaf and dumb is forever growing.

A Society that serves the society

Interestingly, Dr Kunwar Singh Negi was not born a Sikh. Born on November 20, 1927 in village Ayal of Pauri-Garhwal, Dr negi was impressed by the teachings and tenets of Sikhism and converted to the religion of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh, becoming a Khalsa on April 14, 1979 at Sri Akal Takhat Sahib. He always considered this change as a great *bakhshish* of Satguru Sahiban.

Dr Kunwar Singh Negi-run Maharaja Ranjit Singh National Braille Press Society is the only society in India dedicated to the cause of publicity and propaganda of Sikhism by publishing and distributing Gurubani's literature in Gurmukhi-Braille. Most of the literature is distributed free of cost amongst the blinds. There are about 10 million blind people in India, who are deprived of education, because of insufficient Braille books, especially Gurubani books. The society was founded in September 1981 on the occasion of 2nd Centenary Celebrations of Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Sri Goindwal Sahib with the help of Dr. Inderjit Singh, then Chairman of the Punjab & Sind Bank. The books that the society has published so far in Gurmukhi-Braille, has helped several students in Punjab.

The society is pretty resource crunched but what it lacks in terms of material, it makes up with the missionary spirit. It gets no government funding and no other assistance from any public sector organisation. The Uttaranchal Government is least interested in helping the society as it maintains that the society largely works for one religion only, the Sikh panth.

Neither the Punjab Government, nor many of the big names among Punjabi entrepreneurs have come forward to help the Punjabi-Braille initiative. Dr Negi can be contacted at 91-135-2675764 or brailleservice@rediffmail.com. The society's address is: St 1, D-10, Shastri Nagar, PO Nehru Gram, Dehradun - 248001 Uttara nchal, India.

