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Role of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee in Welfare Administration in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in welfare administration with special reference to Himachal Pradesh. As the apex Sikh religious and administrative institution, the SGPC has expanded its role beyond the management of gurdwaras to encompass a wide range of religious, educational, cultural, and humanitarian welfare activities. Using an exploratory and descriptive research approach based on secondary sources, the paper analyzes the Committee's institutional responsibilities and its contribution to community welfare in the state. The study highlights the SGPC's initiatives in the administration and maintenance of gurdwaras, provision of accommodation and essential facilities for pilgrims, publication and dissemination of Sikh literature, organization of religious and cultural events, promotion of dharam parchar, educational support through scholarships, schools, camps, seminars, and youth programmes, as well as assistance in pilgrimage and disaster relief. The findings reveal that the SGPC has evolved into a multifaceted welfare organization that not only preserves Sikh religious heritage and cultural identity but also contributes to social development through humanitarian assistance extended to people irrespective of religion during times of crisis. While the Committee continues to prioritize the educational, social, and economic advancement of the Sikh community, its expanding welfare programmes demonstrate the growing significance of faith-based organizations in complementing public welfare administration and fostering community development and in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords

SGPC, Welfare administration, Social development, Community development, Social cohesion.

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1. Introduction

The welfare administration is like the backbone of modern public administration, essentially working towards the well-being of individual persons and the community. Welfare programme's administration is a complex process that involves policy formation, resource allocation, programme implementation, and evaluation, all aimed at impacting the quality of life of people. Hence, the establishment of a system is ever-important for social policy to make sure the administration of social services occurs smoothly and timely. Welfare administration goes beyond mere social service provision and into the administration with the aim of improving income opportunities and living standards for individuals.

Social policymaking turns social policy into social welfare, and vice versa. Social welfare administration provides planning and organization to implement and execute social policies. They are also engaged in supervising different agencies that work towards welfare of society, both governmental and private. Through various social welfare programmes, assistance is provided to facilitate those in need—whether the individuals facing disadvantages or particular demography confronting certain difficulties. is transformed into social welfare services through the intricate working of social welfare administration.

Welfare administration is basically the careful effort to plan, coordinate, oversee, and manage social services and programmes. These programmes are meant to help people and communities do better. It highlights that the core of welfare administration lies in its ability to transform social policies into tangible services that effectively tackle the diverse social issues prevalent in society. The phrase “the process of organizing and directing a social agency” refers to social welfare administration, which involves the administration and organizational framework of both public and private social agencies that are essential components of the administrative side of social work. To put it simply, social welfare administration involves all of the activities required that enable a social agency to effectively support its customers and communities. For social welfare administration to succeed and thrive meaningful results, it is crucial to set attainable and comprehensible goals for the organization.

Social welfare administration in India is closely linked to the efforts of self-governing establishments such as NGOs or religious bodies like the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC). These institutions help to optimize

social welfare by ensuring that the programmes reach down to the very needy and disadvantaged sections of society. Social welfare in India has thereby widened in scope since the amalgamation of government agencies and these self-governing organizations.

With the Indian welfare administration being charged with the detailed planning, implementation, and evaluation of social welfare programmes. This implies coordination among various ministries and departments dealing in health, education, employment, and rural development, to mention but a few. Yet, given the vastness and diversity of Indian populace, local self-governing institutions complement the response for some community needs and fill the gaps.

This influencing body is the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) as a self-governing body for various welfare projects undertaken for and by the Sikh community. Established in 1920, the committee manages the Sikh Gurdwaras and helps the Sikh community by way of income from social services that include education, medical aid, and emergency relief. The committee does all this through a whole chain of schools, colleges, and hospitals in order to keep these essential services within the reach of the community. Their devotion to “seva” (selfless service) is a powerful example showing how important social welfare can be through religious bodies. SGPC welfare activities are exercising social welfare also beyond the Sikh community. The SGPC has come as a relief force in times of national distress, such as natural calamities, helping the afflicted populations without distinction of creed. This kind of philanthropy inculcates healing to ensure that the role of faith based institutions can serve the goals formulated in order to attain the scope of social welfare.

2. Review of Literature

Kaushik & Sachdeva (1992) in their scholarly article titled “Social Welfare Administration as a discipline and a profession: Perspectives and Prospects” have clarified how the field of social welfare administration works to deal with the challenges faced by various groups, with a strong emphasis on eliminating these issues.

Rao (1992) in the book “Organisational and Financial Management of Religious Institutions” has thoroughly examined the management practices, revenue and expenses, and the perspective of the pilgrims, particularly in relation to Tirumala Tirupati Devasrhanams (TTD). Since religious institutions are the subject of both studies, there is a clear connection between them.

Singh (2009) in the doctoral dissertation, “Management of Religious Institutions by Minorities with a particular reference to the Law Relating to Management of Gurdwaras in India”, renders insights regarding the management of Gurdwaras, specifically looking at Gurdwara Sachkhand Hazur Sahib in Nanded and referencing The Nanded Sikh Gurdwara Sachkhand Sri Hazur Abchalnagar Act 1956. This study highlights the managerial roles carried out by the SGPC.

Kaur (2010) in the doctoral dissertation, “Management of Educational Institutions of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee” has elucidated the management structure of higher educational institutions operated by the SGPC. It has emphasized the hierarchical and financial framework of these institutions. This study is relevant to the current study as SGPC’s educational functions are carried out here in state of Himachal Pradesh as well.

Chandra (2017) in the book “Social welfare Administration in India” has introduced the concept of social welfare administration, and its application at both union and state levels. It has also discussed the role of voluntary organizations in society. While the book doesn’t specifically address the purpose of SGPC, it does enhance to our understanding of faith-based institutions such as churches, mosques, and temples.

Singh (2019) in the Doctoral dissertation, “Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee di Vidyak Dean Dharam Adhiyan Prasang vich” delves into the definition of religious studies as articulated by various scholars. He underlines how it is related to an assortment of the teaching method engaged by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee for religious teaching. Thus, this analysis has indicated academic institutions, including missionary colleges and their affiliated institutions, committed to the rigorous and culturally relevant exploration of religious knowledge, it fails to provide any information specifically as to the activities undertaken throughout the Himachal Pradesh state.

The above review of literature leads to an important research gap. It becomes quite apparent through this brief review that, despite the fact that there are many studies conducted to date, there aren’t many focused studies on the welfare functions being carried out by the SGPC in Himachal Pradesh. There is a dearth of scholarly attention to the functions of self-governing organizations like SGPC in welfare management. As a reputed entity, SGPC should keep constantly assessing his strengths and weaknesses while focusing on the management, operations, and human resources-that is, the basic ingredients of any successful organization. To fulfill this lacuna, the present research tries to examine the role of SGPC in the welfare administration of Himachal Pradesh.

3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are enumerated below:

1. To explore/the role of welfare administration.
2. To examine the functional aspects of welfare administration.
3. To investigate whether the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee engages in any welfare activities in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

4. Research Design

This research study employed a qualitative and descriptive research design, drawing on secondary data compiled from a variety of sources such as books,

journals, articles, and other relevant data materials. This careful approach to data collection ensures that the research is well rounded and supported by a diverse array of the sources which are used to establish the conclusions of the study.

5. Welfare Functions performed by Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in Himachal Pradesh

The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) is known to bring about welfare services for not only the Sikh community but for all the people. Initially, it was founded with the objective of/ the management and supervision of Gurdwaras; today, it has a much wider mission in several welfare activities that cater to the social, medical, and educational needs of the community a significant role in providing welfare services not just for the Sikh community, but for everyone.

5.1 Educational Services

Providing educational services is a very prominent role undertaken by SGPC. They run several universities, colleges, and schools offering programmes in both secular and religious education. These educational premises are tasked with the responsibility for preserving Sikh history and tradition and promoting literacy, all aimed toward offering quality humanistic education to Sikhs. By having a focus on education, SGPC tries to make sure that their students receive a balanced education that addresses moral and ethical instructions based on Sikh philosophy. A few of the initiatives they undertake are listed below:

- Promoting and providing for education through their own established educational institution.
- Advocating for Gurmukhi script of Punjabi be taught as a subject in the schools, allowing students who are interested in learning Punjabi to benefit.
- Offering scholarship and schemes to help eligible students in pursuing their educational goals without worrying about the expenses.
- Running coaching institutions that assist students in their education for achieving their dream careers in defense services, civil services, judicial services, engineering, medical education, and sports.
- Conducting Dharmik Parikhya to nurture a sense of religious understanding, remembering major events and how they shaped religion and strengthened the faith over the period.

5.2 Healthcare Services and Assistance

In order to provide for healthcare, the SGPC is instrumental in the provision which are vital for healthcare services and assistance. In poorly equipped areas, it operates hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries that assist those in need. These healthcare service units provide general and specialized healthcare and surgical services. SGPC's commitment to healthcare provision promotes absolute access to

basic medical services, thus improving the health and well-being of the community through:

- Distribution of medical services by organizing healthcare and setting up dispensaries.
- Offering medical assistance in form of free of cost medicines to the patients in need.
- Providing financial support for medical treatments to the ailing people.
- Running screening camps and health check-up drives.
- Delivering emergency medical services.

5.3 Disaster Relief

Whenever some natural calamities run amok and causes havoc, the SGPC's wheels start turning for disaster relief. Whether its flood, earthquake, and any other natural calamity, an elaborate procedure is followed in the organization for disbursing timely help, including sharing of food, shelter, and medical aid, along with other essentials that the harmed individuals/families require. The SGPC's following disaster-relief activities emphasize the fact that they truly stand with the community when it really needs them:

- Implementing disaster management and relief programmes, including evacuation and transportation to the safer places.
- Offering community feeding in the form of Langar to the people caught-up in the disasters.
- Providing medical assistance to the victims of disasters like landslide and flood.
- Allocating funds to help the affected community members in order to rebuild their businesses.
- Distributing warm bedding and other necessities to those imacted by disaster.

5.4 Social Services

The SGPC SGPC is focused on expanding the availability of complimentary social services aimed to augment community members' quality of life in the health and education sectors. Fostering social equity and extending aid to the under-resourced and vulnerable individuals, along with environmental preservation and protection, is the foundation of their efforts. Influenced by the principles of Sikhism, SGPC social initiatives imbue their programmes with values, such as compassion, service to others, and charity. Below are listed some of their major initiatives:

- They manage and coordination the Gurdwaras to ensure they operate smoothly together.

- New Gurdwaras are being established at recently discovered sites of significant religious importance.
- They work on the reconstruction and restoration of existing Gurdwaras.
- Accommodation facilities are being built to support visitors and community members.
- During tough times, widows and disadvantaged women who belong to the Sikh community receive financial aid to help them sustain their families.
- During difficult times, the community is catered with essentials like ration and supplies which are distributed to support the community during difficult periods.
- They advocate for various issues faced by the Sikhs in state, bringing them to the government's attention for their resolution.
- They address matters related to the properties and assets of the Gurdwaras.
- Issues of mismanagement in heritage Gurdwaras, which pertains within the purview of state government's Department of Art and Culture, are also taken up before the government for resolution.
- To promote a clean and green environment, special plantation and afforestation drives are carried out by the SGPC to cater increased the forest cover.
- The ban on single-use plastic packaging for Prashad is in place to encourage environmental cleanliness and use of sustainable materials for packaging.

5.5 Cultural and Religious Activities

The SGPC also focuses on safeguarding and encouraging Sikh culture and religion. They coordinate the religious community events and festivals that help the Sikhs strung and inherited community bonds. They also help access Sikh teachings by publishing religious texts and literature. The SGPC's help in fostering Sikh culture and community are remarkable. These responsibilities are inclusive of:

- The spreading and nurturing of religious values to understand and rightfully practice them are paramount for spiritual growth.
- Commemorating and highlighting the sacred days and their relevance to the Sikh history on large scales for public awareness.
- Scheduling pilgrimages to holy places with the intention of acknowledging and fulfilling their religious obligations and see historical hallmarks of the revered place.
- The retention of historical texts historical literature and relics for the coming generations.
- The distribution of Sikh literature and scriptures to Gurdwaras and to the community members for their spiritual development.

- The Nanakshahi Calendar is distributed to Sikhs for seasonal and festive events aligned with the lunar cycle.
- Initiatives like Dharam Parchar and Amrit Sanchar to promote religious teachings.
- Organizing workshops, movie screenings, and competitions to engage the community.
- Camps are organized with the purpose to encourage the values and tenets of Sikhism.
- Turban-tying camps and competitions not only highlight the symbolic importance and pertinence of Turban but also teach the Sikhs with the skill of adorning a Turban gracefully.

6. Conclusion

In Himachal Pradesh, the SGPC undertakes a vast range of responsibilities. The SGPC is entrusted with vital roles across various sectors. They manage Gurdwara administration, which includes overseeing the management, coordination, exploration, construction, refurbishment, and reconstruction of these significant places of worship. To encourage the pilgrims have a welcoming and comfortable experience, the SGPC also builds and manages housing facilities for Gurdwara staff and provide lodging within the Gurdwaras. Additionally, they supply essential commodities like as groceries, blankets, carpets, and utensils which deliver to the basics needs of Gurdwaras and visitors. The SGPC is also dedicated to preserving and promoting Sikh literature and scriptures, which are published and printed at their own press in Amritsar. Across Himachal Pradesh, the SGPC distributes the teaching materials and resources of the people of Sikh faith for no cost at all to those in need, promoting easy accessibility and affordability of the Sikh faith for everyone, regardless of their financial situation.

The SGPC offers more than pilgrimage services to and from Punjab. It organizes travel to other regions within the state and to furthermore in the country. Sikhs are also facilitated with visits to historical sites in the neighbouring nation of Pakistan. The SGPC collaborates with the central government of Indian and the state government of Himachal Pradesh regarding the visa and other travel needs. To honor the memories of the revered Gurus of Sikh faith, the SGPC organizes state recognized centennial events, and celebrations for major anniversaries. The SGPC also organizes and provide Sikh educational sponsorship and scholarships, while also taking into consideration the other issues faced by the Sikh community, particularly Sikh student. During the unprecedented disasters and other emergencies, the SGPC provides aid of all forms to anyone in need, without giving regard of their religion. This is inclusive of monetary, medical, and other assistance to women, students, and other community members in the disaster state. To advance the Sikh community, the SGPC strategically focuses on the educational

welfare of the community and sponsors Sikh educational advancement programmes like, camps, workshops, seminars, and Darbars. This is clear with the opening facility of the Dashmesh Public School in Una, which bears a noteworthy Sikh population near the Punjab bordering area. The school provides excellent education to its students in conjunction with the religious instruction. The other activities chalked out by SGPC in the state include hosting educational camps, organizing turban-tying competitions, and planning educational trips. The SGPC is considerably active in major rites such as amrit sanchar and in the propagation of teachings (dharam parchar). These activities, therefore, greatly help the SGPC in fulfilling its purposes to allow those attached to it to appreciate and fathom Sikhism on a deeper level. The SGPC through its activities indeed helps the culture and the ethos of Sikhism to survive and flourish in Himachal Pradesh. Various kinds of events and programmes demonstrate its commitment to safeguarding Sikh history. The continual effort of the SGPC helps to maintain traditional Sikh life and further cultivate the cultural scene across the border in Himachal Pradesh.

As an institution changes and develops, the atmosphere around it shifts through time. People's experiences with the organization change as they develop closer bonds with it. Such changes may manifest in greater opportunities for employment in the institute, greater workload for some staff members, greater operational transparency, and an increased focus on adhering to a strict dress code. All these indicate the organization's dynamic change and the changing demands placed on its staff. Such important changes in the organization have further has an impact on the general public. Today there is a greater emphasis within the organization on the advancement and welfare of Sikhs than has ever been prior when it was basically concerned with day-to-day functions. About the largest proportion of the resources are focus to the empowerment and uplift of Sikhs, and it does give a lot of time and effort to the service of the Sikh community.

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