

Langar: The Challenges and Triumphs of Running a Community Kitchen in *Sis Ganj Gurdwara, Delhi*

Gursimran Kaur Butalia*

Institute of Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

RECEIVED: 06-May-23

REVISED: 16-Jul-23

ACCEPTED: 01-Aug-23

PUBLISHED: 01-Dec-23

*Corresponding Author

Gursimran Kaur Butalia

E-mail: simranbutalia19@gmail.com

Citation: Gursimran Kaur Butalia (2023).

Langar: The Challenges and Triumphs of Running a Community Kitchen in *Sis Ganj Gurdwara, Delhi*. Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci.

Res. 5 (2), 111–120. <https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2023.v5.n2.id1213.p111>



ABSTRACT

Academic research has been concentrated mainly on the role of NGOs and the government in relief measures during COVID-19, demonetisation, natural calamities, political instability, etc. Often, the literary works have been fixated on the philosophical aspect of the religious study of *Langar* in Sikh culture, which is important to study, but no specific importance has been given to its societal impact or its management, which are both very noticeably important in order to understand its true impact. There has been no mention of the Sikh religion's contribution to serving *langar* throughout the trying times, especially when these free kitchens were turned into professionally managed 'Free Food Management Centres' and ensured food supply to the people impacted by the pandemic and other difficult times such as demonetisation, natural calamities like floods, earthquakes, etc. Another aspect, which is how these community kitchens are managed and what kind of monetary, psychological and emotional toll it takes on these *gurdwaras*, has also been missing in these academic studies. The research aims to study the psychological and emotional impact that is faced by the volunteers and *langar* managers in preserving this religious service by conducting thorough research on the management of *langar* in *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* in Chandni Chowk, Delhi.

Keywords: *Langar*, charity, *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, management, outreach activity

Introduction

The concept of charity is universal, and different religions have their own understandings and practices related to it. Charity is based on the idea of giving to others unconditionally, which is considered a fundamental part of serving those in need. We all need to contribute in whatever way we can if we want to make the world a better place for everyone. This crucial role in society is played by charity. In a world full of uncertainty and confusion, charity enables people to see that it is still possible to bless others. Giving to charity gives life a deeper meaning and enables us to understand our role in society. Giving back to others rises from concern and compassion for humanity. Humans are helpful creatures by nature. However, a person's ideas and ideals may be impacted by their prior experiences, which may sap them

of their social conscience and their desire to aid others. Charities help us understand that giving is never wrong and always pays off, especially in the short term.

Almost all religions have a way of giving back to society. In Hinduism, charity is defined as helping others without expecting anything in return and doing so because it is the right thing to do. It is exemplified by selfless charitable acts, and Hindus follow an important principle known as *ahimsa*, which means not harming or killing anything living. In Judaism, *tzedakah* or *Sedaqah* is viewed as a form of social justice provided by the donor as well as those who use the support to do their work and those who accept the support into their lives. The terms charity and *tzedakah* are used interchangeably, but *tzedakah* is the closest word in Hebrew to philanthropy. Philanthropy in spirit is much more than a financial transaction. In

Islam, *Zakāt* is the most well-known type of giving and is seen as a compulsory method of redistributing wealth. It was very much institutionalised in the days of Islamic empires, much like a tax system, where citizens were expected to give a percentage of their income to satisfy the needs of the community (Hardy; Harvard Divinity School, 2013). Charity is seen as a much more personal act in the modern world, but it was much more of a community duty in the ancient Islamic world.

In Christianity, charity is considered the highest form of love and represents the reciprocal love between God and man manifested in the unselfish love of one's fellow men. It is most eloquently demonstrated in Christian theology and ethics by Jesus Christ's life, teachings and death. Using this and other definitions from the Christian tradition, mediaeval theologians, particularly Thomas Aquinas, positioned charity within the context of the alternative Christian virtues, defining it as 'the inspiration or root' of them all. In Jainism, the religion recognises *Parasparopagraho Jīvānām* or interdependence, as a fundamental natural phenomenon. *Parasparopagraho Jivanam* (Sanskrit: परस्परुपग्रहो जीवानाम् *Parasparopagraho Jīvānām*) is a Sanskrit sutra or aphorism of the Jain text of *Tattvārthasūtra*. It is translated as: Souls render service to one another. It is also translated as: All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence. The etymological root of the phrase *Parasparopagraho Jīvānām* lies in the compound of three Sanskrit words: *paraspara* (mutual), *upagraha* (assistance) and *jiva* (living beings—*jivanam* is the plural of *jiva*). This sutra has also been accepted as the motto of Jainism. The aphorism *Parasparopagraho Jīvānām* has been accepted as motto of Jainism. It stresses the philosophy of non-violence and ecological harmony on which the Jain ethics and doctrine—especially the doctrines of *Ahmisa* and *Anekantavada*—are based. This motto is inscribed in Devanagari script at the base of the symbol of Jainism, which was adopted by all sects of Jainism while commemorating the 2500th anniversary of *nirvana* of Mahavira. The Jain scriptures laid down well-thought-out conditions to be observed while giving *Dana*, but they also significantly broadened the scope and extent of *Dana* from the perspective of the recipient. *Dana* has been divided into two classes based on its recipients: *Patra Dana* and *Karuna Dana*. The *Karuna Dana*, or gift of compassion, has a very broad scope, not limited to Jains alone but also to humans and other subhuman beings in need. In Buddhism, the Buddha mentioned six types of people who were especially in need of generosity: recluses or hermits, people in religious orders, the destitute, travellers, the homeless and beggars. Throughout his teaching, the Buddha was

emphatic that one should not avoid suffering but rather do everything possible to alleviate it. Nonetheless, for the majority of Buddhist history, charity was an individual practice, and monastic orders did not generally function as charities in an organised manner, except in times of great need, such as after natural disasters. Zoroastrian scripture also states that there are 33 ways to paradise and that 'he who is blessed on account of charity is able to go on all those ways'.

As part of their religious obligation to society, Sikhs have practiced *langar*, a kind of philanthropy, for hundreds of years. The term *langar* hails from Persian, especially the word *langar* (رنگنل), signifying 'anchorage' or 'refuge'. It has roots in both Sikhism and Sufism, but there are distinguishing features in their customs and contexts. Within Sikhism, *langar* pertains to the communal kitchen and the act of providing gratuitous meals to all visitors, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or social standing. The originator of Sikhism, *Guru Nanak Dev ji*, established this tradition to foster equality, humility and the concept of *seva* (selfless service). The *langar* holds great significance in Sikh *gurdwaras*, where dedicated volunteers prepare and serve vegetarian meals to anyone who enters the *gurdwara*. On the other hand, in Sufism, *langar* is linked to the practice of providing food to the less fortunate as an act of charity and hospitality. Sufi saints and dervishes frequently set up *langars* as part of their spiritual discipline, extending free meals to the impoverished, travellers and those in search of spiritual guidance. This act of serving food in Sufism represents love, compassion and generosity, while also upholding the values of hospitality and care for others. While the concepts of *langar* in Sikhism and Sufism share similarities in terms of providing food and promoting equality, their origins and practices within their respective religious traditions remain distinct. *Langar* is a labour of love, a communal kitchen that is an integral part of serving both the Almighty and God's creations in the Sikh religion. Not only is it a benevolent and charitable act, but it also aims to embody humility, equality and love for all involved in its preparation, serving and consumption (Ahluwalia, 2013). *Guru Ka Langar*, a community kitchen also referred to as *Langar*, is one of the most revered institutions of Sikh religion, philosophy and culture (Trentonsocial, 2018). Based on the concept of *Garib Da Muh*, *Guru Di Golakh* (the mouth of the poor is filled by the treasury of the *Guru*), it calls upon all Sikhs to feed the needy before they feed themselves. *Guru Nanak Dev Ji's* social vision was not a utopia but a workable model. He had put it into practice while living in Kartarpur. Besides this, selfless service was another essential feature of the Sikh way of life, which inspired everyone to participate voluntarily

in community work (Dhillon, 2021). *Guru Nanak Dev Ji* issued three edicts to his followers after settling in *Kartarpur Sahib* and establishing a Sikh *gurdwara*: *Naam Japo*, *Kirat Karo* and *Vand Chhako* (meditate the name of God, work hard and share what you eat) (Singh, 2021). As a result, the *Guru* placed a high value on sharing and partaking of food together in the *langar*. *Guru Angad Dev Ji*, the second Sikh *Guru*, paid special attention to the concept of *langar* and developed it as an essential part of Sikh community life. Apart from providing food, the *Langar's Sevadars* (volunteers) were instructed to regard the vicinity as a place of relaxation and refuge and to continually be well-mannered and hospitable to all visitors. *Guru Angad Dev Ji* found unwavering support from his wife, *Mata Khivi Ji*, by establishing this practice (Bhatt, 2018). She personally attended to those who partook food at the *langar*. Her dedication to the cause continued even after *Guru Angad Dev Ji* died, all the way up to the time of *Guru Arjan Dev Ji*, when she died at the ripe old age of 76. The *Guru Granth Sahib* mentions her devotion to the *langar*. *Guru Amar Das Ji*, the third Sikh *Guru*, reinforced the *Langar* with the aid of changing it right into a 24-hour provider and establishing *Pangat and Sangat*, which required everyone who wanted to meet the *Guru* to first share a meal at the *langar*. The goal was to solidify the concept of *Raja-Runk Barabari* (the rich and poor are equal in the eyes of Almighty God). Those who are unable to let go of their egos will not be able to meet the *Guru*. There are accounts of several kings, including Emperor Akbar, following this practice prior to meeting the *Guru*. Emperor Akbar became so interested in the *Guru* that he presented him with revenue from numerous villages to run the *langar*. The *Guru* politely declined, stating that divine power would run the service through devotee offerings. Before passing away at *Anandpur Sahib*, the 10th Sikh *Guru*, *Guru Gobind Singh Ji*, directed his followers to always keep the *langar* open. The *Guru* writes in the *Dasam Granth* (scripture of *Guru Gobind Singh*): *Deg Tegh Jag Me Dou Chalai* (the cooking utensil [*langar*] and sword will rule the world together). As a result, the *Guru's* maxim, *Deg Tegh Fateh*, was engraved on the first Sikh coin minted in the eighteenth century (may *langar* and sword be ever triumphant). Even today, Sikhs pray to the Almighty for *Loh Langar Tapde Rahan* (may the fires of the *langar* remain ever lighted).

The *Khalsa* Army soldiers had a tradition of calling out *Guru Ka Langar Tayaar* (food of the *Guru*) once the *langar* was ready. Even enemies were welcome to partake in the *langar* before the *Khalsa*, and sometimes the *Khalsa* went hungry because there was no food left. The Sikh Emperor of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, granted *Gurdwara Jagirs* (lands) for the upkeep of *langar*. Other Sikh rulers

established similar endowments. Today, almost every *gurdwara* has a *langar* that is supported by the local community. *Guru Ka Langar* has thus been and continues to be a Sikh tradition in which the community takes great pride and adheres with zeal. *Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha*, a famous Sikh poet and scholar, once stated that sharing food and *langar* is an essential part of Sikh culture and values.

There is no distinction in the operation of a *langar* between those who wish to contribute materially or by *seva*. *Sevadars*, who provide selfless service for free, make the preparation. There is only simple, hygienic and vegetarian food that is served in the *langar*. Those who prepare food do not wear shoes and cover their heads. *Gurbani* (the *Guru's* holy words) are recited throughout the preparation and distribution processes. *Langar*, as a result, is a *prasad* (sacred food). In order to partake in the *langar*, people sit in rows without knowing who the person sitting alongside them is or what his or her caste or creed is. Food is served by *Sevadars*, and utensils are then washed and kept in a designated place by the person who has partaken of the holy food. *Guru Ka Langar* has thus demolished caste barriers and gender prejudices in their entirety.

This practice has been a fundamental component of the Sikh religion. Giving is a wonderful act when done without bias. True kindness is blind to race, ethnicity and religion. The virtue of charity gives people hope in their most difficult and depressing circumstances. True Sikh ethics are fundamentally about one's duty and responsibility not only to the creator but to all of creation. Surrounded by Hinduism and Islam, Sikhism emerged in the context of the Sikh *Guru's* message addressed to all mankind. Ethical relationships depend on the responsibility one person has for the other. Sharing is an essential part of *Sikhi*, as altruism is a prerequisite for serving the Creator and creation. By sharing, one begins to recognise the important divine quality of selflessness. However, it is important to note that man can only know God through love. When sharing is approached from this type of stance of love, the very concept of no longer sharing is incomprehensible. Sharing must arise as a mutual alternative through dialogue, engagement and prayer. It is vital that we deliver without wanting something in return. And, above all, one must not be selfish when sharing. As *Guru Nanak* explains, in order to share, it is essential that 'I dedicate my body, mind, wealth and all to Him. I totally sacrifice my soul to Him' (Khalsa & Thind, n.d., p. 47).

This is perhaps best explained by the Sikh practice of offering *langar* (blessed food). *Guru Nanak Dev Ji* started

practicing *langar* when his father gave him 20 rupees to start a business. Against his father's expectations and to his dismay, Guru Nanak Dev Ji used this money to provide food for the holy people. This profound and eternal act came to be known as *Sacha Sauda*, or the righteous way. Since then, *langar* has become a cornerstone of Sikh religious practice and embodies the spirit of oneness today.

Langar is an institution that provides unconditionally blessed meals to all. What sets *langar* apart from other foods is that it is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In a *gurdwara* (a Sikh place of worship), every hour is the time to eat, so the notion of having fixed mealtimes such as lunch and dinner is irrelevant. *Langar* is above all a labour of love, a communal kitchen that is an integral part of serving both the Almighty and God's creations. The three mottos of *Naam Japo*, *Kirat Karo* and *Vand Chhako* are embodied in the practice of *langar*, which is inseparable from prayer at every stage. It should be financed by an honest life and shared among all. It is not only a benevolent and charitable act, but it also aims to embody humility, equality and love for all involved in its preparation, serving and consumption. A living example of this tradition was the *langar* service conducted by the Sikh community at the 24th Congress of the World Council of Religions in Barcelona. What did not stand out here was that Sikhs were serving *langar*. More important was the effect of this far-reaching act (Goyal, 2019). As a result, people of all faiths came together to participate in the preparation, serving of *langar* and cleanup. In Barcelona, *langar* was no longer just a Sikh institution; it became a way for the community to be together. It has become a tangible way of sharing. This is an example of how faith communities give and receive from each other in a responsible way.

Management in Gurdwaras

Sikhs are supposed to donate 10% of their income for charitable causes, which is called *Daswandh* (tithe). A part of *Daswandh* also goes to *langar*. This *Daswandh* money plays a major role in keeping the *langar* going. This is not limited to *langar* or *gurdwara*; it goes far beyond it. Sikhs reach out to any community if there is a natural disaster or community emergency. They are serving *langar* in Australia now to feed those who are trying to put out horrible jungle fires that have killed over one billion animals and living beings. They also reach out to other communities with money, blankets, medicines, etc., in times of natural calamities. When a Sikh or a devotee goes to a *gurdwara*, he/she almost never goes

empty-handed (Nahal, 2017). As per the Sikh tradition, he/she (including children) almost always donates some amount of money by putting it in the Guru's *Golak* (a donation box set aside in Guru's name for *panthic* causes and *langar*) while paying obeisance to *Guru Granth Sahib* and before taking a seat. That amount is not fixed and can be any amount that one feels comfortable donating. There is no minimum, it is not mandatory and no one will ask for it. During old times, when women from the villages went to the village *gurdwara*, they would take small amounts of grain, jaggery, pulses, milk or other food provisions and use them as donations for *langar* in place of cash. This way of life continues to this day. Now it might be in the form of a bag of groceries, a container of milk, sweets or some other food items. So, the *langar* institution is self-sustaining.

Khadoor Sahib Gurdwara in Punjab has a long list of neighbouring villages (almost 30) who have volunteered to send fresh milk every day for *langar*. The *Langar* of *Khadoor Sahib* is legendary. There are 31 clusters of villages that provide *Langar at Khadoor Sahib* on a continual basis. In addition, thousands of devotees (Sikhs and non-Sikhs) visit that historical place daily, where they enjoy the *langar* and donate a significant amount of money. While some *gurdwaras* might have better or larger *langar* facilities, there is no difference in the quality of food between small or large *gurdwaras* and the spirit in which it is served, thus it is consistent. In some countries, they might have a local food flavour depending on the taste preference and availability of the type of food, but it is always vegetarian. A *gurdwara* is established after a thorough study, keeping in mind the concentration of the Sikh population in a particular geographic location and their spiritual needs.

It is not uncommon for a single Sikh family to host *langar* for thousands of people on a particular day in a *gurdwara*. It happens all the time. Some individuals or families take responsibility to provide a particular item for a particular day (tea, *jalebis*, sweets, *pakoras*, *chhole bhature*, snacks, fruits, juice, etc.). After the Bhuj earthquake, truckloads of food and provisions from Punjab and other areas started to reach the affected areas in a matter of a few days. The same thing happened when the tsunami hit about 10 years ago in Asia.

As rightly explained by Singh and Bansal (2018), Success of management lays on traits of leadership to motivate subordinates, gain confidence of seniors, utilization of resources available. Motivation comes through watching activities of leaders and understanding their success stories. Sikh religion has a very vast and rich history of

such leaders, who not only motivated their disciples to rewrite the history, but laid best practices namely *Kirat Karo, Wand Ke Chakko, Naam Japo, Langar (free kitchen), Dasvandh, Kar Seva*, speak the truth, stand for the right and don't harm anyone, which are derived from the guidelines of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Sikh Gurus* and other leaders. *Naam Japo* means reciting *Gurbani* as per the time of the day while doing daily chores, which shall keep a leader's soul free of greed, lust, ego, anger and favouritism.

The management of *langar* in a *gurdwara* also depends on the leaders who manage it and how selflessly they perform this charitable service. The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) is an autonomous organisation responsible for managing gurdwaras in Delhi state, including educational institutions, old age homes, hospitals and libraries. Established in 1974, it was replaced by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1971, which established a committee elected by Sikh vote, with elections held every 4 years (DSGMC, 2017). The management of *langar* in *gurdwaras* has evolved over the years, from making everything by hand in the community kitchen to currently having the most advanced technology available to help the community kitchen is truly a work of art. The kind of management it requires is one of a kind, as *langar* in even the local *gurdwaras* feeds almost 10,000 people a day. The author is just providing a very small, minute figure compared to what *gurdwaras* such as *Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, Sis Ganj Sahib or Sri Harmandir Sahib*, which approximately feeds about 100,000 people every single day (Eplett, 2016). Every day around 700 kg of *daal*, 250–300 kg of rice, 1,000 kg of vegetables and 80,000 to 1 lakh *rotis* are prepared. The two big iron *kadhai* (wok) make around 500 kg of *sabji* and 300 kg of rice at a time, while each of the six copper pots churn out around 150 kg of *daal* (Baru Sahib, 2021). Aside from the technology and 24/7 volunteer services that help to maintain the community kitchen, there is no barrier of age, caste, colour or creed to who can help or eat in the community kitchen. From children to old people, everyone works together to help in these kitchens. *Langar* has been a saviour during destitute times; the free community kitchens that are the indispensable part of Sikh religion have become professionally managed and established 'Free Food Management Centres' across the world (Singh & Singh, 2021). The management of *langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, like any other *gurdwara*, is done by volunteers and *sevadars* who work selflessly to ensure that the *langar* is prepared, served and cleaned up efficiently. The *Langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* is one of the largest *langars* in India, which serves around 50,000 people every day.

The maintenance of *langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* requires a lot of planning and execution. Volunteers and *sevadars* prepare the food in groups, serve it to the devotees and clean the place after the *langar* is over. At *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, the preparation of the *langar* starts in the morning, and volunteers work in the kitchen till late to prepare the food. The menu for the day is usually planned, with plenty of food to ensure there is enough for everyone. *Langar* usually consists of food like dal, rice, vegetables, bread, kheer, etc. Once the food is ready, it is served to the devotees in the *langar bhawan*, which is a large hall with couches and long blankets spread out on the ground. The *sevadars* follow the tradition of *Guru Ka Langar* and treat the food with the utmost respect and humility. Once the *langar* is over, the *sevadars* clean the place, wash the dishes and make sure everything is left neat and tidy. The entire process of maintaining the *langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* is a well-honed effort, with hundreds of volunteers and *sevadars* working tirelessly to serve the devotees. The Sikhs have a tradition of donating 10% of their income to charity, including *langar*, free cooking at gurdwaras. They donate money or food provisions, and the *langar* institution is self-sustaining, with some *gurdwaras* receiving truckloads of grains and food provisions from all over Punjab and other areas. The *langar* in *gurdwaras* has evolved over time, with the help of advanced technology, to feed around 10,000 people a day. Sikhs reach out to any community in times of natural disasters or community emergencies, providing money, blankets, medicines, etc. In addition, they host *langar* for thousands of people in a *gurdwara*, and during Sikh parades, *langar* is available almost every 50–100 m. Even though some *gurdwaras* might have better or larger *langar* facilities, the quality and spirit in which it is served are consistent even in the biggest *langar* halls in the world.

It is important to note that *langar* is not just a Sikh tradition, but also a universal concept of sharing and serving food with others. In fact, many non-Sikhs have also contributed to *langar* at gurdwaras and other places. In the demonetisation of 2016, when the workers could not afford anything to eat, the *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* opened its doors and helped with the *langar* to provide free food to these labourers. Even during the pandemic, *Guru's langar* provided food and other essential supplies to the poor, vulnerable and everyone in need (Nath, 2016). *Oxygen langar* was another very impressive service the Sikh community performed during the second wave of COVID in India. The DSGMC has provided on-ground support since March 2020, when the pandemic began affecting the lives of people adversely. With the second wave creating greater havoc, they ramped up their

efforts by providing oxygen *langars* and beds, among other things. A 400-bed COVID-19 care centre was opened at Gurudwara Rakab Ganj Sahib, located in New Delhi's main government district. The facility was equipped with essential oxygen support and medicines. If patients developed symptoms, they could be shifted to the Lok Nayak Hospital that the centre was affiliated with. It was one of the three makeshift hospitals DSGMC wanted to establish. The other two were currently being set up. Gurudwara's provided 'oxygen *langars*' to severely ill COVID-19 patients. Helplines were also functional to help people identify the facilities they could visit to get oxygen support until they were admitted to a hospital. Throughout the pandemic, the DSGMC and *Gurudwaras* have tirelessly worked round the clock, offering hope and timely aid to those affected by the pandemic. Their dedication and selflessness have played a vital role in supporting the community during these difficult times (Kaushik, 2021).

These services were and continue to be provided worldwide, wherever the community resides, irrespective of its size. Another aspect of *langar's* productivity in society is its outreach and community-building activities. The *langar* is there because of Guru Nanak Dev's blessings and the Sikh community's resolve to help the needy, regardless of who might need help.

Methodology

In the light of the above-mentioned circumstances, research has been conducted on the volunteers of one of Delhi's oldest and most illustrious gurdwaras, Sis Ganj Sahib, to gather data on the management of *langar* and its impact on the volunteers and the gurdwara during challenging times, such as demonetisation, COVID-19 and other difficult circumstances. The survey has a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Thematic

analysis has been used for qualitative data, which involves reviewing literature, books, religious scriptures and research papers related to Sikh *langar*, while quantitative data will be analysed using statistical methods. This combined approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of the steps taken to sustain the tradition, the psychological and emotional impact on the gurdwara and its volunteers, and the overall significance of *langar* in the Sikh community and society at large.

Results and Discussions

Lack of awareness can be a major issue faced by gurdwaras trying to find a source of *langar* income. This lack of knowledge can be due to a variety of factors, including low disclosure, a lack of education and cultural differences. According to the statistics conducted through the survey (Figure 1.1), the majority of the people either went once a month or rarely to the Sis Ganj Gurdwara, and when asked, the answer mentioned a lack of awareness and cultural differences. From the expert's perspective, there are several reasons for this ignorance, which can be another topic to study in detail going forward when it comes to how this lack of knowledge and cultural differences play such a major role in the community's involvement when it comes to *langar*.

Aside from a lack of knowledge, we must understand that maintaining the management of a gurdwara requires some basic elements that contribute to its smooth and efficient flow, but often some direct or indirect factors can interfere with its management and functional mode. All the problems and issues mentioned below have also had an impact on the number of volunteers working at the gurdwara. Although the impact is not severe by any means, it has shown that there are fewer people than before. Some of these factors may coincide with problems in managing the *langar* supply chain, such as

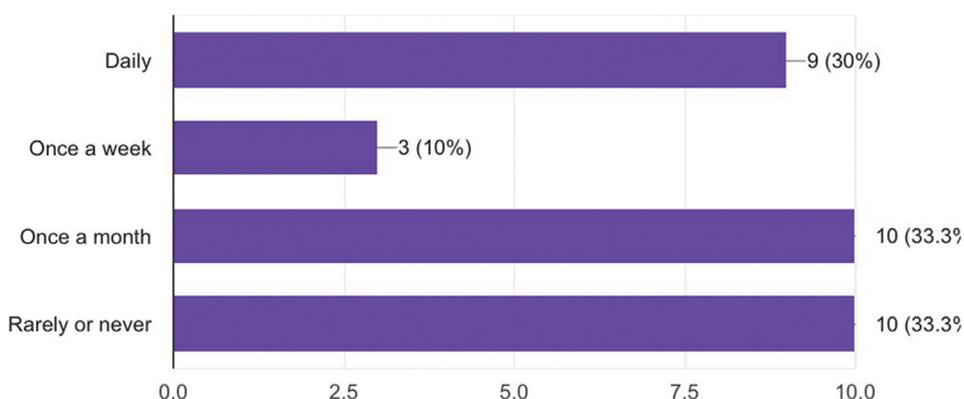


Figure 1.1. Duration of Participation in *Langar*.

GST prices, COVID-19, political instability, migration, increased catering consumption and the philanthropic ethical fabric deteriorating in the region (Figure 1.2).

One of the most important factors in managing the supply of *gurdwaras* is the availability of infrastructure and raw materials. As the *langar* serves thousands of people daily, it requires a constant supply of fresh vegetables, rice, spices and other ingredients. Any problems with the raw materials can affect the quality of the food served. This increased the cost of raw materials, increasing the cost of food production in *langar*. The introduction of GST further complicated tax compliance for an efficient management. The *gurdwara* must register under GST and file returns, which requires additional resources and expertise. Under the GST regime, raw materials such as grains, vegetables and cooking oil used in the *langar* are taxed at higher rates than before. Input credit is a method of charging GST paid on the purchase of inputs and other goods against GST paid on the final product. However, the input credit system does not apply to input goods and services, including *langar*. This resulted in a breakdown in the input credit system, resulting in higher costs. Donations to *langar* are exempt from GST. However, the high cost of food preparation due to higher tax rates on goods may discourage donors from contributing to *langar*. This can have an impact on the overall supply chain management of the *langar*, which is visible from the survey conducted. All these problems have significantly reduced the number of volunteers helping with the *langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on *langar* management at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, as it has affected all aspects of *langar* access, including the availability of raw materials, transportation, infrastructure, skilled labour, sanitation and food safety. In the survey, when asked how COVID-19 has impacted the management at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, the responses often

mentioned were that the most important was an increased workload due to safety and sanitation measures, which furthermore resulted in reduced volunteer participation due to health concerns, which was extremely important to be considered, and also the financial challenges that people were facing due to increased costs and reduced donations, which was also a major point that was given importance. All of this had a very significant impact on the management of *langar* at the *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*.

Political instability can have a significant impact on the maintenance of *langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* as it can affect the availability of raw materials, transportation and the safety and security of pilgrims and staff. In 1984, the Sikh community in India faced violence in the riots that followed the assassination of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This resulted in extensive destruction and loss of life, and several *gurdwaras*, including the *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, were targeted. The riots disrupted the *langar* supply chain, as it became difficult to transport raw materials and ensure the safety of workers and guests. Political tensions and disputes can also disrupt the *langar* supply chain. For example, in 2016, protests in Delhi against the implementation of a new water policy by the government resulted in the disruption of water supply to the *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*. This had affected the *langar* performance, as water is an integral part of the *langar* preparation process. *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* receives donations and raw materials from different parts of India and neighbouring countries like Pakistan. Border clashes and disputes can disrupt the supply chain and affect the availability of raw materials. Political interference in the management of *Gurdwaras* can also affect the use of *langar*. In 2015, for instance, the DSGMC was accused of mismanaging the funds allocated for *langar* and diverting them from political sources. This caused a public outcry and affected the donations received for the *langar*. The recession also affected the contributions of the *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*. Many of the people who used to donate to

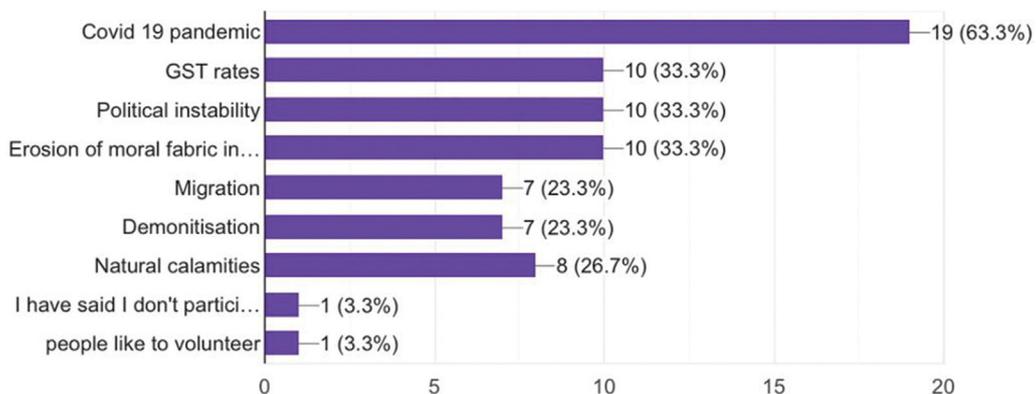


Figure 1.2. Causes for the Change in the Number of Volunteers in Gurdwara.

the *gurdwara* came from other villages or countries, thereby reducing the funds available for the *langar*. This had affected the availability of raw materials and maintenance of infrastructure.

The deterioration of the moral fabric of aid in the region has had a significant impact on the maintenance of *langar* at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*, as it has made it very difficult to maintain it with reduced community support. In the past, volunteers played an important role in running the *langar* service at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*. However, as the morality of charity is being eroded, many people are reluctant to give their time and efforts for the benefit of the community. This has led to a shortage of volunteers and increased workload. The violation of the moral fabric of the services has also been attributed to the misuse of donations received from the *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*. Some individuals and organisations have used the name of the *gurdwara* to collect donations for their own benefit, leading to a loss of trust among the community. The deterioration of the charity's moral fabric has also led to a reduction in the amount of donations received at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara*. Now, some people are reluctant to donate to charitable organisations, including *gurdwaras*, due to concerns about misuse of funds or a lack of healthcare. Earlier, *langar* was

seen as an act of communal harmony and selflessness. However, when the moral fabric of charity is broken, some people lose respect for the *langar* and may not follow the traditional norms of cleanliness and reverence when visiting the *gurdwara*. Not only that, when it was asked to the people whether the traditional values of *langar*, such as selfless service and communal harmony, are still relevant and meaningful today (Figure 1.3), 66.7% said yes, 26.7% said that they were somewhat important and the rest 6.6% did not believe it on the grounds that they had any meaningful role.

Due to all these factors, this has led to psychological and emotional burnout amongst the volunteers and the management staff of the *gurdwara*, according to the responses based on the questionnaire that was conducted for the case study. Although emotional or psychological burnout is not significant, it is still somewhat present amongst people. All the factors mentioned above have played a significant role in this problem. Despite all of these significant issues that are mentioned above, the *gurdwara* management or the volunteers have not lacked in their dedication and beliefs towards the tradition of *langar* and have contributed throughout the difficult times.

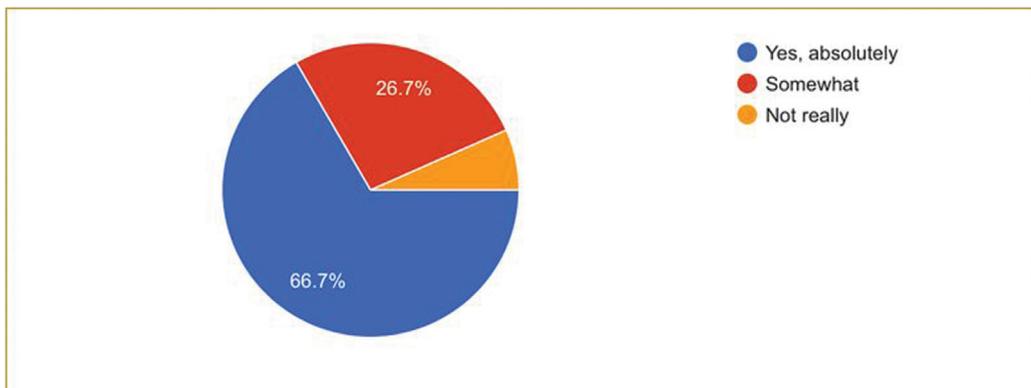


Figure 1.3. Importance of Traditional Values of *Langar*, Such as Selfless Service, Communal Harmony in Today's Society.

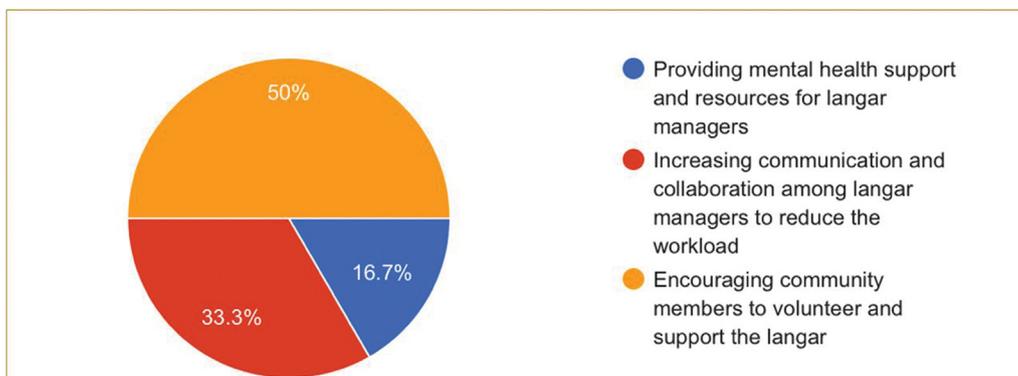


Figure 1.4. Suggestions to Address the Emotional and Psychological Challenges Faced by *Langar* Managers?

By the end, when the suggestions for how the management of langar in Sis Ganj Gurdwara would address the emotional and psychological challenges (Figure 1.4) faced by langar managers were received, 50% of the suggestions were about encouraging community members to volunteer and support the langar, 16.7% were about providing mental health support and resources for langar managers/volunteers and the rest (33.3%) were about increasing communication and collaboration among langar managers and volunteers to reduce the workload for the people.

Conclusion

The Sikh community's *langar* has been a model of selflessness and communal harmony for centuries. *Langar* is a free communal kitchen serving simple, clean vegetarian meals for everyone, regardless of their social, religious or ethnic background. *Sevadars*, or volunteers, work selflessly for free to carry out the system, and *Gurbani* is taught throughout the system and distribution, making *langar* a sacred meal. *Langar* has broken down caste and gender barriers. It is a testament to the Sikh values of equality, service and community. Anchor management is an example of community participation and self-sustainability.

Finally, to conclude, the *langar* programme at *Sis Ganj Gurdwara* faces many challenges that affect its delivery, such as lack of awareness, political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic and food shortages. Proper maintenance requires supplies and infrastructure. The introduction of GST complicated tax laws, increased costs and confused the tax system. Political struggles, protests, border disputes, money laundering and other disputes can hinder the availability of funds. The decreased morality of the people has severely affected the management, resulting in staff shortages and overwork, reduced contributions and a loss of public confidence that affects the economy.

Thus, all these factors combine, causing stress and tension between the management and the people who volunteer on a daily basis in the *gurdwara*. The combination of these factors has mentally and emotionally drained the *gurdwara's* management and staff. Overall, effective management of the *gurdwara's* supply chain requires a holistic approach that addresses these challenges and ensures the sustainability of this important community service. The Sikh tradition of *langar* has not only fed millions of people but has also served to transmit beliefs and cultures of sharing and volunteering. The management of the *langar* has been an example of

community participation and interdependence for centuries, where everyone contributes to its well-being, and will continue to do so.

Competing Interest Statement

The author has read and approved the manuscript and takes full responsibility for its contents. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank the reviewers and editors of this manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

References

- Ahluwalia, P. (2013). *The Bhagat Puran Singh health initiative: A case study in Sikh Social entrepreneurship*. Elijah Interfaith Institute. https://elijah-interfaith.org/pdf/BP_Sikh.pdf
- Baru Sahib. (2021, April 14). *Langar at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib*. <https://barusahib.org/general/langar-gurdwara-bangla-sahib/>
- Bhatt, S. (2018, December 18). *The legacy of Mata Khivi and the institution of langar*. Feminism in India. <https://feminisminindia.com/2018/12/18/mata-khivi-langar/>
- Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC). (2017). *DSGMC - Delhi Sikh Gurdwarab Management Committee*. <https://www.dsgmc.in/>
- Dhillon, B. S. (2021, November 30). Exploring the mission and legacy of Guru Nanak. *Horizon Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences Research*, 3(2), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2021.v3.n2.id1124.p55>
- Eplett, L. (2016, November 22). The Logistics of One of the Largest Langars. *Scientific American*. Retrieved July 10, 2023, from <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/food-matters/the-logistics-of-one-of-the-largest-langars/>

- Goyal, D. (16, November 2019). Explained: How Guru Nanak's langar is helping UN achieve its zero hunger goal. *Indian Express*. Retrieved July 10, 2023, from <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-how-guru-nanaks-langar-is-helping-un-achieve-its-zero-hunger-goal-6118818/>
- Hardy, G.; Harvard Divinity School. (2013, December 13). *Why give? Religious roots of charity*. <https://news-archive.hds.harvard.edu/news/2013/12/13/why-give-religious-roots-charity>
- Kaushik, M. (2021, May 28). Gurudwaras offer a ray of hope and timely help in these grim times. *Forbes India*. <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/covid19-frontline-warriors/gurudwaras-offer-a-ray-of-hope-and-timely-help-in-these-grim-times/67937/1>
- Khalsa, S. S. (Trans.), & Thind, K. S. (Trans.). (n.d.). *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji* (p. 47). <https://www.srigurugranth.org/0047.html>
- Nahal, T. S. (2017, October 8). *Why is langar considered important?* Quora. <https://www.quora.com/Why-is-langar-considered-important>
- Nath, D. (2016, November 26). With no jobs, hungry daily wagers turn to langar halls. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/With-no-jobs-hungry-daily-wagers-turn-to-langar-halls/article16703061.ece>
- Singh, A., & Singh, P. (2021). Role of 'Guru Ka Langar' in pandemic management during COVID-19 guided by religious belief. *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, 7(5), 72–77. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Amardeep-Singh-20/publication/362775787_Role_of_'Guru_Ka_Langar'_in_Pandemic_Management_During_COVID-19_Guided_by_Religious_Belief/links/62fe44c1aa4b1206fabd0b7a/Role-of-Guru-Ka-Langar
- Singh, A., & Singh, P. (2021). *Langar* in Sikhism: An innovative system for food distribution to the poor and hungry. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 14(19), 1757–1762.
- Singh, J. (2021, August 2). Guru ka langar is a revered institution in Sikhism; imbibes its philosophy and culture. *News Intervention*. <https://www.newsintervention.com/guru-ka-langar-is-a-revered-institution-in-sikhism-imbibes-its-philosophy-and-culture/>
- Singh, K., & Bansal, S. (2018). Evolution of management thinking and enlightenment of management's discernment from the profiles of the Sikh Gurus. *International Journal of Mechanical Engineering and Technology*, 9(1), 22–33. <http://www.iaeme.com/IJMET/issues.asp?JType=IJMET&VType=9&IType=1>
- Trentonsocial. (2018). *What is the meaning of Guru Ka langar?* <https://www.trentonsocial.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-guru-ka-langar/>

Biographical Statement of Author

Ms. Gursimran Kaur Butalia is a final year M A History student at Amity Institute of Social Sciences, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India. She received her Bachelor's degree in History from SGTB Khalsa College, Delhi University, India.



Her main research interest lies in Socio- cultural

history, modern Indian history, ancient cultures and languages.

Ms. Gursimran Kaur Butalia

Institute of Social Sciences
Amity University
Noida, Uttar Pradesh
India

E-mail: simranbutalia19@gmail.com