

TWO MAHATMAS AT 'THE ALTAR' AT MODERN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL, PATIALA

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Modern Senior Secondary School & Modern Nursery School, Patiala, Punjab (School), were just so incredibly fortunate to receive not one, but two, great mahatmas at the newly constructed 'The Altar' at the School. The Global Head of Chinmaya Mission, Swami Swaroopananda ji inaugurated The Altar in the morning of 29 April 2023 in a beautiful ceremony attended by School

reflection, prayer and meditation.

The inauguration programme included a play by students depicting a touching incident from the life of Guru Nanak Dev ji. The event concluded with a wonderful rendition of the Sikh aarti. The students who sang were so good that Swamiji specially walked over to them and their music teachers – Kudrat Singh, Jeo Jaspreet Singh and

students, staff, management and those involved in the making of The Altar.

The Altar was inspired when the former Head of Chinmaya Mission, Swami Tejomayananda ji visited the School in December 2018. In a speech to the School, he had outlined the several purposes of education. But finally, he said, the real purpose is to cultivate a “love for God”. This hit my sister, Nanki Singh, who ideated that – since we were promoting value-based education in the School – the School should now create a beautiful altar as a physical symbol of this commitment to value-based education and a practical space, as Swami Tejomayananda ji was later to put it, “for devotion and dedication”. Thus was born ‘The Altar’.

The wonderful architects were Workshop PoV, New Delhi, led by Shamsheer Singh and his

Kamal Deep – and showered lots of praises on them. (I must mention that classical vocalist, Prabhat Rao, who is a member of the Managing Committee of the School, also gave valuable inputs for the music.)

Later, Swamiji gave a one hour talk to students of Classes 7 to 12 on the ‘Mool Mantra’, the opening lines of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. His thoroughly logical talk, laced with humour, was a really inspiring eye-opener for students and staff.

But the blessings for the School did not end there. Swami Tejomayananda ji had also expressed an interest in having ‘darshan’ of The Altar!! So, on the way back from a visit to Himachal Pradesh, he too stopped in the School for a day and a night. He, however, did not want a ‘programme’ to be made out of his visit. After he arrived on 11 May 2023, he walked across to The Altar. There were only the

colleague, Aditya Mazumdar. They were given superb creative inputs by poet & artiste Shyam Banerji and Ruma Dasgupta. The construction was executed meticulously by Sai Construction Co., Patiala.

The Altar actually has three altars. One is dedicated to Lord Krishna – with the cutest Krishna sculpted in marble by Satyam Natha in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Another is dedicated to Lord Hanuman, with a beautiful brass idol made by Karthick in Swamimalai, Tamil Nadu. The third is dedicated to the ten Sikh Gurus, with a powerful 7 x 3.5 feet oil on canvas painting made by Shuddho Basu in Delhi. The result of this teamwork is that we have an altar of a kind that no school in India has!

On inauguration day, Swami Swaroopananda

Principal, Mrs. Manpreet Sharma, Head of Middle School Mrs. Meenakshi Tewari, and a very small handful of staff and management. The school choir sat in the little amphitheatre of The Altar and sang the same bhajans and shabads that they had so beautifully sung at the inauguration. Swamiji, being a great lover of music himself, absolutely loved the singing! As they sang, he slowly went to all three altars. And then he sat down to hear the students. The sun was setting and the lights of The Altar were glowing. It was a lovely sight, as the light filtered through the ‘jaali’ work of The Altar.

At the end, Swamiji spoke briefly about how the lesson to be learnt from Hanuman ji is that he never did anything without thinking. So we must think before we act. The lesson from Lord Krishna is to be friendly to all. And, Swamiji added, that the

ji was received at the programme by the School band. He was accompanied by Swami Madhavananda ji, acharya of Chinmaya Mission, Patiala, and Brahmachari Shaunak. The school choir then came into the act and sang a very, very melodious Ganesh Vandana, followed by an equally sublime Saraswati Vandana. Thereafter, as the Hanuman Chalisa was being rendered, Swamiji walked to The Altar and garlanded Lord Hanuman, touched the moorti and offered prayers. Then, as the students sang two Krishna bhajans, Swamiji did the same at the altar of Lord Krishna. Finally, amid the beautiful singing of a shabad from the Sri Guru Granth Sahib, he placed flowers at the altar of the Sikh Gurus and offered his prayers there too.

Swamiji also made a short address to the School. He said that Lord Krishna, in the

lesson from the Sikh Gurus is that they tried to wake us up from our sleep of ignorance (of the Supreme Truth) and tried to lead us to God, the Truth.

The Altar is a landmark for the School. Blessed by two mahatmas, it will be like the ‘soul’ of the school, guiding the students and staff in a quiet and powerful way. I would also like to thank our mother, Mrs. Anjali Singh, and three Management members – Mrs. Indu Shrikent (Trustee, Saraswati Vidyak Trust), Mr. Chetan Sharma (former Treasurer of the Managing Committee of the School) and Dr. Gurbinder Singh (Registrar, Thapar University & former Member of the Managing Committee of the School) – for all their help and guidance.

The School was founded in 1948 by my paternal grandfather, Sardar Mohan Singh. He was,

Bhagawad Geeta, has said that our mind is our best friend and our deadliest enemy. Guru Nanak Dev ji has also said that ‘Man jite, jag jit’ (Win the mind, win the world). Swamiji said that this is why it is very important that in our education system, we learn good values that calm the mind and give us mental well-being. When the mind is quiet, it unleashes great power within us. Swamiji therefore encouraged students and staff to visit The Altar

at that time, the Managing Director of the State Bank of Patiala and Chief Economic Advisor to H.H. the Maharaja of Patiala. He envisioned that what the newly independent India needed most was to educate its people. He therefore initiated several philanthropic ventures, including starting this School – Patiala’s first private school. The School is celebrating 75 years this year. And we have had the best celebrations possible!





