

Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities

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I read with some interest the article – “Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities” by Prof R S Basi, Prof I J Singh, Prof H Lal and Dr Indarjit Singh, published in the Sikh Review, February 2006. I like to point out the differences between establishing an externally funded Chair/Lecturer/ Research posts (Academic posts) at a university in North America and in the UK.

When Academic posts in British universities are established with funds from private donors or with funds from charitable/ non charitable organisations (e.g. UK Cancer Research, The British Heart Foundations, Unions, Government Agencies, Religious bodies/organisations and Industries), universities will invite them to become a member of the selection committee, although the final say in the selection of the actual candidate for the post is made by the selection committee as a whole.

Should the Academic post be established with funds from a person or an organisation to promote the teaching or research in subject which is not taught, then the donor can tell the university the purpose of establishing the post and what is expected from the person appointed by the university. The appointee will have academic freedom, but has to always bear in mind the purpose of the post. The duration of the post is also determined by the sponsors. Whilst universities need external funding, they have the choice over whether to accept or reject the funds, but are happy to negotiate the terms and conditions of the contract with the donor.

In respect of such contract, it is usual to insert a clause in the contract that it can be terminated by either party by giving three or six months notice as agreed when it is exchanged. How the university offers the contract to the appointed person is university business. Further, as far as the academic and intellectual freedom is concerned, there will be no compromise for it. There is a complete freedom for contents of the course and publications.

On certain occasions, the donor will provide enough funding to the university such that the interest earned on this amount is sufficient, in itself, to fully finance the post. After that, the donor will have no say over who the university appoints, as long as the Academic post is in their name. The funds are also managed by the university without interference from the donor.

I do not know in which UK University Dr Inderjit Singh is or was teaching or what experience he has in this matter. If he is or was teaching at a UK university then he should know about how the Academic posts are established with external funds. Being co-author of the paper, he should have pointed out the differences in establishing externally funded posts in North America and the UK. I have taught at the University of Reading for a number of years and have been involved in securing such external funding for teaching and research posts. I was also a member of the selection committees and during this time, sponsors were also invited to sit on them.

I hope the readers of your Journal will now appreciate that “Western” Universities do not have the same criteria in establishing externally funded Academic posts at the university.