

# Mohindra College—Then and Now

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I got admission in M.A. (Punjabi) at Mohindra College, Patiala in 1949 after graduating with Physics and Mathematics—a Course from Khalsa College, Amritsar. Moving from one premier institution to another was, in some way, a continuation of my experience of being exposed to the process of education in a legendary college at my under-graduate level. At that time, the Punjab University operated from Solan. M.A. (Punjabi) had been introduced for the first time at two colleges only, i.e. Mohindra College, Patiala and Khalsa College, Amritsar. It was hailed as a land-mark in the growth and development of Punjabi Language and Literature. I had the pleasure and privilege of participation in the instructional programme, instituted at Mohindra College, Patiala, in connection with the launching of the post-graduate classes in Punjab under the intellectual leadership of Prof. Pritam Singh. My two other teachers, Giani Lal Singh and Prof. Janak Singh also aroused my interest in the literary culture.

At that time, Principal Teja Singh presided over the destinies of Mohindra College. He had the status of a father figure in the domain of Punjabi Literature, Sikh history and culture. It was he, who inspired me to pursue the study of Punjabi at the post-graduate level. The credit of fertilising my literary and critical consciousness goes to Principal Teja Singh and Prof. Pritam Singh. I still cherish the rapturous memories of their brilliant exposition of Punjabi Literature and the modern critical ethos.

I was allotted a seat in a dormitory of the college hostel. After some time I was appointed the prefect of the hostel by Dr. Gobind Singh Mansukhani, who was the warden of the hostel at that time. In the process, I was allotted a cubicle. In M.A. final I was elevated to the Head-prefectship of the hostel. It is interesting to recall that in those good old days the head-prefect of the hostel was held in awe by resident students and he wielded considerable authority.

When I settle down to recollect the images of those days, the whole scenario of the college as it was then flashes through my imagination. 38-years back, to be exact, Mohindra College had 800 students on its rolls. It was housed in the historic building, representing the blend of the architectural styles of the East and the West. The Science Block and the administrative block had not come into existence. The atmosphere in the college was, by and large, pleasant. Its academic tone and temper were influenced by the hangover of the feudal modes



of thinking and behaviour. There was an old world charm around. In some ways, it helped foster the spirit of discipline among the students.

The students of those days were keenly interested in their studies. It does not mean that they were not fond of indulging in mischiefs and pranks. They were mischievous, no doubt, but the tone and texture of their mischiefs were innocuous and at times, even creative. The teachers were held in greater esteem. Correspondingly the teachers also took keen personal interest in the academic and cultural growth of the students. The students evinced interest in the co-curricular activities. The debates and declamation contests formed a regular feature of the academic and cultural scene of the college. The staging of plays and skits evoked a pervasive response in the minds of the students. The standard of education was commendable though the explosion of knowledge had not yet invaded the new areas of study.

I was a keen student and pursued the study of Punjabi Literature with a spirit of dedication. As I had been initiated into sports at Khalsa College, Amritsar and developed love for Hockey there, I tried to strengthen that interest at Mohindra College also. I started preferring Badminton to Hockey and acquired proficiency in this game. I was runners-up in mixed doubles in Pepsu Badminton Championship, held in the Hall of Mohindra College in 1950. Sometimes I played Tennis also and my initiation into tennis at Mohindra College was to play a significant role in my sports career at later stage in life.

The lure of the mysterious towers of Mohindra College was as irresistible then as it is now. The two towers, pointing to the heavens, are still the tallest structures on the skyline of Patiala. The aerial view of the building of the college reveals the image of 'M' which clearly shows that the architect had kept in mind the shape of the first letter of Mohindra while designing the building. In the fifties no exclusive emphasis was laid on the beautification of the campus and the transplantation of the trees. The old, hoary and protective trees did lend an aura of antiquity to the campus, but at the same time they seemed to wear a tired and forlorn look.

I passed out in 1951 and joined as lecturer at Govt. College Hissar. After 31-years I took over as Principal of Mohindra College, in 1982. It was a home coming for me and I took the new assignment in the spirit of getting an opportunity of rendering service to my alma-mater. I found that many changes had taken place during the intervening period.

In 1987 when I am on the verge of my retirement from Govt. service I look back upon the years that I had spent at Mohindra College. When I try to have a comparative view of the things then and now, a few points stand out as prominent. At present 2200 students are on rolls of the college and there are more than a hundred members of the faculty. After assuming charge, the first administrative



decision that I took pertained to the conversion of the Hall from a reading room into the Badminton Hall. It enabled the sports enthusiasts to make use of its wooden court. It gave a fillip to Badminton and consequently Mohindra College was runners-up in Badminton championship in 1985-86 and in 1986-87, Mohindra College won the championship in Badminton for the first time after a lapse of 21-years.

I also thought of adding an Open-air theatre to the campus of the college. With the explosion of numbers, the college hall had been rendered inadequate for holding functions. I ensured the involvement of the student community in the project. The N.S.S. volunteers came forward in a big way to contribute to the completion of the Open-air theatre.

I have been able to get a special grant of Two lakhs and four thousand rupees from the Government of Punjab and the U.G.C. for the construction of Non-Resident Student Centre. It gives me delight to mention that the construction has already been undertaken by the P.W.D.

During the last five years about one thousand eucalyptus trees have been planted on the campus. They have filled the gap created by the decay and disappearance of the high and hoary trees of yore.

When I was a student in the fifties, the college campus had no boundary wall. In the later years, major part of the Boundary Wall was constructed. The remaining portion has been completed during my tenure as Principal. It gives the campus an exclusive and protected look.

As years roll by, the carry over of the feudal/aristocratic culture has dwindled away to a great extent. The democratic ethos and all that it symbolises has come to exercise a sway on the tone and temper of the college. Certain undesirable but unavoidable tendencies have come to the fore in the wake of the socio-economic and political developments in the country. The co-curricular activities have fallen on bad days. The earlier interest in cultural pursuits like staging the plays and holding debates and declamation contests has been on the wane for the last many years. The respect for the teachers has been one of the casualties of the disturbing changes that have taken place in the realm of higher education in the country.

During my student days, a large number of students took keen interest in the games. In the evenings, the college play grounds presented a fascinating look. Now the picture is different. Students in general have lost interest in sports. Only the 50 players, attached with the sports wing, evince a vibrant interest in the games. The bulk of the student community seems to have grown indifferent to the promotion of physical culture through participation in games and sports.

As an administrator I have felt that it has become increasingly difficult to cope with the spectrum of complex administrative problems. It is to be regarded



as an inevitable consequence of the unprecedented expansion of education after independence.

During my tenure, an Old Students Association has taken shape to provide common platform for the Old Mohindrians who have made a mark in many sectors of national life. At present the Old Students Association has 250 members. Its executive committee has been constituted. It is a tribute to the health of the infant association that it has taken upon itself to commemorate the 112th Founder's Day of the College on 30th March, 1987. It is a matter of pride for the Old Students of this college that Shri S.S Ray, Governor, has kindly agreed to preside over the function. A National Exhibition of Painting will be organised to mark this occasion. It is for the first time that a National-level exhibition is being held at Patiala.

During the last three decades, the institution of hostel has lost much of its relevance and vitality. The hostel of Mohindra College has also been subjected to tremors, generated by the new pressures and compulsions. When I was a resident student, the first floor of hostel building did not exist. It was added to the building later to make available the hostel facility to a greater number of students. During my student days, the level of food served in the hostel was highly commendable. The spurt in prices has come in the way of maintaining those standards. At that time there were no fans in the rooms and the clamouring for more and more facilities was not much in vogue. The present resident scholars enjoy more facilities than their predecessors of the fifties. Nevertheless, the hostel does not have the same fascination for the students, as it did in good old days. The assignment of the hostel Superintendentship has ceased to be attractive, in the face of the problems of indiscipline that have cropped up recently.

No educational institution can function like an isolated island in the sprawling landscape of the country. The main stream of the national life impinges on it directly or indirectly in numerous ways. It cannot escape the onslaught of the social, cultural, political and economic forces, beating in the breast of the country. At the same time, there is a continuity about the life of an institution, It is perpetually sustained by the process of renewal and replenishment. The tradition of continuity, creatively blended with the spirit of change, can go a long way in fostering the multi-dimensional growth of the institution. I am happy that Mohindra College, which is the oldest institution in Northern India has successfully weathered many a storm in its chequered career. It has been able to preserve its cherished traditions in the changing times. I earnestly hope that the students of the coming years will continue to draw inspiration and sustenance from the heritage of Mohindra College that has been nurtured and enriched by the successive generations of distinguished teachers and promising students. □