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NISHAAN

NAGAARA

The Dastaar : a Sikh's Pride

Beyond Symbols : gifts of Eternity

Sikhs in America : keeping the Faith

'Battle for the Turban' in France

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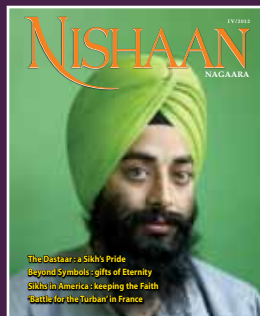
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Resplendent in his dastaar, is this Kashmiri Sikh in Baramulla (photo by: Malkiat Singh)

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Editorial

A Distant Beat, A Different Drummer



The spell that is spell of the past is always enchanting, sometimes empowering. Is it a prison or can it set us free? History never leaves us. It makes us what we are, so it is ever with and within us. And we continue to make history every day.

Today, I focus on how we interpret some of the reality that surrounds and shapes us. Perhaps close to three out of 25 million Sikhs live outside the Punjab and India, with as many as 2 million making their home in North America and the UK. Keep in mind that Sikhs of India and those in the diaspora are living in very different worlds: the context is different as is the language, culture, music, cuisine, social mores, etc. My purpose is to briefly explore Sikhism in North America and India, to see how the two continue to evolve while emerging from common roots but impacted by very different social and cultural realities.

A thoughtful analysis of Sikh presence in North America by Gurinder Singh Mann, one of the few US based academicians of Sikh Studies, traces the Sikh community from our beginnings in Stockton in 1906 to the 2012 shooting of Sikhs in the gurdwara in Wisconsin.

Horrendous as the shootings were they were neither unique nor rare in this society. I will not list the plethora of mass shootings and killings of unarmed people by crazed killers with easy access to guns. Keep in mind that we have seen more fatalities on the streets over the past decade than all the American soldiers killed during the same time in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As victims we do not stand alone in the more than 200 year old history of this nation. Just Google the matter; it will open your eyes. The truth is uglier than we think. We know this was once a country of Native Americans with a rich culture before the Pilgrims, other Europeans and slaves created these

United States, but in the timeline of history this is a young nation of less than 300 years.

Note that Sikhs have had a remarkable presence in North America for more than a century; for instance, they worked on the Panama Canal in 1903-04. But it was different country then. The Asian Exclusion Act prevented Asians from owning land or becoming citizens. Interracial marriages were against the law and Indians could not bring spouses from the home country. (Many Sikhs settled in California and so, many of them married Mexicans, instead.) Remember also that most of these Sikhs were poorly educated, if at all; farming jobs often at subsistence wages was how they made their way.

They struggled mightily. Their primary goal was one of free people everywhere: independence from serfdom, the right to vote and own property. Their struggles have been well documented by scholars and, in time, they prevailed. However, they did not neglect India's struggle for independence from the British and contributed memorably to it.

Notwithstanding myths created by Hollywood and its oaters, the West was not opened by the likes of John Wayne alone: Italian, Chinese and Sikh laborers had a hand in it. It took almost half a century for the discriminatory laws to change - only by the mid-20th century.

After the Second World War, Sikhs started arriving in the USA as students and professionals, first in a trickle and then a mighty stream when immigration quotas were set aside in the early 1970s to be replaced instead by qualification and ability. These Sikhs are the founders of the Sikh communities and the over 200 Gurdwaras that adorn this country's landscape today.

The progeny of this generation is the product of Sikhism but more connected to this culture, language,

cuisine, even music, or habits of thinking than to any values or worldview rooted in India. Inevitable, wouldn't you say? But it surely sets up tension and gap, not easily spanned between immigrant parents and their progeny. Again inevitable! All immigrants face this reality, no matter where they came from; we are neither alone nor the first.

Immigrants create institutions to capture the sights, smells and sounds of home that may be thousands of miles away. For their progeny the home is different, as are the sights, smells and sounds. Christianity has travelled the globe and now has over 250 denominations and sects, some will say over a couple of thousand (it depends on how you are counting). The Jews, too, show a wide variety in their understanding of the faith; some sects refuse to recognise variants of their faith and label them as heretics. The way Christianity is practiced in America is not the same as it is in Italy, France, Germany or Haiti. My comments here apply pretty much to all existing religions - from Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, to myriad other faiths of mankind.

With time and travel interpretations come to differ and seemingly contradictory practices take hold in differing cultures. In the final analysis it is the culture, language, cuisine, music and the habits of the heart that give structure to communities, religions and nations. Don't forget that it is religion that is often the binding glue that unites people as a community.

With that in mind I would include human movements like Communism or Socialism and even strident Atheism in my list of religions. In this, my definition of religion is more expansive.

Such is the history of all religions and of all people. Even as offshoots of the same stream, many rivulets, sects and denominations arise from a single stream and then continue to diverge as they travel along.

When did humans embark on their earthly journey? Unfortunately to this questions there are as many, if not more, answers as there are religions. Humans now inhabit every continent. Science tells us that we broke off from the Chimp evolutionary line perhaps 5 million years ago. A primitive human (*Homo Habilis*) dates from about 2.2 million years ago; *Homo Sapiens* may have appeared about 250,000 years ago. Mitochondrial DNA and fossils indicate that the first humans originated in Africa some 200,000 years

back. The Biblical date of Creation, 6000 years ago, finds no scientific support and is best metaphorically interpreted.

Modern evolutionary biology points to a single source in Africa for the origin of human populations. But now thousands of years later what makes us into the many unique populations are matters like language, culture, geography, climate, cuisine and history. They formed and shaped us, and continue to do so, if ever so slowly.

I offer you equally simple ways to look at such transformations of religions. I look at Sikhism, its pristine message and its progressive worldview, way beyond the narrow interpretations of reality of many other faiths of mankind.

In the final analysis a man's religion is an individual's choice. What I mean is that religion provides a lifestyle governed by a set of behaviors and rules, much as a family, a community or a nation is. A code of conduct delineates a community or a population group from others: neighboring communities who may be like us in many ways but also unlike us in some critical detail. It is like fences between neighbors that are absolutely essential, but they must never become walls that shut neighbours off from each other. Yet, it becomes very much an individual onus how to interpret a particular directive or doctrine of one's community or religion. How I should obey a particular recommendation or a specific ukase is such that I have to make my own choice about it.

Simply stated, I suggest an experiment. Invite some followers of the many existing religions - Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Sikhism, or a lesser known brand. Now ask each person of a *given* faith: "What it means to you to be what you are - a Muslim, Christian, Jew, Sikh or what have you?" I am certain even in the face of a preponderance of agreement among the members of the same religion, there will emerge subtle differences in how the individual members of the same faith will answer.

In other words, the answers will be specifically personalised by each member. Some individual practices, feelings or expectations of a religion will reveal telling differences. Yet there will be enough commonality for them to embrace and stay under the same label.

I can bet that Sikhs born and raised in the Punjab and those now growing up in the diaspora will show subtle but unmistakable differences in matters that some may find critically more important than others. Where the differences emerge from is not so difficult to discern.

I submit that Sikhs of India and those in the diaspora are living in very different worlds: the context is different as is the language, culture etc. I illustrate my view by a self-evident example.

Today, better than 90 percent of Sikhs exist in the country where the religion arose – India. The value system and the governmental structure differs from that of, say Great Britain, Canada and the United States, in major ways. The expatriates interact with Judeo-Christian communities and spiritual traditions, while Sikhs in India are more intimately impacted by Hindu society and to a lesser account by Islamic presence.

Think, for a moment, of the Shromini Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), the premier Sikh elective body in India. It came into existence during the British colonisation of India and was created under British law. India is now independent but the law defining the scope of the SGPC still exists. This means that since its formation in 1925, for over a century, this organisation acts under charter and authority of the government of India. I know of no other religion anywhere that is subservient to a secular government!

The SGPC, in many ways makes crucial decisions for Sikhs, how to define them under law. To the Indian Sikh the hand of the government in Sikh affairs may or may not be galling but to Sikh living outside India it is both unwanted and unwarranted.

Another example: the Indian Sikh is materially affected if there are quotas for recruitment into the Indian armed services, education institutions or job opportunities. To a Sikh living abroad those issues have meaning but the more critical reality is how to deal with similar matters where they live, for instance in American society where laws are different as is the process of how to deal with them.

The issues are similar for Sikhs anywhere or everywhere: whether they are of jobs, housing social justice, the genocide of 1984. The question always is how to change the existing institutional framework

to recognise an equal place at the table of society for all, including Sikhs. The growing divergence between Sikhs in India and Sikhs abroad comes from the societal and governmental institutions, the culture, language and the legal framework that exists or can be constructed to respond.

That is why I am absolutely wonderstruck at the institutions a new generation of young Sikhs in the diaspora have founded such as the SALDEF (Sikh-American Legal Defence & Educational Fund), Sikh Coalition, United Sikhs and Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI). They exist to help create for the Sikhs an equal place at the table of this complex society.

The first two are largely dedicated to legal issues ranging from bullying in schools to hate crimes, job discrimination and recruitment into the US Armed Services. The primary mission of the United Sikhs is to aid the larger community (Sikhs and non-Sikhs) during disasters like floods, earthquakes by aid and medical missions etc. SikhRI has a unique mission of internal development of the community. It recognises that Sikh immigrants are often poorly informed of the fundamentals of their own faith and, therefore, inadequate representatives of their rich faith. The better Sikhs they are, the better citizens they would become.

Unquestionably, if Sikhism is to remain universal it must find roots outside the soil, culture, language, cuisine, music, people and worldview of the Punjab and India. If Sikhism is to remain eternal its message must speak to us today as it did to countless others 300 to 500 years ago.

That's why I find that India-based Sikhs and Sikhs abroad are on a divergent path - but that's the way to adaptation and progress without compromising the fundamentals. It is also necessary to keep in mind that we remain branches of the same tree and the same roots. The connection has to be nurtured; it should never sunder.

How best to define this path? In my view by creating several semi-autonomous regional, national and, finally, supranational organisations that collectively focus on three realities:

(*) think globally, (*) act locally and (*) always nurture the fundamentals.

Dr I.J. Singh
New York

Divine Revelations

Gurpurab in New Delhi and Nankana Sahib



Gurpurab at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi. (From left) Indian Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari, President Pranab Mukherjee, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other dignitaries attend a prayer session to mark the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev.

the future when you see me, you can give it back to me." After the Guru had left, the man told his wife about the incident. The wife immediately scolded the man, "You fool, why did you take a needle from a guru? He is an old man. Suppose he dies and you don't get to give back this needle, what will you do? Offering him something is fine but you should not receive anything from a man like him. Else, you will be in debt forever. You will be unable to wash out that one karma, and this may mean another thousand lifetimes for you. This is not a good thing. Somehow try to find him and return it to him immediately."

So the man started trekking the path that Nanakdev had taken. After a couple of months the man caught up with him and said, "Guruji, I don't want to carry this needle with me. You are an old man. In case you die, I would not be able to carry this needle to heaven and return it to you there. I will be in debt forever." Guru Nanak replied, "So you know that you cannot carry this needle to heaven, right?" The man said, "Yes." "When you know you cannot carry a needle, what about all those other things you are accumulating? You will not be able to carry any of that either." The man fell at Nanakdev's feet. He went back home, just kept what was needed for his family, and went about building whatever was needed for the wellbeing of people all around.

Wherever he went, Guru Nanak attracted a large group of people around him. When he came, he did not ascribe to any particular religious tenet and his teaching was universal. He initiated people into certain types of meditation and devotional practices. People could not fix Guru Nanak as belonging to any particular religion. He dressed unconventionally for a spiritual person because he didn't want to fit into any mould that was already there. So he appeared neither like a Muslim fakir nor a Hindu saint. He designed his own clothes and wore it in such a way that they could not identify him with any particular faith.

Guru Nanak was a compassionate and courageous man. Usually he would be traveling by foot, walking from village to village, offering his teachings to people. He was not one of those all-the-time smiling, gentle saints. He knew when to be hard and when to be soft.

One day, he happened to be a guest at the home of a very rich man in the area. After a few days, as he was leaving, he gave this man a sewing needle and said, "Keep this with you. Sometime in

The world is a limited space with limited resources. So whether it is individuals, societies or nations, when they go about accumulating endlessly, all that can happen is strife and pain for self and others. Unless every individual decides for himself, "This is what I need. The rest of my capabilities, I will use for everybody's wellbeing," he is a disaster to himself and to the world. All human suffering and the suffering of every other creature has been created by our ignorance, and nothing else. And this ignorance is getting empowered by technology, and it's going all out. The true disaster on this planet is not an earthquake, volcano or tsunami. It is human ignorance. Enlightenment that comes with awareness is the only solution.

Sadhguru

Janamsakhis

Recitation of Janamsakhis or birth stories of the Guru and imbibing their message is an integral part of the Sikh's life. Merely listening to a Janamsakhi -- which is the narrative of Guru Nanak's life -- is like '*janam saphala karna*'; that is, to live life in a meaningful way. Nanakdev had not only given a divine message of liberation but had actually lived such a life, serving as role model to all Sikhs, inspiring them to adapt it at the practical level. Never imposing by nature, the Janamsakhis completely absorb the listener.

A common strand in all the Janamsakhis is Guru Nanak's emphasis on 'truthful living' which is the way to liberation. He says, "Listen to my advice, O my mind! Only good deeds shall endure, and there may not be another chance." The ultimate way of realisation is shown by a simple sakhi. Once there was a thug named Sheikh Sajjan. He would appear to be a noble man but would rob people deceitfully. He pretended to be kind, God-fearing and hospitable -- he would offer food and shelter to visitors and in the stealth of night would kill them, and take away their valuables.

Once Guru Nanak, along with his Muslim companion Mardana, stayed at Sajjan's rest-house. It was almost midnight and despite waiting long for his guests to fall asleep, Sajjan continued to hear the soothing sounds of bani played on the rabab. Guru Nanak recited a hymn: "Bronze is very bright to look at; but if you keep it, your hands get blackened with

it. Similarly some people appear to be good, but they are like a house whitened on the outside, but empty within. A man should be good from inside as well as outside."

Sajjan was remorseful and falling at the Guru's feet, confessed his crimes. Sajjan distributed all his possessions and converted his house into a *dharamsala* which, according to the Puratan Janamsakhi, was the first such centre established in the history of early Sikhism.

Every individual is considered to be a reflection of the Almighty and His supreme creation. Therefore the aim of life should be to develop the best in man which is God. Waheguru is not only *Ik Onkar*, the One Supreme Being; *Satnam*, Eternal Truth; *Karta-purakh*, Supreme Creator; *Nirbhau*, fearless; *Nirvair*, with no enemies; but is also *Akal-murat* and *Ajuni-saibhan* or Timeless and Formless. As mortal beings, we should try to absorb attributes of the Supreme and at the same time, know our place in Creation. This realisation brings humility and shows us the true path of ultimate release. But it cannot happen without guruprasad or Guru's Grace.

Having surrendered his ego, the Guru ka Sikh meditates upon *Naam* of God's name, while earning his livelihood through honest means and sharing it with the needy and performing *seva* always. With this simple, practical yet magical formula of life, *Kirat Karni, Vand Chhakna, te Nam Japna*, provided by Baba Nanak, Sikhs celebrate life throughout the year. But there are special occasions such as Guru Nanak Jayanti that warrants celebration on a wider scale.

Organising kirtan-durbars, processions, prabhat-pheris and langars, Sikhs sing with devotion as follows: "As Guru Nanak made his appearance in the world.... There was light everywhere.... As when the sun rises, the stars vanish and darkness retreats.... Wherever the Guru set foot.... The spot became sanctified.... By manifesting the Eternal Name.... The Guru redeemed all the four corners and all nine realms of the Earth."

Kulbir Kaur

“We kept Nankana Sahib, but lost the Guru”



The anguish of a Pakistani Muslim, on the 542nd birth Anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak at Nankana Sahib

Millions of Sikhs and their friends around the world are celebrating Gurburab, but few outside India know the significance of this day or its history. It's the 542nd birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith and one of the greatest symbols of pluralism and tolerance in the world. Mahatma Gandhi may epitomise India in the West, but he is just one of the many towering figures of history that have shaped the land, its culture and its religions. Poets such as Tagore and Iqbal immortalised India in verse while emperors like Ashoka and Akbar ruled over dazzling domains that stunned the world.

Among the great philosophers and thinkers that India gifted to the world are two men who tower above the rest : Buddha and Guru Nanak, the founders of Buddhism and Sikhism. While Buddha is well known in the West as a result of his creed and followers, Guru Nanak, whose birthday we celebrate today is yet to be discovered. Let this Muslim introduce you to the man who founded the world's youngest religion, Sikhism and who had a profound role in shaping my Punjabi heritage, alas, one that

was torn to shreds by the bloody partition of India in August 1947.

Today, the place where Guru Nanak was born in 1469 is a city that was ethnically cleansed of its entire Sikh population during the bloodbath of 1947. Nankana Sahib, a place where the Guru spent his childhood with Muslim and Hindu friends is akin to a Bethlehem without Christians; a Medina without Muslims. For a few days the town will bustle with Sikh pilgrims from all over the world, but soon they will depart and nary a turban will be seen until the Sikhs return the next year.

The city of Nankana Sahib is near Lahore, my maternal ancestral home, where my mother and father were born. My mother told me how she as a Muslim girl grew up with Sikh neighbours and how she was part of the Sikh family's celebrations at the time of Gurburab and how she would travel with her friend to Nankana Sahib. Decades later she would still recall her lost friend who left Pakistan to seek refuge across the border. Today Nankana Sahib celebrates, but there are no Muslim girls accompanying their Sikh friends.

None. It is sad. Sad, because Sikhism and Guru Nanak were intertwined with Islam and Muslims. The Guru's closest companion was a Muslim by the name of Bhai Mardana. It is said when Mardana was dying, the Guru asked him, how would you like to die? As a Muslim? To which the ailing companion replied, "As a human being."

Five hundred years later, a border divides Muslim and Sikh Punjabis. A border where two nuclear armies and a million men face each other. As a Muslim Punjabi, I feel that the British in dividing the Punjab separated my soul from my body and left the two to survive on their own. Muslim Punjabis lost their neighbours and family friends of generations. Most of all they lost their language that today languishes as a second-class tongue in its own home. We kept Nankana Sahib, but lost the Guru.

However, the tragedy that befell the Sikhs was far more ominous and deserves special mention. For Sikhs, the Punjabi cities of Lahore and Gujranwala, Nankana Sahib and Rawalpindi were their hometowns and had shared a history with their Gurus. With the 1947 partition, not only was Punjab divided, but the Sikhs were ethnically cleansed from Pakistan's Punjab.

As a result of the creation of the Islamic State of Pakistan, the Sikhs lost absolute access to the numerous holy sites: Gurdwara Janam Asthan, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, in Nankana Sahib; Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal; Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore where the Fifth Guru, Arjan, was martyred; Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Kartarpur, where Guru Nanak died and, politically, the memorial to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Emperor of the Punjab, in Lahore which was his capital.

When the killings and cleansing of 1947 ended, not a single Sikh was visible in Lahore. Of course, Muslims too were chased out of the eastern parts of Punjab, but they were not losing their holy places of Mecca or Medina. Even though we Muslims despair the occupation of Jerusalem, we still have the comfort of knowing that Muslims still live in and around the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

But what about the Sikhs?

To feel their pain, Muslims need to imagine how outraged we would feel if, God forbid, Mecca and Medina were cleansed of all Muslims and fell under the occupation of, say, Ethiopia. How can we Muslims ask for the liberation of Muslim lands while we



The emptiness of Nankana Sahib today is starkly seen in this photograph.

institutionalise the exclusion and ethnic cleansing of all Sikhs from their holy sites inside an Islamic state? Muslims who cannot empathise with the loss of the Sikhs need to ask themselves why they do not ?

Before 1947, Punjabi Muslims did not consider Sikhism as an adversarial faith. After all, from the Muslim perspective, Sikhism was the combination of the teachings of Sufism, which was rooted in Islamic thought and the Bhakti movement, an organic link to Hindu philosophy. It is true that Moghul emperors had been particularly vicious and cruel to the leaders of the Sikh faith, but these Moghuls were not acting as representatives of Islam. Not only that, the Moghuls inflicted even harsher punishments on their fellow Muslims.



Sikhs come to Nankana Sahib from all over the world for Gurburab, and then leave.

With the creation of Pakistan, the Sikhs lost something even more precious than their holy places: diverse sub cultural streams. One such stream flourishing in the Thal region (Sind Sagar Doab) in what is now Pakistan, near Punjab's border with Sind and Baluchistan, was known as the 'Sewa Panthis.'

The Sewa Panthi tradition flourished in southwest Punjab for nearly 12 generations until 1947. This sect (variously known as Sewa Panthis, Sewa Dassiey, and Addan Shahis), is best symbolised by Bhai Ghanniyya who, though himself a Sikh, aided wounded Sikh and Muslim soldiers alike during the Tenth Sikh Guru's wars with the Moghuls. Sewa Panthis wore distinctive white robes. They introduced a new dimension to the sub continental religious philosophies. They believed that sewa (helping the needy) was the highest form of spiritual meditation - higher than singing hymns or reciting holy books. The creation of Pakistan dealt a devastating blow to the Sewa Panthis and they never got truly transplanted in the new 'East' Punjab.

The organic relationship between philosophies and land, indeed, requires native soil for ideas to bloom. Other such

sects and deras (groups) that made up the composite Sikh faith of the 19th and early 20th centuries included Namdharis, Nirankaris, Radha Soamis, Nirmaley, and Sidhs - all were pushed to the margins, or even out of Sikhism, after the partition.

The tragedy of the division of Punjab is best captured in a moving poem by the first prominent woman Sikh/Punjabi poet, novelist, and essayist Amrita Pritam, '*Ujj akhaan Waris Shah noo*' (An Ode to Waris Shah), which she is said to have written while escaping in a train with her family from Pakistan to India.

Amrita Pritam wrote:

*Ujj aakhan waris shah nuun, kithon kabraan
vichchon bol,*

*tay ujj kitab-e ishq daa kooi aglaa varkaa phol
ik roii sii dhii punjaab dii, tuun likh likh maare
vaen, ujj lakhaan dhiiaan rondian, tainun
warisshah nun kahen*

*uth dardmadaan diaa dardiaa, uth takk apnaa
Punjab aaj bele lashaan bichhiaan te lahu dii
bharii Chenab*

"Today, I beckon you Waris Shah, speak from inside your grave. And to your book of love, add the next page. Once when a single daughter of Punjab wept, you wrote a wailing saga. Today, a million daughters cry to you, Waris Shah. Rise, O friend of the grieving; rise and see your own Punjab, today fields lined with corpses, and the Chenab flowing with blood".

As I celebrate the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak I read some profound words of wisdom he left for his Muslim friends. The Guru said:

*Make mercy your Mosque,
Faith your Prayer Mat,
What is just and lawful your Qu'ran,
Modesty your Circumcision,
And civility your fast.
So shall you be a Muslim.
Make right conduct your Ka'aba,
Truth your Pir, and
Good deeds your Kalma and prayers.*

REMEMBER WHOM YOU ARE



Inderpreet Singh, Chair of SikhRI Board, leads the workshop for older teens.

An Educational Initiative

On 24th December 2011, the largest classroom in the oldest gurdwara in New York echoed with the sounds of excited children and the voices of instructors telling the story of the *Sahibzade*. Many of the young people who attended the seminars led by the Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI) had driven with their parents from as far as fifty miles that Saturday to hear the story of the courage and determination of the *Sahibzade* that makes their story timeless and relevant. Some of the older children shared their own stories, tapping into their own sources of courage to hold true to their identity and maintain deep pride in their traditions today. Over a pizza *langar* which was prepared on site, everyone came together to enjoy the meal and to share their new knowledge and excitement with each other over their slices.

All in all, about 600 people representing 30 gurdwaras from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut came to Richmond Hill, NY, for a series of workshops and presentations and a fundraiser for SikhRI. Gurduara Sikh Cultural Society management

and SikhRI staff were full of gratitude for the enthusiastic turn out and the vast array of sangats in attendance. Dastaars of all styles, families, friends, Sikhs from all walks of life gathered together over langar and Gurbani to discuss, in English and Panjabi, their hopes and goals for the progressive future their community, their children's future, and the future

ਹਮ ਜਾਨ ਦੇ ਕੇ ਔਰੋਂ ਕੀ ਜਾਨੋਂ ਬਚਾ ਚਲੇ।

ਸਿਖੀ ਕੀ ਨੀਵ ਹਮ ਹੈ ਸਰੋਂ ਪਰ ਉਠਾ ਚਲੇ।

ਗੁਰਿਆਈ ਕਾ ਹੈ ਕਿੱਸਾ ਜਗ ਮੈਂ ਬਨਾ ਚਲੇ।

ਸਿੰਘੋਂ ਕੀ ਸਲਤਨਤ ਕਾ ਹੈ ਪੋਦ: ਲਗਾ ਚਲੇ।

ਗੱਦੀ ਸੇ ਤਾਜੋਂ-ਤਖਤ ਬਸ ਅਬ ਕੋਮ ਪਾਏਗੀ।

ਦੁਨੀਆ ਸੇ ਜ਼ਾਲਿਮੋਂ ਕੇ ਨਿਸਾਂ ਤਕ ਮਿਟਾਏਗੀ

- ਜੋਗੀ ਅੱਲਾ ਯਾਰ ਖਾਨ



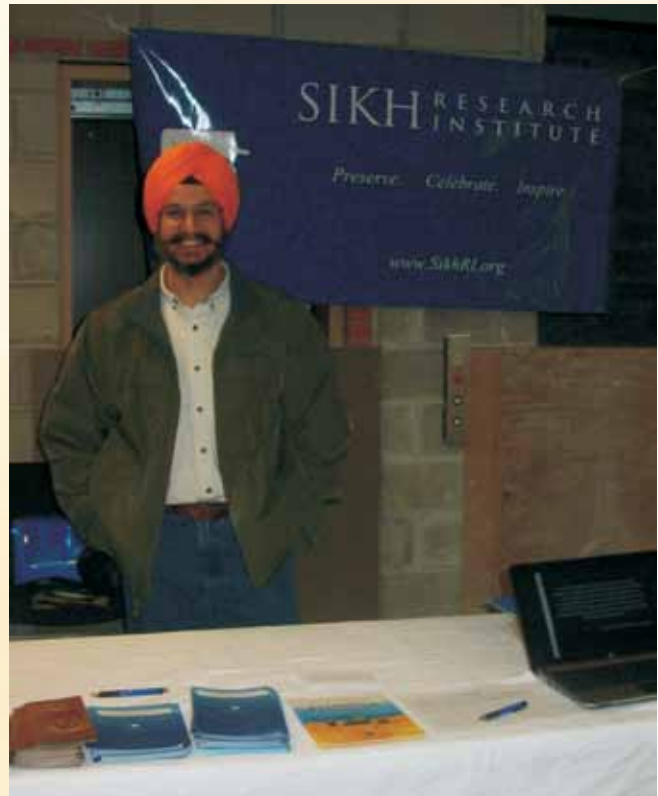
Inni Kaur, member of SikhRI's Board, asks the young people to help tell the story of the Sahibzade's supreme courage.

of Sikh communities around the world. President of the Sikh Cultural Society, Gurdev Singh Kang, said that it was sentiment of the community that these events needed to come back to the Tri State areas with increasing regularity. "People really appreciated what happened in the seminar," he said. "Discussions on these topics create an environment where attendees return to their communities with increased confidence in their heritage and are able to move away from their complexes."

The day began with workshops for the children, some as young as five, excited to be starting primary school soon, while others were in their early 20s and already at University.

Each of the seminars explored the story of the sacrifice of the *Sahibzade* for the *Panth*. The young people were encouraged to see the lives of Guru Gobind Singh ji's children as more than history, but as a call to action for Sikhs everywhere today to model themselves after that supreme courage and conviction.

Inni Kaur, a member of SikhRI's Board, and Amrit (Minti) Kaur lead the sessions for the younger children, providing outlines of the story, but asking the children to contribute their own lines as they



Mandhir Singh, member of SikhRI's Board, greets those arriving for the day's events.



Hundreds from the Tri State Area of New York gathered together for the day's event.

remembered their history. Gathered around the instructors, the little ones grew quiet as Inni and Minti helped them to recall the way the *Sahibzade* had refused to bow to the Mughal ruler when they were forced to meet him. By entering through a window instead of a tiny door, the *Sahibzade* came in feet first instead of headfirst, and thus did not corrupt or compromise their Sikh values by bowing to him.

Gathered around the children was a ring of mothers and grandmothers who were sitting quietly and listening to the story as though it were the first time they had heard it. There was none

of the usual noisy chattering among mothers in the background, just many pairs of eyes and an occasional eager contribution as the presenters unveiled that wonderful story of courage and sacrifice of the Guru's children on that day. When Inni and Minti imparted to their audience the power of the words the grandmother imparted to the *Sahibzade* "Remember Who You Are", there was rapt attention. Many mothers and grandmothers of the children in the audience came up later to express their appreciation for the manner in which the timeless message had been woven into the history lesson.

Following this, the children who had sat so quietly and listened so carefully, were able to release their creativity by working on a beautiful craft project which explored the attributes of *Wahe Guru* which are contained in the *Mool Mantar*. While the children were cutting and gluing, Inni and Minti helped them to consider the way that these attributes



Harinder Singh, Chief Programming Officer at SikhRI, spoke on the past, present, and future goals for Sikh communities around the world.



Gurdwara committee members were very pleased at the turnout, which represented members of more than 30 gurdwaras in the area.

connected to the *Sahibzade*, especially the quality of “timelessness beyond death.” The craft in many ways was a simple project. Yet, the excitement and careful attention that the children brought to their parts of the construction seemed to impart special beauty to the finished project.

In the adjacent room, Inderpreet Singh, Chair of the SikhRI’s Board, conducted a seminar for the older children. He initiated a group discussion among the children, teens and young adults about the challenges many of them face today in the form of bullying—verbal and physical—and also peer pressure. They broke into smaller groups and shared their own stories with each other. After

the participants had spent time with these smaller groups they came back as a single group where they went over a quick historical timeline beginning with the emergence of Guru Nanak’s revolution and culminating with story of the *Sahibzade*. As the participants were helping to put together the history, Inderpreet asked them to think about how challenges of the *Sahibzade* and their courage in facing up to them, were relatable to the situations of bullying and peer pressure that the teens that day had just shared.

The session was closed with a reading and short translation of the famous poem by Jogi Allah Yar Khan on the significance of martyrdom of the *Sahibzade*.

Afterwards, Inderpreet Singh said that he was especially impressed with the attention and enthusiasm that the participants had for the topic, even when it came to sharing their frustrating or painful experiences. “It seemed that this was really something that these teens wanted to talk about, and it



Children crafted this beautiful collage, as part of their workshop listing all the traits Sikhs should seek to embody.

reinforced my feelings that, in facing the challenge of prejudice and bullying, all major Sikh organisations like SikhRI, the Sikh Coalition, SALDEF and United Sikhs for example, have a very important role to play in the community uplift."

Participants who came that day also attended a fundraising session which was facilitated by Harminder Singh Jassal, member of SikhRI's Board. He provided an overview of SikhRI's history as an organisation and the vision that the non-profit has for projects and events in the coming year. No one organisation can have all the answers, but he wanted to share with listeners that "SikhRI is excited and energised to bring their work to as many communities as possible and that the support of educational programming and resources is a step in the right direction."

At close of the day's events, Harinder Singh, SikhRI's Chief Programming Officer, presented the topic *Sikhi Vision: 2020*. The talk used the metaphor of vision both as a tool of hindsight and forward thinking, to explore what Sikh communities all over the world could achieve by the year 2020, "with concerted passion, cooperation and planning." His elegantly designed slideshow presented an overview of Sikhi in the world as it stands currently, with maps of diasporic communities, a focus on status of the Panjab today—socially and economically—and a brief

discussion on the role of governmental channels and state involvement in changing communities.

Harinder Singh concluded by offering his take on the most effective strategies for progress and unity among Sikhs everywhere and asked people there to feel inspired to change themselves and their communities through cooperation and dialogue in the Panth. This idea especially caught fire during the Question and Answer Session when it was clear that people were energised about the impact they could make and wanted to hear more from others in the room. In many ways, the fact that so many sangats come together and get passionate about working together in the future, was the most important first step that could be taken on this journey.

"Having Gurdwaras collectively organise and fund an educational initiative is a first major step in reviving Sikhi education. While we sort out the dysfunction in management in our gurdwaras and organisations, we must remain focused on the mission of Sikhi and preparing its next flag-bearers with gurmat-based values," said Harinder Singh. "SikhRI looks forward to developing Gurdwara-based partnerships in the coming year to commemorate 100 years of the first US Gurdwara and 25 years of the New York Day Sikh Parade."

Inni Kaur



Dastaars in Manhattan, at the New York Day Sikh Parade

BEYOND SYMBOLS

GIFTS OF ETERNITY

We reproduce this remarkable exchange of letters between a son with traumas in his mind and his father, who counseled him on faith beyond rituals and symbols.

This first appeared in print over four decades back and is true for eternity.

The earth on that day was parched and brown, the roads were unusually deserted of the traffic and even the construction workers, otherwise so busy and undaunted by the heat, were looking for a shade to rest in. It was a very hot and humid day. In the well manicured lawns of an elitist college in the Delhi University, (St. Stephens') many students were stretched out on the grass or sitting on the worn out wooden benches, under a cluster of Banyan trees. They were taking cold drinks and gasping for fresh air. The clouds were grey, there was not even a whisper among the tired trees, and the earth itself seemed to have failed in its rotation. You could touch the heat, feel it, smell it and it seemed to trap you.

To fight the heat, and the sweat, everyone in the college lawns was busy talking, except for Jaskirat Singh who was sitting all alone, contemplating under the thatched roof of the motorbike shed. He was tall, well built, sharp featured and looked very distinctive with his bright red turban, bearded chin and a jet black cavalier moustache. One could hardly imagine, what his imported jeans must have looked like when

he first wore them two years back because now they were held together by a series of patches of various dimensions ranging from a triangle to a hexagon.

Jaskirat was from a fairly affluent family of Punjab and had been residing in a hostel for the last eleven years, going home only for the summer and winter vacations. From his school days he had been very interested in his studies and was always among the first three in his class. A voracious reader, an excellent sportsman, the most sought after orator in his college, a member of the college students' union, he always strived for perfection in whatever he tried. But now in his final year of M.A., though still quite young, he felt he had lost the spark of life. He carried on his work almost mechanically, going through the monotonous routine with boredom, there was no longer any zest in what he did and the drive, which had once felt, was completely gone. He was confused, lonely and almost angry with himself.

His friends did not consider him to be enough 'Hep' (a slang word often used by students for one who is completely westernised in his manners,

values of life and is well-experienced in psyche-delic experiences, in short a product of the Hi-Fi culture), and this was certainly a drawback as, it was the degree of hepness which an individual could imbibe, however artificial the attempt or the result might be, which provided the key to the all-night parties and was a measure of the upward social mobility among the student community.

Jaskirat's flowing beard, his untrimmed moustache and his refusal to join friends in drinking bouts and smoking joints of Marijuana earned him the nickname of 'Sant Maharaj ji' But his ostracisation in the campus did not end here, the pressures were increasing every day. Amrita Kaur popularly known as 'Miss I.Q.', a classmate of Jaskirat and a good friend of his, was unwilling to accept his invitation for a party, because he insisted on carrying a *Kirpan* with him to the party, which for her was sign of cultural shallowness and crudeness of the mind. Such behaviour for her was certainly an obstacle in her endeavour to be one with the "In-Crowd". She was in no mood for a compromise this time and was determined to put him in a tight spot. In her intellectual anger she tersely told him, "You claim to be progressive in your views, you talk of the natural law of development to higher forms of existence, but still you carry a sword like a feudal hero, who is not ready to give up his obsolete armour. If it is for self-defence and honour, which you are so fond of claiming, in that case an ack-ack gun would be anytime more efficient to do the job. Live in the present, do not be a priest of the past". A note slipped by her in Jaskirat's room in the hostel offered him a job of "Moral Science teacher in a Convent School."

The harder that Jaskirat tried to untangle his problems, the more he was convinced of the futility of his attempts. Once he had been proud in his capacity of employing logic and reason to unravel the mysteries of life, now even this powerful and convincing pair, betrayed him. Unable to carry on with the ever-increasing pressure of his tightrope waling, he decided to write to his father who had always been keen to see his son happy, at peace with himself and above all, a *Guru Ka Sikh*. Jaskirat was fortunate to have as his father a famous poet – who had been honoured with several coveted awards both within and outside India. During the past thirty years, he had steadily become known through his

many books as one of the most stimulating and unconventional poets of our time. He had been a guest lecturer at Cambridge, Harvard and Michigan and had spoken before various international associations and institutions.

The correspondence between the father and son had always been a great source of inspiration, courage and confidence for Jaskirat and he always used to read aloud, to his friends, the letters from his father. When his books, friends and teachers failed him, he invariably turned to his father. This had been a regular feature with him since he was a six and had learnt to write English. When he was seven years old, he had wanted to know, how he could run faster, at twelve he wanted to know, how he could develop a sharper memory and now at twenty-one he wanted to know why he should be duty bound to keep long hair and carry a sword. It was this dilemma which seemed to be eating him up and leaving him in a paralysed state. The cure he knew, if there was one, was only available with his father, to whom he must write about his ailment. In writing to his father he felt like a rebel, an insult to his family and a traitor to his community. But the jigsaw puzzle had to be solved whose pieces he himself was in no position to put together.

So Jaskirat Singh wrote to his father

Sat Sri Akal. It is with extreme pain, conflict and misery that I am writing to you. I feel utterly empty, almost naked, my heart weary, dull and isolated. This could have been another one of those nice and happy letters, which we both have been writing to each other, all these years. But all those nice things seem to be happening no more. Happiness which completely ravished my heart once has gone and now I have only the empty memory of it. I seem to have lost the intimate contact with life. I must apologise, for suddenly bursting forth like this and for not having written about my problems, all these months. But till about a week back I was confident of finding a solution to my questions. It was only when the books which I so patiently read, all those self-proclaimed gurus I went to see, and hear, and my own experience and reasoning failed me, that I resolved to write to you, Dad, my inability to accept the 5 K's, which all my life till now, seemed to be so crucial for me in my effort to be a God-fearing man, a religious man, dutiful son and above all *Guru Ka Sikh*.

I have no doubt and question about the efficacy of these symbols three centuries ago when they were essential in times of war to maintain the identity of Sikhs are give them a common denominator of unity and togetherness. It was a good strategy for fighting against an enemy bent on destroying the very seeds of Sikhism. But for the present these symbols have no justification, no meaning or any convincing explanation. Not only has it become difficult for me to explain the relevance of a *kirpan* or a *kara*, but also for those who sermonise in the gurdwaras or those who so zealously write in the religious magazines. Sardar Gajpartap Singh wrote a five page article on the utility of the 5K's, but when I met him at the club last month, he was definitely not carrying a *kirpan*. He is no exception in these double standards.

It is not me alone who has felt this lacuna, but most Sikh boys in my college (Rajbir, Suchet, Mandeep) are also unable to accept these symbols and their validity for everyday life. They can establish no coherent connection between a *kirpan* and the human effort for communion with God. In no way can I convince them that these symbols make me more of a Sikh than them. They are as much recognised as Sikhs as I am. I fact more so because they are seen in tune with the modern times and I so much of a romantic, fatalistic idiot who sees in the idealistic past and in a set of 5 symbols a stepping stone for my liberation in future. The belief in God, the need for my liberation in future. The belief in God, the need for a deeper consciousness, the harm in smoking, the ill effects of drinking, the daily reading of the Japji – all these I have no objections to and fully agree with, but the 5 symbols do not fit into any logical framework. A happy and contented life-5 symbols seems to be such an absurd and illogical equation.

Dad, you teach to a certain extent because you are getting paid for it, I go to the university because I expect my education to provide me with a suitable career and it is the same story with everyone else—all of us are engaged in something which is significant, useful and meaningful to us. But these symbols, seem to have no practical utility – spiritual, physical or monetary. They have become like the dead skin which must be removed. That which cannot be made use of and understood, has no life in itself, it is superfluous and dead. Our life is full of unhappiness, with few moments of peace and joy, so anything that promises us a haven we readily subscribe to it. Some see the futility of the daily existence and consequently take

recourse to religion, which turns out to be an effort to find hope and security in dogmas, in superstitions and in ritualistic symbols. As beliefs shape experience, these symbols become an inescapable reality. Once the mind has experienced the pleasure which identification through these symbols brings, the mind is firmly entrenched in this deceptive pleasure and nothing can shake it, the end result is that we are slaves of this false identification. Resistance against this identification breeds fear. A fear which is the very antithesis of creativity and an integrated life. It is fear, conscious or unconscious, that makes us respect these symbols. We are never educated or helped to adhere to the given rules. The religious magazines inform us what is to be done, the priests tell us what is life and our inward fear compels us to obey, because if we do not confirm we shall be confused, we shall feel lonely and lost.

So we take to these symbols because we are very scared without them. We do not want to question them because that would not be honourable. And the older generation does not want us to inquire : they do not have the courage to face our questions. They are too busy with their own idiosyncracies, with their do's and don'ts of bourgeois morality and respectability. The acceptance of these symbols with them has become the means for gaining status in society. The end result is that we are no different from a monkey who is imitating all the time. An imitation which springs out of our effort to be safe, to be enclosed and never be confronted with unhappiness. Not to imitate but to search for yourself—that is living, is it not? We are told that freedom to search comes only when we are old with experience but Dad, there must be freedom to live while we are young, freedom to grasp our own instincts and act accordingly. Why can't I free myself from this structure of imitation? It is constantly building up fear in me and this fear is further strengthening this structure. To be my ownself, I must break these imposed symbols.

Putting on my 5 symbols – is that religion for you? These symbols may give me a certain pleasure; identification; but that is not religion. Accepting certain rituals, dogmas and symbols—has all this got any link with religion? My belief in God is not bound to my hair. These symbols are not religion, they are only the result of our being forced to conform to war conditions, for the selfish interests of the present society. Is not religion something much purer and

deeper than these symbols? We may put on an outer garment, but the inner essence of what we are is always the same. We must learn to live without these symbols and face reality. These signs have to be discarded and life has to be seen as it is.

So far I have merely written of what my own feelings were on these symbols, but even those who emphasise on the absolute necessity of these symbols for my claim to be a Sikh have no consensus or a profound understanding of these symbols. They have nothing concrete to offer and one writer is as apart from the other in his explanation for these symbols, as two political opponents. Every Baisakhi, a new addition is made to the already innumerable explanations. Where could a young Sikh boy or girl anchor his or her boat? They are left to their own training for compass-reading to find the correct bearings and directions. In such circumstances it is not surprising that a wrong reading is made of the latitudes and longitudes and very soon the young one finds himself sinking deeper and deeper into this bog of multiple explanations. The best way out for him becomes to be rid of these explanations altogether and of what they seek to explain.

While trying to find a logical explanation for these symbols, I came across no shortage of methodological approaches, which range from efforts made to demonstrate the significance of the 5K's, by drawing parallels with other religions and the lives of the great men of these religions, to the sociological method which seeks, "to relate the rite and the social occasion of its performance, to the total social system of the group or category of the persons who recognise the obligation, to perform it." Incidentally the basis of acceptance of any explanation, in academic circle is the quantity of jargon used by a scholar, instead of qualitative analysis. One sociologist claims that this approach is more suitable because he is adhering to explicitly formulated rules of method and the others are not probing in the right direction because they draw easy inferences from deductive reasoning and because they neglect the significant relations of opposition.

We are told that cultural, military, psychological social, political, economic, spiritual, physical and sexual factors were the main considerations, which made Guru Gobind Singh endow the Sikhs with 5 K's. If I accept one set of these explanations, the next set contradicts the former. My despair with these

historical constructs is not isolated, it has become a common feature with thousands of Sikhs and I don't have to write the solution which they find for this despair. The picture can very well be illustrated if we take up these symbols one by one and look at what significance is attached to them :

The Kesh (Hair)

The explanation and the significance attached to them in most contemporary works starts from the instructive Biblical story of Samson and Delilah, as told in the *Old Testaments*, which is made as a confirmation of the virtue of remaining unshorn. Many similar examples are also cited from classical Hinduism. Manu, the Hindu law giver, lays down, "Even should a man be in wrath let him never seize another by the hair, when a Brahmin commits an offence for which the members of other castes are liable to death, let his hair be shaven off as sufficient expiation." The keeping of hair is regarded as an indicator of living in accordance with the way of nature. The shaving of the hair it is maintained is an interference with the natural law of the growth of hair. A latest book published on Sikhism by a premier university of Punjab, emphasises that the keeping of the hair was part of the Sikh ritual which was life affirming, an indicator of the Sikh's commitment to a social worldly life in contrast with the Hindu sanyasis and jogis who cut their hair, because they professed to the creed : "I am no one's and no one is mine". The Sikhs in contrast were to be a part of the world and to affirm this worldly existence, they were instructed to keep long hair while the sanaysis shaved their head, beard and moustache, before entering the new ascetic phase of their life. The cutting of the hair is thus seen as a social death. The Sikh community on the other hand was an affirmation of the social world "As the battle ground of freedom". The meaning of being unshorn, therefore, signifies according to this book. "The permanent renunciation or renunciation".

Various articles emphasise on hair being a living organ of the body and to cut them is seen as depriving the body of an essential source of vitality. The hair seen as a contract point with the sun, the basic source of universal energy. One author cites the authority of C.G. Jung and claims that the Guru Sahib was great psycho-analyst and he asked the Sikhs to keep hair so as to confirm the instinct of masculinity, from which man at time deviates. To convince the youth, some influential speakers stress on the scientific validity of

hair, but without any empirical data to substantiate their statements. Others see the hair as a symbol of virility, honour, power, aggression and so on.

The Kanga (Comb)

The *Kanga* is explained, in utilitarian terms, as a means to keep hair neat and clean. It is also seen as a symbol of the discipline of mind. In a flight of imagination, one author writes in a magazine published from Calcutta, that by wearing the comb, the Sikh should be reminded to keep his mind under control, his thoughts should not be allowed to wander aimlessly, his mind should be kept orderly, methodological and well disciplined. The *Kanga* is seen as a fetter to excessive anger or excessive attachment. (It is not explained how?) Most writers dismiss its significance in one line and see it as a twin of the long hair.

The Kachha (Underpant)

The case of *Kachha* is even more interesting. An eminent writer writes in a book sponsored by the Government of India, that the *Kachha* is for a smart wear as against the loose unstitched dhoti worn earlier. Strangely, reading the mind of Guru Sahib, It is claimed that the loose dhoti represented to the Guruji a loose mentality. By providing the Sikhs with

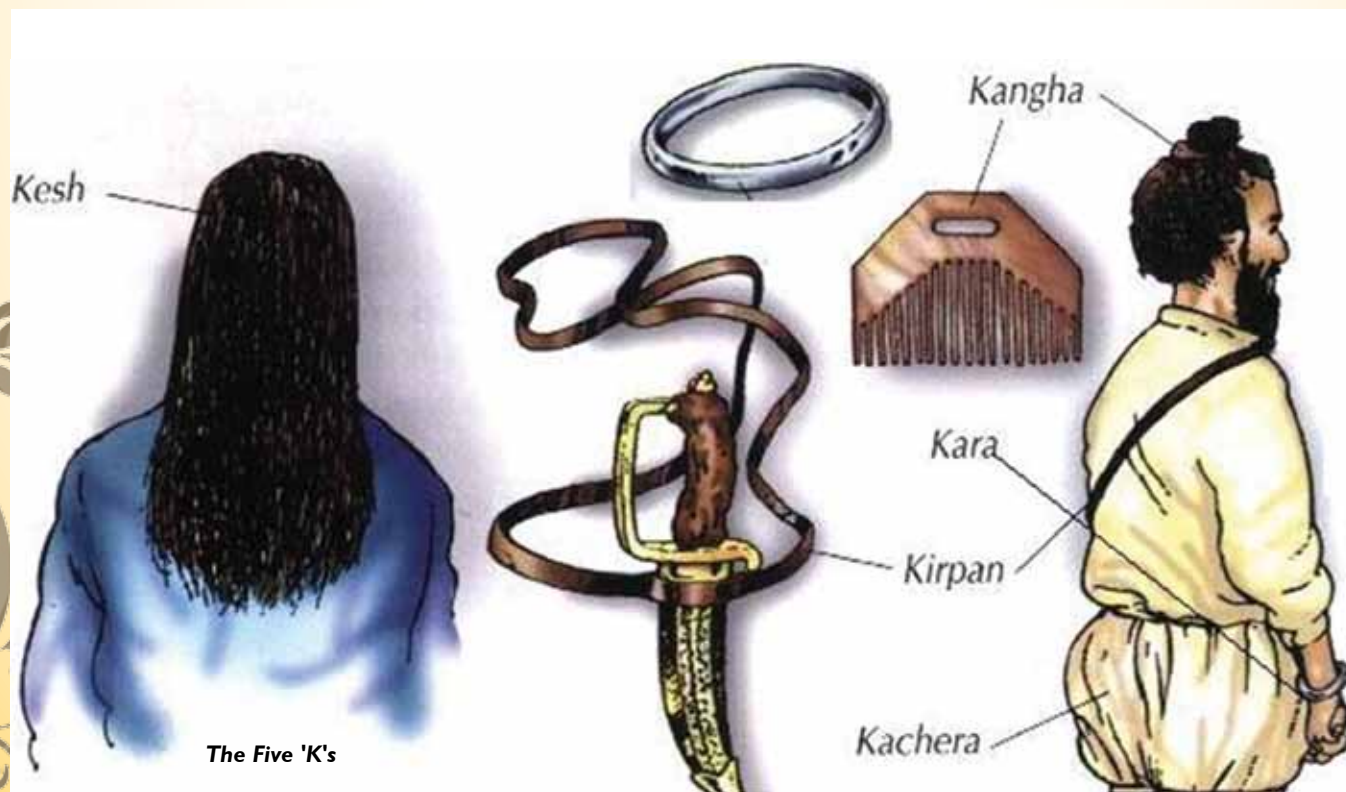
the shorts it was intended to symbolise the spiritual and mental breakaway from traditional dress and thought. The mind was to be freed from the bonds of superstitions and the people were thus to be released from immature and effeminate submissiveness. Hence the symbols of the *Kachha* were same for the Sikh women; they were also intended to develop the same qualities as a Sikh man. The *Kachha* is also seen as a symbol of control over excessive sexual indulgence.

The Kirpan (Sword)

The *Kirpan* is made out to be a symbol of royal authority and of freedom from oppression and servility. Its obvious meaning is stated to be that of self-defence and the individual freedom and self respect, embodied in the right to bear arms. The sword, it is said, cuts at the root of evil and worldly attachment and destroys them utterly. The primary significance is said to be that of self-defence, with a word of caution that it is not an instrument of aggrandisement but self protection.

The Kara (Iron bangle)

A Sikh journalist, in his account of the Sikhs, writes that the *Kara* was a symbol of humility as well as a charm worn before going to the war. On the other



hand a senior Sikh historian feels that the *Kara* denotes the universality of the new religion. In very appealing reasoning it is also argued that the complete unbroken circle symbolises the Buddhist wheel of life. The spiritual reality of life exists continually, free of both time and space and the *Kara* is an appropriate symbol of such eternal existence. The human soul, it is instructed, must become as strong as steel used in the *Kara* which has been tempered in the furnace. The other day a Bhai in the gurudwara insisted that the genius of Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji was reflected in his providing us with a steel *kara*, which can protect us from lightning. A student speaking on the relevance of the 5 K's felt that the *kara* was to protect the arms in the battlefield from sword cuts. It was an excellent shield for the arm, according to him.

The explanations for K's are a paradise of pick and choose. One may choose the one which fancies an individual the most, very much like a nice trouser in a show window. It is not strange if some think, that the choice is still not wide enough to appeal to their sense. So they come out with the choice of discarding these symbols. If I take the view that the *kirpan* is for self-defence, can I discard it, if I have twenty bodyguards with all the latest equipment for protecting my life? Again if an individual feels that if the *kirpan* is for self defence, as is often told to him by the historians, in that case he can hypothetically argue that he should be allowed to do away with it, because he feels that the state has made adequate arrangements for his protection.

Father, I am utterly incapable of understanding the value, the justification and the imposition of these symbols. I am deeply hurt but am unable to find any medicine for my wounds. The cures which have been suggested have further aggravated my malady. The numerous explanations given for these symbols seem to be like so many needles pricked into my body. The books, the Bhais, the glossy magazine, the well meaning speakers, have all failed me and I turn to you not only because you are my father but also because of your deep commitment, understanding and love for the Sikh way of life.

I understand, it is going to be a long, weary and difficult way to a deeper understanding of these symbols, but I am prepared to jump into the arena and take the challenge and I give you my word that in case you can show me the way and the significance of these

symbols, I will not hesitate for a moment to go to Sri Anandpur Sahib and be an *Amrit-dhari* Sikh.

The Father writes to his Son

Sat Sri Akal. I must thank you for the deep confidence and the love you have for me. It has always been a joy to read through your letters as they manifest the sensitivity of a seeker of truth. I am very happy that you had the courage and conviction to express so openly the things that seem to have been distressing your heart. I somehow felt all this brewing up in you, for the last two years, but had never allowed myself to face it directly, till you wrote the present letter. It is a pleasure to hear it all, so plainly stated, and I hope, I shall understand and calm your mental anguish.

When you leave the university (Cornell in New York, the USA) and face the world it seems to me that what is crucial in life is not to succumb, not to bow your head to various pressures, but to know and feel them as they are, in a gentle spirit with a great inward strength, so that these pressures will not create conflict in your life. You may question what is given to you or what many of your age assert is being forced on you—but this also means that you must question yourself. You must also question, what you call the significance, the need, the value of your own life. It is only with such an integrated total approach, that you will understand not only the *kirpan*, the *kara*, the *kanga*, the *kes* and the *kachha*, but also appreciate the agonies, the joys, the pain, the pleasure, the vanities and hope of living.

In your letter, the one word which was overpowered you, the one emotion which drives you on, is *significance*. Over and over again, you want to know what is the *significance* of the 5 K's? The word certainly is not out of place in our materialistic and individualistic existence. In our efforts to be practical individuals, we want to imbibe only what is of utility and significance, the rest we want to discard. The search for significance in everything is a curse of the present century. It is a form of self-enclosure, self-killing and therefore it breeds the fear of living. The whole world, all your friends, your relations, everyone is struggling for significant and useful things. But what might be significant for you might not be so for your friends.

The first step in your questioning of the 5 K's should be to be free of this yoke of significance. It is this illusionary search for significance, which has

made many young ones and their seniors, discard their *kesh*, because they see no value in them. It is a pity that we want to reduce Sahib Guru Gobind Singhji to our own mundane level of thinking and view all his actions in light of practical animal utility. If he was in search of merely objects of practical utility, he could have made a truce with Aurangzeb, when the latter made the offer. Shivaji did so at one stage, because his search was different, his life was different. If the rider of the dark blue steed wanted the 5K's to be reflections of practical use values, he could have very well added not only more weapons, but instead of a sword, he would have given us a gun, as guns did exist at that time. A gun would have been more efficient and better suited for self-defence and for war too. But he was not inspired out of a hunt for weapons of self-defence or practical value, as we would make it out, reflecting our own thinking backwards in History. The Guru Sahib was not a novice in the ways of arms. If he only wanted his Sikhs to be armed for war, through these 5Ks he would have rather equipped them the way he did Banda Bahadur at Nanded, when he gave him 5 arrows and a bow. The sword, anyway, in the battlefield would have been useless without a shield.

The *kanga*, the *kesh*, the *kara*, the *kirpan*, the *kachha*, were all delicate gifts of love and beauty to the Khalsa from a man who desired nothing for himself, but everything for the Khalsa. These gifts were from a Guru who grabbed not the gifts of his disciples but instead he totally surrendered everything for the cause and love of the Khalsa. A way of total love which has to be unique for the Khalsa: "*jau tau prem khelan ka cao sia dhari tali gali meri ao.*" (Guru Nanak Dev Ji). "If thou art zealous of playing the game of love, then enter upon my path with thy head on thy palm." It was out of such love that these gifts were presented to the Khalsa and not out of any attempts to carve out soldiers. When there is total love there is action, there is sacrifice, is there not? The love of the Guru for the Khalsa was not the result of mental vibrations, and there was in his life no gap between love and action, as there is between our thinking and action. It is only we who want to be one sided in our love and make claims of loving the Guru in our ideals, in our heart and consequently we reason out that we don't have to express our love for Him in action, in the *kesh*. But can there be love without total commitment and action? No. The total love of Kalgidhar Guru Gobind

Singh Ji for the Khalsa becomes apparent in the book titled the *Sarbloh*, where He becomes one with the Khalsa and portrays the Khalsa as his highest love:

*Khalsa is the breath of my body,
Khalsa is the very soul of my life,
Khalsa is my real pride and glory,
Khalsa is my own personal self,
Khalsa is my life's sustainer,
Khalsa is my body and breath.
Khalsa is my creed and karma.
Khalsa is my conscience keeper,
Khalsa is my perfect satguru,
Khalsa is my brave friend,
Khalsa gives me intellect and wisdom,
Khalsa is my object of meditation.*

The mind that loves the Sikh way of life is a religious mind because it is in the movement of living, of action, of truth, of God and it is only such a mind that can know what is the beauty of the gifts the Guru gave to us. The 5 ornaments that we wear are the gifts from a Guru, whose two younger sons, seven and nine years old faced death in Sirhind in a manner which is unequalled in the annals of human history. These two innocent children were walled alive because they refused to bow before the sword of hatred. The Guru's mother expired at Sirhind out of shock, over the death of the small children. The two elder sons of the Guru died fighting in action for us. Guru Sahib, himself fell as victim to the dagger of two cowardly Pathans at Nanded in Deccan, who stabbed him in the back.

Could such a man whose whole family was destroyed for the total love of the Khalsa, be looking for practical utilities of an animal existence? He was not the person to endow us with gifts of mere practical value, but gifts of love, which knew no questioning, no bartering, no deals and no betraying. His was a total sacrifice and a total love, in both thought and action, for the happiness of the Khalsa and these gifts had their pangs of birth in a sea of human blood. It was not out of any practical benefit that the evil genius of the Mughal government announced awards for the hair of the Sikhs. It was because they knew that without these gifts, without these embellishments of the Guru's love the Khalsa would disintegrate.

All the children of the Khalsa are to always wear a sword. In no way, their own private possession or property. The *Kirpan* is a gift from Guru Gobind Singh ji, the Khalsa. It is not to be judged and measured as a

weapon of war or peace, it is a gift activated by the love of the Guru. Even a whole army of bodyguards or the best police state in the world cannot make it redundant. It shall always remain attached to me, the bodyguards cannot make it obsolescent. The sword is the lover wherein the Guru resides. A Guru who in his love saw no difference between human beings and fused all of us in one creed of devotion, service and sacrifice in an age when common men were hanged for even drawing water from the same well as that of the higher castes. The lower castes were beaten to death if they as much as touched the kitchen utensils of a Brahmin.

A *kalal*—wine distiller—once came for the Guru's darshan and stood at a distance, for the caste of the *kalals* was considered low in the social hierarchy.

When Guru Gobind Singhji saw him He said, "Come in and sit with all of us in the tent." The man quivered, hesitated and said. "How can I, the lowliest of the low, sit in the assembly of the Gods? Guruji, I am a *kalal* whose mere sight pollutes." On hearing this, Guru Sahib instructed his musicians and bards to welcome the man with music and songs and coming down from his couch to bless him, he said, "You are not a *kalal*, but a Guru-ka-Lal" (a ruby of the Guru). Who has such love for us? The sword which we have, is an ornament for all of us, the rich and the poor, you, me have, is an ornament for all of us, the rich and the poor, you, me and entire humanity. To wear a sword which was once a privilege of the few high born, under the dictates of the Mughal aristocracy, with the Guru's blessings became a gift which anyone could carry, without fear of being persecuted, because now it was in love from the Guru to the Khasa., "*dan dio iniko bhalo avranko dan no lagat niko.*" "To bestow gifts on them alone is worthy, to make gifts to others is not kind".

When his hands stroked our hair, washed them, combed them, dressed them, knotted them, and placed in them the invaluable *Kanga*, how can we, his sons and daughters, bear our hair to be cut? The Guru Sahib saturated our hair with *Amrita*. He left the imprint of his blessings and joy in our hair with *Amrita*. He left the imprint of his blessings and joy in our hair. Our hair are like the untouched pearls in the deep oceans not yet disfigured by the fortune hunters. You say it is inconvenient, frustrating, impractical to grow our hair long. But more frustrating is an existence of no inspiration, no effort. Our superficial

hollow life is no way less discouraging. The day to day fragmentary living, the everyday struggle for good, the daily pain, suffering, distress, torments and headaches are in no way less discomforting. But inspite of all this, do we cease to exist? No, on the contrary we strive all the more and struggle for pleasure, gratification, comforts, and joy. If we can reconcile ourselves to such an empty living, can we not grow our hair long which is so inspiring, creative, fulfilling and above all a gift from our Guru, a gift whose rejection would be a rejection of our existence, the negation of the very purpose of our life?

In the West, children love so much the gifts given them on Christmas by the mythical Santa Claus, they hungrily search their stockings for the gifts placed in them by their parents and after receiving their gifts feel so elated. And are we so ungrateful, that we fight, throw away, kick at the gifts of our living father, who kept nothing for the future of his House and gifted to us everything he possessed—physical, spiritual and material.

The elegant *kachha* we wear everyday is the very same as the one worn by Guruji himself, by his disciples and by his lovers. Clad in it, we are one with him. The exotic wooden comb he tucked in our hair, also combed, danced and swung in his hair. The *kanga*, is the new born babe, playing in the lap of the loving mother, whom we so brutally want to strangle. It was these very same presents for which tens and thousands of my brothers laid down their lives. Have you watched the tears in the eyes of a sheep when she is being sheared? And many of us are happy without our hair—we, for sure, have travelled a long way from the animals !

The *kara* has to be received by us as a present from our Guru, which is not comparable to our intelligence, our achievements. It comes to us as a manifestation of His love and benediction. It is strange behavior indeed that we constantly argue about it. He put on our wrists the *kara*. From that day it was forever ours, no one could separate it from a Sikh. And we still advance reasons for it. He loved me. He made me His own. He elevated me from the darkness of ignorance to light of spiritual consciousness. Can I not even make His gifts my own ? We, his children, wear these gifts, carved out of infinite love. One with these gifts, we blossom, separated from them we wither. The decay in the Khalsa is apparent.

Each one of us wears the hair and beard of Guru Gobind Singhji, exactly as he wore them. We are created in his majestic image.

Jab lag rahe khalsa naira. Tab lag tej dio mai sara, jab eh gahain bipran ki riti, main a karo in ki partit. "So long as the Khalsa retains its identity, I will bestow on them full glory; but the moment they adopt Brahmanical ways, I will not protect them". Our significance is in Him, and not anywhere without Him and His gifts. In these gifts we are reminded of his Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence.

Jaskirat, do not make our presents into dead symbols, they are the gorgeous ornaments of the living. We are the "Wedded Woman," of the Lord. They are the wedding gifts from our Bridegroom. He gave all of them to us and they are God sent – imperishable, indispensable and indestructible. You may object and say all this is irrational, unacceptable, superstitious and fatalistic. But the waves of pure love always have their own logic, irrationality and fatalism. I love the Guru's irrationality – if you want to call it so.

Sev kari inheiman bhavat, aur ki sev suhat na jiko.

"To serve them pleaseth me, service of any other is not dear to me." I don't have the courage to reject such devotion.

Does a would-be-wife question the intrinsic value of the engagement ring, she is gifted by her husband? No, never, even if it is made of copper or a shell. Today, you want to discard these gifts, because gold has more value. Yes, iron was poor in worldly goods. A wealthy merchant, Hargopal, once grudgingly brought for Guru Gobind Singh, two gold bracelets studded with precious jewels, not because he loved the Guru, but because he felt that in doing so, he would please his own father, who was a devotee of the Guru Sahib. One of these expensive bracelets accidentally fell into the Jamuna river from the hands of Guru Ji. At this, Hargopal was very displeased and when his attempts to recover the bracelet proved futile, he asked Guru ji to point at the exact place where he had dropped the bracelet, so that he could take it out. To indicate the place in the river, where the bracelet had fallen, Guru Gobind Singhji took out the other gold bracelet from his wrist and throwing in the river, he told Hargopal, "it is there."

You want to question the utility of the iron bangle of the Guru, but not of the gold bangle which is so much in vogue at Sikh engagement ceremonies today?

You are ready to discard the Guru's bangle for the yellow metal. But do not forget your first marriage, out of whose womb you stand today, aspiring for these worldly gifts. The body can be made the basis of either animal incontinence or a divine temple. The choice is yours, the consequences are yours. These gifts are not to be stored in the darkness of the cellars; drink deep into them, if you want to live in spiritual grandeur.

The head of a Sikh, the *kes* of a Singh, having seen once offered and accepted, became forever of the Guru. It is in unceasing trust with Him. It is, therefore, imperative for a Sikh to carry his head high and not to bow it before a mortal barber. It shall only bend and bow before the Guru. Once a new musket was brought, as a present, for Guru Gobind Singhji. He said, to test the love of his disciples, he wanted to try the aim of the musket on someone's forehead. He looked around and asked if any of his Singhs would offer himself for the trial. Quick came up scores of unflinching Sikhs, each pushing the other one away, regarding it as a boon to meet death at the Guru's hand. And we today so unspired, sleeping beauties, that except for empty words, have no deeds worthy of our name.

Every day we recite in our prayer, *Nanak das sada kurbani*. "Nanak, thy servant is ever a sacrifice to Thee". But what is it that we sacrifice everyday? Guru Gobind Singh was the purest sacrifice. We may never ever reach his height, but some sacrifice we can. But instead we sacrifice our 5 Ks ! Shocking is our spirit of sacrifice. If the Khalsa today is hollow, it is because we forget our tradition of sacrifices, it is because we forget the love of a sacrifice, it is because we regard his gifts as mere symbols. *Balhari gur apne diohadi sadvar*. "I am sacrifice to my Guru myriad times a day". Are we the worthy inheritors of this heritage? After drawing on his blood, now we want to stab him in the back?

Jaskirat, one kilometre from the Lahore railway station stands a gurdwara, sacred to the Sikhs in the loving memory of Bhai Taru Singhji. It bears the name of Shahid Ganj, the abode of the Martyrs. Bhai Sahib was resident of village Poola, where he had a small piece of land. The wheat and the maize that he produced and the humble mud hut he had, he happily shared wearing all the weary travelers who passed through the village and needed shelter for the night. He belonged wholly to the Guru's hymns and

early in the morning, under the stars, while on the plough, with a white turban and a blue *chola*, a poor toiler of the earth, he recited the *japji*. The *japji* which has in it the inimitable cosmicness of life in nature. The villagers loved Taru Singh for his fellow feeling, harmlessness and spiritual purity.

But being a Sikh, Taru Singh was not destined to live any longer his life of love, free from the hatred of caste, colour and region. The authoritarian Mughal government of medieval India was not willing to appreciate the way of life of the Sikhs, which drew no dividing line between man and man, between Hindus and Muslims, between Brahmins and the Shudras. *Manas ki jat sab ek hi pachanbo*. "All men are the same", was a creed which cut at the very root of Mughal establishment based on human distinctions. To extinguish this smithy of love, the government offered numerous monetary awards for the heads of the Sikhs who were declared outlaws. The greed for gold tempted Bhagat Nirangi to lodge a complaint against Bhai Taru Singh with the Subedar (governor) of Lahore stating that he gave shelter to dacoits, "the Sikhs, and the property of Muslim and Hindu subjects of His Gracious Majesty was unsafe." Such a complaint was unnecessary for the very living of a Sikh, was reason enough for the state's armed forces to go and imprison Bhai Taru Singh, who was bound in ropes and brought before the Subedar.

When the subedar saw this youngman of 23, he was overwhelmed and moved by his presence. There was a radiance around him which made the Nawab exclaim: "*Khuda!* What divine Noor (glory) on his face. I pray that he should be a Musalman!" Addressing Taru Singh, the Nawab said "O, graceful Sikh, I feel sorry for you and I wish to give you a new lease of life."

Taru Singh responded: "Reward me with a new lease of life ? Why stain me with such dishonor while my brothers and sisters are being martyred here every day, every hour."

The Subedar said, "your presence is resplendent and with a heavenly light. Somehow my heart does not permit me to have you killed, but you must cut and present me your tress-knot".

Taru Singh replied, "the Sikh and his hair are intrinsic. I will be pleased to give you more than you ask me, my head with my tress knot". Our hair are the eternal gift of love, of immeasurable beauty to the

Khalsa by our Guru, they cannot be separated from a Singh's head, without separating his head. The one who just looks at them can never understand them. It is like looking into a mirror, but you are not one with the mirror. The observer is only capable of experiencing, he is never the mirror, the experience, the state itself. This hair is the fountain of joy, the spring of life for us.

The Subedar was still confident of bribing him and then said: "Taru Singh, you are too young. You have not yet experienced the beauty and joys of life. I will make arrangements for your marriage with a woman of your choice. You will be awarded with a high *mansab* (office) in the Mughal army. You will be endowed with a hereditary *jagir*, I promise you all sorts of luxuries but you must part with your way of life and accept the Muslim religion".

A *Guru ka Sikh* can never be tamed and now his tears mingling with a smile of joy, Taru Singh replied, "Having been blessed by Him, they come (into the world) and recalled by Him they go back", said Guru Nanak. "It is the right and privilege of the brave to die, for a Sikh, life has no beginning and no end – it is both death and life. Neither my life nor my hair are for bargaining in your court which views beauty, life and religion in measures of gold. The value and beauty of our hair cannot be measured in terms of luxuries and *jagirs*. Your thinking is materialistic and is therefore negligible, but an integrated living is always spiritual".

The Subedar could no longer bear this song of truth and he cried out, "Stop him, for he disturbs kill him at once, but cut his hair before".

The Mughal soldiers caught hold of Bhai Sahib's head and chin, but the barber found it impossible to bring his hand near his head. With a stroke of his head he would push back his captors and make them whirl on the ground. A cobbler was then sent for to try his skill with his tools and scrap off Taru Singh's hair, but his attempt too proved abortive. At last the help of a carpenter was asked for the foul deed. With a stroke of his adze, he cut off Bhai Taru Singh's head but failed to cut his tress-knot. (1743 A.D.)

Thakur Rabindranath Tagore, the great mystic-poet of Bengal has adoringly sung of this episode:

Prathona Atit Dan : "More than asked for"

*For a Sikh to cut his tress-knots
Amounts to discarding his dharma.
The Pathans brought, bound hand and*

*foot, the Sikh prisoners,
 Shahdid Ganj earth turned red
 With their blood.
 The Nawab addressing Taru Singh, said unto him:
 'I wish to spare thy life'.
 Taru Singh retorted: 'Spare my life !
 Why thou dishonourest me ?
 Said the Nawab: 'Thou art bravest of the brave'
 I don't wish to wreak my anger on thee.
 Taru Singh replied: 'O Nawab, thy
 request with my heart I comply
 and liberally grant thee more than
 what thou beg'est of me,
 My head with my tress-knot.*

Jaskirat, if Bhai Taru Singh had looked for practical utility, significance and relevance, would'nt he have exchanged his hair for a *jagir*, for beautiful women and the power he was offered? But all these he regarded as worthless when he weighed them with his way of life. If the hair were mere symbols for him, would he have staked his life for them? The term, symbols can never express the depth of these gifts. You will never find even a most dutiful policeman leaping to death, to uphold a short circuited, burning traffic light signal, because it is a sheer symbol for the cards and lorries on the road, it is an external factor to his life. But our 5 K's are much deeper and profounder than symbols and this is the reason we find not only Bhai Taru Singh, but a whole galaxy of martyrs in our history – Bhai Mati Das, Dyal Chand, Bhai Mani Singh, Bhai Bota Singh, Sardar Mahtab Singh, Sukha Singh, and Subeg Singh – all playing with their lives, which appears to us so irrational and fatalistic.

Son, read about the 5 symbols in isolation, mediate on them as links with lives of your ancestors, it is only then that their meaning will be apparent to you. In themselves the 5 K's might appear to be mere symbols, show windows, but it is only when they are knit with our lives, woven in our existence, painted with our daily sorrows and joys that their value, justification and significance emerges. They are inseparable from our life and if you perceive of them as separate, it is not surprising that they appear to be frivolous, unjustified and a burden of the past. If you are wounded and in agony it is because you want to separate, from yourself, what is vital for existence.

Unfortunately, you visualised only a part in segregation from the whole. You are looking out

of a small window set in the wall, from which the outside may appear to be attractive and convincing for sometime, but it does not allow you to view the beauty of life. Without linking these ornaments of love, with your daily existence, you can never have perception of the whole, therefore you will always be sad and when the end comes, you will still not remain in your dungeon with its dark windows, but will leave it and love the whole way of life. If you don't constantly have a passionate love for these presents of the Guru, then you are like a flower without fragrance, withered and lying in the dust, being crushed and kicked by every pedestrian. Only he can have love for God, who abandons his ego, forgets himself completely and thereby brings the state of creative consciousness. The "me", the "I" from its very birth is constantly building a barrier of knowledge around itself, around its actions and ultimately leads to isolations and despair. A life of the dead.

Knowledge is only a minor part of life, not the totality and when this assumes all consuming significance, as it is now, then your life becomes artificial, an empty cup, from which man tries to escape through superficial escapes with disastrous result. Knowledge is like a kerosene lamp on a dark night, but it can illuminate only so long as it has fuel. Life is much vaster and deeper, it cannot be lived with the aid of an extinguishable lamp. Knowledge is essential to everyday existence, as money is to buy your food, but it cannot grasp the reality of love, of God, of living. Love is not to be looked in the net of intelligence; if you use knowledge to grasp love, it will die as the fish does out of water. Knowledge must be left behind for love to be. Burdened with mechanical learning, you will never understand what is beauty, what is measurable. The light of knowledge is a covering under which lies a realm of truth, which knowledge cannot penetrate. The worship of knowledge is a ritualistic pilgrimage, which can never dissolve the contradictions and miseries of life. Mere knowledge, however earnestly learnt and cleverly assembled, will never resolve the meaning of the 5 K's. To assume that it will, is to invite frustration and misery. You may know all about the working of the earth and the functioning of the skies and still not be free from sorrow, envy and pain.

To know these gifts, to value truth, to be one with God, you must have no claims to beliefs, no speculations.

Sochai soch na hovaije sochai lakhvar. "Mortal cannot comprehend Him by thought." If you have gathered the knowledge of living, the knowledge itself becomes more important, not your living. If you want to understand these gifts, everything will come right. Live in them and there is understanding,

Hukmai andar sabh ko bahr hukam na koe. Nanak humki je bhjhi ta haumai kahe na koe. "Nothing at all outside His will, is abiding. O Nanak, he who is aware of the Supreme, will never in his selfhood utter the boast: It is I" The Supreme Will was to live in the glory of these embellishments of ours and so shall it be.

These gifts of ours are not symbols of a religion, or compulsory rites of a religion. The Sikh way of life is not to live on any set of rituals, formalism, *talismans*, penances, austerities, pilgrimages or symbols. The Sikhs were rebels against all this and more. The *gurbani* abounds in hymns against ritualism and symbols. Guru Nanak Devji said in one of his compositions "Yoga lies not in smearing one's body with ashes, nor does it lie in wearing earrings, nor in cutting one's hair, nor in playing on a *singi*."

Could anyone have said some thing more against the irrelevance of symbols ? How strongly he felt against empty symbols may be gauged from these lines, "With *tikka* (the sacred mark) on their foreheads and dhoti wrapped around their loins and legs, they look pious, but infact they are the world's butchers carrying daggers in their hands." (*Asa-di-Var*) The shallowness of ritualism and symbols was exposed thoroughly by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, in the *Akal Ustati*:

*Some worship but stocks and stones, while others
Suspend the lingam from their necks.
Some look out for God in the East, other in the West.
Some worship0 but idols, some are unwise enough to
worship the dead;
All these are involved in a false show, and they find not
The Mystery, that is God.*

After the victory in the battle of Bhangani, Guru Gobind Singhji blessed Pir Budhu Shah, with no treasures and no elephants for his services, as was the custom of that time, but endowed him a *kirpan* and a comb with some broken hair of his. These gifts are still preserved as sacred relics in the former princely state of Nabha. This very jewellery, he presented to all of us, inspite of the fact that our lives were not wrought in the furnace of sacrifice – a jewellery which

no craftsman, no intellectual, no jeweller is capable of imitating. These gifts of ours are the constellation of super-consciousness, the very essence of breath of God in us, of which our tress-knots are the spiritual crown of humanity.

Jaskirat, ask not from me, the significance, the value, the power of our tress-knots, for I am incapable of describing it. In the meadows, dales and mountains of our trees-knots, the bliss of perennial joy flows, in the beautitude of our tress-knots, the lovers are fired. In our mystical tress-knots, the insipid mankind is inspired; in the holiness of our pristine pure tress-knots, the Sun chariot rides high in eternity; in the infinity of our tress-knots; the melting snow caps of the mountain peaks wash away all sorrow; in our sublime tress-knots, the rapturous winds roar; in the sanctity of our tress-knots, the rapturous winds soar; in our august tress-knots, the frenzied rain torrents pour; in the creativity of our transcendental tress-knots, his nakedness is robed anew in the effulgence of these gifts.

Live in the eternal joy of your tress-knots and you will know what it is, to be. Men collect the ashes of the departed soul and pray for him, in the church and the temples and you want to discard this living soul, this living temple! People build monuments for the dead, you want to uproot the living monument the Guru gave to you? If you want it to disintegrate you may, but you shall forever be buried under it.

The love shall still come your way because you are one of the descendants of the ancient lore, you will still flex your muscles when the song is of your forefathers, but you would have converted the garden of the living into the weeds of the dead. The gardener will shed his tears but no more will you grow. Soon, even his tears will dry as he tends new gardens. A time comes when no womb of knows of the long ruined monument. It passes back into the womb of agony and is possessed by the serpents, jackals and chameleons.

Jaskirat, our 5 K's are beyond the realm of rituals and symbols, they are the timeless ones. Can you and me enclose with our intellects what is not measurable? Can you and me enclose with our intellects what is not of time? Can our constant hatred, anger, ugliness, lead us to the unknown ? Do we have an instrument to gauge, what has no beginning and no end ? Can the truth of these gifts be trapped in the cage of our logic? What we may capture by our mechanical knowledge

and logic is superficial, never the cosmicness of these presents. Many of us spiritedly respond to tranquilisers, but living in love, needs to tranquilisers.

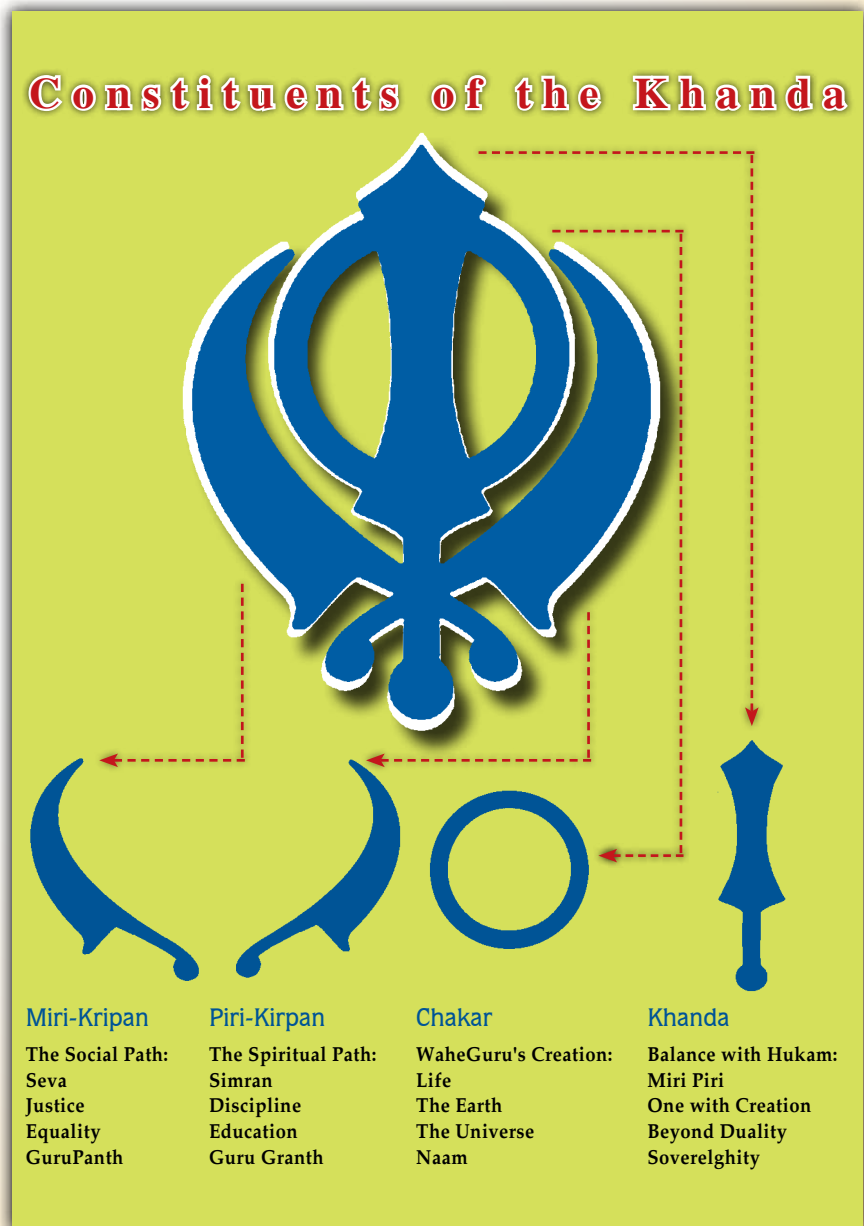
The beautiful, the loved can never be dissected and summed up. For these gifts, we can reach no conclusions, no morals and no judgements because they are not symbols, but pieces of art. What would the cuckoo's song mean to you, if you want to take down its notations and analyse them? What would your mother be for you if you want to know her by analysis? Only a biological skeleton for procreation. You have so much trapped yourself in a net of words, of speculations that the feeling it self, which is the only thing that is deep and vital in us, is lost. The highest art in life to be beautiful. And these gifts are the force that creates the beautiful, the artist, in us. It is one in a million, who has the beauty of these ornaments.

The *Kesh*, the *Kachha*, the *Kara*, the *Kanga* and the *Kirpan* are the gifts, chiseled out for the Khalsa, by the divine artist. These are the gifts endowed to us for ever, by the Divine Bridegroom, on the day of our marriage to Him, on Baisakhi, in 1699, at Anandpur Sahib. They are the true embodiments of art and any one looking at them can have his bosom full of meaning, ecstasy, inspiration, love, joy and what more can we wish? In them we have the treasure mines, in them is the beauty and we are so ignorant of it. We cosmic brides will carry His gifts of love in honour, purity and splendid glory, and our love will blossom in all climes, in all times and in all continents.

May the blessings of *Waheguru ji* be with you forever. Your loving father,
Harcharan Singh

Three months after receiving this letter from his father, Jaskirat Singh felt that the time had come to keep his vow to his father. Bathed in the harmony, melody and fragrance of a new dawn, he travelled to Sri Anandpur Sahib and on 18 October 1967, he affirmed his love for the Guru Sahib, by taking *Khande ka Amrit*, at Gurdwara *Keshgarh Sahib*—birth place of the Khalsa. He accepted Guru Gobind Singhji as his spiritual Father and Mata Sahib Kaur as his spiritual Mother and Anandpur Sahib as the place of his new birth.

Thereafter *Jaskirat Singh* continued his distinguished career in the Indian Foreign Service, sponsoring several study circles on the Sikh way of life in London, Geneva, Berlin and Delhi. With his inspiration, many Sikh boys in Germany, who had under environmental pressures become patit, very lovingly took the *Amrit* prepared and administered by *Jaskirat*. He is in love.



* “The Dastaar is a Sikh’s pride”



MasterCard CEO Ajay pal Singh Banga addressing high ranking Nigerian officials and bankers in the capital Abuja

The Sikh turban at the workplace

The turban to a Sikh is not a substitute for a ‘hat’, nor just a head covering or such like paraphernalia! It is a religious garment, an article of faith, which is mandatory for a Sikh to adorn. It has immense spiritual and temporal value and signifies a person’s commitment to the ideals and principles of the Sikh religion. The turban signifies sovereignty, self respect, courage and piety of the individual.

As a senior European diplomat has proclaimed:
“The turban is intrinsic to the Sikh’s persona.”

A Sikh wearing his turban is making an open declaration that he lives by the principles espoused in the Sikh Scriptures and teachings of the Ten Sikh Gurus. A Sikh, with his turban, looks distinguished and well groomed, which is also the neatest way to care for his *Keshas* (hair) as a Sikh required to keep his hair intact.

Guru Gobind Singh, when only nine years old, had declared that he would create such a visage for the Sikhs that when present in any crowd, he would be distinct. He also declared that there would never again be an occasion to arise when the question is raised: “there a Sikh present?” This is in reference to the moment in time when Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur, the Ninth Guru, was beheaded in Chandni Chowk and the tyrants had challenged, “is there a Sikh here to claim the body of his Guru”, the taunt being that no one dared call himself a Sikh anymore. But there were Sikhs, one who collected the Guru’s head to take it to Anandpur where Gobind Rai, son of the Martyr-Guru awaited and the other, who took the body to cremate it along with his humble hut at the place where now stands Gurdwara Rakab Ganj, next to India’s Parliament House and the Government’s seat of power.

Guru Gobind Singh created the Order of Khalsa at the Vaishakhi of 1699, calling for five volunteers

✿ (The word for turban in Persian (Farsi) is *Dastaar*.)



Satjiv Singh Chahil, of Hewlett Packard's Personal Systems Group at the AFI Lifetime Achievement Award: 'A Tribute to Michael Douglas.'



After his distinguished career, Justice Choor Singh of the Singapore Supreme Court, going through the Nishaan at his residence in Singapore.

who were ready to give their lives for their faith. What followed was the bestowing upon them of *Amrit* as they emerged dressed in splendid attire and resplendent turbans. He instructed that all Sikhs must henceforth maintain the five *Kakars*, articles of faith, the most prominent being intact hair, to be covered by the turban which is integral part of the Sikh's uniform. He instilled supreme confidence in them and empowered them to live with highest levels of dignity and to challenge those who would oppress them. Supremely, he removed the fear of death from his followers, which is the reason for humans to become submissive and cowardly.

The turban is symbolic, as also celebration, of that psychological and historical upliftment of ordinary human beings, who dedicate their body and soul to Waheguru, the Akal Purakh, and thereafter go about their lives virtually as nobility. Guru Gobind Singh lifted the status of common men to that of 'Sirdars' not because of wealth or power, but by raising their spirits and forever altering their psyche. Since then, all Sikhs are called 'Sirdars'.

The turban has, of course, for centuries been worn by men in India and in many other countries of the East. There is repeated mention of turbans in the Old Testament and in the Quran Shairf. Turbans have been worn by Nobles and Rulers. In Iran, Saudi Arabia and some other Islamic countries, turbans are essentially



American Sikh from California in New Delhi (with Vice Admiral Inderjit Singh Khurana formerly with the Indian Navy)

worn by the Clergy where even Royalty may not wear turbans. In India, too, turbans were worn by the Mughal Rulers, Muslim Clergy, Hindu Royalty, Noble Men and by the warrior Rajputs. Ordinary persons were not bestowed turbans, except on formal occasions and at Shahi Darbars. The turban was a sign of power, status and nobility.

Yogi Bhajan Singh when addressing his American followers had said that “with each layer that you put on your head, you totally wind in your consciousness, your commitment to Sikh ideals and add to your identity. When a person looks at you, he immediately realises you are someone whom has to be reckoned with.”

We are unfortunately faced with the situation where a large number of Sikhs, specially those living away from India, are not wearing turbans anymore, not keeping unshorn hair. Yet most of them proclaim their devotion to Guru Granth Sahib and the Gurus. Many Sikh youth, even when described as ‘patit’ are doing *paath* from Gutkas in gurdwaras and performing seva with total dedication. They declare themselves very much as ‘Sikhs’, but do not look like them.

We must consider as to why some of these persons are discarding their hair and not wearing turbans. It is opined that these misguided souls find it hard to find jobs wearing turbans, others say that they cannot keep a perceived ‘lifestyle’ with intact hair and turbans. However, they swear their love for the Guru and religious feelings which are in their hearts and minds and not dependent on external appearance. Others argue that most men in the World do not wear turbans, nor keep unshorn hair and are doing “very well, living a life of comfort and prosperity”. So they want to be “like them.”

Thus we come to the key question: is the turban an asset or hindrance for devout Sikhs in their day to day life, in the current environment, specially those living away from India?

So consider this: every employer wants an efficient, productive, knowledgeable, reliable and sincere worker, to do his or her job well and for the employer to get best return for the compensation paid to the employee. Does the turban become a hindrance to the performance of an employee?

Emphatically not ! On the contrary, if a person explains to the employer that, being a Sikh, he is committed to ‘Kirat Karna’ or earning wages by honest and hard labour, the employer would certainly be moved towards that person. Amongst a group of applicants, the turban-wearing Sikh will always stand out, drawing attention giving an opportunity to explain significance of his turban. A Sikh at the workplace, with his obvious commitment on life values, would be more productive, more reliable, a sought after employee. His turban in fact is a major asset ! What we have to do is to create awareness amongst the mainstream communities about Sikh beliefs and ideals - and opportunities will flow thereafter.

It is a mistake to believe that because of the turban, Sikhs are being discriminated against or when they apply for jobs, do not get even called for an interview, or are not selected after an interview. It is a simplistic assumption to lay any blame on the turban, as there could be many other causes. There certainly could be a situation when an employer looking at a turban-wearing Sikh, and being ignorant about his beliefs and ideals, could perhaps have some initial hesitation. This is not because of discrimination against the turbaned Sikh, but because of the lack of understanding of what a Sikh stands for. There have also been situations

Michael Boneham, outgoing President and MD Ford India with his successor Joginder Singh at a press conference in Chennai in November 2012



recently when bearded and turbaned Sikhs are mistaken for Muslims. In such cases it is not because of any likely belief of a person but because one looks “different”. This requires us, as Sikhs, to create an awareness such that all know what a Sikh with his turban believes in and so remove any doubts and misgivings amongst potential employers.

Many inhibitions on part of employers to avoid employing Sikhs with turbans can, in fact, be attributed to the nature of tribal instincts: a different looking person, from another culture or area, is looked upon with suspicion, primarily by an instinct for self-preservation. In India and sometimes even in the Punjab itself such feelings remain also amongst some Indians, an inherent prejudice against persons of another state, culture or religion. The turban worn by Sikhs could actually assuage feelings of the employer and so the answer lies in creating confidence amongst the employer and trust in the turbaned Sikh.

Conversely, the turban of a Sikh would well become “an obstacle” if he went to a place of ill repute, but then, this is the essence of the Sikh wearing a turban, which “saves” him from undesirable places! The story of Bhai Joga Singh is well known: when on his way to meet his Guru, he stopped at a house to spend the night. He heard music of dancing girls from the floor above and was tempted to go upstairs but at the gate stood a man who said to him “Oh Guru ka Sikh, this is not a place for you”. He returned to his room and thanked his Guru for preventing him from any misdeed. The turban is a great asset to the Sikh. We are at times confronted with situations where Sikhs with turbans are hesitant to be seen in “bad places”.

When early migrant Sikhs in the Western world sought jobs, where “uniformity” was essential, they were asked to shave, remove turbans, wear the uniform cap, be this in the armed services, police, transport

services or others. In such cases, after due pursuit, explanation and persistent follow ups, Sikhs were 'cleared' to work with turbans, modifying the uniform rules. Now turbaned Sikhs are increasingly engaged in public services all over the world.

Sikhs with turbans must therefore create awareness about their beliefs and their commitment to honest labour, about their dedication and sincerely and so create the fantastic opportunity of turbaned Sikhs becoming the most sought after workers in all fields. Once that reputation is established, Sikhs with turbans will get preferential consideration for employment, with their turbans considered as a great asset !

We should work on strategies to create such 'Brand Equity' for turban-wearing Sikhs. Everyone should automatically assume that a Sikh with his turban can be depended upon, without any doubt or hesitation. In fact a Sikh's turban can become his most valuable asset but the onus is on us to create and develop such a 'brand image'.

In Australia, and many other developed countries. Sikhs with turbans are now holding senior and key jobs in major corporations. It is only because of their limited numbers that such Sikh professionals are not widely known about, but they are there, many turbaned Sikhs who have used their identity to great advantage.

In the UK and Singapore, turban-wearing Sikhs have been resplendent in the courts of justice, bending the tradition of wig-wearing. Sikhs with turbans are Members of Parliament in the UK and Canada today.

In summary it must be clear that the turban to a Sikh is a great asset, bestowing on him an image of person of high character, hard working and in high spirits, one who does not discriminate against others, having full faith in One Divine Universal Supreme Being, and with the unshakable belief that all of humankind is HIS creation.

Manmohan Singh Baveja



Suneet Singh Tuli (right), CEO of Datawind, presents the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with an Aakash2 tablet during a meeting at the United Nations headquarters in New York. They are accompanied by India's UN Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri at the centre.

Sikhs in the “Land Of Freedom”



Need for Awareness & Appreciation

In aftermath of the shooting, flowers at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin.

Simrat Dugal, who spent many years in college in the United States of America, writes that the shooting at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin was not simply a case of “mistaken” identity in Oak Creek. There has been a surge of hate crimes against Sikh Americans especially after 9/11.

I suppose that 5 August 2012 started the same as any other Sunday for many of the worshippers who frequented the Sikh Gurdwara of Wisconsin in Oak Creek, a small town just south of the mid-western city of Milwaukee. The building was bustling with activity, as congregants were working to ready the gurdwara in time for the typically well-attended Sunday service. In the middle of seva, amidst washing the floors, cleaning the rooms, readying the main hall and preparing the langar, none of the devotees in the temple could possibly have



In grief, on 5 August, 2012

anticipated the shockingly violent turn the morning’s events were shortly to take place.

Armed with a 9mm semi-automatic handgun, a lone gunman strode purposefully into the gurdwara at approximately 10:30 am and opened fire on the few dozen devotees congregated in the building. Shots rang through the temple, plunging it into complete chaos as men, women and children found refuge in corridors or office rooms, where they hid for over an hour. In

the carnage that day, six people were killed and three others wounded before police officers were able to stop and kill the shooter in the temple parking lot.

The incident's immediate aftermath was rife with speculation, as officials maintained a long and excruciating silence about details of the event. For almost twelve hours after the incident, the police did not release particulars about the dead and details of the perpetrator remained unconfirmed for a long time. Nonetheless, as reports from key witnesses began to emerge, the shooter was confirmed to be a middle-aged white man, suggesting that the violence in the temple was of a xenophobic and ethnocentric nature. In an official evening news conference held later that day, the police labeled the shooting as a "domestic-terrorist type incident", all but confirming what many Americans had already begun to suspect: that this was, by almost all accounts, a violent and vicious hate crime carried out against the Sikh-American community.

As more information about the perpetrator was uncovered and investigators were able to confirm multiple details about the day's events, the shooter was finally identified as Wade Michael Page. Very quickly, information about Page was uncovered from the depths of the internet and what people found unsettled both the Sikh diaspora and the rest of America.

A dishonorably discharged ex-army service man with an overly large 9/11 commemorative tattoo, Page was, by all accounts and his own declaration, an outspoken white supremacist. A member of the 'Hammerskin Nation' (a 'brotherhood' of skinheads based in Texas) and several 'white power' music bands, he had an extreme affinity for Neo-Nazism and a penchant for hostile lyrics. No stranger to racist symbols and violent allegory, he also had numerous other white supremacist tattoos and was described by old friends and associates as having regularly talked about the need for radical 'racial war.' Although Page never explicitly outlined why he decided to carry out his assault in the Sikh temple—there was no note, no video, no manifesto—it did not take long for the authorities and the general public to piece together a motive. Pending a lengthy investigation and official confirmation, the overwhelmingly accepted consensus is that Page attacked the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in a xenophobic fit, most likely motivated by severe 'Islamophobia.'

Chances are that if you ask any Sikh-American as to when things changed, when they realised that simply being Sikh would make them a target for violence and harassment, they will unhesitatingly say "9/11". Although the events of 11 September 2001 were carried out by a small group of very extreme and militant Muslims (who did not even reside in the United States), it is largely the South Asian and extended Arab communities in America that have suffered most heavily in the aftermath. The Islamophobia—and by extension the Sikhophobia—that has swept both civil and official American life in the hours, months and years that have followed 9/11 which has, at "best," been damaging to the self-respect of South Asian and Arab communities and has, at "worst", resulted in harassment, assault, vandalism and even death.



Outside the Gurdwara on day of the shooting. (AP Photo/Jeffrey Phelps)

But Sikhs are certainly not Muslims and mosques are not *gurdwaras*! So why exactly, then, do white supremacists like Wade Michael Page unleash their violent brand of Islamophobia against the Sikh American community?

There is little, by way of evidence, to suggest that Page had prior connections or interactions with any Sikhs, so the assumed conclusion is that he (just like other hate crime assailants) was ignorant of the appearance of Sikh men with that of stereotypical Islamic terrorists: "brown skin, turban, beard," as Simranjeet Singh of the *Huffington Post* simply put it. Such conflation of Sikhs with Islamic extremists (particularly in the case of hate crimes in the United States) are certainly not new, so it is hardly

surprising that the Sikh community initially reacted by emphatically distancing itself from the Muslim community. Within hours of the shooting, dozens of Sikh leaders went on record to stress that Sikhs and Muslims are different, that the Sikh-Americans are “a peaceful community” and that the shooter had “misplaced” his aggression onto the “wrong community.”

In hindsight, such responses, while understandably natural, seem to be highly reactionary, implying, first, that there is a “violent” community towards whom the hate crime should’ve been targeted (Muslims), and second, that the shooter had “mistakenly” targeted Sikhs.

planned undertaking. Whether he meant to attack Muslims or Sikhs is completely immaterial in the face of the fact that he clearly thought of the Sikh congregation as an entity that was distinctly unlike his own. This is to say that he didn’t “mistakenly” pick the Sikh community when he should’ve perhaps picked a Muslim one, it is to say that he conflated the two en masse into a monolithic entity that he considered distinctly different, distinctly un-American, distinctly foreign, and distinctly “other.”

It is in light of the cases of hate crimes like the one perpetrated against the Sikhs in Wisconsin (among all the other hate crimes against Sikhs) that I would strike at the heart of an issue much deeper than Page simply



Police secure the Gurdwara

To say that Wade Michael Page got “the wrong community” because Sikhs are “peaceful” is to suggest that he should’ve taken his violence to another community, one that is violent. It is to suggest that Muslims should’ve been targeted instead of Sikhs, and sets the precedent that Page’s violence would’ve somehow been understandable—even perhaps deemed acceptable—if he had attacked a mosque or similar Muslim congregation.

Similarly, it would be gravely erroneous to suggest that Page’s attack on the *gurdwara* was a “mistaken” one, because it was in everyway a very deliberate and

targeting the wrong community. Such incidents are incredibly symptomatic of a xenophobic trend that is much older and more historically deep rooted than the relatively recent rise of Islamic terrorism and Islamophobia. Indeed, I would argue that Islamophobia is a recent offshoot of a larger trend in American history to reject non-white, non-Protestant immigrants and citizens as Americans. Indeed, along with black Americans, East Asian Americans, Jews, Catholic Irish and Italian immigrants and, of course, Native Americans, Sikhs, Muslims and other brown skinned communities have long faced discrimination

in the United States, with reports of violence against Sikhs in America going as far as back as the early 1900s.

First Sikh Immigrants

The first Sikh immigrants in America came to the west coast as early as the mid 19th century. Some reports even suggest that the first Indian in California arrived as early as 1857 – “an Indian adventurer (...) in the gold fields” they recorded. Seeking better economic opportunities than those available in their native Punjab, and perhaps buoyed by the allure and promise of the expansive American landscape, hundreds of Sikh men made the long journey from India to the unfamiliar pastures of Canada, California and the American Northwest. Although most hailed from farming communities, many initially only found work as labour in timber factories and lumber mills, while others worked alongside Chinese, Japanese and Filipino immigrants to build the Western Pacific railroad lines.

Over the course of half a century, Indian immigration to North America developed a sizeable and sustained momentum, and by 1899 there were

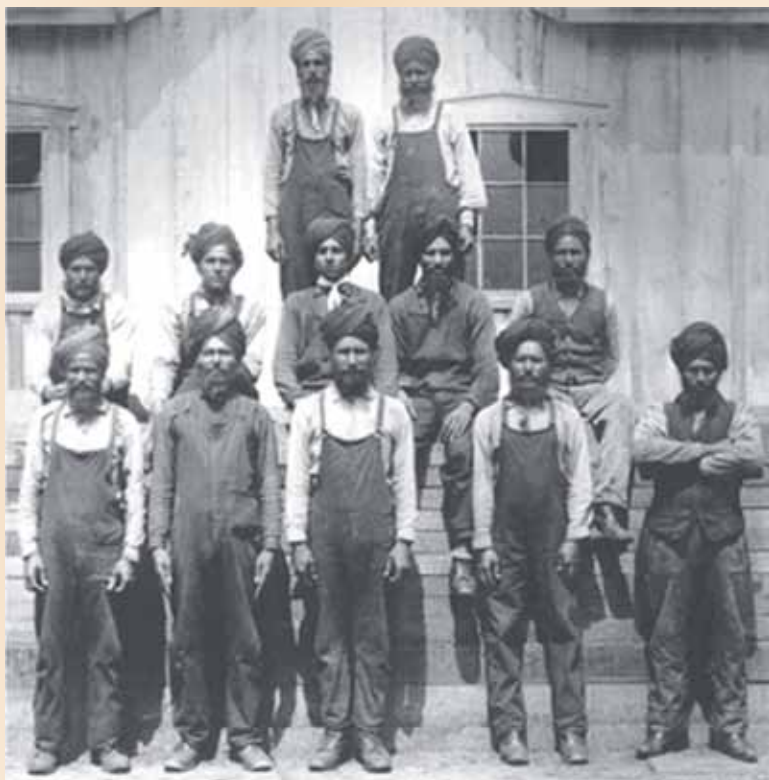
approximately 2000 Indians spread across the western United States. Although most of these immigrants continued to feed into factory, mill and railroad construction jobs, a small but increasing number arrived on American soil as either students or bona fide businessmen. Most immigrants, both the skilled and unskilled, expected to return to India, but with the distance and expense—and the lack of opportunity to return because of tightened immigration policies—many eventually settled permanently in the United States. North and central California, in particular, became popular hubs for Sikh immigrants, as the expansive and fertile tracts of land in the central and Imperial Vallies were well suited to the Punjabis’ strong agricultural skill sets.

The steady stream of Indian immigration to the United States continued through the 1900s, peaking in the three years spanning 1907-1910 before tighter immigration restrictions forced a downward turn. The Immigration Act of 1917, which prohibited immigration from certain Asian regions, was particularly instrumental in reducing the number of Indians who were able to enter the United States. Soon after, a second law called the *Oriental Exclusion Act*



One of the earliest photos taken of a group of Sikh immigrants at Angel Island.

was passed in 1924, virtually banning immigration from Asia and bringing Indian migration to the United States to a near complete standstill. Immigration reform policies such as these were dripping with racist intent, underscoring popular American sentiment that Asian (Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Filipino) immigrants were alien and un-American. As such, these reform policies were implemented to deliberately prevent Asians from assimilating into the fabric of American society and indicated, in no uncertain terms, that immigrants from Asia were unwelcome in the United States.



Sikh mill workers at the Northern Pacific Lumber Company, Barnet, British Columbia, c. 1905.

Sadly, large-scale immigration bans and restrictions were not the only racist governmental policies applied to Sikhs and other Asians in America. In California, local land ownership laws barred non-Americans from owning tracts of land, handicapping many Punjabi immigrants who had settled down in the state as farmers. In addition, strict naturalisation laws prevented Asian and other non-white immigrants from becoming American citizens, further compounding the difficulties many Sikhs faced as they attempted to settle into lives in their new world.

Family life, too, was disrupted by racist official policy, as immigration restrictions disallowed Indian women from entering the United States, even in cases of married couples and families. In fact, the restrictions were so severe that only ten to twenty Indian women were permitted to enter the country every year, regardless of the number of Indian men who were allowed in. There were also several anti-miscegenation laws in California that disallowed intermarriage between races. This essentially meant that it was unlawful for Indian men to marry American women, leaving many immigrant men in the precarious situation of either becoming life-long bachelors or unlawfully marrying American women for love. Interestingly, many Sikhs circumvented this problem by marrying local Mexican women (to whom the miscegenation laws didn't apply), resulting in a cultural mixing that is unique to California. Estimated to be approximately 400 couples strong, the Punjabi-Mexican community constituted a small but significant portion of the larger Indian immigrant community and was instrumental in perpetuating a unique, multi-cultural diversity within the Sikh diaspora.

Official restrictions and state legislation were not the only racist and constraining dimensions of immigrant life. Civil life was also strife with racism, as American Sikhs had begun to deal with hate crimes and criminal intimidation as early as the early 1900s. In two separate incidents—one Bellingham, Washington in 1907 and one in Live Oak, California in 1908—Indian immigrants were the targets of several riots and numerous instances of mob fuelled violence. In both cities, mobs gathered to target the “rag heads” (turbaned Sikh men), forcing their way into various Indian residences, stoning and beating up Indian workers, and successfully keeping the police from getting involved in the incident.

In fact, according to Vijay Prashad, a well respected South Asian historian with a particular academic interest in South Asian migration to the United States, newspapers also got into the act by reporting these incidents as heroic acts, thus further encouraging xenophobic and criminal behavior. The *Bellingham Morning Reveille*, for example, ran a drawing of what



Punia Singh Chima harvesting celery, Yuba City, California, c. 1922.

appears to be a Sikh man with a caption that read: "This is the type of man driven from this city as the result of last night's demonstration by a mob of 500 men and boys." Such news pieces framed the mob violence that drove Sikhs out of Bellingham as a mark of pride for the city, and their use of language like "this type of man" only underscores the xenophobic current running through the incident. This article, and the few others like it, was written with the express intent of emphasising that the "raghead" Indian was a different kind of person; one that was distinctly un-American and thoroughly unwelcome in a city like Bellingham.

But Prashad also says that the Sikhs didn't take this violence lying down. Almost a decade after the incidents in Live Oak and Bellingham, one Sikh man was reported to have bragged, "I used to go to Maryville[California] every Saturday. One day a ghora came out of a bar and motioned to me, saying, 'Come here, slave!' I said I was no slave man. He told me that his race ruled

India and so I hit him to prove the point!" There are few reports of incidents where Sikh men were able to successfully defend themselves against xenophobic attacks, but it is somewhat heartening to know that many Sikhs were able to push back against hateful and racist behaviour.

Barred from purchasing and owning land, disallowed from keeping their families intact, and targeted in numerous incidents of xenophobic and racist violence, the early Punjabi pioneers struggled against the odds when they came to settle in America in the early decades of the 20th century. Yet, through sheer resilience and hard work, they were able to become a thriving and successful community. And although they worked and lived as unwelcome immigrants for several decades, they lobbied and rallied to eventually win the right to naturalisation and citizenship in 1946, when the Luce-Celler Act was passed by the federal government.



Balbir Singh Sodhi : victim of xenophobic hate, 2011



This picture, from 1915, is one of the first of the Sikh Temple in Stockton, California. The Stockton gurdwara was the first gurdwara to have been built on American soil.

By the time the second major wave of Indian immigration began in the 1960s, some Sikh families had been settled and living in America for three to four generations. And while many probably still had trouble assimilating because of their distinct physical appearance, most had presumed that the worst of the xenophobic violence meted out to them had been left behind in the annals of the early 20th century.

Victims of xenophobic hate

Balbir Singh Sodhi was planting flowers around the perimeter of his gas station in Mesa, Arizona, on a September Saturday in 2001, when Frank Roque, a local aircraft mechanic, drove up to the station and shot him dead. Apparently, he “mistook” Sodhi for an

Arab because of his turban, beard and clothes. Roque then continued on a shooting rampage, attacking an attendant of Lebanese origin at another gas station and an Afghan family who had recently moved into a nearby neighbourhood. Roque was reported to have boasted that he was going to shoot some “towel-heads” before he left for his blood thirsty excursion. Later that year, in December 2001, two men beat Surinder Singh, a Los Angeles store owner, with metal poles. They were reported to have said that they were going to “kill Bin Laden” that day.

Other incidents of extreme violence against Sikhs have also unfolded in various places all over the United States over the last decade: Rajinder Singh Khalsa was beaten unconscious by six men in New

York City in 2004; Iqbal Singh was stabbed in the neck in California in 2006; Ajit Singh Chima was beaten in New Jersey in 2008; Jasmir Singh was attacked outside a grocery store in New York in January 2009; a cab driver called Harbhajan Singh was beaten in Sacramento in 2010; and Gurmej Singh Atwal and Surinder Singh were gunned and killed in Elk Grove, California in March 2011. In each case, assailants were reported to have made Islamophobic declarations prior to, during or immediately after the incident, and in each instance nothing was stolen from or taken off the victim's person. In depth investigations into each of these cases have concluded that each one of these incidents was a hate crime.

Hate crimes against Sikhs have not been limited to random, physical attacks; they have also included severe damage to property, particularly in the case of gurdwaras. In March 2004, the Gurdwara Sahib temple in Fresno, California was defaced when the phrase "It's not your country" was painted in blue spray paint on its wall. More recently, in February 2012, a gurdwara that was under construction in Sterling Heights, Michigan was vandalised with graffiti depicting a gun and a Christian Cross. The word 'Mohmed' was also scrawled across the wall, most probably in reference to the prophet Mohammed.

Alarmingly but also very tellingly, these occurrences are just a few of the thousands of hate crimes cases that have been reported in the wake of 9/11. In fact, the rise in the number of hate crime cases is so drastic that more than 1,000 incidents of criminal discrimination (including murder, assault, vandalism and verbal harassment) were registered by Arabs, Muslims and South Asians within *just one week* after 9/11. And to add more disturbing numbers to the mix: the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) estimates that that anti-Muslim hate crimes in the US increased by almost 1,600 percent between 2000 and 2001 and these are just the number for instances when hate crimes were actually reported.

If you looked carefully at those statistics, you might have noticed that the numbers report "anti-Muslim" hate crimes, with absolutely no mention of "anti-Sikh" hate crimes. Sadly, there are currently no official government statistics that specifically tally the number of hate crimes that have been carried out against Sikhs, so there would actually be no way to report how many anti-Sikh hate crimes were reported

to the FBI. The Sikh Coalition, a New York based advocacy group, has been attempting to track the number of hate crimes against Sikhs in America (and have estimated the number to stand around 700) but their numbers are unofficial.

Strangely, the FBI has never actually tracked anti-Sikh hate crimes, despite the 100 year history of hate crimes against Sikhs. In many ways it has also conflated Sikhs with Muslims in some of its own practices, most tellingly by filing cases of criminal discrimination against Sikhs in the broader category of anti-Islamic hate crimes. Their rationale has been that in most cases Sikhs have been confused for Muslims, so they have always chalked the motivation for the criminal discrimination to be 'Islamophobia', not 'Sikhophobia'. Essentially, this has meant that the FBI has never felt the need to collate accurate statistics for hate crimes against Sikhs, and so has folded all cases of criminal discrimination against Sikhs and Sikh communities into statistics reporting anti-Muslim hate crimes.

Sadder still is the fact that racism and discrimination has come from official authorities as well. Over the last ten years, wide spread racial and ethnic profiling has resulted in more Sikhs, Muslims, Christian Arabs and other "suspicious looking" brown individuals being unnecessarily stopped, searched and harassed in public places like airports and train stations. It has caused a disproportionate number of innocent Muslims, Sikhs and Christian Arabs to be jailed on "suspicion" of terrorism and has overwhelmingly resulted in an unbelievably large number of hate crimes and instances of criminal discrimination.

The good news is that things are changing (and the more heartening news is that things had begun changing even before the tragic events in Oak Creek). Earlier in 2012, New York representative Joe Crowley formally approached the Justice Department to ask them to begin tracking anti-Sikh hate crimes by placing a designation for crimes against Sikhs on the FBI Hate Crime Incident Report Form. In April 2012, nearly 90 members of the US House of Representatives endorsed the campaign. A formal Senate subcommittee hearing on the issue was convened in September 2012, and it had an attendance of over 400 people (both the hearing room and the overflow room were filled to capacity). At



Harpreet Singh Saini testifies at the US Senate hearing convened to address Sikh hate crimes.

the hearing, Harpreet Singh Saini became the first Sikh to testify in the US Senate, giving a moving and emotional tribute to his mother, Kamaljit Singh Saini, one of the victims of Wade Michael Page's attack on the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin. After assessing the proceedings, the US Department of Justice formally recommended that the FBI begin tracking hate crimes against Sikhs. And although such recommendations are not binding on the FBI, this high level of endorsement has given Sikh Americans a lot to be positive about.

November 2012 has been designated as *Sikh Awareness and Appreciation* month in California. To ensure that *Sikh Awareness and Appreciation* month is properly recognised, the State Superintendent Tom Torlakson urged all City and District Superintendents "to promote awareness of the contributions of Sikh Americans to California's history." This is another heartening move in the right direction, because the real way to reduce the number of hate crimes against Sikhs and also other minority groups is to help educate people about the customs and traditions of various communities.

The sad truth about criminal discrimination and racism against Sikhs is that the violent reaction to the "foreignness" and different-ness of Sikhs has only taken on an Islamophobic tinge in the last 10 years. In fact, the official and civil discrimination against Sikhs in the last decade has stemmed from the same xenophobic impulse as it did a hundred years ago, it's just that Sikhs are being classified differently (first we were "ragheads" and now we're "terrorists"). Although the increase in incidents of violence against Sikhs could be co-related to conflating Sikhs with Muslims, the bottomline remains that Sikhs have always been unacceptable to some Americans because of their turbans, their beards and their brown skin, just as Muslims and other immigrants have also been discriminated against for their own set of differences.

It is a lie to say that all communities are the exactly same because we do have different histories, different customs, different religions and even different appearances; so the real move forward will only happen when communities learn to live with each other, to accept their differences and (dare I say it) even celebrate them !

Michelle Obama Visits Wisconsin Gurdwara



In horror and shock after the dastardly attack on Sikhs at their Gurdwara in Wisconsin, the administration of the United States of America declared a week of mourning, with US flags on all official buildings on half mast. President Obama Michelle condoled with the Sikh community (*in sharp contrast to the apathy and attitude after the genocide of Sikhs in the capital of India in November 1984*) and in August 2012, America's First Lady Michelle Obama visited the Sikh community of Wisconsin to privately meet with families of those killed by white supremacist Wade Michael Page. At the Oak Creek High School, she expressed her condolences to Secretary of the Gurdwara at Wisconsin, Kulwant Singh Dhaliwal.

Michelle Obama spent about 30 minutes with Sikh families. In addition, the family of policeman Lt. Brian Murphy, who was shot more than eight times by Wade, met privately with Michelle Obama in a separate room.

Amardeep Kaleka, son of Satwant Kaleka, who was killed while he tried to protect the others, said about Michelle Obama's visit. "It felt sincere. She knew about my father and what he'd done. She called him a hero and said he should be remembered for the good that he had done." He further informed that after meeting the families Obama spoke at a campaign event and the crowd at Bradley Tech applauded other members of the Sikh community when they walked into the rally.

Amardeep said "this healing touch by America's First Lady helps the families tremendously. Her visit goes a long

way to assuage the feelings of hundreds of Sikh families across the nation. The Sikh community is thankful to Obamas for their support and their special gesture during this difficult time."

"Their embrace of the Sikhs represented the feelings of millions of Americans during this national tragedy. We will continue to offer our prayers for the victims and Police officer Brian Murphy who has become a hero for the entire nation and Sikhs will always be grateful for his selfless and courageous acts." said Dr Rajwant Singh of SCORE.



American melting pot more myth than reality ?

A high point of American modernisation has been its claim of being a true ethnic-melting pot. It boasted as to subsume and assimilate all the ethnic, religious and racial identities into one homogeneous collectivity called the 'US citizen'. The near uncontested hegemony of America has thrived as much on its robust economic foundation as on its much-vaunted image of an open, liberal and non-discriminating society. All this, however, was to change after post 9/11.

There has been an alarming rise in the incidents of hate-crimes in the US post that attack and, more recently, an Indian student named Saurabh Bhalerao was gruesomely injured in New Bedford, Massachusetts. He was mistaken to be a Muslim even as he pleaded about his Hindu identity.

What, however, makes it far more serious is the US government's response in the wake of 9/11 attack which, till then, had believed 'terrorism' to be a menace which existed only in some distant lands like the Balkans, Kashmir and the Middle East. They have since not only indulged in selective discriminations in visa policies and electronic-monitoring of the 'Naturalised Americans', wherever and but whenever a person whose name, if even remotely sounded anything Arabic, were clearly hounded and harassed.

Of course, all this is in the name of security compulsions. One is instantly reminded of how some time back Kamal Hasan was stranded for hours at one of the airports in the US just because his name carried the prefix 'Hasan'. There are reports of students, especially Muslims, being denied visas.

And now in another bizarre display of cultural insensitivity to 'others', the US State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs, one hears, have prepared a video film called 'a war without border' which apparently shows Sikhs as terrorists and copies of the video have been distributed to 5,000 school teachers all over the US. Enraged at its far-reaching implications for the community as it might create a permanent hostility,

many Sikh organisations have registered strong protest to the US authorities.

There is an old saying that it is during the crisis that one's character is truly tested. And if the 9/11 attack was one such occasion, there can be no doubt that the US has failed miserably in the test. Its dominant image of a true "ethnic melting pot" lies decomposed and debunked to the utter embarrassment for those who had celebrated the demise of Soviet Russia as a triumph of liberal democracy.

Post 9/11, while the entire world shared the grief and anguish of the USA, many expected it to be a turning point in the US policy towards social engineering which had hitherto been excessively techno-centric undermining the 'human element'. As a matter of the fact, the US believed so strongly in the role of law enforcing agencies or policing as social adhesives that it forgot to realise the implications

of underinvestment in what James Coleman would call 'social capital' i.e. the ability of people to work together for common purpose in groups and organisations. As a result, American society has witnessed the rise in violent crimes and court litigations; the breakdown of family structures; the decline of intermediate social structures like neighborhoods, churches, unions etc.

The decline of sociability in the US or loss of 'trust' as Francis Fukuyama, the much celebrated proponent of 'End of History' thesis would term it, is evident in the fact the US pays significantly more than other industrialised countries for police protection and keeps more than one per cent of its population behind bars. As Fukuyama would argue in his book "trust, law, contract and economic rationality provide necessary but not sufficient basis for both the stability and prosperity of post-industrial society; they must as well be leavened with reciprocity, moral obligations, duty towards community and trust, which are based on habit rather than rational calculations."

American society will have to rethink its 'US Universal' attitude and the task of citizen building will have to be based on inter-ethnic confidence building measures. In the meantime, however, a compulsory lesson on 'cultural pluralism, and an exposure of John Beattie's 'Other cultures' to the 'Original Americans' would be a good start.

Santosh K. Singh



Keeping the Faith

"It really began," says Dr Rajwant Singh, Chairman of the Sikh Council on Religion & Education (SCORE), "after 35 Sikhs met Clinton administration officials and a Bill was passed in the US Congress in 1993, called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. That's when President Clinton invited a coalition of different religious groups to meet him and I was in there."

Although the Sikh Council was formed in 1998 in Washington to raise the profile of the community, it was after 9/11 that the issue became crucial when the average American confused Sikhs with Osama's 'baddies' and attacked anybody in a turban.

But other issues have been boiling too, related to religious freedom. Ronald Reagan apparently imposed a 'Wasp' workplace dress code that Sikhs lobbied against for the right to wear the turban, beard, kirpan and kada. Not surprisingly, they had backing from the Democrats.

"Hillary Clinton came home to dinner and promised to take up the issue," recalled Rajwant Singh. A Bill is pending in the US Congress, called the *Workplace Religious Freedom Act*. Senator John Kerry introduced it and so far, it has the support of 25 senators (55 out of 100 are needed to get the Bill passed and the Sikh Council is lobbying hard for it.)



Playing basketball for the College
(top) the Khanda symbol at the court.

In fact, the issue came up in the US Air Force Academy, where recruits of all faiths were forced to say Christian prayers. A Jewish recruit took the court in 2005 and that too, is pending judgment.

Another move is afoot to include Sikhs in the US Army, co-sponsored by Senator John Cornyn of Texas. There are already about 100 Sikhs in the US Army and thereby, a poignant tale. The late Dr Bhagat Singh Thind (who died in 1967 short of his 75th birthday) was a highly respected professor of religion and philosophy in California, where the first Sikhs migrated to Orange County nearly a 100 years ago.

Thind fought for America in World War I but was denied citizenship by a US Supreme Court ruling that allowed citizenship only to Anglo-Saxons. Thind fought the case and the ruling was finally overturned in 1963, with life-changing consequences for all non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants to the "land of the free and brave."

"Dr Bhagat Singh Thind remains unsung though he fought for civil rights for all, not just Sikhs. The first gurdwara was built in Stockton, California in 1915 and was totally supportive of India's Freedom Movement. Sikhs have shared a 100 years in the history of this 200-year-old country called the USA and we want everyone in America to know it," emphasised Rajwant Singh. Perhaps they will one day.

RN



THE
SIKH FOUNDATION

Remembering 1984 : Waiting for Justice



Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany and Congressman Jim Corman address the House of Representatives, Washington D.C. in Spring 1984

The Sikh Foundation's active duty

“A community that forgets its martyrs falls into a constant decline and suffers from repeat persecution.”

On the anniversary of *Operation Blue Star*, the Sikh Foundation highlighted the active role played over the last three decades in helping to seek justice for those innocent people that lost their lives in the Sikh holocaust and making sure history never repeats itself.

The Sikh Foundation's efforts in fact began a few months before the 1984 attacks when a group of 150 Sikhs from all across the U.S. were invited to speak to the U.S. Congress in Washington D.C. about "the impending dangers in Punjab." The group collectively decided that Dr. Narinder S. Kapany, Chairman of the Sikh Foundation, should be the one to address the group of congressional leaders.

It was a profound moment in history where Dr Kapany insightfully warned U.S. officials that "information gathered shows the government of India instructed by Indira Gandhi is getting ready to attack the Golden Temple and we strongly advise them not to do so, because if they do – it will be the beginning of the end !"

Following the proceedings, the Sikh Foundation sent a telegram to Indira Gandhi stating "the Golden Temple is under serious threat of being attacked by the government of India and we strongly urge you not to do such a thing!" To aid in the situation, the Sikh Foundation proposed that a group of Sikhs from the U.S. would come to Delhi and Punjab to pacify the situation and convince elected leaders that an operation like this should never be undertaken. A copy of this letter was sent

to K. Shankar Bajpai, India's ambassador to the U.S. However, no response was received....

A few short weeks later the Indian government ordered the attack on the Golden Temple under *Operation Blue Star* and numerous other Sikh gurdwaras in the Punjab. As a consequence, and as we all know too well, this led to the massacre of thousands of innocent Sikhs in Punjab, Delhi, and across India. It was the darkest hour for the Sikhs. In the United States as in the world over, Sikhs were shocked, appalled and despite differing political viewpoints that often exist within the community, Sikhs were in total opposition to the actions taken by the Indian government.

At that time, the Sikh Foundation arranged to meet with over twenty congressional delegates including Sacramento Democrats Vic Fazio and Robert Matsui and former Republican representative Paul McCloskey. The panel was willing to travel to New Delhi, meet with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and visit Punjab to speak with prominent Sikh leaders on the seriousness of their situation and changes that needed to take place, and come back to the US and issue a report on their findings. As this trip was being organised, a letter of the proposed mission was sent to Ambassador Bajpai.

Instead, Bajpai responded forcefully saying "no country, even a democracy, allows self-constituted delegations from other countries to come and pry around in its domestic affairs," calling it "an unwarranted intrusion into the internal affairs of India." Ambassador Bajpai denied issue of visas for the panel to come to India, thereby infuriating the Sikh community in the USA even more.

After that episode, a local television journalist intervened and organised a well-received teleconference between Dr. Kapany and Ambassador Bajpai that was broadcast around the country to educate Americans about the attacks on Sikhs and the atrocities committed by the Indian government. Bajpai said a "limited press censorship" had been imposed but "as normalcy returns, the political dialogue will be resumed." Dr. Kapany brought light to the fact that the Punjab had been "sealed off" for more than 10 weeks. "If there is nothing to hide, then why is it being hidden?" he asked.

In an effort to educate more of the general public, the Sikh Foundation helped raise a substantial amount of funds for this period in 1984, to print full page spreads in many major metropolitan newspapers including San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington DC showing the damaged Golden Temple area as a result of *Operation Blue Star*. It brought awareness to Americans about the 1984 assault on Sikhs, taking place thousands of miles away. Through this, it inspired Americans to feel sympathy and concern for the deniable human rights and freedoms that their Sikh brothers and sisters faced, which was analogous to the suffering and hardship endured by Americans under their fight for freedom from the British in the 18th Century. The article included a call for duty to send messages of concern and aid to the addresses of the American Red Cross, US Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, US President Ronald Reagan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Punjab Relief Fund established by the Stockton Gurudwara.

In wake of the terrible times in 1984, Dr Narinder Singh Kapany gave a lecture at Vancouver while it was still very fresh in everyone's minds. The talk was very well received by over a thousand people, and so much so that the speaker after him, a senior member of the Canadian House of Representatives felt so compelled by what he had heard, he forwarded a copy of Dr. Kapany's speech to all of the members of the Canadian House of Representatives in Ottawa highlighting the situation of Sikhs in India.

Near three decades later and notwithstanding all efforts by many organisations including the Sikh Foundation, most Sikhs say that the scars from the Golden Temple invasion will never heal, but the wounds can be dressed, and action can be taken to overcome the dehumanising repression inflicted on the Sikh peoples. It's for that reason when asked about his motivation was after so many years of arduous effort that Dr. Kapany replied, "A community that forgets its martyrs, falls into a constant decline and suffers from repeat persecution. You have to remember your own martyrs, and in our case, we have had so many of them over history of the Sikhs."

Mass graves are still being found in areas of Haryana and northern India of the Sikhs, killed and buried by the mobs in 1984. Until there is justice, the Sikh Foundation will continue its mission. Several years ago, the Foundation spearheaded efforts to formalise plans and designs for a monument to Sikh martyrs to be constructed in Delhi and Amritsar. The vision was to have a museum of the Sikhs, a modern, high-tech library with computers, and a cultural centre where Sikhs and others would have a centre to discuss matters of vital interest to them. Not surprisingly, when presenting the idea of the monument to senior officials of the Indian government and also to a number of wealthy Sikhs residing in Delhi, the project was a 'non starter'.

Nonetheless, the Sikh Foundation continues to play an active role in remembering the Sikh martyrs of 1984. Most recently and keeping alive its dedication to their memory, the Sikh Foundation helped to fund a very important movie the critically acclaimed film called *Amu* directed by Shonali Bose. *Amu* is about a Bengali girl who after being adopted grows up in the US and upon graduating from college goes back to India to visit her family. The young girl discovers the reality of having been born in a Sikh family whose family died during the attacks of 1984. It is a very touching story and helps us remember many of those that had similar stories and scarred by those ghastly times.

When the director was asked her motivation for the film, she answered that "I wanted people to know the truth and wanted to give a voice to the families that have been continuously unheard and denied." This was absolutely orchestrated by the government and was an act of state terrorism- not just mob rioting as typically broadcast by the media. This was a planned cold-blooded massacre. The army was told to stand out for three days and not intervene as politicians gave material to *goondas* to carry out specific orders of wiping out Sikhs. There has never been so much hard evidence, and yet it's been covered up for over 25 years without any trials." And

the families of the victims are still waiting for justice," said Shonali Bose.

The Sikh Foundation has teamed up with artist Devender Singh of India to portray the lives of Sikh martyrs and families affected by 1984 which will be represented in an upcoming Sikh Arts calendar, which is produced annually by the Sikh Foundation.

While many contributions have been made over the last near three decades, the Sikh Foundation is determined to persevere and play an active duty in making sure those who lost their lives in 1984 will never be forgotten and will be forever etched in our hearts and memories for justice will someday be rightfully served.

Sheena Kaur Singh



*Amu : the haunting story of 1984,
directed by Shonali Bose*



Sikh soldiers of the British and Canadian armed forces, with veterans at a London ceremony

Proclaiming Our Identity – With Pride!

All amritdhari (baptised) Sikhs are required by their faith to wear the five distinctive symbols. The specific injunction, issued by Guru Gobind Singh, to keep unshorn hair as God-gifted at birth, makes the importance of ‘Kesh’ pre-eminent among Sikh symbols.

The extraordinary importance given to ‘Kesh’ by Guru Gobind Singhji was because of many physical, moral and metaphysical reasons.

Matchless Martyrdom: In 1675, when his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji was publicly beheaded in Chandni Chowk of the city of Delhi, Guru Gobind Singh keenly wanted to know how many Sikhs were present at the site of martyrdom. He was told that Sikhs

simply could not be distinguished. Guru Gobind Singh must have felt compelled to invest the Sikhs with a distinctive persona so that they would never hide their identity in the face of terrible adversity.

Guru Gobind Singh wanted his Sikhs to profess their faith fearlessly, irrespective of consequences. He, therefore, made it obligatory for the Sikhs to wear natural *Kesh* as a symbol and stamp of Sikh identity.

Life of Honour & Dignity

Sikh history is replete with countless sacrifices made by Sikhs to preserve the sanctity of ‘kesh’ and carry forward traditions of their Gurus who had endured great hardships, made personal sacrifices and suffered

martyrdom so that we may have a life of honour and dignity.

Thus, 'Kesh' should have been treated as a symbol of religious veneration, but sadly, this is not the case. The symbol is being dishonoured and abused without any qualms. Mindless Sikhs today are wearing caps instead of the magnificent turban. Worse still, some shave – clumsily shingle – their beards on the flimsy ground of 'convenience'. These Sikhs tend to argue that, in this age of competition and long working hours, time must be valued more than anything else and to tie a turban everyday and dress the hair properly, 'wastes' a good deal of time.

Religion is not a matter of convenience; it is a matter of conviction and total commitment.

*Jao tao prem khailan ka chao,
Sir dhar tali gali meri aao.
Eit marag paar dharije
Sir deeje kand na keeje,*

"If you want to tread my path said Guru Nanak, then come to me with head on your palm and once you set your foot on this path, then find not a way out and be prepared to give your head."

(SGGS: 1412)

"The sacrifices of Guru Arjan Dev, Guru Tegh Bahadur and countless other martyrs, reiterate the message conveyed by Guru Nanak. India's hoary heritage has remained glorious because of their extraordinary sacrifices."

Guru Gobind Singh gave that call for total commitment on that Vaisakhi day in 1699 before he administered Amrit to the Panj Pyaras and created the Khalsa Panth.

Distinctive Discipline

The code of conduct prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh was devised so as to impose clear discipline on the Sikhs so that they remained easily distinguishable by their common visible identity and maintain the highest moral and ethical standards that were followed and demanded by his predecessors.

To further ensure that the common identity prescribed for members of the Khalsa Panth was neither diluted nor deviated from, Guru Gobind Singh enjoined upon the Sikhs to always tie turbans and never a 'topi'. As stated by Surjit Singh Gandhi in his book *History of Sikh Gurus Retold*, "there is a 'Rahat'



attributed to Guru Gobind Singh according to which a Sikh who violates this code is cursed".

*Joe Sikh sar topi dharei
Sat janam kushti hor mareh*

Character comes at a Price

Thus, total commitment demanded by the Sikh Gurus meant strict compliance of the rules and rituals of the faith. A Sikh cannot accept what suits him and reject what he finds inconvenient. Some rules may impose hardship but then they are necessary for the purpose for which they were given.

The contention of those who advance "inconvenience" as an excuse to abuse their hair does not stand to reason. The average well-groomed Sikh does not spend more time on grooming his beard and tying his turban than the average non-Sikh spends on shaving and dressing his hair. I know of many non-Sikhs whose daily shave alone involves more than half an hour, in addition to frequent visits to the hair cutting saloon. In fact, the 'inconvenience' and time involved in both cases is virtually the same!

Life of ease spells decay

Moreover, convenience is not the only thing in life. Man is an integral part of society and, as such, the sentiments of society must also be respected. An apostate hurts the feeling of his parents, his relatives, his friends, nay, the whole community. But this is not

all. We must re-visit the pages of Sikh history and understand what has been our reaction throughout the hardships, difficulties and inconveniences.

The pages of Sikh history are red with the blood of its martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the sake of their faith. Without that, Sikhism would not have survived.

Moral fibre is everlasting

What was the matchless spirit that inspired the minor sons of Guru Gobind Singh, and countless other martyrs? What was the inspiration of the Sikhs at Nankana Sahib and other Sikh shrines during the early stages of the Akali Movement for the liberation of Gurdwaras? What was the soul that inspired Guru ka Bagh? What was the reaction of Sikhs after the tragic partition of India?

Truth of the matter is that the pristine edifice of Sikhism has been built with sweat and blood. Every difficulty and every inconvenience has added strength to our determination and speed to our endeavours. We survived that terrible period when ruthless effort was made to exterminate the entire community, because we refused to believe that there was any difficulty that could not be overcome. We brought the mighty Mughal Empire to its knees with our miniscule forces, because we had the courage to accept difficulties and face them courageously.

“It cost something to proclaim oneself” wrote Duncan Greenless “when the Sikhs were hunted down for torture and death. Thus wearing long hair trained them in courage, in being ready at all times, to be martyrs for the faith.”

Wearing the ‘kesh’ in the 21st Century, therefore, remains a test of discipline, courage and firmness of one’s faith. Those Sikhs who put forward ‘inconvenience’ as a plea for dishonouring or renouncing the symbols of their identity, are either oblivious of their inspiring history and heritage or lack the courage of their conviction and fidelity to their faith.

Let us look into our hearts. This is a moment for some candid and serious introspection. There is urgent need to rediscover and reinvent Sikhism and rejuvenate interest and pride in the Sikh persona. A movement like the Singh Sabha, with greater zeal and enthusiasm, needs to be started again to stem the tide of apostasy. All doubts that are clouding our minds must be cleared



“Proud to be Sikh”: the future is strong

by reasoned debates, rational arguments and scientific explanation. Time has come for the Sikhs to reassert their cultural and religious identity.

Nevertheless, however cherished a symbol may be, it must be based mainly on independent reasoning to sustain its survival. For a deeply devout disciple, faith is sufficient to abide by the discipline prescribed by the Gurus. But faith alone is not acceptable to the rational mind. The rational thinker requires cogent arguments, doctrinal support, scriptural evidence and expository material to corroborate the truth.

There is, therefore, urgent need for new exegetical literature to meet the requirement of changing times and imagination. Once the dialectics are understood and the rationale of the symbols established, the symbols may be accepted willingly, in fact worn with courage and pride !

As members of this great religion, we are not ‘owners’ of the legacy of Sikhism. We are indeed caretakers for the next generation! We only hold that in trust for them. Let us not betray that trust. Let us renew our covenant with the great Gurus and carry forward their legacy. Let us restore the glory of our religious identity and do so with infinite pride.

Paropkar Singh Puri

Professor Kirpal Singh of New Zealand writes on

“My Turban and sartorial adventures”



Professor Kirpal Singh with his wife at Wellington, New Zealand in 2012.

I have had marvellous encounters on account of my wearing a usually colourful and neatly tied turban during my engagements with the Delhi University, Delhi, University of Amsterdam (Holland), Catholic Univ. of Lovain (Belgium), Imperial College, London, University of Bern in Switzerland, University of Dar-Es-Salaam, Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria), University of Papua New Guinea, Universiti Putra, Malaysia, Queensland University, Brisbane (Australia), Victoria University,

Wellington, New Zealand and the East West Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii.

An initial encounter at Delhi University was, however, curious on account of my navy blue-coloured turban. The HOD of Chemistry got the impression that I was an Akali and could bring in elements of Akali politics in the department. He tried to stop my admission in the Ph D programme with a polite advice that I would do better in the Indian Air Force ! The matter went to the Vice Chancellor of the University and I was granted admission and eventually earned a Ph D degree.

I then used to wear turbans in dark colours with neat six layers (now 5-layers) with contrasting ‘fifty’ and matching shirt, neck tie, trousers and shoes. In Holland, Belgium and Switzerland, I enjoyed preferential treatment wherever I went. At social levels I got invited and was photographed extensively. I was surprised when people frequently approached me in public places with offers to buy me a cup of coffee or whatever.

In Amsterdam, my landlady would show off my pictures to her relatives and visitors with much pride. Once an Indian from London spotted me at Amsterdam. He was an artist from Southall touring various European cities by car. He invited me join him on his travels. When we reached Germany late in the night, we located a rest house. They had only two rooms available, one with four beds and the other with a single bed. They lodged my friend with shared accommodation and allocated me the single bed room. My new friend was not so comfortable on the allocation, but the manager explained that he could not offer anything better to the ‘Maharaja - with turban. My friend had realised the dignity of a turban !

I was interviewed in Belgium for a research job in 1971. The Director of the Institute on offering me the job remarked “it would be great to have you with us as an added attraction to the Institute

and in the town of Leuven". In Bern, I went to a photographer to get some passport size pictures. He asked me if he could display a picture of mine in his show case to which I agreed. After a week, I saw many people gazing at me with appreciative glances. I became conscious and asked my colleagues at Bern University whether they had noticed something strange. I was then told that there was a 5-foot portrait of me mounted on a frame, displayed outside a photographer's studio. I rushed back and requested that to please only display a smaller size in his window !

During 1972-74, there were two other turbaned Sikhs resident in Bern— one was Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh (as the Ambassador) and S.M.P Singh (Consulate Officer). People would tell me that they had seen my relatives in Bern !

On arrival in Tanzania, I was greeted as 'Banna Singha' – a common respectable address for a turbaned Sikh. In Nigeria, I was known as 'Alhaji' as most Muslim Nigerians who have performed Hajj normally wear turbans on special functions. The Amirs in Nigeria also wear turbans (white or black) in daily life. I enjoyed tremendous respect in Nigeria on account of my turban. The last (late) President of Nigeria did his Masters' Degree with me, and many students rose to become Professors, Vice Chancellors and Senior Govt. functionaries across Nigeria.

In Malaysia, since there are many Sikhs in prominent positions especially as medical doctors, lawyers, policemen, businessmen, academics and Government officials and so on, my turban was amicably greeted at all levels. In Papua New Guinea, I was the first Indian (and also Sikh) appointed as a Professor in UPNG. On one occasion, the Governor General of



Professor Kirpal Singh (Professor of Chemistry 1976-1988) with his Postgraduate students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria in 1980.

PNG attended a function organised by the Highlander students in UPNG and I was introduced to him. A few weeks later, he invited me and my wife to his residence for a party at the Government House. When asked as how was it that I was the only academic invited he responded "you look distinguished in the turban" ! During my tenure in PNG, four Indian High Commissioners were posted and all said that whenever they met the Prime Minister of PNG, he always mentioned that "we have a turbaned Professor Singh at the UPNG". When I leaving PNG in 2007, a number of students (who even became senior officers in public life) came to see me and told me -"Professor - please do not leave PNG and stay here - we shall also build a memorial in your honour in our State". Somewhat emotional but flowing with respect.

In Australia and New Zealand, a turbaned-Sikh is well accepted but out of curiosity often questioned about the length and time taken to tie a turban neatly and the significance attached to colours. In most countries, people asked me to give a demonstration on 'how to fix a turban'. They do not believe that it takes me just some minutes to tie it. Since 1989, I have served as a Member of the Board of Directors, Pacific Basin Consortium on Environment and Health, East-West Centre, Honolulu, Hawaii and invited to Conferences (the next one is from 24-27 September 2013).

During a conference in Beijing in 2007, the delegates were taken around visiting the historic Tiamen Square and, as usual, I was singled out by visitors from various countries for photographs with them, thanks to my turban.

I have loved wearing my turban and cannot imagine myself ever without it. It is always inspiring to see a Sangat gathering wearing different colours of turbans. *The United Colours of Sikhs !*

Injustice and Ignorance in Middle Europe

"When injustice was committed by a small group of ignorant people within a seemingly archaic organisation, as it happened with Sikhs in Poland by some Border Guards, it was time to decide 'enough was enough,'" says Shaminder Singh Puri, who launched the campaign looking to tackle the issue focussing particularly on airport security checks.

Shaminder Singh is a Scientist and Secretary General of an international science organisation and a geologist from Dorchester upon Thames, Oxfordshire, who alleged that the Polish airport authorities persistently harassed him, as well as many other Sikhs by making it mandatory to remove the turban and place on the conveyor belt like hand luggage for examination. Polish security staff stubbornly refused to first utilise other routinely available check procedures, such as hand held security devices, pat down of the turbans, and puffer. He claimed that there was a total lack of sensitivity, which was "simply a result of ignorance".

Thus, the campaign, 'Respect to the Sikh Turban', with a worldwide following is aimed to gain recognition about the significance of the Sikh Turban or 'Dastar' which for the Sikhs, is a sign of faith and identity and to ensure that this does not receive abusive or undignified treatment at airports. This campaign is addressed to all reasonable travelling people, to the Border Guards of EU Countries, to the Government agencies that regulate their Border Guard services and to Airport Authorities.

As Shaminder Singh Puri puts it,

"The root cause of the campaign goes back to mid-2009. At that time the EU Commission dealing with airport safety introduced new regulations on security checks. While these checks were generally very sensible and necessary, one aspect of the rules affected Sikhs.

There was a requirement (though not compulsory) that head gear (hats, caps, baseball caps and other similar items) had to be passed through the scanners. While this does not affect most people it does affect Sikhs, especially those that are the citizens and residents of EU Countries.



Border Guards in some EU Countries took this regulation literally. They demanded that Sikhs remove their turbans, place them on the tray for hand baggage and pass them through the scanner, despite no indication of any alarm signal.

From August 2009 to September 2010 the Sikh Community made many attempts to have dialogue with the Polish Border Guards suggesting that we provide them with information about Sikh turbans, about Sikh values, about the possibility of non intrusive checks – and only then, by intrusive checks if some prohibited item was suspected in the turban.

We even went to the length of agreeing to a Memorandum of Understanding, albeit with some junior staff of the Border Guard, all to no avail.

As Shaminder Singh Puri stresses, "This is a fight we must win. It will avoid future harassment of Sikhs wearing their turbans. If this Court action in Poland is successful, it will be easier to ask European Court of Human Rights to make the ruling applicable in all the rest of the EU Member States."

Gurpreet Kaur

GUARDSMAN BHULLAR OF THE SCOTS GUARDS

Guardsman Jatinderpal Singh Bhullar, 25, who joined the Scots Guards of the British Army in 2012, proudly wears his turban as part of the uniform. The decision by the British Army has proved controversial with Bhullar's fellow soldiers. The Army's Sikh chaplain has stated that Bhullar has endured taunts about his turban and hair and beard. Bhullar is based at Wellington Barracks in Birdcage Walk. The base is used by soldiers from the Scots Guards' F Company, who have been responsible for public duties and guarding the Queen at Buckingham Palace.

Jatinderpal Singh, who is from Birmingham, paraded for the first time on 10 December 2012. Standing alongside his fellow Scots Guardsmen in their bearskins was Sikh Jatinderpal Singh Bhullar – the first soldier in his 180-year-old regiment to swap the traditional headwear for a turban. His mother Gurbax Kaur Bhullar, 48, from Slough, Berks, said: "We are very proud of him. Jatinderpal wanted to join the Army because his



grandfather had served in the First World War. It was a great passion of Jatinderpal's from a very young age, and he would say when he grew up, wanted to be in the Army and make his country proud of him."

There was no mistaking the pride on the face of Guardsman Bhullar, who wears his regimental cap badge on his turban. He has described guarding the Queen as 'the best thing in my life'.

The 25-year-old former builder from West Bromwich – who will also be distinguishable from his fellow soldiers in F Company Scots Guards by his beard – had dreamed of joining the Army since learning as a boy that his grandfather had served in the First World War. The Guardsman said: 'Conducting public duties while being a practising Sikh and wearing my turban is a great honour for me.

Wearing the five 'Ks' with pride, -he will also be distinguishable from his fellow soldiers on parade by his neatly-tied beard.



Rebecca English



Jatinderpal Singh Bhullar, 25, participating in the Changing of the Guard ceremony.



Jatinderpal Singh Bhullar is the first Sikh posted at Buckingham Palace as part of the Scots Guards.

Sikhs and Scots have served side-by-side in war and peace for over a century, including during two World Wars, earning innumerable gallantry awards including the Victoria Cross, facts that need to be remembered for all time.





“Battle for the Turban” in France

The UN Human Rights Committee has ruled that the French ban on wearing of “conspicuous” religious symbols in schools – introduced in a law adopted in March 2004 – violated a Sikh student’s right to manifest his religion, which is protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In a decision that was sent out in mid-December 2012 to the UNITED SIKHS legal team, in relation to a complaint made by Bikramjit Singh in 2008, the Committee accepted that the wearing of a turban is regarded as a religious

right for a Sikh and is also intrinsic with his identity, and that France had not justified the prohibition on the wearing of the turban.

The Committee accepted that France was entitled to uphold the principle of secularism (laicite), a means by which a State party might seek to protect the religious freedom of all its population; it recognised that the adoption of the 2004 law had responded to actual incidents of interference with the religious freedom of pupils and sometimes even threats to their physical safety.

The Committee however went on to express the opinion that this was not enough to justify the interference with religious rights that the law represented. France had “not furnished compelling evidence that by wearing his *keski* (small turban) [Bikramjit] would have posed a threat to the rights and freedoms of other pupils or to order at the school. The Committee also considered that the penalty of permanent exclusion had not been shown to be necessary and that it had been imposed, not because of any harmful conduct by Bikramjit, but because he belonged to a broad category of people by their religious conduct. In the Committee’s view, France had not shown “how the sacrifice of those persons’ rights is either necessary or proportionate to the benefits achieved”.

The views were adopted on 1 November 2012, at the 106th session of the Committee’s sitting.



Sikh students: the turban is intrinsic to their personality.



One hundred years back, in defence of France: Sikh soldiers marching in France at the start of the First World War. The Sikhs first landed in Marseilles on 26 September 1914 and received a heroes’ welcome. ‘Unique stalwarts from the east’ flashed the press! Not only were they welcomed, but throughout the war the French with whom they came into contact, treated them with amazing friendliness and a spirit of equality.



Gurpreet Singh (centre) of the United Sikhs, along with Manjit Singh GK on his right, speaking at a rally outside the French Embassy in New Delhi.

Less than a year earlier, the UNHRC had also concluded that France had violated the religious freedom of 76 year old Ranjit Singh when he was asked to remove his turban for his ID photograph. A UN decision is still awaited for Shingara Singh, whose passport has not been renewed by France because he refused to remove his turban for his ID photograph.

As Mejindarpal Kaur, International Legal Director for United Sikhs, told a media conference in Paris: "Laicite or secularity is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end. The end that laicite must achieve is freedom, equality and fraternity. Likewise the turban is a means to an end and Sikhs in France will continue to wear the turban so they may work towards a society that is free, fair and for the good of all mankind."

"We now look to France to fulfil its treaty obligations under International law. It also has a moral

duty to ensure that the freedom of religion and belief is upheld for everyone who lives within its territory," she emphasised.

Stephen Grosz of *London Solicitors Bindmans*, who was instructed by United Sikhs to represent Bikramjit Singh, said: "The UN Human Rights Committee is the first international body examine the substantive merits of France's ban on religious symbols and clothing in schools. In this significant ruling, it has made clear that the prohibition is unjustified. France must now prevent similar violations in future, and, in particular, the Committee said that it should review the law of 2004 that imposed the ban. France must also provide Bikramjit Singh with a remedy, including appropriate compensation. France has 180 days to explain to the Committee how it proposes to give effect to the decision.

Bobigny Gurdwara.



We see it as our friend to help us be good citizens,” explained Shingara Singh, Director United Sikhs in France .

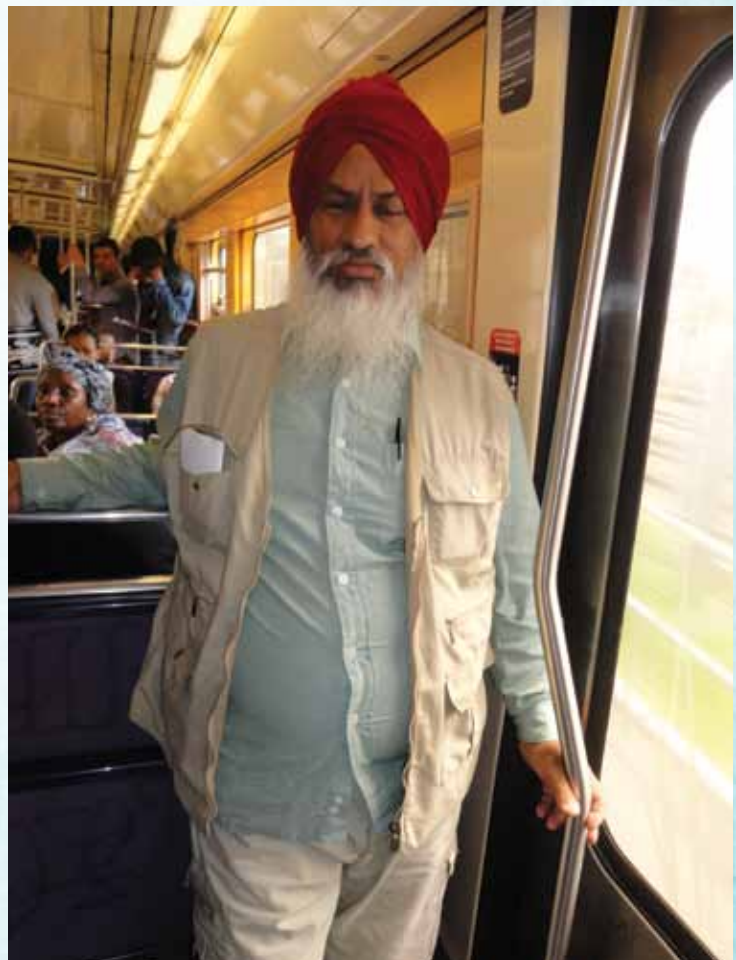
“Our stand for the turban will not only benefit France but the whole world. It is not a coincidence that this battle of the turban is being fought in France, a country that lives by laicite. The turban will show the world that the true meaning of laicite can only be achieved if its people are allowed to be free to practice their faith,” said Gurdial Singh of the *Turban Action Committee* of France, who has relentlessly been part of the campaign.

Dr. Harbans Lal

Bikramjit Singh, whose religious rights the UN decided had been violated, said, “I am very pleased with the UN’s decision and would like to reassure the French government that we are in favour of secularity, in its true sense. The Sikh turban stands for liberty, equality and fraternity because the right to wear a turban is open to all – men and women, rich and poor. “In fact, the turban is a symbol of laicite – it does not discriminate. The Turban is not a sign of oppression. It is practice of freedom,” added Bikramjit Singh, who after being expelled from school, completed his education privately and is now a project engineer with an engineering firm in Paris.

Instead of the Indian government taking it up to protect Bikramjit Singh’s religious freedom abroad so that he and other Sikhs were not banned from wearing the turban in French public schools, it took an NGO, United Sikhs, to take up-and win-this case at the UN ! One is very proud of United Sikhs and the global Sikh community for the victory at the UN.

“Religion and politics are two wheels that balance civil society. If one wheel comes off, society ceases to be stable. Laicite, or secularity, is the oil that ensures that the two wheels keep moving. Sikhs do not see laicite as the enemy.



Avtar Singh, resident of Paris in France for several years, on his way to the Gurdwara at Bobigny.



A young American-Sikh in a Gatka demonstration at Amritsar.

Gatka: the origins and its Practice Today

Gatka' is a weapon-based martial art associated with the Punjab and literally means the wooden training sticks which are intended to simulate swords in sparring matches. This practice predates the Mughal era and is still continued by Sikhs in India and their diaspora as well as certain other ethno-cultural groups in India and Pakistan. In a stricter sense, *gatka* may refer specifically to this exercise; however, the term commonly refers to Punjabi or Sikh martial arts in general, including other weapons aside from the training stick of its namesake. When taken in their entirety, the Punjabi fighting system should more properly be called *shastar vidiyā* (ਸ਼ਸਤਰ ਵਦਿਆ, from the

Sanskrit *sastravidya* or "knowledge of the sword"), a classical term for martial arts in general.

The 'Sikh *gatka*' can be practiced either as a sport (*khela*) or ritual (*rasmi*), the sport form being played by two opponents wielding wooden staves called the *gatka*. These sticks may be paired with a shield, and points are scored for 'hits' or touches on vital spots. The other weapons are not used for sparring, but their techniques are taught through preset routines. Although primarily weapon-based, the Punjabi *gatka* incorporates *kushti* as its unarmed component.

Gatka originated in what is now northwest India and neighbouring Pakistan, its techniques ultimately rooted in the fighting methods of the medieval Punjab.

The people of the area were feared warriors, known for their tall stature and relatively heavier build. Their system of fighting is termed as *shastar vidiya*, originally used in reference to swordsmanship but also a generic word for armed combat. *Gatka*, referring specifically to its role as sword training, was used in much of north India and even the Mughal emperor Akbar is known to have practiced *gatka* with a sword and shield.

With the spread of Sikhism during the 15th-16th century, Sikhs in particular became renowned throughout South Asia for their heavily martial culture. Guru Nanak, founder of the Sikh faith was born into a kshatriya family, as were many of his first disciples. His successor, Guru Angad Dev, taught followers to train the body physically, mentally and spiritually, encouraging the practice of martial arts. The sixth Sikh patriarch, Guru Hargobind, propagated the theory of the warrior-saint and emphasised the need to practice fighting for self-defence against the Mughal armies during the reign of Aurangzeb, owing to growing animosities.

The tenth patriarch, Guru Gobind Singh was a master of armed fighting who galvanised the martial energies of the Sikh community in founding of the Khalsa Panth in 1699. The Khalsa's aims were to fight oppression, assist the poor, believe in the One God, abandon superstition and defend the faith. This is symbolised by the *kirpan* or dagger, one of the five Ks which every baptised Sikh is required to carry. In regards to training the brotherhood, Guru Gobind Singh pledged that he would "teach the sparrow to fight the hawk". The Akali Nihang, a stricter order of Sikh warriors, exemplified his principles of combining spirituality with combat training.

Following the Second Anglo-Sikh War of 1848-1849 and subsequent establishment of the British Raj, the Sikh martial traditions and practitioners suffered greatly. Ever wary of the Sikhs, the British ordered effective disarmament of the entire Sikh community; the Akali Nihang, considered the keepers of all Sikh traditions were particularly regarded as being disloyal to the colonists. More than 1,500 Nihangs were executed by the British for plotting rebellion and according to folklore, many went north to the mountains and established themselves there.

During the Mutiny of 1857, in a reverse of sides with the sepoys, earlier helping the British in the Anglo-Sikh Wars, the Sikhs assisted the British in

crushing what clearly was a mutiny of the Native Army. As a consequence of this, restrictions on Sikh fighting practices were relaxed and *gatka* re-emerged after 1857. The old method of sword training was used by the Khalsa from the 1860s as a practice for hand-to-hand combat. Then, as Sikh educational institutions opened during the 1880s, European rules of fencing were applied to create what is now called *khela* or sport *gatka*.

The British colonists soon enough engaged Sikhs from India to fortify other British colonies as soldiers and security guards. *Gatka* is still practiced by the Sikh communities of former British colonies and neighbouring countries including Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Thailand.

Gatka in the Sikh Diaspora

Today, *gatka* is most often showcased during Sikh festivals. Since India's independence, *gatka* has been managed and promoted by the Punjab *Gatka*



Gatka demonstration in Wolverhampton, England (2007).



Young Sikhs practice Gatka at a park in England.

Association and the Gatka Federation of India. The latter organisation formulated and standardised rules and

regulations for gatka as a sport, and provided training through seminars, workshops and camps under the new rules.

The Punjab Education Department has now introduced *gatka* into the school sports calendars in the state, while the School Games Federation of India also incorporated *gatka* into the 56th National School Games calendar 2011-2012. Once considered an essentially male domain, *gatka* is now commonly practiced by females as well. To promote and popularise the art outside India, the Asian Gatka Federation, Commonwealth Gatka Federation and International Gatka Federation have also been constituted. *Gatka* competitions are held annually during a sporting event in the rural Punjab town of Kila Raipur, while the Sikh community of Malaysia often holds *gatka* demonstrations during certain festivals.



An array of weapons displayed before a Gatka demonstration in London.

WARRIORS WITH RESOLVE!





Videos of Sikh youths doing a modern-day Gatka have gone viral on the Internet.

From the dusty bylanes of Tarn Taran in the Punjab, a group of Sikh youths has emerged as the new Internet sensation. Videos of them doing extreme stunts on reality TV shows have gone viral, with eight million hits on *You Tube* alone.

Bir Khalsa – a group of 250 Sikh youths between nine and 28 years of age – has reinvented the Gatka, a Sikh martial art from the time of the sixth Sikh guru, Guru Hargobind, involving use of sticks and swords. The group has taken it to a whole new level. Weary of repetitive routines at village fairs that made them local celebrities but failed to generate any income, the group, started 18 years ago, recently decided to shed the traditional costume for military-style fatigues. The change into a Punjabi version of GI Joe appears to have paid off and the group's *Power of the Khalsa* video is currently vying for eyeballs with the *Tanglish Kolaveri Di*.

The makeover goes beyond the cosmetic. Unlike traditional Gatka, they do death-defying routines – with members plunging through thousands of tubelights and shattering blocks on a partner's skull. In a particularly terrifying act, three men are placed between beds of six-inch nails while others hammer on them.

The troupe's 31-year old leader and chief trainer Kanwaljit Singh, who took over in 1996 from founder Amarjit Singh who had left to join the Punjab Roadways, says, "The new act and combat gear gives the boys a younger, more universal look'. He adds, "The idea is to draw young men away from drugs to a healthy life." A seven-minute video of the group's performance at Eenu TV's talent show in Hyderabad telecast got over 6.4 million views within four days of it being posted across Chinese sites Youku, Tudou and Sina Weibo.

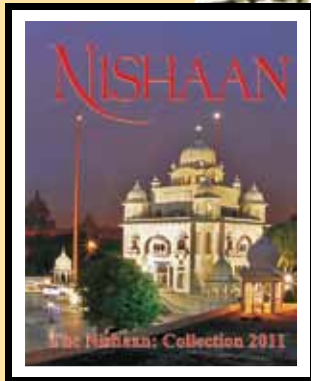
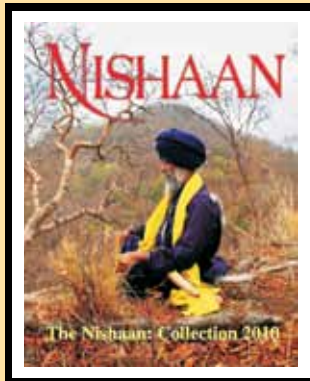
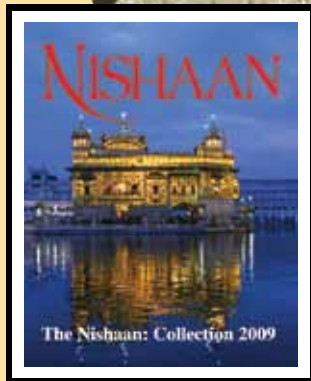
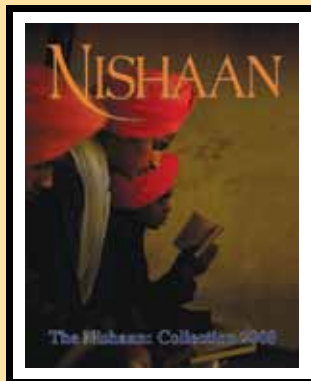
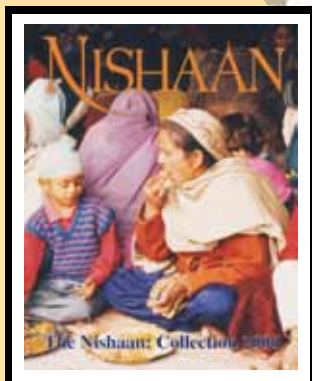
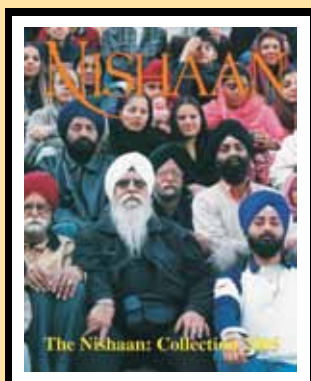
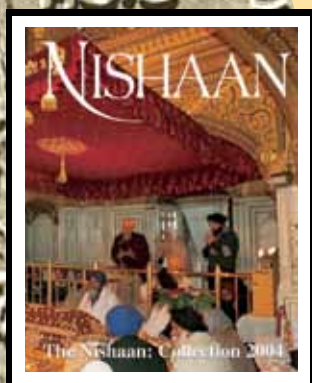
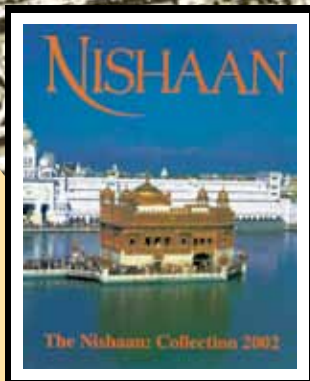
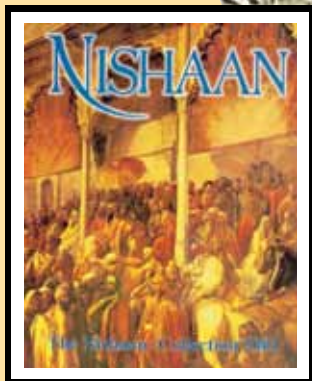
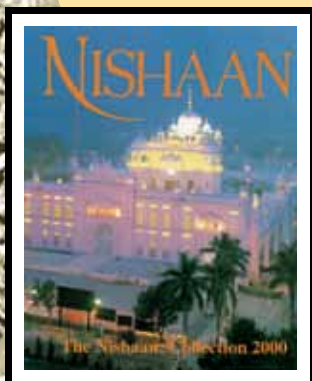
Accolades go beyond the cyber world. The group was second runner-up on *India's Got Talent* on the Colors channel in September 2010 and bagged the top spot on Eenu TV's version of the contest a year later. Bir Khalsa's success has attracted many to Gatka. "Tarn Taran already has 35 new groups," says Harinder Singh, 38, who manages the group's publicity.

Fame has brought with it invitations to events across the country. The group has just returned from a multicity tour and is now training hard for the Baisakhi fair in Toronto, in April. So, are the blood and guts for real?

"One hundred per cent," says Kanwaljit. "This is not like WWE wrestling. Our swords have the sharpest edges. And, the boys do get hurt,' he adds proudly.

Asit Jolly
From *The Tribune*

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