

In Britain, do as the Sikhs do

London: The Sikhs are economically the most successful religious group in Britain, says the Office of National Statistics on the basis of the 2001 census. Eight out of 10 Sikhs are likely to own a house, considered the basic symbol of prosperity. The document titled Focus on Religion, was published late last year. **The Sikhs' success is a tribute to the work ethic of the first generation and the ever-growing economic success and educational achievement of subsequent generations.**

The figure of 82 per cent home ownership among Sikhs compares favourably with 70 per cent among the Christian majority. Sikhs are as likely as Christians to hold a university degree. A quarter of Hindus have a degree, while 16 per cent of Christians and Sikhs are educated to that level. The first-ever breakdown of religious groups by the census shows that Britain has proved most receptive to the ambitions of migrants. Hindus and Jews, too, are ahead of Christians in terms of home ownership, at 74 and 77 per cent, respectively.

Hindu men are second only to Jews in holding managerial posts (45 per cent) or rising to the top of their profession. One in 20 Hindu men is a doctor; the figure for the Christian majority being 1 in 200.

The figures show high levels of deprivation among Muslims, raising concern that some are increasingly becoming economically and culturally isolated. Almost a third of Muslims have no qualifications and 14 per cent are unemployed. Two-thirds of Muslim women have no jobs, compared to just over a third for any other group.

[Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*]

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Sikhs in France worried over sons' education

Bobigny (France): These days, many Sikhs in France worry that the world they embrace may reject their children and, come September, close the school door on boys wearing turbans to cover their unshorn hair. Two months before the start of the new academic year, it remains unclear whether Sikh turbans, considered articles of faith, will be forbidden by a new law banning religious symbols schools.

To critics, the confusion over where Sikhs fit into the new law reflects its folly. But the legislation has strong support in a France increasingly rattled by a potential challenge to its culture, and it appears headed for implementation. Sikhs, whose faith preaches religious tolerance and universal brotherhood, feel their plight underscores what critics at home and abroad suggest is an injustice of the law – seen by some as an anachronistic effort to keep France French in a multicultural world.

Education minister Mr. Francois Fillon said in 2004 that Sikh boys could wear hairnets to school to meet the law's requirements. Sikh elders were horrified, and the ministry appears to have backed off. Now there are rumblings that Sikhs could be grouped in a single school, turbans untouched.

“Something grave is happening,” said Mr. Kudrat Singh, who teaches yoga at a Gurudwara here. “The identity of a human being should be left to his own determination.”

France’s tiny Sikh community was forgotten when experts and lawmakers held marathon debates on the need for a ban on religious symbols in classrooms to counter what authorities say is growing influence of Muslim fundamentalism in the nation’s schools. The law that followed, passed overwhelmingly, bans conspicuous religious signs and apparel in schools starting next year.

[Courtesy: *The Statesman*]

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First Sikh school in France by September

Even as the Sikh community living in France continues to mobilise international opinion against the ban on wearing of turbans in educational institutions, the apex body of gurdwaras there has decided to set up a school funded and managed exclusively by the Sikhs. The foundation stone of “Guru Tegh Bahadur Public School” was laid on February 19, 2005. Named so by the Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurdwara Committee of France, the school is located in the Parisian suburb of Bobigny, a 15-minute drive from Charles de Gaulle airport.

The decision to set up a school was taken by two representatives of the community living in France, who visited India in January. Mr Jasvinder Singh Mann and Mr Iqbal Singh Bhatti returned home to convene a meeting of all five gurdwaras there and endorse the decision. “It will be the first-ever school to be set up by the community in France,” Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee president Paramjit Singh Sarna told The Tribune. Mr Sarna returned from France last week after participating in the foundation stone-laying ceremony.

He said the school would be ready in five months and classes could commence by September. “It has been decided that the school would be open to all communities. It will teach from all the scriptures of all religions and not just Sikhism,” he observed. Mr Sarna said the DSGMC had sought permission from the Union Government to transfer Rs 25 lakh for constructing the school building. “They were short on funds, so they approached us. We then decided to give Rs. 25 lakh as first installment to them.”

The decision to set up the school, he explained, was taken because of the delay in getting the Government of France to lift the ban on wearing of turban. Moreover, he observed, the community wanted to do something on its own to uphold the sanctity of the Sikh faith. The President of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Bibi Jagir Kaur, has welcomed the decision. “Setting up such a school will immensely benefit the community in general and students in particular,” she observed over the telephone. She, however, had a word of caution: “Our work is not finished yet. We have to continue to take steps for overturning the ban on wearing of turbans.”

[Courtesy: *The Tribune*]
(thru Sr. Partap Singh)]

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India expects Pakistan to protect Nankana Sahib

Concerned over the attack on the Nankana Sahib Gurdwara in Lahore, India hoped that Pakistan will take “necessary measures” to protect the holy shrine.

Reports from Pakistan said the Gurdwara and a college on its campus were attacked by a mob last year to protest a committee’s recommendation that the Punjab government return the Government Guru Nanak Degree College building to the Nankana Sahib Trust to accommodate Sikh pilgrims and shift the college to some other premises.

Though New Delhi considers the incident basically an internal affair of Pakistan, it has reacted cautiously in view of the current thaw in Indo-Pak relations.

In a related development, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee has decided to send a five-member team to Pakistan to inquire into the attack. The team will submit its report to the President.

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A Punjabi speaking Sikh is the new face of FBI

A hot-shot gizmo-loaded Punjabi-spewing turbaned Sikh as FBI agent? Well, that’s the new face of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It is part of the world’s most feared sleuth agency’s decision to go in for an image makeover in the aftermath of 9/11.

“It’s not the same world. It’s not same FBI,” a turbaned bearded Sikh proclaims in FBI’s latest recruitment ad now running across a bunch of American TV channels and on FBI’s website, www.fbi.gov. Many a Sikh group in the US, including the World Sikh Council, have appreciated the inclusivist advertising policy of FBI, whose agents so far have had a stereotyped image of a young white, clean shaven, blazer-attired male.

Incidentally, the US has witnessed many instances of racial violence where Sikh men were attacked because they were mistaken to be of Arab origin. More than anything else, the latest development denotes the success of the Sikh community in identifying itself with mainstream Americans. At a time when President George Bush’s visits to Gurdwara are becoming staple media news, the Sardar-in-FBI spot only takes it forward.

“I have an international relations degree. I speak Punjabi fluently. I analyse and decipher security threats. I am an intelligence analyst in today’s FBI,” says the Sikh in the ad, which ends up conveying a lot more about post 9/11 America and the place of immigrants in it.

[Courtesy: *The Times of India*]

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