

The Sikh Identity: Negative Trends - A Challenge for Youth

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THE INCOMPARABLE GURU GOBIND SINGH JI established on 13 April 1699 the unique institution of Khalsa brotherhood. He ordained all his Sikhs to keep unshorn hair. He also created a casteless and classless fraternity by giving all males the last name as 'Singh' meaning lion and females, 'Kaur' meaning princess.

In recent times following the partition of India in 1947 and more so after the genocidal massacre of Sikhs in 1984, some disturbing and defeatist trends among the Sikhs need serious thinking by our intelligentsia, religious and political leaders as how to arrest and counteract them without any further loss of time. The following trends need to be urgently addressed:

A large number of Sikhs have started trimming their beards. Some trim so badly that they give a very poor image of a Sikh. Usually sons of such Sikhs who indulge in trimming their beards do the same or completely shave off. We often see a father or a grandfather holding a clean shaven son or a grandson. Trimming of long hair by the Sikh girls has also become fashionable. The result is, that it is not uncommon to see a Sikh and his wife with bob hair.

Many Sikhs now feel shy to use 'Singh' or 'Kaur' in their names. You come across names like Harjit Soni, Birinder Kohli, Gurdeep Gill, and so on without using 'Singh' or 'Kaur'. It appears that perhaps they want to hide their Sikh identity. This defeats the very purpose and the spirit in which Khalsa was created as one brotherhood.

All over the world, people converse in their mother tongue. In India also, Marathis, Bengalis, Tamils, Gujratis etc speak in their mother tongue among themselves including their children whether they are living in their own state or at any other state in India or out of India. Surprisingly only Punjabis, both Sikhs and Hindus, who consider themselves modern speak Hindi with their children. They falsely consider it more refined than Punjabi. Even many grown ups and well to do Punjabi Sikhs converse in Hindi although they can speak in Punjabi as well. This is indeed very strange. Those who consider themselves elite or upper class prefer to speak in English. This trend is primarily due to the fact that Punjabi Hindus disowned Punjabi and declared Hindi as their mother tongue. Since well to do Hindus converse in Hindi with their children and quite often among themselves, Punjabi Sikhs think it to be more fashionable to converse in Hindi and elite Sikhs in English. This complex from the minds of the Sikhs need to be removed, especially because Punjabi Muslims also declared Urdu as their mother tongue. So Punjabi is now left to be the mother tongue of the Punjabi Sikhs only. If Sikhs don't take a note of this, then in few years time they may be speaking only Hindi which will become their mother tongue.

Young Sikh boys wear a 'patka' to cover their hair. It is o.k. till they are 13-14 years old. Thereafter they should start wearing a turban especially from class 9th onwards, if not earlier. Those who don't start wearing turban at this stage, continue

to wear a 'patka' not only till they finish school, but also when they go to the university, which does not give proper image of a Sikh. Some of our sportsmen are in a 'patka' even while giving interviews for T.V. coverage or to the press or in ads. Wearing of 'patka' while playing games is o.k. but not on social, official or other public functions and occasions. Quite a few Sikhs are seen in a 'patka' in T.V. serials which is not correct.

Although over 50 years have passed since independence but not a single good Punjabi movie has been made. This is inspite of the fact that a large number of actors and producers are Punjabis. Sikhs are occasionally shown in Hindi movies but more as jokers, taxi drivers, doormen at five star hotels and so on. Moreover, they are not shown in proper Sikh form. Their beards don't look normal and natural and they wear funny type of turbans. During the course of the movie, a Sikh character alternates with trimmed beard and a turban and then without a turban and shorn hair on the head. This is highly objectionable. They are never shown in proper respectable Sikh form. Since Punjabi Hindus disown Punjabi as their language, the Sikhs have to seriously think of producing some good Punjabi movies based on novels, plays and stories by well known authors. Sikh characters in respectable and proper Sikh form should be heroes and heroines. If Hindi movies around a Muslim family with a Muslim hero can be made, then why not around a Sikh family with Sikh boy as a hero.

Well known Sikhs in their respective fields who get media coverage need to take special care about their form and behavior as they are to set an example for the younger generation to emulate.

I hope my suggestions will be taken seriously by the Sikhs, both in India and abroad, and will take immediate steps to take remedial measures.

