

Partition, 1947 was a Mixed Blessing for Sikhs

This is in connection with Anuradha C. Kumar's review 'Predicament of Sikhism' of J S Grewal's *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (May 13, 2000)@

Your readers may be interested in knowing one aspect of modern Sikh history which most historians have failed to grasp. It is the revitalising and rejuvenating effect which partition in 1947 had on the Sikhs and their religion. While division of the country has generally been portrayed as a tragedy, for Sikhs it has in fact been, (as following facts will bear out) a blessing and a boon, virtually bringing to an end for their predicament'.

One has to study the economic and political plight of the Sikhs in the decades before partition and their social-polity and demographic position during those days in order to understand the veracity of this statement.

In united Punjab the population of the Sikhs was just 13 per cent and their share in trade, industry and professions was less. Educationally they were behind other communities. There was only one institution of higher education of the Sikhs in the whole of Punjab till the late 1930s - Khalsa College, Amritsar. Shortly before partition, Muslims constituted 48 per cent of the population of Amritsar, the sacred city of the Sikhs, while the Sikh population there was less than 10 per cent. Their share in the city's trade, business and professions was much less. Sikhs owned 3 per cent of the residential and business property in Amritsar city. The position of Sikhs in other cities and towns of Punjab was probably no better. In Amritsar district Muslims were 46.5 per cent. Similarly in other districts of East Punjab, which constitutes the core of Sikh homeland today, the population of Muslims was far in excess of the Sikhs, excepting Ludhiana, where Sikhs had a slight edge over the Muslims.

However, the districts of East Punjab were home to about 70 per cent of the Sikh population of United Punjab. They were not only educationally and economically backward, their agriculture was also stagnant. Wheat production in these districts was almost half of that in West Punjab that had canal irrigation on a large scale.

Laxity in religious belief of a large number of Sikhs in these districts was proverbial. It is pertinent that most of the leadership of the Sikhs before partition came from West Punjab.

Partition of the country in 1947 not only uprooted and traumatised the Sikhs, but also gave them a new vigour and vitality. Catapulted out of the backwardness and inertness of rural life, the innate qualities of hard work and enterprise of these Sikhs acquired a new sharpness and thrust.

In the first year or two after partition, the Sikhs living in East Punjab did not feel quite comfortable with Sikhs from West Punjab because of their forwardness and religious orthodoxy. The Hindu-Sikh divide soon followed which ruling Congress initiated for electoral advantage. When in 1951 Census (and subsequently) the Punjabi Hindus declared that Punjabi was not their mother tongue, even Sikhs of East Punjab began to fortify and assert their identity. From the denial of Punjabi Suba by Nehru to "Operation Blue Star" by Indira Gandhi is a matter of recorded history, though much of it is overlaid with half-truths.

Sikhs are more fortunate than Jews because they could carve out their homeland before anyone could think of the pogrom. Needless to say that the result of Operation Blue Star would have been altogether different if Sikhs had been as scattered as they were before partition. Far from creating a predicament or dilemma, this has provided the Sikhs with a well spring of fortitude which will help them to fortify their identity for generations to come.

SHAMSHER SINGH NARULA

3 - Navjivan Vihar
New Delhi. 110 017

* * * * *

Panj Pyaré in 1699 Spanned All of India Let us Beware of Canards

During the past week I have come across two gross canards. It appears that distorting Sikh history is becoming popular past time. This is so because our key institutions charged with doing research on Sikh history, and rebuttal of any distortion or misstatement, have become ineffective under the weight of their political masters.

The first case is a statement [SR: Jan. 2009] by S. Jaidev Singh Kohli, in his article "The incredible Guru Gobind Singh". On page 22, S. Kohli has given the origin of Panj Pyaré as under:

1. Bhai Daya Singh – Lahore
2. Bhai Dharam Singh – Saharanpur (U.P)
3. Bhai Himmat Singh - Patiala
4. Bhai Sahib Singh - Nangal
5. Bhai Mohkam Singh – Ambala

This statement is completely contrary to the historical accounts about Panj Pyare. I wish S. kohli had given a bibliography to support his contention. It raises many questions. Firstly, it conveys the impression that Sikhs during the period of the 9th Guru Sahib were confined to Punjab and adjoining areas only. The fact that the Sikhs had, during the Gurus' period had spread far and wide in - and beyond India, should not be discounted. Secondly, origin of Pyaré from all parts of India, as well as belonging to all castes, high, middle and low is negated.

The second case is a statement attributed to Sr. P.S. Pasricha I.P.S. (retd) who is Administrator, Board of Management, Sri Hazur Sahib. As published in the *Punjab Star* (a Punjabi news paper from Toronto) of January 27 – Feb 02 issue, in an article by Prof. Balwinder Singh, S. Pasricha is stated to have made the following outrageous statement (or said words to that effect) :

1. that Guru Gobind Singh came to Naded 'to seek help from the Marathas'.
2. that he sought this help because the Sikhs had forsaken him! and
3. that Guru Gobind Singh was assaulted by his own followers (Sikhs) which resulted in his death!

These claims are completely in variance with our authentic history. Indeed, such canards only serve RSS stand about the Guru. These completely absolve the Subedar of Sirhind from the conspiracy to have Dasam Patshah eliminated, for fear that the Wazir Khan himself could be punished by Emperor Bahadur Shah on persuasion by the Guru. Also, it is an accepted historical fact that Guru Gobind Singh went to South to meet Aurangzeb on the latter's request, after *Zafar Nama* had been delivered to him, which exposed his hypocrisy and wounded his conscious. Unfortunately, Aurangzeb died before they could meet. Now, we suddenly have this politically motivated statement from an eminent Sikh rewriting the history!

I am not sure what can be done to avoid such gross misstatements distorting Sikh history, without any verified research, and which only cause confusion amongst the Sikh Sangat. As it is, we Sikhs have stopped reading our history and our scripture, depending on dubious writers/Pathis, and thus becoming susceptible to incorrect and distorted information. (Victims of misinformation by choice, and supplied by so called Sikhs only).

COL. AVTAR SINGH (RETD.)

Toronto
Email: singh.a@rogers.com

* * * * *

A Wake-up Call: Census Enumeration 2011 and the Sikh Vanjaras/Sikligars

Sir: Guru Nanak's loyal disciples: constituting the tribal sects (denotified) of Vanjaras, Sikligars, Lobanas, Satnamis [and other Nanak Panthis] have a rich heritage. They have made numerous sacrifices in the Sikh history, and suffered brutalities of both the Mughal and the Colonial rules. Often they had to migrate to tribal belts and dense forest to save their lives - and the Sikh faith.

They are currently spread over in many backward rural areas and the city slums of various states. Their All India population is estimated at about six-crores. They are all living "below-poverty" line, but denied any benefits: like housing resettlement, and other developmental assistance, under various Central/State's Government Sponsored Developmental Programmes.

Indeed, they ought to be categorized under "Sikh minority" status that could enable them to avail of any assistance under "Prime Minister 15-Points Programme of Minority Development" (2005). In many states they are yet to be enumerated among main Sikhs population, during census times, due to indifference of local governments, and total ignorance on part of Sikh Vanjaras Community (Tandas).

This is a wake-up call for all Panthic Missions and Institutions to ensure publicity and awareness among these communities and - importantly - to assist them to get themselves enumerated as "Sikhs" during forthcoming Census Operation 2011.

By such an official recognition, the Sikh population is sure to get an honourable count, and a respectable voice in Indian Democracy. My trust has been promoting various projects since 1997 for their economic rehabilitation, and for providing Sikh Heritage "awareness", at different state centres, in collaboration with some locally-based active Sikh NGOs. A more planned campaign for Vanjaras' betterment needs to be initiated by the Sikh nation.

MOHINDER SINGH

Secretary-cum-treasurer

Trust for Welfare of Vanjaras & other Weaker Sections

Email: vanjarat@sify.com

