

Contemporary Sikhism: Core issues

Your editorial "Sikhs under Siege" (SR June 2003) bears testimony to your courageous enunciation of "core issues" confronting Sikhism. Particularly significant is the questionable move to exclude Sahajdharis - a devout and traditionally supportive community, constituting a reservoir of the future Khalsa, from the electoral process for Gurdwara management.

One is also struck by the government's continued indifference to rectifying the injustice that is being perpetrated against Sikhs in general by portraying them as unpatriotic, overlooking the countless sacrifices made by the Sikhs throughout the freedom struggle and more importantly - in defending India's borders, while contributing meaningfully to make the country surplus in foodgrains and earning substantial foreign exchange by dint of their exceptional entrepreneurial skills.

I would like *The Sikh Review* to continue dissemination of Gurbani's soulful message - and to reach every Sikh home so that we remain true to the Guru's universal message of compassion and humanitarianism. May *The Sikh Review* nurture our spiritual roots - through *Naam Simran* and a willing acceptance of *Bhana* - God's Will.

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Turban: Symbolic of Honor & Respect An American's Plea

I read with interest the column in the June 6, 2003 Faith & Values section, about the trouble Sikhs have, entering US courtrooms while wearing their turbans. This same issue was an important component in the founding of the United States.

In 1670, while still in England, William Penn (subsequently the founder of Pennsylvania) was arrested for preaching the Quaker doctrine in the streets of London. During his trial, he refused to remove his hat as part of the Quakers' religious testimony against "hat honor" (the Quakers believed that only God deserved such honor, not men).

Just as in the Sikh cases, those London judges claimed that hat removal was required for their respect. What was clear was that it was not respect that the judges wanted but 'blind obedience to authority.'

While Penn was acquitted by a brave jury that stood up to the London judges' attempt to railroad him, he was ultimately fined 40 marks for contempt of court for wearing the hat!

Yet, even today, the face of authority tries to oblige men (in this case, the Sikhs) to pull off their hats in its presence, claiming the act is necessary for

respect. Respect is inside of a person, not worn about his body. I guess that the Founding Fathers never realized that such a right would be infringed, or they might well have been forced to make a lengthy enumeration of such privileges in their Declaration of Rights.

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[Courtesy: Tarunjit Singh Butalia]

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Sikh Massacre 1984: Probe Judge's Probity questioned

I wish to draw you attention to an article: "encounter with a judge" by Manoj Mitra (*Indian Express*, Ahmedabad, dated 12.6.2003). Mr. Justice Nanavati is one-man commission of enquiry moving into the 1984 massacre of Sikhs.

The mindset of this judge stands revealed from the instances given in the aforesaid article, like showing no concern for the victim's family, wherein the police framed its members in a false case of indiscriminate shooting. This virtually connotes approval of the act of disarming of the 300 Sikhs who were later killed in one Delhi colony. On the other hand, the judge demands conclusive proof whether the attacking Hindu mob was really armed! Then there is the mysterious disappearance from the record of the affidavit incriminating the police.

Thus the Nanavati Commission is likely to be another cover-up exercise for the perpetrators of the 1984 massacre.

It might be better if the Sikhs demand that the Central government wind up the Commission.

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Gender Equality & Humane Attitude: A Plea from Australia

As I understand Gurbani, the Sikh moral tradition treats all human beings as equal and with due respect without any distinction of race, caste, class, status, gender. If any wrong practice is in vogue, whether at Darbar Sahib or any other Takht, it must be revoked, and all the *bipar an-ki-reet* rituals should be stopped because Sikhs are not supposed to imitate Hindu rituals. This means we must keep gates open to all, including women, so that they participate in *Seva/Kirtan/Paath*.

I endorse Sr. Gurmit Singh's plea. In principle, any one can do *seva* inside Sri Harmander Sahib and in Parkarma at any time - all 24 hours, (except washing the holy Harmander Sahib, which is carried out after Palki departs at 10.30 PM.) *Seva* of washing sanctum sanctorum is conducted from 11 PM to 2 AM, - as I had the good

fortune to do it for 40 days after I finished my Engineering College in 1958 (Perhaps, I used to pray for good marks daily, as result comes after three months). The *Kirtan* starts at 2.30 AM , though *Palki Sahib* is brought at 4.30 AM, and *Parkash* is done while *Swaiyaas* are recited. Thus *Kirtan* timings cannot be changed nor is there a problem in that regard.

But I understand the problem with priesthood is about Women (mainly from abroad) wanting to do *seva* inside Sri Harmander Sahib between 11 PM to 2 AM. Also, there is a demand that women should be allowed to carry *Palki Sahib*. I am not sure of actual reasons of the hesitation on the part of management to allow these two. I do believe there are practical problems. Inside Harmander Sahib, *Seva* is carried out by very few persons, most of whom are 'regulars', well known devotees and know the routine, because there is very little time in which to complete all the work, only about 3 hours, from the time they take up every thing from the floor till the time *Pihris* and the floor coverings are laid back, including accessories inside. In this short time, the floor is washed and dried by mops in hands; also during winter nights. There is a problem to allow novice persons inside at that time. There are also sensitive security reasons to restrict strangers going inside at that time.

There is also a risk of complaints and misunderstandings arising by young men and women cleaning inside in a small area, specially when all cleaning is done bending over and moving on knees. Also while carrying *Palki Sahib*, each person is bodily pushing and hugging due to eagerness to touch *Palki Sahib* by hundreds of pilgrims at *Amrit Vela*.

Thus, before we start blaming the SGPC management of inequality, and mismanagement, etc., the actual reasons from their point of view must be understood. It is not uncommon for callow young boys to molest young girls daily in the *Parkarma* and in lines of devotees. Even pick pockets are active, though we may like to believe only PURE & HOLY souls to be there, among Sikhs who go there. At night, too, there have been problems when female pilgrims sleeping in *Parkarma* have been molested by males.

I am sorry to dampen the enthusiasm, but facts are facts. I have personal experience as my parents used to live at Amritsar, and for months on vacation, I used to go there morning and evening. With the good, there are also the bad persons among visitors. Imagine if some nasty things happen and there is scandal Who will get the blame? SGPC management. When there is unrestricted opportunity to do *seva* any where in the complex for 24 hours, why is such a fuss being made about *seva inside* a little area and that too which is done only for 3 hours each night? This is just political and there are forces trying to malign Sikh institutions. Some persons living in Western World do not understand the reality and are trying to make it a gender issue. Why is there no uproar from mainstream women of Amritsar and Punjab, about this matter for all these years and even now? There are many women who, during the day, go about cleaning inside Sri Harmander Sahib with cloth, when they wipe floors in and around, also do *Jharoo* of the bridge, clean upstairs and walls etc. No one stops them.

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Tozuk-e-Jehangiri Misquoted

I thank you for publishing my article "Tozuk-e-Jehangiri Misquoted ..." in the March issue of ***The Sikh Review***. While I thank you for insertion of some suitable words at places, I request your attention to the following points, with regard to the article:

Opening two lines of a para on page 41 have been missed and therefore the sentence has lost cohesion and rendered incomplete. Some words in the second column of this page have been printed incorrectly. On page 42, the words "well known diarist" have been substituted for the words "Well known person" for Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi.

I want to clarify that this person was not a diarist, but a well known religious preacher and a revivalist. His mausoleum exists at a little distance from Gurdwara Fatehgarh Sahib, Sirhind, and thousands of Muslims from Pakistan and Afghanistan throng to this place for pilgrimage every year on his "urs". The contents of his letters are mostly of religious nature and do not constitute a chronicle.

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