

PERVERSION ON TV: To view or not to view

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Scene 1: Jassi's living room adorns the pictures of Guru Nanak and idols of Hindu gods and goddesses. Jassi is shown doing *namaskar*, and then distributing the *karah parshad*, immediately after preparing it without doing the customary *ardas* and taking the *hukumnama*, to family members, whose head is not *Keshdhari*.....scene cut!

Scene 2: Ravi Kapoor, in whose house Tulsi is currently residing, is shown as a "cut-Surd" and his Uncle, a *Keshdhari* Sikh with a flowing beard. Their house in Chandigarh is shown having idols of Hindu gods and goddesses.....scene cut.....another scene... Ravi Kapoor's daughter with her hair trimmed is shown accompanying Tulsi to a Shirdi Sai Mandir in Mumbai who, upon Tulsi's insistence, offer thanks for her recovery from her illness.....scene cut!

Scene 3: The Sikh family of Pammi shows the eldest male member as a *Keshdhari*, with the rest of them having shorn hair and the ladies with trim hair. A marriage ceremony is being held in a *Mandir* according to Hindu rites, not according to *Anand Karaj* as is the custom for Sikhs in a Gurdwara.....scene cut!

All the above must be familiar to readers in India; if not, then let me tell you that the above are short clippings of what is being aired all around the globe on popular channels like Sony and Star Plus in the prime time slots. *Jassi Jaisi Koi Nahin*, *Kyon Ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* and *Jis Desh Mein Nikla Hoga Chaand*, tele-serials whose clippings have been mentioned above are much sought after by audiences in India. If you happen to miss them on a particular day, be assured that you can recapitulate the repeat screening the next day. And if you happen to miss that too, then one of your family members can record it for you on the latest electronic gadgets easily available nowadays, thanks to the technological revolution.

Am I sounding like an adman promoting the above tele-serials? Heck, no! Do not be carried away by my opening lines and approach because my only intention is to interest you to read on till the end of this piece.

The majority of the Indian population, including Sikhs, are hooked on to either one or the other or all of the above mentioned serials. And I won't be surprised if the diaspora Sikhs are in the same boat! There is *prima facie* nothing wrong with these serials which show the complexities in relationships of modern day upper middle class living, for any family of any religious background, but the point under contention is that the Sikh characters being portrayed are sending a perverse and distorted message of Sikh way of life to young impressionable minds who know not to distinguish between drama and the real principles of the Faith. It is even more disturbing for Sikhs to view such gross misrepresentation of Sikh practices and principles. Think of the grave impact such scenes are going to have on the younger generation who is already on the rampage to discard their *kesh*, the core of Sikh identity!

People are hooked on to the once called idiot-box like never before; and why won't they be? There was a time, in the late seventies and eighties, when there was

hardly any choice, in fact, no choice at all to view the programs since the state control on telecasting was totalitarian. With the opening up of Indian economy to Western aids and influences, today one can click on to any one of the 60 odd channels for viewing. It is easy to develop channel loyalty, especially if a particular serial is of interest to the viewer.

Whether the above concoction is with the connivance of the majority community, under the guidance of the Hindu Vishwa Parishad, or the fundamentalist RSS who have the hidden agenda to bring back the Sikhs into the fold of Brahmanism and annihilate Sikhism, or out of sheer ignorance of the serial writers, **it is unpardonable**. Something has to be done as a plan of action to thwart these dangerous elements from further eroding Sikh moral values which are currently tumbling downhill at break-neck speed, especially so, after the aftermath of the **1984 pogrom or massacre**.

Admitting our weaknesses and being aware of where we stand will make our attempts at the much needed internal reforms and educating the non-Sikh masses more fruitful. Let us learn from the Jews who have the great knack of uniting together, no matter what differences they may have in their social or political life whenever they have faced religious threats from others to annihilate them! The speed with which the Sikhs are being wrongly portrayed on the small screen will work like slow poison, and one has only to wait expectantly for the older knowing generation to depart from this world for the poison to give it final fatal blow to Sikhism!

There must be hundreds of Sikhs worldwide who must be harboring similar sentiments as mine, and must be feeling helpless! Not to worry because, as the saying goes, **"The pen is mightier than the sword"**, and it is the duty of Sikh magazines and newspapers to highlight the necessity of putting a stop to these wrong projections and, at the same time, arouse the need for Sikhs to have a TV channel of their own which should be used for propagating Sikh values and sentiments. Strong protests should be immediately lodged by active Sikh organizations and the Singh Sabhas, in all the capitals of the states of India, in order that whatever damage has been done so far can be reversed to some extent, at the same time alerting the story writers and producers of such serials, or face legal action. Stereotyping Sikhs as comic characters on the Bollywood cinema has been the practice of storywriters and directors since long. Had the Sikhs collectively protested on this issue way back, the present situation on the small screen would not have arisen at all!

Some relevant questions to be pondered, in this context are :

1. Why is the Akal Takht or the Dharam Parchar Committee of S.G.P.C. not raising their voice of concern at the spread of signals that condone and advocate idol worship as being representative of Sikhs?

Let it be categorically stated in the press that Sikhs do not worship idols and do not pander to the posse of Hindu gods and goddesses; at the same time neither do we disrespect those Hindus who believe in idolatry. Is not Guru Tegh Bahadur's great sacrifice proof enough in the history of India that Sikhs respect other's faith even to the extent of putting at risk one's own life?

2. Is there a Censor Board for television, the equivalent of the Indian cinema industry? If yes, are there Sikhs involved in them as members who give their green signal for the airing of these programs? **And if not, then the Akal Takht should raise this matter urgently so that it can be taken up, through the Punjab Assembly, with the Information and Broadcasting Ministry as a matter of priority.**

3. Has the time arrived for the setting up of Television, Advertising and Film Industries in Punjab along the lines of Hollywood, Bollywood and Tollywood so that acting and modeling as a career for the Sikh youth can be pursued by them without compromising their *Kesh* which today is a deterrent for those aspiring to pursue a career in this field? A recent example I would like to share is that of a close relation of mine who got selected in the preliminary and second round of the "Gladrags-Look of the Year Male Contest" held in 2002 at Khandala, but got disqualified in the third round at Goa, for reasons which you can guess. Two renowned ad agencies were interested in appointing him but did not sign the contract because he refused to oblige them by cutting his hair, which they put as a pre-condition before signing of the same.

The need for Sikh media is all the more pertinent today following 9 September 2001, as Sikhs in the West continue to face a backlash due to ignorance about their faith and religious symbols. If the traditional dress of undivided Punjab, the *salwar-kameez*, can penetrate every nook and corner of India, then a time shall come when the Sikhs in their pure form shall also surpass others in the fields of acting and modeling, not only in India but all over the five continents.