

“Rehat Pyari Mujh ko”

How to stay connected with the Creator

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EVEN A CURSORY READING OF *The Sikh Review* makes it clear that Sikhs today are dispersed all over the five continents. Name any country in the world and chances are that one will spot a Sikh gentleman in his pristine glory of a turban with beard and hair intact. It is a different matter that in the homeland Punjab, the callow youth in the age group of 15 to 30 are unabashedly patronizing hair-cutting salons (a matter of shame when one comes to know that the recent splurge in setting up the latest beauty salons in collaboration with or as a franchisee of multinational cosmetic companies in Indian metros and other cities are in majority none other than, the so called *patits*) to ‘overcome’ their instilled ‘inferiority complex’ to merge with the mass, so as not to look different from the majority. In Sikh households outside India too, the turban and the beard are spotted only on the late or mid nineteenth century immigrants, i.e. the elders among the migrated family. For the younger generation no amount of persuasion can work. Gone are the days when the parents threatened, “We don’t want to listen to any argument. You have to keep your hair and beard intact. That is final. Or else we shall disown you.”

The Western culture is such that even if you disown the child or the teenager, the State is unlike in India statutorily bound to look after the upbringing of the deserted. Such laws do not exist in India. But it amazes me to see the situation in India no better. In fact most Sikh parents in India appear unperturbed at this growing trend, more so after the 1984 *pogrom* which has instilled a great dread in the minds of Sikh parents and the ‘lucky’ survivors.

Before the next census is officially released in 2011 in India, it is highly imperative for the Sikh community to conduct an internal census to know the future outcome of the ‘identity crisis’ gripping the Sikhs and burgeoning to become a crescendo. A survey can be effectively conducted by the S.G.P.C., through the various Singh Sabhas existing in almost all the states in India, wherein one could get the precise picture of what could be the outcome by - say - 2045 A.D. when it is expected that India shall be the most populous country in the world. In fact a census conducted all over the Sikh Diaspora would be more fruitful. The disturbing question that is looming in my mind for past few months is: “Can the Sikh religion survive without the original identity created on Vaisakhi of 1699 at Anandpur Sahib?” I am quite aware that my readers are going to be in a furor after reading this piece, but I have to boldly comment, **“For how long more can we evade this? One has to face the problem head-on, or in the process of evasion, be prepared for the worst”**.

It seems that the time is not far off when the basic Five K’s will only be displayed at the Sikh Heritage Complex now being erected at Anandpur on a massive scale. Or, maybe, only remain in the family albums to be glanced at when an overnight visitor happens to drop in.

It may seem shocking, but the fact is that Sikh intelligentsia and the religious leaders at the helm of Sikh affairs prefer to befool themselves and ignore the crisis in hand which is spearheading towards a hair-shorn community of Sikh youngsters. Don’t they have the guts to face the crisis level-headedly? Probably, not! Due to the

glaring fact that one or more members in their families have already started owning *razors, blades and shaving creams*. They fear to raise this repressed topic for fear that fingers of accusations shall be pointed at them, demanding to 'bring their own house in order first.'

Amongst the Sikhs there is a specific term framed in the dictionary for almost everything and everyone. If you are born to a Sikh family and, subsequently, you shear your hair, you are called a *patit*. If you are not born in a Sikh family but have the love and inclination towards *Gurbani, keertan* and happen to frequent the Gurdwara, you are called a *sehajdhari*. By what name the siblings of a *patit* be called who, in all probability, are never going to learn *Gurmukhi*, or be interested in the *Gurbani* and teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib?

Upto the present time the Sikh *persona* (of exhibiting the five *K's*) was only - and still is - given due respect and importance. What one used to hear from the elders was: "Let them develop the habit of wearing the turban and maintaining the uncut *keshas* and gradually they will also develop the love for the *Gurbani* and its teachings." **But passage of time has proved otherwise.** The *rehatnama* of Bhai Nandlalji states, "*Rehat pyari mujh ko, Sikh pyara nahi*" and "*rehani rahe soi Sikh mera*" has done its work. These sayings, and more of their likes, had sowed the seeds of today's crisis which has flowered into neither the *rehat* has survived nor the *Sikh* in pristine shape. **Had the Sikh values been inculcated into the *patits'* tenure, of while being *keshadharis*, the situation would not have been so alarming.** Ultimately, the final blow to Sikhism shall be when Sikh values remain no more and Sikhism will degenerate into chaotic ritualistic religions of yore, namely, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, etc. with *endless Akhand Paath*, pilgrimage to Amritsar and Hemkunt Sahib, for readymade salvation. **If the Sikh values remain no more, then of what use shall be the physical identity of Sikhs?** I don't have the courage to answer this.

Let all of us be cautioned that a Sikh with a *turban, keshas and kirpan*, having no *Sikhi* in him/her, will remain as a showpiece, and hollow as a bamboo. It is no wonder that the very rituals and superstitions which Guru Nanak rejected in *toto* have re-entered into the hollowness of the body-politic called Sikhs. The 'wisdom' of 35 enlightened souls enshrined in Guru Granth can be known solely by '*vichaar*'. A person of any caste, creed, race, colour or sex can utilise this universal wisdom as benchmarks and lighthouses on the turbulent sea called 'life.'

It is high time for us to decide what is more important – the Sikh values or the Sikh identity, or both? It is basic human nature to rebel against whatever is externally imposed upon somebody. This external imposition becomes a conditioning and a time comes when one wants to break free from the shackle of impositions. Whatever is adapted in life out of one's experience, free will and understanding, one tends to retain lifelong - that is referred to as 'wisdom'.

Do not forget that Sri Guru Granth Sahib has been ordained as the guiding light for Sikhs to lead this earthly sojourn. I get the shivers when I recollect the words of a Khanna based scholar, Sr. Atambir Singh visited Kolkata a few years back amidst lots of controversies hovering around his bluntness in *prachar*, "The time is not far off when even the Guru Granth Sahib shall not remain the prerogative of the Sikhs because the non-Sikh scholars and *pracharaks* have understood the greatness and

universality of Guru Granth which the Sikhs have kept covered with mountains of *roomalas*, uninterested to understand and do *vichaar* on its' sayings."

During an important social event in a Sikh family, one observes the elders of the family scurrying to buy the best of *roomalas* to be offered to the Guru Granth in a Gurdwara. And what happens to the loads of *roomalas* offered during a year's time - only the granthis could reveal! A Sindhi friend who accompanied me recently to Gurdwara Bangla Sahib remarked sarcastically, "The Gurdwaras should display a rack of beautifully embroidered *roomalas* for sale next to the entrance where one pays to buy them for offering which the *granthi* can again recycle it to the display rack for resale". Charity can be practiced by using the same amount in helping a needy person instead of investing in a *roomala*.

The speed with which the canvas of life is changing all around us, the Khalsa, it seems, will soon become a dying minority amidst the minority Sikh community in India. The last 306 years has witnessed the stress upon *Amrit Sanchar* and strict maintenance of Sikh identity, **thus relegating to secondary position the importance and need for inculcating Sikh values into one's life to actually call oneself a Sikh of the glorious Guru Nanak**. Had equal, if not more, importance been given to the understanding and *vichaar* of Guru Granth Sahib for the last three centuries, then reality would have witnessed the actualization of the *Ardaas*, "*Raaj karega Khalsa.....*" Even now it is not too late, provided our Sikh stalwarts at the Five Takhts wake up to this clarion call, "**Now or never!**"

