

Man's fascination for miracles

Sir, - The news items "Mother's miracle gets Vatican's recognition" and "In search of Mother's miracle" indicate man's unending fascination with the unexplained, the uncomprehended, half-feared but also half-desired. Today a miraculous recovery from illness may be given the medical name of spontaneous remission. Yet a technical term does not explain such an extraordinary event, it only labels it. Anthropological findings suggest that reports of miraculous feats are universal, or nearly so. Equally widespread is the apparent emotional need for miracles, for manifestation of supernatural powers. Despite this popular demand for miracles, founders of the world's great faiths have refrained from claiming miraculous powers. Christ himself is never cited in the Gospels as seeing himself as a miracle worker. Lao-tse, Buddha and Muhammad disdained miracles. But their followers disregarded this viewpoint and proceeded to attribute numerous colourful - and often bizarre - miracles to them.

Miraculous, magical or supernatural feats are widely attributed to saints, holy men and ascetics. Ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and theologians have recorded this widespread human craving for the miraculous as well as events and anecdotes that come into being to fill it. Yet mankind's universal need for miracles has remained, itself, inexplicable.

To arrive at a succinct definition of the term "miracle", Christianity and more specifically the Roman Catholic Church has laboured diligently through the centuries. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* notes that Vatican I declared: "In order that the service of our faith be in accord with reason, God willed that, to the internal help of the Holy Spirit, there be joined external proofs of His revelation, i.e. divine deeds, principally miracles and prophecies. Since these clearly show forth God's omnipotence and infinite knowledge they are signs of revelation that are most certain and suited to the intelligence of all men." The council condemned the view that "miracles are impossible and therefore all accounts of them, even those contained in the sacred scriptures are to be rejected as fables and myths".

Modern science and the skeptical 21st century mind generally would seem to be at odds with mankind's traditional need for the miraculous. The two attitudes stand side by side. Many of us share them in our very souls. Despite the daunting pressure of electron microscopes and computers, we continue to stand in awe of the inexplicable. Being thrilled by the supernatural is human, all too human.

MANOJ GHOSH
Kolkata

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1984 Widows: Reprehensible Demo

Sir, - It was reprehensible on the part of some Sikhs of Delhi to lead a batch of widows of Nov. 1984 massacre before the American Embassy, complaining about their plight. They have lowered the dignity of the Khalsa Panth. It is shameful that the Sikhs have not rehabilitated, the victim families themselves. Instead they have been concentrating on building bigger Gurdwaras in Delhi and elsewhere.

Religious and political leaders of the Sikhs have damaged Sikhism. There is need for a revolution in the thinking of the Sikhs, to restore the glory of the Khalsa Panth forgetting all that has happened since 1849.

“NANAKDAS”
Dr KULDIP SINGH, FRCS
2080, Sector 15-C,
Chandigarh – 160 015

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Preserving our Heritage

In the Sikh prayer, following words were added by the SGPC after 1947, “...benevolent Lord, bestow on the Khalsa the beneficence of unobstructed visit to - and free management of - Nanakana Sahib and other shrines and places of the Guru from which the Panth has been separated.”

Because of the attention paid to the Gurdwaras after 1947 in Delhi and some other places, impressive buildings have been built. The Panth can feel proud of its services. However, there are many historical places in Indian States and in neighbouring countries (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka) and also some even in the pre-partition Punjab which stand neglected, rather almost forgotten.

In 1980, this writer went to Puri, Orissa. Eager to pay his homage to the Gurdwara where Guru Nanak recited the shabad, *gagan mai thal*. I looked for the shrine. However, the local accompanying officials could not locate it. Even the tourist office was not aware of the place. The extent of my disappointment was beyond expression.

When I again visited Puri in 1989, luck favoured me. A young boy, presenting himself as a Kalyugi Panda (also called Punjabi Panda) met the author at the railway station. He claimed to be the descendent of Kalyugi Sadhu of Behram to whom Guru Nanak revealed the true path of holy life. The boy guided us to the Baoli Math located in the Swarg Dwar Bazar.

In the veranda of the old building, we found many *pandas* squatting there and an old *palki*, with uncleaned *rumalas*, covering Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Seeing us, the local *panda*, wearing only a *langoti*, covered his head immediately and did *parkash* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. After my wife recited one hymn from Sri Guru Granth Sahib, we descended the steps of the *baoli*. We found the water to be sweet inspite of the *baoli* being on the seashore.

During the Vaisakhi of 1999 when *jathas* came from home towns of the Panj Pyaras, I met the Jatha from Puri to talk with them about the Baoli Math Gurdwara. I was sad to be told that the *jatha* actually came from Jamshedpur (Tata Nagar) and not from Puri?

Are we not insincere when we pray for the opportunity for “seva-samhal “of the historical shrines beyond our direct control, since we have ignored so many historical places related to the Gurus where there is no restriction at all? The Panth has all the resources (look at the gold plating of some Gurdwaras) to take

care of the historical places connected with the Gurus. But something is wrong somewhere.

Before I close, let me state one more such case for the information of the Panth. As a boy (1940) we were told that there are five platforms built to memorise the route adopted by Guru Nanak from Kurram Pass (Parachinar) in NWFP upto Kohat; one such platform being in a village about twenty kilometers from Parachinar on Kohat-Parachinar road. Vaisakhi Mela used to be held in that village on the banks of river Kurram. All these places remained ignored (there remained merely memorial platforms) till August 1947.

Is it too much to request the SGPC, who claims to be the representatives of the Panth, that they nominate some local / regional committees to take care of such historical places before they are claimed and grabbed by non-Sikhs. Because of being neglected, some places have already been taken over illegally by people. Let the Panth come out of their slumber and live like true Sikhs. **We should not let our historical places be forgotten and our history destroyed. Let us be loyal to our Gurus and our heritage.**

ER. HARJOT SHAH SINGH
#1589, Phase 3B2
SAS Nagar (Mohali)
Punjab

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Definition of a “Sikh voter”

The notification of government in India, as to the qualifications of a Sikh voter for SGPC elections as one who does not trim or shave his beard or Keshas; who does not smoke tobacco or use it any other form and who does not use intoxicants, is a landmark in the history of modern India. All the time after 1947AD, Sikhs have been made to believe that it is the government of majority community in India which is deliberately hurting the cause of Sikhs. However, this notification will certainly accentuate in fighting amongst Sikhs. There has been a section of “sehajdhari Sikhs” which has been clamouring for acceptance as equal partners in the management of Sikh affairs in India.

In the Diaspora, this faction has already grabbed management of many Gurdwaras as the true representative of Sikhs, if they constitute majority in the jurisdiction of the Gurdwara. No doubt there has been some Sehajdhari “Sikhs” in the past who made notable contributions to the cause of Sikhism in the Diaspora. Some have done much, like Dr G.S.Sidhu in Australia and S. Jagat Singh in USA (as well as in Fiji before migrating to USA) and need to be remembered for building Gurudwaras, enhancing the reputation of Sikhism and recognition of Sikhism and on radio or television.

The Gurdwaras in India, like village TALHAN, near Jalandhar, are the cause of factionalism; none aspiring for its control due to financial temptations is qualified to handle its affairs as a Gurdwara. This is the opinion of an eye witness from USA who visited it sometime ago. The people claiming to be Sikhs would not qualify if the definition announced by this notification is strictly applied to these Sikhs. Even the

Granthis are not fully aware of the fundamentals of Sikhism and they perform rituals, like a *pujari* in a temple.

SARJIT SINGH SANDHU
USA.

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“Sword of Sikhism”: Tribalist origin refuted

Sir: This is with reference to the article “The Sword of Sikhism: A Study of Sikh Militancy”, by Prof. Mark Juergensmeyer, published in the Oct.-Nov. 2003 issues of *The Sikh Review* [pp.37-45]. On Pg. 40.

Prof. Juergensmeyer states: “Members of a tribal group, the Jats, began joining the Sikh community at the end of the sixteenth century. They were great warriors and imposed their martial values and symbols onto the whole of the Sikh community.”

The learned scholar gives no reference for the above statement, but it is evident that he has borrowed the theory from Dr. W H McLeod’s book: *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*. The way the second line has been worded it appears as if it is an undisputed fact. However, this is far from the truth. Dr. McLeod suggests that the arming of the Panth was not the result of any decision by Guru Hargobind. In his opinion, the growth of militancy within the Panth must be traced primarily to the impact of Jat cultural patterns and to economic problems that prompted a militant response.

Prof Jagjit Singh has convincingly argued against the correctness of this theory in the book *Perspectives on the Sikh tradition*. Moreover, despite the martial tradition attributed to the Jats as a class, there is no indication that the Jat *zamindars* of the Mughal province of Lahore were *zor-talab*, that is, they had to be compelled by force to submit the revenues they collected. There is no indication that the Jats of Punjab rose against the state - except as members of the Sikh Panth. Even Dr. McLeod doesn’t seem to have the same amount of confidence in his theory as Prof. Juergensmeyer has shown. In his recently released autobiography, Prof. McLeod states that the effect of Jat cultural patterns within the Panth is a “theory” and not an established fact.

The veracity of the above “theory” is based on the assumption that Jats were present in the Sikh Panth in considerable numbers during the end of the sixteenth century. However, the proportion of Jats in the Sikh Panth in the late sixteenth, or the early seventeenth centuries, cannot be estimated from the evidence available at present. The only reliable source is the *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, which dates to the mid-seventeenth century. It is possible that Guru Hargobind’s military policy could have been the factor responsible for their increased number in the Panth.

As regards Jats “imposing” their symbols on the whole Sikh community, one is reminded of Dr. McLeod’s assertion that “there can be no doubt that the Five K’s reflect the complex of Jat cultural patterns and contemporary historical events.” He maintains that keeping uncut hair and bearing arms were Jat customs that received ample encouragement from the events of the eighteenth century. With these two

symbols, he pairs the comb and the bangle, respectively. He, however, has no explanation to offer for the *Kachhera*.

Probably, no Sikh scholar has endorsed this rather naive and mundane explanation for the institution of the Five K's. Dr J.S. Grewal feels that the evidence on *Kesh* suggests that the Jats, at one time, used to keep their hair long. But the Jats attached no **sanctity** whatsoever to their hair. Long hair is not the same as uncut hair. For Guru Gobind Singh, the sanctity of the *Kesh* was all-important.

Scholars feel that this point is so crucial to Dr. McLeod's hypothesis that it demands more reliable and acceptable evidence. Dr. Grewal states that the *Kirpan* does not appear to have been popular with the Jats, and Guru Hargobind was the first Guru to make it important. He rejects McLeod's explanation by saying that it is not even an 'informed' conjecture.

I hope you will bring the above points to the notice of your readers.

ISHWINDER SINGH
#114, Sector 18-A, Chandigarh
Email: ishwinder@sancharnet.in

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Gurbani Kirtan on TV eludes Viewers in Europe

For 9 years I have been a subscriber to ZeeTV. At first "Z" Channel used to have transmission for 12:00 hours which was increased to 20 and then finally 24 Hours, round the clock. Every weekend we could listen to the mornings '*Shabad Kirtan*'. Then from summer of 2003, they gave us for 4 hours *Live Gurbani from Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar* thru. ETC (Punjabi) TV on Saturdays/Sundays. But now there is nothing at all, neither on Zee TV nor on Zee Cinema. There is no explanation when we write or telephone, no clear-cut reply is forthcoming. So I and many Punjabis like me have stopped renewing our Annual subscription of 220 Euros!

SAB TV – in alliance with MATV – thru Astra-2 Leicester – U.K., has arrangement of "free to view" programmes in Hindi (mostly) in Gujrati and a few in English. Every morning from 8 A.M. to 9 A.M. There was '*Shabad Kirtan*' (Pre-recorded). But recently, this too, has stopped. This place has been taken by "Sky News". The Sikh organisations in U.K. are so poor that they can't hire a satellite channel to telecast or sponsor – Punjabi cultural and *Gurbani* programmes? Such a shame....!

AMARJIT SINGH TAJ
Via Giacomo Puccini, 129
06077 Point Felcino (Perugia), Italy

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Inter-Faith Goodwill

Sir, We appeal to you and the entire management of all Gurdwaras, to organize special programs in your Gurdwara, '**Sharing Your Faith with Your Neighbors**' directed towards our **neighbors, religious and civic leaders, teachers, and elected officials in our communities**. The objective of this event will be to provide understanding among non-Sikhs about the Sikh religion and its traditions. We are suggesting that on **every Gurpurab**, Gurdwaras all over the USA and other parts of

the world, create an opportunity for our neighbors to know more about Sikhism. This program will give non-Sikhs the opportunity to meet us, and observe our religious services, and perhaps partake in Langar.

In recommending this grassroots event we have drawn upon the experience of other faith communities that have a long tradition of inviting their neighbors to observe their services and participate in meals to create awareness about themselves. Although we have resided and worked in America and other countries for more than 100 years, the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks revealed that most people are ignorant of our beliefs and identity. Because of our distinctive identity we are erroneously associated with terrorists, making us a vulnerable minority. Even our children have not been left untouched by this wave of prejudice. Our children are being victimized by being taunted and bullied by their peers in schools. This has caused tremendous emotional and psychological stress to our children and us. Therefore, through this program we hope to create more understanding and awareness about our faith and ourselves.

Having this program the week before, the say, Vaisakhi or other Gurdurab, will make it a nationwide public event and go a long way in creating more understanding and awareness about the Sikhs. **By holding this program worldwide we will portray a sense of unity and purpose within our community and share our blessings with others. Would this not be a wonderful way to celebrate our Beloved Gurus days?** We sincerely pray that every Gurdwara makes an effort to become an important part of this historic event. We are also joined by prominent Sikh organizations in support of this type of event.

We are working with other national organizations to co-sponsor this event and to help get the word out. In addition, national and local media is being contacted. For local contacts each Gurdwara is encouraged to appoint their own spokesperson and two youth coordinators. We will provide all the information needed to make it a successful event. In addition, we will be available on the phone to help with anything else. Please send us your specific contact information ASAP so that we can send you all the materials that we have prepared for everyone's convenience.

Dr. RAJWANT SINGH
Chairman, SCORE
Washington D.C.
Email: rajwant@aol.com

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While I agree with the sentiment behind this message, I have a question to pose to the writer and other SAI members. Television and serials like the ones quoted below are simply dramatizations of day to day life. The reason these programs appeal to so many people is because they show people like them dealing with problems like they do. While I personally have a low opinion of these programs, my opinion does not arise as a result of their misrepresentations of Sikhism. The film "Bend it Like Beckham" too, misrepresented some of the tenets of Sikhism, and although this bothered me, I found out that a lot of Sikhs in Britain do live like the family in BILB. The job of such "soaps", however ignoble, is to appeal to the masses and what appeals to the masses is familiarity. I have seen Sikh families who do live amongst Hindu idols and no matter what I may think of that, it exists. Thus, all these programs are doing is appealing to people to increase their viewership. I think the

problem is a much deeper one, for if TV is dramatizing reality, must not the problem lie in reality itself? I think we need to look to society and our homes *to make the change*, rather than “censor” what the TV does. If society changes, television too, will follow suit.

As for this comment: “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!” *Again, I think the problem begins from the home* and extends to society, after which it is picked up by the media. There are a lot of stimuli out there to influence the so called younger generation into taking drugs, cutting their hair etc. The rationale and logic that the youth must apply comes from the home and school. So I think instead of pointing fingers toward the media, which we all know to be purely capitalist, lets look toward ourselves and attack the problem at its root rather than its tip.

SIMRAN

[Email:ishwinder@sancharnet.in]