

Aspects of the Sikh Religion

A Dialogue with Prof. Hardev Singh Virk

* Excerpts of the Interview recorded by Asian Television in September 2003 in Canada for the Sikh Youth of North America by Professor H.S.Virk , after his retirement from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

Q. What are special features of Sikh Religion?

- A. (a) It is one of the five major religions of the world, viz., Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.
- (b) It was established by Guru Nanak in 15th Century, in the epoch when Martin Luther introduced Reformation in Roman Catholic religion in Europe.
- (c) It is a unique religion and not a synthesis or syncretisation of Hinduism and Islam, as misunderstood by most of the foreigners.
- (d) It has its own Holy Book, Aad Guru Granth Sahib, which contains hymns of Sikh Gurus, Hindu and Muslim saints of India.
- (e) It has a universal message for whole of mankind: Reality (God) is one, its name is Truth, Creator Person, Without Fear, Without Enmity, Timeless Being, Unborn, Self Existent, Realised with Grace of the Guru.
- (f) AGGS was installed in Harmandir Sahib by Guru Arjun, 400 years ago (Sept. 1604) (Bhadon Sudi 1, 1661 Bikrami).
- (g) Creation of Khalsa (Transformation of Sikhism) in April 1699, which gave distinct identity to the Sikhs.

Q. What is your message for the Sikh Diaspora?

A. Diaspora is the term used for the Jews who spread all over the globe. Now same is the case of Sikhs. Guru Nanak visited many countries during his itineraries, called *Udasis*. He visited Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tibet and Ceylon. Guru blessed his Sikhs in a unique way; if he was served well, he used to utter a blessing: **Be uprooted**. To others who misbehaved, He uttered: **Be confined to your home and hearth!** So the Diaspora Sikhs should prove themselves worthy of great Guru's utterance by excelling in all fields of their activity. In Multicultural society of Canada, they have equal opportunity to prosper. My students in Abbotsford and Toronto are doing fine. Sikhs have established their own schools, Gurdwaras and cultural centers. While keeping their separate identity intact, they should participate in all spheres of activity. During my travels in B.C; Ontario and Alberta, I was pleased to see that Sikhs have created a niche for their religion and culture in Canadian society.

Q. What is the purpose of SGPC and role of Akal Takht?

A. Guru Nanak established *Dharamshala* at Kartarpur and started *Sangat* and *Pangat*. Guru Amardas set up 22 *Manjis* to propagate Sikh Religion. Guru Ramdas created Amritsar city and Guru Arjun, Tarn Taran. Sikh Gurdwaras were managed

by Udassi/Nirmalas during the period of Sikh *misals*. During Ranjit Singh's rule, it further degenerated into the Brahmanical tradition. Singh Sabha Movement (1872) was promoted by professor Gurmukh Singh and Giani Ditt Singh of Oriental College, Lahore. Sunder Singh Majithia, Harbans Singh Attari, and a galaxy of other Sikh intellectuals were involved in its activities.

British Govt. wanted to perpetuate the Brahmanical tradition and accepted Mahants as owners of Gurdwaras. During 1920's, the struggle for Gurdwara control by the Sikhs was started. Mahant Narayan Das of Nankana Sahib Gurdwara murdered 130 Sikhs and in Jaito Morcha nearly 200 Sikhs died in jails. Gurdwara Bill was passed in July 1925 and first election was held on 18 June 1926. SGPC came into power. Akali Dal became a political wing of SGPC. All evils of election process i.e. corrupt practices were used even during first SGPC election.

Q. What is the concept of Miri and Piri in Sikh Religion?

A. Since the times of Guru Hargobind, the concept of Miri-Piri was introduced in Sikh Religion. Guru Jee wanted to wear 2 swords at the initiation ceremony: one of Piri (divine power) and the other of Miri (temporal power). He also raised army to defend Sikh religion against the state repression let loose by the Mongol rulers. Akal Takht (The throne of Timeless Being) was set up by Guru Hargobind (as his seat of Temporal power) and political decisions were taken sitting there. It was constructed in front of Harmandir Sahib(Golden Temple), so that temporal power is subordinate to spiritual power or divinity of Sikh religion. During *misal* period all Sikh Sardars assembled here on two occasions, Diwali and Baisakhi, to take stock of the Sikh affairs. This gathering was called Sarbat Khalsa. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was also called by Akali Phula Singh to appear at Akal Takhat, when he violated Sikh *Maryada* by marrying a Muslim dancing girl 'Moran'. Akal Takhat held a special role in Sikh religious and political affairs and its *hukamnamas* have sanctity for all Sikhs.

Q. What is your message for Sikh Youth of America?

- A.(a) Sikh youth must study history of Sikh Religion, its unique philosophy of universal brotherhood and other salient features in the comity of world religions.
- (b) They must keep and cherish their unique identity. I was the only Sikh student in University of Paris in 1970 amongst 100,000 on its rolls. Hence I used to be invited as a special guest on all occasions. I always considered myself an ambassador of my country and Sikh Religion. So Sikh youth must behave in a manner which leaves an impact on the minds of other people with whom they interact.
- (c) Sikh youth must try to excel in their studies, professions and sports.
- (d) Participation in Sikh youth camps is useful.
- (e) Keeping Sikh and Indian traditions intact will be useful for the Sikh youth.
- (f) Exploring other cultures in a multicultural society is a useful act.
- (g) Sikh youth must avoid the use of DRUGS as forbidden by the Sikh Gurus and Rehat Maryada.



Valaya Brothers' "Double Take"

They were both born on October 8, look almost identical and even share common likes and dislikes. They could well be twins, except that they were born eight years apart. Meet fashion designer J.J. Valaya and his brother T.J. (Tribhavan Jit) Singh. While JJ is the creative brain behind the Valaya design house, TJ is the brain that does the number crunching and looks after the administration.

"But we can switch roles quite adeptly, if needed," warn the Valaya brothers. After graduating from the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), JJ launched his first collection in 1991. He did not do as well as he had expected. Disillusioned but not defeated, he got his brother TJ to handle the commercial aspects of fashion. Within a year, JJ set up his first shop in Delhi and by 1993, he was retailing across India. In 1996, JJ opened his own lifestyle store Life. Together, the Valaya brothers have managed to build one of the most established brands in the Indian fashion industry.

JJ ON TJ

TJ has always been what an older brother should be: protective and loving. Being younger, I've always had the advantage of using TJ's wisdom and vision, which puts me on the right course. There is a significant age difference between us, so it's not as if we grew up together. Despite this, we share several common interests and have developed more than just a brotherly bonding.

As a child, I was always curious about TJ's things. Since he was older, he always had cool stuff and I'd fool around with it. That would irritate him. Like when I messed up his Yezdi bike, which he had during his army days. I cut up, re-painted and re-designed his bike. The results were quite interesting. Of course, he says I was way too naughty – but I'm sure he had his moments too. Just that I wasn't old enough to remember.

What I really admire about TJ is his eternal optimism. He is far more mature than I am, which is why he's the perfect person to manage my business. What really works for us is our common interests like travelling, gourmet cuisine, antiques, movies, art and architecture. But he's lukewarm about my other interests such as my love for the Orient and photography.

I have often come across siblings who do not share common passions – thankfully, we don't fall in that category. Imagine how boring it would be to grow up together without having anything common between us.

But believe me, TJ has great potential to irritate me too. He really drives me nuts when he assumes the military man *avatar*. He turns into this strict disciplinarian but then I know that he is right because discipline is important in a business. Actually, we even end up having several arguments because of this trait. Normally, he wins. Well, big brother after all.

But that's ok. After being brothers for over three decades and working partners for over 12 years, all imperfections in either one of us have become part of our personalities and are totally acceptable to both.

TJ ON JJ

I quite enjoyed it when my parents brought home this little brother for me. He was like a new toy or more like my birthday present. J.J. and I are both born on October 8, just that we are eight years apart. Otherwise, we would have been the perfect twins.

I think it is this freak in nature that makes us inseparable. He was, of course, naughty and immature. Imagine having a little brother rummaging through your stuff when you're a teen. And he was so inquisitive! One day, while playing with my records, he broke one. I got wild and gave him a thrashing. After that, he left the records alone. Unfortunately, he then discovered my prized Yezdi.

Even now he manages to irritate me with his whimsical nature and what he calls creative laziness. But now the big excuse – the one I always buy - is that it's all creative genius. In fact, I do believe that he's one; his brain is always churning out some brilliant idea.

I think we make a rather good mutual admiration club. I'm often asked if I feel overshadowed by my little brother and my answer is a big 'no'. There's never been any sibling rivalry between us. We know our positives and negatives and complement each other.

In fact, when JJ finished design school and decided to launch himself, I thought it would be a good idea to retire from the army and help him out with the business. After all, creative minds should not be bothered with little details.

Hence, we have been in it together for the last 12 years. The positive side to this togetherness is that unlike many other siblings, we don't have to make any extra effort to catch up with each other. We are together for nearly 8-12 hours everyday and are constantly travelling together all over the planet for our shows.

