

Canadian Sikhs & the Martial Tradition

On the invitation of the Maritime Sikh Society, Halifax, Canada, two army officers, Brig. Gen. Rick Parsons and Major Harjit Singh Sajjan, visited its Gurdwara on Nov. 26, 2006. There was quite a concern among the Sangat about the safety of Canadian troops deployed in Afghanistan. They wanted to send them cheering messages in X-Mas time.

Another part of the desire to show our support for the troops was more personal in that our president, Sardar Martin-Jarnail Singh, had done all his public schooling with Pte. Nathan Smith who was one of the first Canadian soldiers to die in Afghanistan!

Army officers' visit turned out a very exciting event with Canadian media, CBC, ATV and representatives of the Press all over the place. Brig.- Gen. Rick Parsons, commander of Land Force Atlantic Area, advised the press that to send troops to different places is the decision of the Government. As soldiers they are supposed to accept orders and perform their duties. In Afghanistan, there is definitely an improvement in the situation. There is social equality, justice and improvement in the overall quality of life for many Afghans. In his presentation, Brig.- Gen. Rick Parsons hinted at the opportunities for ethnic groups (like Sikhs) in the army. The Brig.-Gen evidently knew about Sikhs and their valour.

Maj. Harjit Singh Sajjan discussed how his Sikh heritage helped break down barriers with local Afghan villagers. "They were happy to see that somebody who they would normally look at as a Sikh ... (was) wearing a Canadian uniform," he told reporters. "And they saw that as a little bit of hope for them."

He said speaking about the Canadian mission at a religious ceremony was "actually very appropriate" considering Sikhs' history of helping others.

With his turban and beard and chest full of medals, Maj. Sajjan related very well with the Sikh Sangat and a source of inspiration for children.

Martin Singh, Our society's president, said he invited the officers to expose the local Sikh community to the Forces, to show that different cultural groups are reaching out to the military and because many local Sikhs have at least one family member serving in either the Indian, Canadian, British or American armed forces.

Ms Kanwal Sidhu, a grade 4 public school teacher, brought messages and questions from her students. They were supportive, but marked for their innocence. That created some fun. About a dozen Sikh children presented cheering cards to the army officers meant for Canadian soldiers deployed in Afghanistan.

At the end Gurdwara President Sardar Martin Singh thanked the guests and presented *Siropas* and ceremonial Swords to them. Sikh Society's Cybrarian, Jagpal S Tiwana, presented sets of four books to the guests. Three books were produced by our society members and the fourth was the biography of Bhagat Puran Singh, an ideal Sikh humanitarian.

Canadian army officers' visit to our Gurdwara was a great historic event. This was perhaps first time that uniformed army officers visited a Canadian Gurdwara and were honored there.

Sikhs have strong army traditions. Most Sikhs were pleased to know that they would be welcome in the Canadian army. This will help in removing prejudices against turbaned Sikhs. Sikhs are mistaken for Muslims, followers of Osama-Bin-Laden, in the West. People have not forgotten that in 1991 a Sikh, Ram Raghbir Singh, was not allowed to enter a Legion's canteen in Calgary because he was wearing a turban. There are Sikhs in Canadian Parliament, in Canadian police, why not in army.

A war has many ugly sides, but it also provides opportunities for employment. When the World War II started in 1939, Congress leaders in India advised Indians not to cooperate in

the war efforts of the British. The Sikh leader Master Tara Singh exhorted Sikh young men to offer for recruitment, though this was against the declared policy of the Congress. M K Gandhi got upset and fired Tara Singh from the Congress party's national executive. Sikhs benefitted a lot from going in the army. When India became free, Indian army had more than 30% Sikh officers.

Sikhs welcome any opportunity to get into army.

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New Delhi's Sikh Forum held a Public Meeting on 22nd remembrance day of Nov'84 Carnage at Bhai Vir Singh Sahitya Sadan. Affairs of DSGMC were also discussed. Dr. Amrik Singh Presided. Dr. A.S. Narang conducted the meeting.

All speakers expressed their grave concern at the disputationous functioning of Gurudwara Committee and its declining respect amongst the Sikhs of Delhi. Speakers regretted reports of (if unsubstantiated) allegations of corruption against committee and its members.

Dr. Maheep Singh – Nov 84 has become part of our (soc) Psyche. We are prepared to forgive, but not forget Nov 84. We want good management of Gurudwaras and schools run by DSGMC. An independent Education Council to uplift the standard of our schools is a must. We want to know since the last election, what progress our schools have made. What has been achieved. Is it sufficient / satisfactory?

Sardar H.S. Phoolka – When Nanavati Commission report was presented in Parliament – for 3 days parliament discussed this report. Every newspaper and TV channel throughout the country gave wide coverage to bring out whether Govt. has given justice. But the public gave vent to their feelings that justice has not been given. A new chapter was written when after 21 years of the event, a senior leader had to resign. This is first time that investigation has been initiated against any minister. He regretted that some of our leaders have gone to the witnesses, who had deposed before various Commissions/Inquiries and have pressurized them to change their statements or withdraw it. Such people are still our leaders. Do we need such leaders?

Prof. Ajaib Singh – All changes in Gurudwara management can be brought by voters. We find that good voter, concerned Sikhs, educated sikhs do not cast their votes. It is voters who can check corruption. He has observed that with every election, the general standard of honesty of members goes down. He exhorted every voter must vote, consider Election Day as a big important day, It should be observed as holiday.

Jathedar Manjit Singh – GK. We must remember historic events like Nov'84. It is matter of regret that Sikh Community, as whole could not provide protection to witnesses. Even today some of our leaders are standing with guilty persons of Nov'84. At present DSGMC President has unlimited powers – which leads to mismanagement/Corruption – Suggested that yearly board election be held on time. There should be Gurudwara judicial Board, anti-defection law be applicable to DSGMC. An autonomous education/ medical council is necessary.

Dr. Amrik Singh – Gurudwara Act 1973 was enacted more that 33 years back, but Act rules/regulations are still to be approved & published by Government. Sikh masses want change in the act, to improve the functioning of our Gurudwaras as well education Institutions but how to do it. It is with Govt. We can demand or appeal for it. Sikh Forum has requested Chief Minister as well as Minister in charge of Gurudwara affairs that Govt. should constitute a Committee of Senior officers, which can go into the present drawbacks/ deficiencies and suggest amendments/changes. We have offered the Services of a retired Secretary Law ministry, a very capable sikh legal expert.

Prof. Harmohinder Singh – Paid homage to martyrs . He does not subscribe to the view

that each succeeding committee's standard of integrity or otherwise is lower than previous one. Election and party system co-exist. The group which gets majority, its supporters are given all appointments, the other group is left high & dry. Many times candidate get elected who do not deserves to be there. As against that many persons were good when they got elected, but after some years in the Committee, gets corrupted. The root cause of corruption or mismanagement of Gurudwara/Schools etc. is due to yearly election of Executive Board.

He suggested Direct election of President, Vice President Gen. Secretary and office bearers at the time of general election for a period of 4 years. If this is not possible the executive board term be extended to 2 years. This will check the annual Sale/Purchase of members.

We have good Chairmen who have improved the functioning of the school, but the community is not recognizing good Chairmen. Our school's standard deteriorated when it was decided that Chairman of schools / Institutions can be elected member of DSGMC only.

Maj. Gen. M.S. Chadha –moved the following Resolutions.

Ministry of Home Affairs may kindly be requested to inform the progress on the "Rehabilitation Package" to provide relief to victims of 1984.

How much amount has been paid by various States to the victims of Nov'84 Carnage by 31st October 2006 .

How many persons have been provided jobs or recruited as per various schemes mentioned in the "Rehabilitation Package"

Cases were to be initiated or reopened against persons named in Nanavati Commission. How many such cases have been opened/ initiated. Name of such persons.

Peter Singh Dhillon donates \$2 mn to Canadian university

The University of British Columbia is \$2 million richer after a gift made by an Indo-Canadian businessman in memory of his father who was also the community's first police officer in Canada's famed RCMP.

Peter Singh Dhillon, head of the Richberry Group of companies, the largest growers of cranberries, (a major commercial crop in Canada), made the donation in memory of his father Rashpal Singh Dhillon, who founded the company in 1978, after working for 24 years as a police officer.

Half the donation will go towards research into pulmonary fibrosis, the fatal lung disease that Rashpal Singh died of in 2003, and the other half towards studying the health-giving properties of cranberries. "When my grandfather passed away, my Dad and his sister made a gift to the university in their father's name. So I wanted to do the same thing," Dhillon was quoted as saying by

The Vancouver Sun. "After finishing high school, my father became an Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer in 1954, the first Sikh to do so in B.C. history. However, unlike Baltej Singh Dhillon (no relation) who, in 1991, made headlines for becoming the first Sikh officer to wear a turban while on duty, my father happened not to wear a turban," Dhillon said.

The money will be used by a research team led by Darryl Knight, an associate professor of pharmacology and therapeutics. It is estimated that the fatal lung disease worldwide affects over five million people and about 40,000 people die of it each year.

"The \$1 million gift may not be able to find a cure," Dhillon said, "but it may find some answers to help people who suffer from the disease to manage it and prolong their lives."

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Turban apology to Sikh in US

A restaurant in the US has tendered a formal apology to a turban-wearing Sikh who was

denied entry by a doorman seeking to enforce its “no hats” rule.

Hansdip Singh Bindra was denied entry by the Richbrau Brewing Co. restaurant in Richmond, Virginia, when he visited it on November 24 2006 with his extended family.

Bindra attempted to explain that he was not wearing a “hat”, but a turban that was a mandated religious article of faith for Sikhs.

“There were all sorts of people there, and yet I was being singled out solely because of the way I looked,” said Bindra. **“I wear a turban everyday as a Sikh, it’s who I am.”**

In the apology letter addressed to Bindra, Michael Byrne, the director of operations at the restaurant noted: “..I would like to extend to yu an apology for our doorman enforcing the ‘no headgear policy’ literally.”

The apology came after the Sikh American legal defence and education fund wrote to Byrne on behalf of Bindra that “a Sikh turban, a Jewish yamulke, and a Muslim hijab were all federally protected religious articles of faith and, as such, were allowed to be worn by individuals in all circumstances.”

