

Celebrating Advent of Guru Gobind Singh Ji: The Momentous Challenge

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During the first week of January 2007, Khalsa Panth the world over will celebrate the Prakash Utsav or birthday of *Sahib-e-Kamaal* Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Tenth Nanak, with great fan fare. He graced this earth only for a short span of two scores and two years, yet the price he paid in the sacrifice of his father and four sons as well as the agony he endured personally, for ever transformed the entire nation of India. By nurturing his Khalsa Panth with all he had, '*Sarbans Daani*' Guru Ji wanted to make sure that the Sikhs will stay uniquely distinct, pure and morally supreme, above and beyond all. On finding out that his young children had willingly offered their lives for the commitment to their faith, he exclaimed, 'What does it matter if my four had to die? There will be crores and crores of my Khalsa Sikhs in future much closer to me than my own children'.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji left nothing to chance in his just and fair struggle to uphold the moral principles of Sikh faith. **He truly emphasized full freedom for the people of diverse religions so that they could practice their faiths without fear and coercion.** In establishing 'Guru Granth and Guru Panth' as the two pillars of Tisar Panth, a third religion, distinct from Hinduism and Islam¹, he brought forth a religio-cultural revolution among the disenfranchised masses of India. **Such an innovation was not only aimed at providing his followers with a cultural distinctiveness but it also imbued a strong sense of self-esteem and purpose, committed to fighting tyranny and despotism. He felt that the appearance too of every Sikh would have to be emblematic of the Khalsa² so that 'the Fauj (army) of Akaal Purukh', established under the ordained Will of God, as a beacon for generations to come.**

But, Alas! some among the modern young and naïve Sikhs have started to pretend as that so long they otherwise keep their commitments to the concepts of their own liking, it really shouldn't matter whether *kesh*, or hair is kept unshorn or not? After renouncing the Sikh identity, they justify their action under a self-serving argument that being Sikhs of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, they need not follow the dictum of Guru Gobind Singh Ji as it relates to the Sikh identity. **Here, it is conveniently forgotten that the creation of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh Ji, was indeed a fruition of process that Guru Nanak had initiated.** A perusal of Sikh history and scriptures will clarify this point further. Guru Nanak Dev Ji from the very inception of the Sikh faith put an injunction against cutting hair. Referring to Giani Gian Singh's *Gian Ratnaavali*, Principal Ganga Singh writes in '*Puran Manukh*' that prior to his worldwide sojourns, Guru Nanak asked his companion, Mardaana to maintain three essentials; one being 'Sirrh Kesh Rakhnai'³ meaning 'You must maintain uncut hair'.

Furthermore, recently in the November 2006 *Sikh Review*, Dr. M. S. Rahi states 'Internal evidence from Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji is sufficient to prove that Guru Nanak regularly wore a turban-the symbol of civil dignity'⁴. In support of a turban, as an essential component of completeness of mankind, he refers to this line on page 1084 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, 'Saabat Soorat Dastar Siraa', meaning 'Let the complete body be the turban on thy head'.⁵ The importance of turban is also evident in 32nd Vaar of Bhai Gurdaas, where the condition of a person walking back home, bareheaded, without a turban, evokes a response that makes the house-ladies cry as if some relative had died.⁶ And, finally, the Tenth Master put this requirement into a firm footing by turning it into the most important article of Sikh faith, instead of leaving it to a matter of personal convenience.

The question arises why now the modern Sikh youth refuses to stand tall in carrying the flag of uniqueness of Sikh identity high? And why has it started to look the other way around? In part, such behavior tends to receive a subtle boost from the duality shown by the so-called protectors of Sikh faith, the leaders, both political and religious. In subtly letting their children shun the Sikh identities with no remorse, these leaders simply add fuel to the fire that is already engulfing the glorious dictums of the Sikh faith.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji succeeded in 'teaching the sparrow to hunt the hawk' and 'one man to fight a legion'. If history is any witness, he truly brought a sea-change by liberating the psyche of the Indian people, enslaved by a centuries old caste system. **Sahib-e-Kamaal turned degenerated weaklings into a wall of solid rock ready to withstand injustice anywhere, any time. This metamorphosis helped rejuvenate the downtrodden Indian Society that had turned timid and chronically subdued as a consequence of continuous torture perpetrated by the intolerant rulers who were no more than religious bigots.** His life carries an extraordinary significance not only for the Sikhs but for other countrymen who owe their faith's very survival to the personal sacrifices of this matchless man of God and his family. Yet neither his followers nor his countrymen seem to have any inkling about the message that Guru Ji imparted. Being a Sikh and an Indian, I often wonder as to how come my people have turned so casual in ignoring his fundamental philosophy?

'The Outlook' and 'Times of India'⁷ recently reported that the rural Sikh youth of Punjab, a state where the Sikh faith initially evolved and flourished, is rapidly discarding its Sikh identity by saying good bye to the full uncut hair and turban. Painful as it may sound, the facts reported in these articles bring home the truth that we, the Sikhs, in total contrast to who we are, have started cutting the same branch of tree on which we happen to be sitting. Instead of maintaining our unique identities, as ordained by the architect of this unique concept of Saint soldier-hood, the young Sikhs in the villages are running ahead of one another in hordes to become part of what Puran Singh called 'Barber-made-civilization'⁸. The village barbers seem to be having hey days with almost eighty percent of the Sikh boys in rural Punjab now sporting crew cuts and discarding their turbans⁹ by their own sweet will and thus demolishing the very pillars of Guru Panth.

'Does it mean that, if the present trend were to continue, the days will not be far off when villages in Punjab won't have a single turbaned Sikh?' reluctantly asks Chandra Suta Dogra in the September 15, 2006 edition of *Outlook*.¹⁰ The Sikh religious hierarchy must respond. Unfortunately the surviving lot might simply consist of only two kinds of Sikhs: one taking care of the Gurdwaras and control over their Golaks. And the other, the so-called Sikh leaders of Punjab whose only objective seems to be pulling one another's beard as TV cameras click.

Priya Yadav, in the Oct 30th edition of '*Times of India*'¹¹ brings home the same painful reality of the modern-day rural Sikh youth among whom the turban is disappearing fast. 90% of the Sikh families in Punjab have at least couple of members of the house hold without turbans. She further mentions that the young people of Punjab do not consider Pagri (Turban) an attractive option. They think it is tedious to tie and is out of tune with time.¹² What an irony in defying their Patron Guru who ordained them the other way around? Was it not 'tedious' for a father to let go of his young sons into the battle-field so that the entire nation could live a liberated life, free from the clutches of foreign invaders and religiously intolerant rulers? And what about the people of the majority faith of India, (some of whom at times enjoy a sarcastic laugh upon the conforming Sikhs?) Was it not the same Guru, who at the age of nine, prompted his father in offering his head for the protection of a faith that wasn't even

his own, to help prevent the holocaust of the entire population of Kashmir? The followers of the majority faith seem to have conveniently forgotten the tradition of long hair and turbans, with their deep psychological bearings, as was practiced by their forefathers and religious men.

The tree of Khalsa Panth planted by the Tenth Master, under a command from Akal Purukh and nurtured with the sacrifices of his family, was meant to be kept alive unto eternity complete with uncut hair and a beautiful turban. 'A turban to a Singh was always to be considered no less than a crown to a King' by his followers. But ignoring the titles of a Sardar, the King and a Sardarni, the queen, conferred upon his Sikhs by this King of Kings, his followers started taking an easy route or 'Bipran ki reet' (tradition of the others}. Paying no heed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji's pre-ordained consequences, we make ourselves susceptible to his dictum 'Main no karoon innkee parteet' (I will care no more for such fallen individuals). Without a unique identity that often induces hesitation in the steps towards despicable acts, the moral grounds become shaky, making it easier for the Sikh youth, like the rest of the crowd, to fall prey to intoxicants and illicit drugs. **By discarding the turbans, they fail to stand tall and instead turn themselves into Zombies filled with intoxicants, opium, hashish or alcohol, merely ending up living half-dead without any remorse.**

Let us now look at the other aspect of Guru Gobind Singh Ji's Philosophy. The democratic principles that Guru Gobind Singh Ji espoused were abundantly obvious in the unique process of the creation of Khalsa. Transforming himself into a Chela, or disciple, he bowed in front of the Punj Piaras whom he had just created, and humbly sought the gift of the heavenly Amrit from them. This indeed was a unique event act in the annals of world history. It had never happened before, and if the past bears any relation to the future, it never will. He was perhaps one of the rarest examples in the history of world religions, where a spiritual head refused to be recognized as God by his followers. Putting a serious injunction against those who ever wished to know him as such, he commanded 'He who calls me God will for sure burn in the fires of hell, for I am only a Servant of God; yea doubt not the veracity of this statement'

¹³.

Sirdar Kapur Singh, the legendary philosopher, has stated that the concept of Democracy envisioned by Guru Gobind Singh Ji included an aristocracy dedicated and consciously trained – not the one by right of birth or status but rather the one which is grounded in virtue, in talent and in self-imposed code of sacrifice to humanity. ¹⁴ Let us uphold his moral tradition, both in action and in spirit. Until we do, we won't be worthy of a true celebration of Prakash Utsav (Birthday) of this most marvellous Man, the *Sahib-e-Kamaal*, who ever walked on the face of this earth.

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References

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