

# When Life gives you a Lemon

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This is going to be a column of clichés, but I hope, not without meaning. A string of words aptly joined becomes a cliché by overuse; it becomes overused because nothing else carries the truth quite so simply, precisely or effectively. Phrases become clichés because they contain a kernel of truth.

It is obvious that life isn't always a bed of roses. In fact, it seldom is, and even then only apparently so, and perhaps, only to those do not feel and cannot think. If it is a bowl of cherries, they never come without pits. Nevertheless, as thorny as life is, it is better than the alternative. How then to deal with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, the pits and thorns that accompany life, even in the best of times?

What kind of an attitude will carry one through the muck and the suffering of life? **Sikhs call it *chardi kala*. I have seen it literally translated as eternal optimism, cheerfulness.** Cheerfulness in the face of certain disaster seems an anachronism. Perhaps such optimistic happiness would be possible but only in a state of numbed mindlessness. And most people are neither willing nor able to suspend their feelings and thoughts so completely or successfully. Sikhism never recommends mindlessness, in fact it asks its followers to cultivate what the Zen would term, 'a state of mindfulness'. Then what does it really mean to always be in a state of *chardi kala*?

**When Guru Arjun and Guru Tegh Bahadur accepted torture, suffering and finally martyrdom, they rejoiced in God's will. It does not mean that they were unfeeling of pain. There are so many examples of martyrdom in Sikh history that their recounting here must surely be incomplete and inadequate, so I will not attempt.**

Each of us must die and that is inevitable, but death is never welcome except by the suicidal. It is by how one accepts the reality of death that courage is measured. No one can walk away from death or suffering, defeat, pain and regret. **Gurbani reminds us that "suffering" and "pleasure" are like two dresses hanging in your wardrobe that each of us must wear in turn. No one is exempt.** It follows then that it is in wearing the robe of suffering nobly and gracefully that *chardi kala* is defined.

**To me *chardi kala* is a state of mind defined by hope and faith. There can be no *chardi kala* without faith in *bhana* and *hukum*.** Think of the well known prayer often ascribed to Plato: "God, grant me the power to change the thinkg I can, the serenity to accept what I cannot change and the wisdom to know the difference."

This prayer speaks powerfully of *bhana* and its acceptance. The fact that it is a prayer says that everything exists and occurs within *hukum* or a certain order, even if, and especially if, it remains misunderstood by us or beyond our understanding. **These two - *hukum* and *bhana* - are inseparably intertwined. The latter does not and cannot exist without an acceptance of the former.** Without these concepts as the axle of one's life, there can be no equipoise, no centered existence, no *sehaj*. Without them one cannot be at the mountaintop without plumbing the depths of the valley of sorrows.

It isn't *chardi kala* if it is found only in victory, never in defeat. That way lies more and guaranteed suffering. *Chardi kala* is easy in victory, even inevitable. It is in defeat that it must be sought and harnessed. **It is in the depths that *chardi kala* defines character. And that is the essence of Sikh teaching.**

At one time in my life I was working at night and going to graduate school during the day. Life was hard. Although my research advisor wasn't a Sikh I talked to him about the Sikh

teaching on *chardi kala* and how difficult it was to always the walk the path. After thinking awhile he said he understood, and then summarized the concept in one simple sentence: "When life gives you a lemon make lemonade."

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## **In a rich white U.S. enclave, the new Mayor stands out: A turban-wearing Sikh**

*Paul Vitello*

**LAUREL HOLLOW, New York:** Harvinder Singh Anand, the new Mayor of this Long Island village of multimillion-dollar homes, private beaches and yacht owners, is, like many other residents, a successful business executive, a boater and a connoisseur of world travel.

His Sikh turban and beard drew double takes when he moved to the community 10 years ago, but it does not get many anymore. At least not among the locals.

Nonetheless, Anand's way of standing out in the crowd of Bermuda-shorts-and-loafer-wearing people who elected him in June - he ran unopposed - attracted television crews from U.S. and Indian networks to his inauguration in July. The newscasters described the election of Anand, 47, who is from a New Delhi and is the first member of any minority group to become Mayor of this 95-percent-white community of 2,000 fronting on Cold Spring Harbor, as an unparalleled event.

**In fact, he is part of what political analysts see as a new U.S. pattern. While minority candidates are usually propelled into office from densely populated enclaves of their own ethnic groups, a small but growing number of Indian-American officeholders has been getting elected recently in communities across the United States where they are the tiniest of minorities.**

That group is so small that most of its members know each other and many reached out to congratulate Anand on his election.

The calls came from Upendra Chivukula, a New Jersey state assemblyman elected in 2002; Jay Goyal, a 26-year-old second-generation Indian-American elected to the Ohio Legislature last year; Nikki Randhawa Haley, a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives since 2004; and Kumar Barve, the dean of Indian-American elected officials, who won a seat in the Maryland House of Delegates in 1990 and is now the majority leader.

Some are Democrats and some Republicans, but they all share a high level of education and a crossover election appeal. It is a testament, perhaps, to the fact that, compared with other immigrant groups, Indians tend to speak English when they arrive and are ready to assume a place in the middle class.

Over all, the Census Bureau counts 2.3 million Asian Indians in the United States. In Iowa, Ohio, Kansas, Minnesota, South Carolina and Maryland, each of which has sent an Indian-American to its state legislature, the Indian-American population is below 2 percent. Chivukula, a Democrat, represents a district where the Indian-American and Pakistani-American population is somewhat higher, at 6 percent.

United States Representative Bobby Jindal, Republican of Louisiana, a second-generation Indian-American who was elected from a district whose population is 1.5 percent Asian, narrowly lost his bid for governor in 2003 and recently began a campaign for this year's election for governor. This is a state where Indian-Americans account for about 1 percent of

the population. He won.

“There are about 110,000 people in my district,” said Goyal. “About 50 to 75 of them are Indian-American families.”

Ingrid Reed, director of the New Jersey Project, a nonpartisan voter advocacy group financed by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, said the pattern was probably unique in the history of American immigrants entering the electoral process. Usually, new immigrants seek office with campaigns focused on issues of particular concern to their own ethnic groups.

Indians including Sikhs began to immigrate to the United States in large numbers in the late 1960s, after a 1965 immigration law lifted quotas that had severely restricted Asians and other non-North Europeans from becoming legal residents. The law also established rules favoring immigrants with professional skills in science and technology.

The 1965 law made it possible for Harvinder, the newly elected Mayor here, to immigrate in 1982 upon graduating from Punjab University with a degree in chemical engineering. After postgraduate work at Hofstra University, which is also on Long Island, he got a job with a small chemical company, then moved up to a larger company, and in 1995 formed his own company with a partner. It manufactures chemicals in the United States, China, India and Thailand.

Soon after moving to a gated community in Laurel Hollow, where the 2000 census says the median household income is \$200,000, he became active in civic affairs. He organized the two dozen homeowners in his development to form a cooperative to buy heating oil and unify the system of garbage collection.

“At the end of the day, I am a businessman,” said Anand, who ran without party affiliation in the village election but calls himself a Reagan Republican. “I believe in efficiency and cost-effectiveness.”

His wife, Dr. Chandni Anand, is an internist. They have two children, Nikita, 14, and Angad, 13.

A member of the village board of trustees, John Fitteron, a retired Getty Petroleum executive, said, “Harry is just a highly capable individual who, like all of us, wants to give something back to the community.”

In Laurel Hollow, that is expressed in the issuance of boat permits and the maintenance of roads, and in upholding the zoning code in negotiations with very rich people over their wishes to build very big houses.

Anand arrived recently at his office in Village Hall, which sits on a lawn overlooking the village’s private beach, wearing his usual business suit. He checked in with the clerk and treasurer, Karen Navin, and her deputy, Nancy Popper, attended to business about permits for residents who wanted to cut down some trees, then stepped outside, where most of the people wore dripping-wet bathing suits.

“Harry Anand,” he said to one after another on his stroll across the lawn, gripping wet hands and making eye contact with people, **a few of whom seemed unable to keep their eyes from the turban.**

If Anand noticed, he did not show it. “I’m the mayor of Laurel Hollow,” he said with a polished smile. “Just elected. So nice to meet you.”

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## **Court orders NYPD to reinstate**

## **Sikh employee, allow turban at work**

### ***Suman Guha Mozumder***

The New York City Human Rights Commission last July ordered the NY police department to reinstate a traffic agent and allow him to wear his turban at work.

The Commission noted that the NYPD failed to provide evidence that if a traffic enforcement agent wore a turban instead of an NYPD hat, it would create safety and identification issues and raise concerns of public safety.

The failure of the respondents to provide evidence to establish an undue hardship necessitates that the commission order the respondents **to immediately reinstate the petitioner and permit him to wear his turban while on duty, the commission ordered.** “The size, color and accessories to be worn with the turban are matters that can be worked out between parties.”

The community hailed the order favouring Jasjit Singh Jaggi as one that would open up opportunities for Sikhs in police departments in NY and elsewhere.

**“This is great news not only for Jaggi but for the Sikh community, which has been discriminated [against by] police and [in] other jobs because of turbans. We need to celebrate,” Pritam Singh Bindra, president of the Panthic Cause that helped Jaggi file the complaint with the NYC Commission of Human Rights, told ‘India Abroad.’**

In June 2002, Jaggi filed a complaint, alleging the NYPD discriminated against him and violated the law by refusing to accommodate his religious belief. When he reported for duty in August 2002, he was told he would either have to give up his turban, resign, or be fired. Jaggi resigned. In April, Administrative Law judge Donna R Merris said Jaggi had been discriminated against on the basis of religious beliefs and, in an April 28, 2007 ruling, she asked the NYPD to reinstate him.

The ruling was referred to the Rights Commission, prompting the July 1 order reinstating Jaggi. The commission noted that failure to abide by its order may result in the NYPD being penalized.

The ruling follows another case involving a Sikh trainee who was dismissed by the NYPD in July 2002 for refusing to wear a hat instead of his religiously mandated turban. Amric Singh Rathour, 25, filed a federal lawsuit alleging violation of federal and state civil rights law. The suit is in the pre-trial stage.

Sikhs have been attempting to work in police department across the country., but have not had much success, thanks to the ‘no-turban’ policy. Sikh groups have cited the examples of the Canadian and British police departments which permit Sikhs wearing turban to serve.

Prominent Sikhs, including Baltej Singh Dhillon of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Dr Arjinder Pal Singh Sekhon, a colonel with the US Army, gave testimony during the hearing in the Jaggi case.

[Courtesy: *India Abroad*]



## **US Sikh’s unique gift to native village**

### **Library on wheels in Punjab**

***Ramesh Vinayak***

It’s sweltering afternoon in Gujarwal, a village in the interior of Punjab’s Ludhiana district. But the village springs to life as a caravan-like bus rolls in and is parked in front of the Government Girls’ High School. Both elders and children board the airconditioned vehicle and are instantly transported to a world of knowledge. **For it is a library on wheels - the first of its kind in the state - run by Jaswant Singh, a US citizen. He makes two or three long trips to India every year and has hired two persons to manage the library.**

The bus has on its racks 3,000-odd books on a wide range of subjects. There are children's books, those on general knowledge and even some out-of-print books by eminent Punjabi writers. The library reaches out to 15,000 people in six village - Jorahan, Gujjarwal, Rangoowal, Phallewal, Kalakh and Dhulkot - twice a week. Jaswant Singh, 73, adds 300 new books every year. A Ph.D. in library science from the Western Michigan University and librarian in American schools for three decades, he invested Rs 30-lakh into the venture modelled on the American Bookmobile concept. "In a democratic society, every child has the right to have access to knowledge without a direct cost," says Jaswant who provides the locals books free of cost. The mobile library's popularity is reflected in the growing number of the books issued to the locals - from 508 in 2004 to 6,354 last year. **"The bookmobile has promoted the reading culture among the young generation," says Gujjarwal sarpanch Lakhwinder Singh.**

Jaswant Singh started this initiative in his native village, Jorahan, in 2003 with the aim of reviving the book culture in rural areas. He wanted to set up an example in public library service to drive home his campaign to push the state government into enacting the Public Library Act. "Without the Act, Punjab will fail to benefit from the Knowledge Commission report which recognises a public library as an extremely important element of knowledge economy," he says.

The Act provides for the establishment, operation and maintenance of an integrated, comprehensive and efficient rural and urban public library system. In India, only 12 states have enacted the Act so far. Not surprisingly, Punjab has only 17 public libraries, compared to 35,000 in West Bengal. The Act will not only lead to a proliferation of libraries, but will also help stem the school dropout rate and create at least 40,000 jobs. "I am not going to die before seeing this Act through in Punjab," says Singh passionately.

[Courtesy: India Today]

