

# **Fear is the enemy! Let us stand tall & turbaned**

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At a Summer Youth camp in distant California last year, little boys and girls sported badges that read: "Proud to be a Sikh". In New York, a young executive wrote to a newspaper: "I stand out in a crowd because I wear a turban. I belong to the Sikh religion - the fifth largest faith in the world." The fear psychosis in USA following the 9/11 terrorist strikes has not demoralized the Sikhs in general. Their deeper spirit and outward identity - in resplendent turban - links them with their lineage - traceable to Guru Nanak Guru Gobind Singh, who forever banished fear from their mind. Their faith provides a sense of oneness with the the cosmic spirit and makes them at home in the universe.

Yet, in India, a weekly newsmagazine gave currency to the story that "many foreignbound Sikhs remove their turban and clip their hair to escape post-9/11 racial profiling." Responding to this stinging report, a perceptive reader, Preetika Sachar, argued: "Young Sikhs are using 'racial hatred' as a credible excuse to get a clean-shaven look."

The old adage "ignorance is bliss" has exploded in the surging information revolution. But a section of people in Punjab continue to wallow in ignorance of the Sikh heritage and live their lives in shallow consumerism. The reactions to the 9/11 among Sikhs in India and North America is a study in contrasts! While some in Punjab are at pains to have a new face on their passports, the Sikhs across America have undertaken a campaign to create awareness about authentic Sikhism.

In 2001 the alarmist reaction of average American to any man with beard and turban arose from the media's obsessive concern with the physical appearance of Osama bin Laden. The Sikhs joined their compatriot Americans in the prayers for the 3000 victims, including New York's firemen, and the brave passengers who confronted airborne terrorists over Pennsylvania that September morning. The Sikh organisations sought Federal government's intervention to educate airport security personnel. In short, our brothers and sisters across the seas were galvanized into united action to assert their distinctive identity that represented peace and compassion, not violence and terror.

Let us - Sikhs in India - reassert our heritage to carve out a bright future in righteous, pride. Sample what others have said about Sikhism's moral tradition:

- Abul Turani, a courtier and close confidante of Emperor Aurangzeb was sent to Anandpur to report on the activities of Guru Gobind Singh. He reported about Vaisakhi of 1699 as under:

".... then Guru Gobind Singh accepted *Amrit* from Five Beloved Ones and his name was changed from Gobind Rai to Gobind Singh. Thousands took *Amrit* on that day, I was also pulled by some invisible power and requested for *Aab-e-hayat* (Amrit). Guruji in his bounteous mood patted me on my back and administered *Amrit* to me, and in this way my sins of past lives were wiped. My name was changed to Ajmer Singh.

He then warned, the Mughal emperor: "do not oppose a living God on earth. If you do not act on my advice, you and your domain will perish soon."  
[This Ajmer Singh died fighting for the Guru at Chamkaur on 22-12-1704]

- On 10th January 1761, Abdali routed Marathas in third battle of Panipat, though Abdali had only 15000 men under his command, against 1,50,000 Marathas and Jats. On 5.2.1762, he took the roving Khalsa groups by surprise and massacred thousands of unwary Sikhs at Kup near Maler Kotla (*Wada Ghalughara*). He stayed in Punjab till the end of the year to see the effect of this victory over Sikhs. While Marathas took ten years to recover their loss only partially, Sikhs took just ten weeks to make up their losses and regained the spirit of defiance. They rose like a suppressed flame with greater vigour and recaptured much of looted booty, liberated all women and caught about 2,000 Pathans to clean the *Sarovar* at Amritsar. Sikhs were taught to remain united and fight back against adverse situation. They used the inspiring words in daily *ardas* "*Jahan jahan Khalsaji, tahan-tahan rachhya riayat*".

- It was this spirit which worked wonders against all odds which compelled Zakaria Khan to say that the Sikhs' abode was the saddle of their horses. No wonder, therefore, that they rose from the crumbling Mughal Empire to unassailable glory by virtue of the fact that they were born amidst tempest and terror, vicissitudes and conditions that generated matchless courage of burnished steel. From Babar to Alamgir, history had oscillated from torture to tyranny, but foundations of tyranny are basically weak and are bound to collapse.

- Dr. Gokal Chand Narang said that threats persecution, imprisonment, deportation, torture, execution, outlawry and massacre - all these weapons were employed, one by one, against the builder of the nation (Sikhs) who were destined to wrest the sceptre of the Punjab from the hands of Mughals."

History of these brave people began at Talwandi in 1469 and it was illumined in the azure skies of Anandpur. In many ways, their saga of historic deeds brought out the best in Khalsa, created in 1699 which ultimately culminated in capture of Lahore in 1765 by Sobha Singh, Jaimal Singh and Lehna Singh which paved the way to establish an egalitarian and humanist Sikh kingdom in the Punjab in 1799.

- While addressing people of Britain, Max A. Macauliffe declared: "I have seen such a religion in East which is easy to comprehend, where idol worship,

meaningless ritualism, caste discrimination, widows' sacrifice at the burning pyre of her husband's body, enslaving of women, use of liquor and tobacco, killing of girls, or speaking ill of others **are strictly prohibited**. This religion forbids pilgrimage of "holy rivers", while it sanctifies acts of charity, justice, humanity, truth, honest living and all other moral and social traits.

- Dr. Sir Mohd. Iqbal said, after reading Japji, "that Guru Nanak understood Islamic faith better than any learned Muslim."
- Qazi Noor Mohd. was compelled to admit that blessed are these Sikhs who do not attack a person who is unarmed, who do not attack a fallen foe, and do not touch jewelry on the person of any woman.
- Sir Michael Edward said that Darbar Sahib (Amritsar) should not be considered as a building, as a visit to this shrine galvanizes the soul and is the index of dedication of this living community.
- Rabindranath Tagore and Vinoba Bhave said, "Whenever people of the world realize the universal system they will have to understand the cosmic anthem: *Gagan mey thal ravi-chand deepak bane, tarika mandal janak moti*" - within their souls."
- "If ever the humanity seeks humility like Jesus, overflowing wisdom of the Buddha, the glowing face like Shri Krishna, *maryada* of Ramji, then they should see the multi-dimensional qualities of Guru Gobind Singh," observed the devout Sadhu Vaswani.
- Pearl S. Buck, the American Nobel prize winner said that while listening Gurbani from Guru Granth Sahib, she felt transformed.

To conclude, at a time when there is extensive erosion of moral values, and a wide spread alienation of the younger generation, we should look within ourselves as to why we cannot revive the glory of Sikhism. Let us not divide ourselves for power, self and personal aggrandizement. Let us be aware of the selfless sacrifices of our ancestors and try to live upto their ideals of simple living and high thinking. Let us work for truth and humanitarianism. Sikhs can no longer afford the luxury of pessimism.

