

Unjust bracketing of Sikhs with Hindus under Constitution of India

Sir, - The November 2002 editorial 'Vision & Verities revealed by Guru Nanak: A plea for return to Faith', raises some pertinent and critical issues for the future of Sikhism in India of diverse faiths. Every now and then we come across the suggestion of a brazen attitude of Hindu scholars to treat Sikhs as Hindus. The Indian Constitution does a patent injustice to the Sikhs (as well as Jains and Buddhists) by indirectly bracketing Sikhs in the definition of a 'Hindu', even though they form a distinct community.

Sikhism is, and has been, from inception a separate religion, like Islam and Christianity, having its own Code of Ethics, marriage customs and beliefs, etc, which do not subscribe to the customs of Hindus, particularly their ritualism, division into four castes and belief in multiplicity of gods. The Code of Ethics ('*Rahit Maryada*) of Sikhs defines a Sikh as a person who believes in:

1. One eternal, self existing immortal God;
2. The Ten Gurus [Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh]
3. The Guru Granth Sahib, as the Eternal Guru
4. The writings and teachings of Gurus
5. Tenth Guru's *Amrit* [which inter-alia, requires keeping of unshorn hair].

A Sikh does not believe in any other religion. Sikhism is a unique way of householder's life - temporal and spiritual - as demonstrated in practice by the Ten Gurus during their life times [1469-1708], spanning nearly 240 years. Guru Nanak [1469-1539] as founder of Sikhism, emphasized the fundamental truth of all religions, and whose mission was to put an end to all religious conflict. He condemned the formalism of both Hinduism and Islam, preaching the Gospel of Universal Brotherhood and unity of God. Guru Nanak pronounced that 'there is no Hindu or Musalman. All human beings are children of one God and hence his message of universal brotherhood for all men of different faiths. He emphasized that we should respect all religions without any distinction, for whereas God is one, the means and ways of attaining unity with God - the ultimate goal of all human-beings - is the same.

Historically, Sikhism is the latest world religion. It came into being during a period of religious revival led by Hindu Bhakti Movement and Muslim sufism in India in the 15th & 16th centuries. Whereas it is true that many who believe in Sikhism were originally Hindus, but then so were majority of Indian Muslims (including Kashmiris) who had been forcibly converted to Islam by the Mughals (during regimes of Babar to Aurangzeb) who had come to India primarily as invaders to loot the wealth of India, but then settled down to rule over its land, subjugating the native population. Here, it may

be recalled that Guru Tegh Bahadur had been beheaded during Aurangzeb's regime, when the Guru refused to embrace Islam, to save Hindus (on supplication of Kashmir Pandits) from the tyranny of forcible conversion to Islam at the behest of Aurangzeb. This is a unique and perhaps solitary example of a supreme sacrifice of life to save followers of another religion.

That Sikhs are a distinct minority community in India (like Muslims and Christians) was amply, though diabolically, demonstrated in 1984 when thousand of innocent Sikhs were singled out in different parts of India, and mercilessly massacred following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, allegedly, by her two Sikh security guards.

India rightly prides itself in diversity of its population belonging to different religions, castes and creeds. So, why the discrimination against Sikhs by denying them their distinct identity in the Constitution of India, and unjustly forcing the income-tax paying Sikhs to declare themselves compulsorily as Hindu Undivided Family (HUF). In the fitness of things and fairplay, both on ethical and moral grounds, the Sikh community (which contributed so much during the freedom struggle of India by fighting and making personal sacrifices against injustice and economic exploitation by Britishers of Indians during their two centuries rule over the country) should in all fairness and natural justice be given their due place as a separate religion, and not treated as a sect of Hindus, in order to recognize them as a separate community having its own religious traditions, ethics, customs and a distinct way of life. Accordingly, it is imperative that the Constitution of India, including various amendments thereunder like the Hindu Succession Act, which includes Sikhs in the definition of Hindu, should be suitably amended.

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Blessings from Nonagenarian Member

I completed 92 years of age this January, you may have seen my article on Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji's date of birth "1661 or 1666" in the Quarterly *Nishan* III/2002 issue. My spiritual energy and intellectual study keep me ticking, even as I engage in *Naam Simran*.

My daily routine is: I rise early in the morning, have bath and am ready by 4 am - to listen to *Gurbani Kirtan* relayed over TV from Harmandir Sahib, followed by BBC News.

My wife, of sixty years remained bedridden after a brain surgery at Apollo Hospital and passed into God's care in July 2002. Our children came from overseas in time to see her depart. Now books are my best companions. A sum of Rs. 150 is sent by MO in renewal of my subscription.

With affectionate regards,

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[By a happy coincidence, his article: *Charisma of Guru Gobind Singh Ji*, appeared in the January 2003 issue. We wish our revered member a holy, joyful and healthy life. - Ed. SR]

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Greetings from Pakistan

Sitara Travels, one of the leading tour operators of Pakistan has been arranging Sikh Yatra for many years. Like all the previous years, this year we again have launched Yatra programme to Pakistan on the occasion of Vaisakhi.

This is a seven-day programme covering all the famous Sikh shrines and other attractions related to the Sikh religion. In case you are interested to join this programme then please send us mail at islamabad@sitara.com or sitaratravel@yahoo.com and we will be pleased to send you all the necessary details.

SHAH HUSSAIN

Pakistan

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Defining "Sehajdhari Sikhs"

Sir - Everyone desirous of adopting Sikhism as religion of choice and free will normally goes through the ceremony of "amrit-Pahul". Those who opt for taking 'Amrit' and abide by its vows and *maryada* in everyday life, are Singhs of the Sikh Panth; others who observe *maryada* and maintain long hair while having faith in the teachings enshrines in Guru Gobind Singh and also regularly sing, recite and listen to Gurbani with devotion, are Sikhs beyond any question.

Those who fulfill conditions of a Sikh but do not maintain long hair should be considered *Sehajdhari Sikhs*. I suggest that *patit* Sikhs also falls in this category rather than be ostracized into oblivion. This is one way of upholding the status of *Sehajdhari* Sikhs. According to my opinion, the Gurdwara Act should be scrapped as mother religion is governed by an act of God.

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Message from our Overseas Patron

I very much admire the work that *The Sikh Review* has been doing. But it is high time that the Sikhs turned from the Gurus' inner mission to their 'world mission' to proclaim the humane values of the Sikh religion. May the Guru make you strong and as brilliant as ever for many years!

Currently I am busy reading the microfilms of those first years of the East India Company in Calcutta, and I am impressed at how well the ordinary educated Bengali of the day was more than a match for either the English East India Company officials or for the Mughal officials of the old Muslim Kingdom.

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Ambiguous Historians

Sir, - I was struck by Sr. Khushwant Singh's article, (*The Sikh Review*, Nov. 02, Page 20) under the caption: "No one must go hungry". The fifth Takht of the Sikhs, was built by the Sikhs to commemorate the "assassination" of their last Guru, Dasmesh Pita

Sahib, Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The "assassination" theory is open to question. Besides, the Hazur Sahib represents a distinct chapter in the life of Sri Dasmesh.

Some time back, I objected to certain distortions in the "Sikhs in History" by Sangat Singh. It is odd how some eminent authors distort and conventionalize our history. They refer to Guru Granth Sahibji as Sikhs' Bible and call the Sikh *amrit* ceremony as Sikh "baptism", and get away with it. I wonder what can be done to stop all this? This reminds me of Guru Nanak Devji's slok "*jeta pariah teta kariah*".

Regarding Sardar Tirlochan Singh, popularly known as *Veerji*, this writer had good luck of association with him. His *sewa* is truly incredible and I wonder how he does it. He does lot of *path* and *sewa*. However, I once asked him about the importance of taking *Amrit* for a Sikh, and his reply was, for him, Amrit is *sewa* and it is not necessary to take amrit! He is supposed to have miraculous powers and can read your mind and tell the future, but only if he is in a mood and wants to do so. Normally, if you ask him a question of the future, he will give an evasive reply. For him *sewa* is everything. My own understanding is *sewa* and *simran* are both integral to the Sikh way of life. Every Sikh must take Amrit.

I take this opportunity to ask if any of your readers can provide me with address of a Panjabi magazine called "*Sura*" which I believe is an excellent monthly magazine on Sikhism and Gurbani. I would like to subscribe to it.

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Politics of Gurdwara Management

Sir: Your editorial "Politics of Gurdwara Management" [SR, December 2002] is timely and cogent.

Sitting in the heart of Sikh Gurdwara Management in Amritsar, we feel, that true religion has taken a back seat. SGPC is basically a means to win power for various factions, be it Akali Dal (Badal) or Tohra faction. Religion has been reduced to ladder to climb upto political and economic power.

Sikhism preaches a casteless society, but reality is the opposite. Caste based gurdwaras are mushrooming both in the rural and urban areas of Punjab. The vision is reduced to a rhetoric and SGPC has hardly done anything to control it, barring lip service. Even Akali Dal factions of Badal & Tohra, issue ticket for SGPC elections on "caste basis". It leads to sharp social division among the Sikhs. Well put by Prof. Kashmir Singh of Guru Nanak Dev University, "if a group of Sikhs belonging to one particular caste loses control of the management of a particular gurdwara to another caste, they split, and build another gurdwara to satisfy their ego."

It will require a Herculean effort to counter this trend. Who can do it? Certainly not the SGPC, with its own internal strifes and tussels at present. Sarbat Khalsa has to put their heads together and work out a strategy to reverse this perversion.

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The Sikh Review in Nigeria

Sir: My family and friends look forward to issues of The Sikh Review every month. We all wish to convey our appreciation for excellent improvement in the quality of this magazine. Your editorials raise compelling issues concerning the Sikh community and suggest cogent solutions. The articles by various contributors touch informative subjects and are well researched. Your approach to authors to express their views freely - and provide clarifications at later stages - adds to the utility of the Journal.

In the absence of any proper Gurdwara in Lagos, we organize weekly gatherings of *shabad Kirtan* and Sukhmani Sahib, followed by Guru Ka Langar. Birthdays of our Gurus (Gurupurab) are celebrated at the residences of devotees in the presence of large participants. Occasionally, *ragi jathas* visit us here for the benefit of devotees in this country.

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