

Freedom of Expression Abused

The noted Mumbai-based women's fortnightly FEMINA - a part of the Times of India Group - published an article written by one, Kirat Kaur Chandhok in its issue dated December 01, 2004 captioned "Fake Hair for stupid Sardarnis". This frivolous piece of writing attracted adverse comment from many

discerning readers, particularly Sr, Harbhajan Singh (former chairman and Mg. Director, Allahabad Bank) and Sr. Tarlochan Singh, Chairman National Commission for Minorities, New Delhi. Several Calcutta organisation, including the Sikh Nari Manch, The Sikh Cultural Centre and The Sikh Forum also sent to the editor their letters of protest, by post and email. We publish below the letter we wrote to the editor - as the most gentle sample of our sentiment as also the response which the editor, FEMINA has sent to Sr. Tarlochan Singh - in typical "legalese" - trying to wriggle out of the embarrassment. We have chosen not to reprint Ms Chandhok's offensive article in order not to hurt feelings of our readers.

Ed. S.R.

Editor-in-Chief
Femina
Mumbai

Sub: "Fake Hair" by Ms Chandhok in Femina dated Dec. 01, 2004

Dear Madam,

My wife and I have been regular readers of FEMINA - and admire your ceaseless efforts to liberate and empower Indian women, even if your outreach touches only the upper crust of the society.

Both of us are, however, disappointed and deeply hurt after going through Kirat Kaur Chandhok's short - and shallow - 'confession' of how she has been deceiving her parents by first shortening her hair and then wearing a wig to keep up appearances!

This is an instance of sheer hypocrisy. Your editorial discretion should have rubbished her false and meretricious piece of frivolity. Surely you know that *Kesh* - uncut hair - is an article of faith for every Sikh, male and female. No wonder Keshava is a name for Divine power and Sukeshini is cherished as a name for women. Here, in Bengal, only widows are forced to shaving their head. The offending article concludes with an outrageous advice: "rebel young". A generation struggling with the moral crisis and physical degradation certainly deserves better than this!

Yours truly,
Kuldhir S. Singh & Saran Singh

RESPONSE

"National Commission for Minorities
Lok Nayak Bhavan (5th Floor)
Khan Market, New Delhi 110 003
Attn. Mr. P. Sharma, Legal Officer

Dear Sirs,

**Ref: The article titled "Fake Hair for Stupid Sardarnis"
published in Femina December 1, 2004 edition**

We invite your attention to your letter No. S/016/15/1/04_MEC/NCM dated 17.12.2004 addressed to The Editor, Femina, forwarding therewith two complaints, in respect of the captioned article. Our response hereunder is without prejudice to all our rights under applicable laws.

At the outset, we wish to state there was absolutely no intention on the part of the Editor or the Publisher to hurt the religious feelings and sentiments of the Sikh community. Moreover, we do not consider that the contents of the said article are in fact defamatory.

The said article merely attempted to reflect the dilemma of a Sikh girl (whose identity has been altered at her request) who cuts her hair given the religious tenets of Sikhism, which do not permit the same. The title of the article has to be read in the context of the article itself, which sets out the personal experience and dilemma faced by a Sikh girl who cut her hair but was not prepared to hurt the sentiments of those close to her. The emphasis of the article is on the lengths that she went through to ensure that such sentiments were not hurt and the import very clearly is that such rebellion is not worth the effort, far from actually encouraging Sikh women to cut their hair as alleged. The title of the article has to be read in the context of its contents, which clearly associates "stupidity" with hasty acts in defiance of religious or social tenets and does not, in any manner, seek to categorize Sikh woman as stupid as alleged.

We convey our deep anguish, if the religious feeling and sentiments of the Sikh community have been hurt by publication of the said article and reiterate that it was entirely unintentional. We are willing to consider publishing the following apology in the next issue of Femina:

"We refer to the article titled "Fake hair for Stupid Sardarnis" published in the December edition of our magazine. The article was merely a true life account, and contained the personal views, of the Sikh girl who cut her hair despite the same being prohibited by the tenets of her religion and actually details the lengths to which she went to ensure that the sentiments of those close to her were not hurt on account of her hasty decision. There was no intention to hurt the sentiments of the Sikh community nor criticize the tenets or practices of the Sikh religion nor to incite any member of the Sikh community to act against the tenets of their religion. It however, appears that the sentiments of members of the Sikh community have been hurt by the article and hence offer our sincere apologies to them."

We would appreciate your confirmation that following the publication of the abovementioned statements, the matter referred to in your letter No. S/016/15/1/04-MEC/NCM dated 17.12.2004 on the subject including without limitation, the letter dated 9.12.2004 from Shri Gurbinder Singh Sethi will be treated as amicably settled and closed without any further claims of any kind by yourselves or Gurudwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, (Ranchi), Mr. Sethi or any person claiming on their behalf, directly or indirectly.

Thanking you,
Yours faithfully,
For Femina

Sathya Saran
Editor”