

# Identity Crisis? Youth deserve Empowerment

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Is it really so? At the International level, Sikhs have a very good image. Recently, when Indo-US Nuke deal was signed, one red-turbaned Sikh was present among those who witnessed the signing of the Hyde Act, 2006. The two nations agreed to co-operate on the civilian use of nuclear energy. Dr Manmohan Singh and President Bush signed the agreement in July 2005. Dr Manmohan Singh, the most qualified and dignified PM, represents more than one billion people of the Republic of India.

Guru Nanak says, "*Sachhe marg chaldian ustat kare jahan*" - which means that followers of True Path earn the praise of the whole world.

A Sikh scholar, Surinder Singh Matharoo was recently appointed Professor of Sikh Musicology in the Thames University of London. He will teach the various *Ragas* of the Sikh scripture to foreign students, may not be Sikhs. Indeed he is spreading the message of love as preached far and wide by Guru Nanak. Such examples can be multiplied.

At the national level, we have Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission. He thinks of infrastructure, health care and education for one and all, with no reservations, nor any bias nor prejudices. We have the Chief of the Army Staff, JJ Singh, a unique personality of a Sikh entrusted with the security of the nation. Many others are contributing to the development of the nation.

So what crisis? I find however, that the Sikh psyche in Punjab seems brutally bruised because of their own actions, which unfortunately differ from true Sikh ways of life seeking peace for everybody.

I am reminded of a story. Once Guru Nanak accompanied by Mardana, a Muslim, visited a village. The villagers spoke harsh words to Guru Nanak, but he blessed them. "Be happy and stay here." Guru moved on to another village. The villagers served food and listened to his hymn. Guru Nanak blessed them. "Be dispersed". "Why have you wished them to leave their hearth and home?" asked Mardana. Guru Nanak replied, "These folk will carry goodness and love wherever they go."

A Sikh, in that tradition, wherever he goes he creates an environment of love, works hard and shares the fruits of hard labor. Think of Sikhs living in India or abroad. They have, indeed, created a fine image of the Sikh way of life. For instance, in UP, Sikhs have converted barren land into fertile land by dint of hard work and brought prosperity to the people of that area. In M.P and Gujarat, Sikhs are doing exceedingly well in industry and providing gainful employment to many local people.

Many Sikhs occupy high positions in foreign countries. For example, Ujjal Singh Dosanj became the Prime Minister of a Canadian state. He identified himself with the aspirations of the country the citizenship of which he acquired. The late Harbhajan Singh Yogi Ji established a credible Akal Security in America. Amrit Singh, the youngest daughter of Indian PM, Dr Manmohan Singh, is a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union. She is well known for her investigations of the alleged torture in American prisons in Iraq, and other countries.

Let us look into the historical events which influenced the Sikh psyche to understand the nature of crisis if any. Guru Nanak says that unless one introspects truly, one can not dispel illusions: "*bin appa cheeney, mitte na bharm ki kai*"

Sikhism has faced hostility since its inception. They always stood tall to uphold truth, equity and honor. Once there was a Sikh empire but did not survive for variety of reasons. I find Maharaja Ranjit Singh was not a 'saint soldier'. It appears that he was soldier first and last.

Sikh values were not cultivated widely. Treachery reigned supreme among courtiers. They never understood humility the basic philosophy of Sikh Panth. Guru Nanak says: "*man ka sootak lobh hai, jiva, kasootak, kur.*" It means: Pollution of mind is greed; that of tongue is falsehood. In other words, greed of material things, pride or power, wealth leads one astray from truthful life.

With the death of Ranjit Singh the glory of Sikh Raj was gone. The 19<sup>th</sup> C was indeed a difficult time for Sikhs, yet the Sikhs soldiered on.

Five events of 20<sup>th</sup> C are important which display the changing image of peaceful Sikhs to that of 'brandishing' swords. Sword was ordained to be used sparingly and that too for self defense. Once Guru Nanak was asked who is great, Hindu or Musselman? He replied both will weep unless they have good actions. "*Shubh amlan bajhon, donon royee*".

**1. The Gurudwara Act 1925:** A peaceful Morcha, i.e. non-violent protest liberated Gurudwaras from the clutches of Mohants. These priests wielded gun power to scare those who opposed their illicit relations with woman. Consequently SGPC was established to administer these historical Gurudwaras in accordance with Sikh principles.

It appears that the SGPC now dabbles into power politics, no longer a guiding star for Sikhs. Elections are fought for the control of money offerings only. Huge offering by the devotees is used for pomp and show. Irrational superstitions are a galore. For example, a board is hung on the gurudwara wall displaying "The wish of begetting a son is fulfilled here." Rituals, the bane of Sikh life, are glorified and practiced.

**2. Independence Act, 1947:** The country was divided into India and Pakistan. The Punjab, the land of five rivers was also divided. In this partition, Sikhs suffered most: the birth place of Guru Nanak lies in Pakistan; the Sikhs had to migrate into India leaving behind fertile land and flourishing business.

The partition had left a scar on the mind of Punjabis especially of Sikhs. I mean the harmony of Punjab was badly disturbed. However, the Sikhs settled in different parts of India, re-emerged as a hard working community and achieved distinctions in many fields especially in Military occupation. The name of Gen. Jagjit Singh Singh Aurora, the warrior Sikh, is a legend. Ninety thousand Pakistani soldiers surrendered to him in a war on the Eastern Front. He fought for truth steadfastly. Another legend is General Harbax Singh who dug up the grave yard for invincible American Patton tanks used by the enemy in a war on the Western Front in 1965.

**3. PEPSU merger Act, 1956:** The Patiala and East Punjab States Union was merged into Punjab. Hindus disowned the Punjabi language as their mother tongue. The recruitment in military on the basis of population was an unfortunate decision. The rural Sikh youth was disappointed. There are few incentives for entrepreneurs to set up industry in Punjab to employ the youth gainfully. Farming does not support them either. Farming on less than 20 acres does not produce enough and to spare. Restiveness among Sikhs began to appear in Punjab. There was a division between urban Hindus and rural Sikhs.

**4. Re-organisation Act, 1966:** The Punjab was divided into three states, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab on the basis of language. Chandigarh, in lieu of Lahore was built new capital of Punjab, but now is the bone of contention between two states. Division of water resources is another sour point.

It was all madness at play between two communities in Punjab. Punjabi culture, harmony and love since centuries past lost its flavor. Rivalry in politics spelled havoc for Punjab. Anandpur resolution seems to widen the divide. A doubt on the patriotism of Sikhs cropped up, although the sacrifices of Sikhs for the freedom of India are unparalleled in the history. For example, the non-violent philosophy of peaceful Sikh morchas was highly appreciated

by Mahatma Gandhi. Non-co-operation of Namdhari Sikhs was an example by itself against the commercial tyranny of British rulers. Bhagat Singh is a legend in the freedom movement. Yet it appears the Sikh psyche, in Punjab was brutally bruised.

**5. The Akal Takht** was desecrated in 1984 by the Indian forces. The Sikh youth was dubbed as militants. The alleged militants were hiding in the Golden Temple premises. It is unfortunate that extremist elements stored guns in the premises of the Golden Temple, the hub of peace, calmness and love. The spirit of seeking truth, being tolerant to differences and free discussion of issues, the boon of Sikh philosophy seemed to have taken flight.

To avenge Operation Blue Star, Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India was assassinated by a Sikh, her security guard who could hardly realize the consequences of his action. Then terror was let loose on Sikhs throughout India. The Sikh youth was disappointed with the Sikh leadership, particularly that of Akali Party. The party apparently lacked the broad vision enshrined in Gurbani. The wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Self praise is no recommendation.

In this background, we find the Sikh psyche was immensely injured. A section of Sikhs in Punjab harbored extremist tendencies — the root cause of alienation of Sikhs from the mainstream. The *bana* i.e. *five kakars* were glorified; the Gurbani, the voice of Guru was relegated.

The Sikh need to appreciate the voice of Guru Arjun Dev when he was tortured to death: *ulahano mein kahu na deeo, man meeth tuhara keeo*. This means that I do not blame anybody. I have simply pleased you, O God. He accepted the will of God. That was the spirit of forgiveness which uplifted many a Sikh from the turmoil. The liberal Sikhs who had firm belief in Sikh tenets emerged from the ruins of Punjab. Yet they face new challenges of modern times. A few are stated here.

1. The apostasy among youth is a matter of concern. It appears there is lack of awareness of Gurbani among Sikh masses.
2. The neglect of Nanak Panthis: They are tribal Sikhs and have faith in Guru Nanak but are socially, educationally and economically very backward.
3. Dasam Granth: Who is the author of this Granth? Which contents stand the test of Gurbani? What is its status vis-à-vis Guru Granth Sahib?
4. Mushroom growth of *deras* which spread falsehood in the name of Sikhism

In view of these difficulties, we need to chalk out a programme that can soothe the injured psyche of Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh says " *saach kahon sun leho sabhe jin prem keyo tin he prabh paayo*". I tell the truth. Hark ye all, those who love one another shall find God.

We need to deliberate on the following issues seriously. I pray to Almighty Waheguru to grant us strength to follow the path of righteousness, tolerance and love:-

**1. Translation of Guru Granth:** Thoughtless reading does not make sense. It becomes a ritual. The Sikh priests are not adequately qualified to interpret the Gurbani in its true spirit of *ek pita, eks ke ham barak* in its widest sense. We have one father God, we are all His children.

Quality educational institutions and Health Centers of excellence are an imperative need. The menace of *deras*, where Babas read the *bani* according to their own whims. Guru Hargobind wished Akal Takht to be seat of power, the Power of Love. Good men can win hearts by actions only. But then their actions and words must match.

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## A Plea for Prachar aimed at Youth

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A large number of Sikh Institutions, SGPC, DSGPC, the Institute of Sikh Studies, Sikh Missionary College – Ludhiana, Alag Shabad Yug International Trust, Ludhiana, to name a few and a large number of Gursikhs at Delhi, at all major towns of Punjab and at Chandigarh, are engaged in disseminating the Sikh Theology, Philosophy, Heritage and Moral traditions to our youth.

However, despite the above effort, the truth is that we have made little progress in getting the Sikh Youth into our fold. While such an effort in foreign lands has yielded exceptionally good result, we have, at home ground, remained largely unsuccessful. Lack of coordinator has been the major factor responsible for our tardy progress in Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh.

At present a number of agencies/individuals are doing the same things, piecemeal and some important issues have been left out. Therefore, consultations/Discussions were held at Delhi and Chandigarh to evolve a practical programme that may be launched both at Delhi and Chandigarh simultaneously. These two places been chosen, as a large number of Sikh students are located here; also we have facilities for Prachar, by way of accommodation and allied administrative support in our Gurdwaras and schools. Prachar in rural areas would be taken up in Phase II.

Besides many others, the following prominent personal were consulted/participated in discussions held at Delhi and Chandigarh.

- Dr. Kharak Singh - Editor, Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh.
- Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh, Ph.D (U.S.A.)
- Sardar K.S. Duggal, Ex. M.P. (R.S.), Delhi.
- Sardar Surinderjit Singh Pall, (Retd.) Chief Commissioner.
- Air Marshall I.S. Chhabra (Retd.)
- Wing Commander R.S. Chhatwal (Retd.) Secy. The Sikh Forum.
- C. Pal Singh IGP (Retd.) – Noida.
- S. Pritam Singh Kohli, I.A.S. (Retd.) – Chandigarh.
- Dr. Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon – Chandigarh.
- Major Kuldip Singh Bhasin – Delhi.
- Lt. Col. M.S. Sethi (Retd.) – Delhi.
- Bakshi G.P. Singh, director Bakson & Bakbro – Delhi.
- Maj. Karnail Singh (Retd.), President Sector 34 Gurdwara – Chandigarh.
- Sardar G.S. Makin, ex. Naval Officer – Chandigarh.
- S. Gajinder Singh – Mohali.
- S. Sardara Singh – Chief Editor *Gurbani is Jag meh Chanan* – Mohali.

It is heartening to confirm that all those approached assured their total support for the common, noble cause, and they would contribute according to their area of expertise, influence and facilities available.

The plan of action envisages the following:

- To spread word that at homes, all Sikh families may speak in Punjabi. We should avoid speaking in English, Hindi or in mixed languages.
- To spread word that Children and Parents not knowing Gurmukhi may learn it at homes/Gurdwaras.
- To spread word that all Sikh families may recite some Path at home, which may gradually be enhanced.
- Ladies, gents and children may learn and recite Kirtan at homes/Gurdwaras. All Gurdwaras would be approached to teach Gurmukhi and Kirtan to interested persons.

- Grandparents at homes may narrate *sakhi's* to grandchildren. This will help promote pride in Sikh Heritage at young age among our children.
- Free literature for all the above activities would be provided to all.
- Motivational talks by experts, to be arranged for all children to learn Gurmukhi, Gurbani, philosophy, History and traditions.
- Those found interested, regular weekly classes would be held for them.
- During vacations, let us hold full time Camps, for 7 to 10 days duration. All important aspects of Gurbani should be covered and practised. Also included would be quiz competitions and other competition to promote greater interests Audio/Video aids would be used for better effect.
- High skilled professionals (Retired/Serving) volunteers to conduct training of Sikh youth for high status jobs, such as I.A.S., Medical, Engineering, Defence Services and the like.
- Motivate Sikh Youth to preserve their identity (Uncut hair and Turban).
- To make efforts to steer away Sikhs and our youth from Alcohol and Drugs. Eminent speakers would be invited to hold discourses/show films and documentaries on this issue.
- Promotion of welfare of Girl Child.

Our main requirement, for the accomplishment of the above mentioned tasks – is the grass root Nishkam Sewaks, both male and female of any age and back ground. All our efforts would be made to utilize the services of large number of such volunteers.

Finally, no new organization is being set up either at Delhi or Chandigarh. All operations would be launched from Guru Nanak Mission, Noida – Sector 37, Noida, U.P. 201 303 and Sector 34 Gurdwara at Chandigarh, where maximum facilities exist for the conduct effective Parchar.

The above programmes would be commenced during this year. While there is all the will and determination to make the joint effort a success, we seek the community's help and cooperation in terms of provision of free literature – Punjabi Primers, Gutkas, Sikh Sakhis, Kirtan Shabads. Books on Sikh History, Sikh struggles/Morchas, Sikh Rehat Maryada and Sikh Heroes. We also require full range of technical facilities to screen Audio/video shown/films. The donors may kindly send the above material to Guru Nanak Mission Noida, Sector 37 Noida, U.P. 201 303 and to Sector 34 Gurdwara at Chandigarh.

We would be grateful for any suggestions/advice from any quarter.

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