

Non-conforming Sikhs on TV: An Inappropriate Role Model for Youth!

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THE WORLD HAS BEEN changing rapidly in almost all spheres of human existence. Along with such changes, the different religions of the world also keep on undergoing continuous metamorphosis but it is mostly superficial. To a great extent the fundamental basic principles, the essential pillars, of each living faith that pertain to its moral spiritual values as well as what differentiates one faith from the other usually remain unaltered more or less.

The commitment of any individual to its faith usually varies, depending upon the understanding and interpretation of the basic concepts of that faith by such a person. For example, on one extreme there will be a group of people willing to go all the way to decimate anyone who they think is not living in accordance with the basic concepts of his or her religion. On the other side of the isle, there are people of the very same faith, who absolutely will have nothing to do with the philosophy being perpetrated by the first group. Then, there are some in between who may care less, one way or the other. For them, the principles of the faith are often a moot point as long as individuals could simply be included in their particular faith as and when such a need might arise.

In most of the circumstances, the faiths of the world and their codes did not take births in a defined time span; rather, they were gradually incorporated among the masses over a period, usually much after the permanent departure of the originator or originators of the concepts. Many a times, it might not even be obvious to the followers as to who and what, indeed, was the real source behind such a thought process for a particular code of a given religion.

The followers of most of the faiths usually do not exhibit any distinct and discernible outward characteristics that might help differentiate them from the others. Stated bluntly, they attempt not to wear their religions on their bodies. The members of their hierarchy; however, might hold on to the outward religious articles for they simply wish to appear distinct from the ordinary followers. Oftentimes, the hierarchy itself may not concern with the lifestyle or follow what it preaches to the others, for it presumes in having automatic confirmed seats in the realm of so-called 'the power that be'. Consequence: all labor intensive and expensive religious rituals and activities are left for the commoners to follow while hierarchy exudes itself to be immune from a need for such efforts.

When it comes to the Sikh faith on the other hand, it truly stands unique. Some of the fundamental differences between it and other religions of the world are so obvious that they put the Sikh religion into an altogether different wavelength. First of all, it is historically not as old as many other faiths. Sikh Gurus developed its basic principles in a documented span of time by using their own practical examples. The faith places emphasis upon an internal moral life style in accordance with the spiritual principles enunciated clearly in the Eternal Guru, 'Guru Granth Sahib Ji'. At the same time, it is also well known to its followers that the external appearance of a Sikh with all the articles of faith intact on his or her body, were equally made essential by Sikh Gurus. In no uncertain terms, the religion ordains that as a 'Sikh of the Guru' one must keep a total belief in all the teachings of the Gurus

including maintenance of all articles of Sikh faith that provides a unique Sikh identity with uncut hair and beard. Moreover, all the followers are to be considered equal and no differentiation is to be made between the preachers - the hierarchy, and the preached - the ordinary followers whether it relates to the external Sikh codes or internal moral values.

This ordinance about external identity was not a hollow sermon; rather, the unique identity of a Sikh, bestowed upon by these articles, was considered essential for him to stand out at the time of need and not to run away from the path of truth and justice. The tenth Guru himself amply proved this concept by his personal sacrifices. Whether it were his two younger Sahibzadas, his father, or even his ordinary but committed followers, all chose death and extreme degree of torture but allowed not anyone to mess up with their Guru-given form by cutting their hair or letting any other prescribed commands fall wayside.

Instead of putting all out, efforts to achieve the ultimate spiritual goals of Sikhi, both internal and external, some of the so-called modern Sikhs have started to question the necessity of maintaining the basic codes of Sikh faith. They often put forth arguments that do not make much sense to the students of Sikh history. The negative antagonistic fire of dissent against the codes that keeps burning among them is fueled by inexcusable dilly-dally behavior of Sikh hierarchy. The duality of Sikh parents towards the dignity and preservation of the Sikh articles in their children acts like a blast of the wind that further spreads this unfortunate fire.

One of the most important catalysts in the painful denigration of the Sikh-form among the youth now-a-days happens to be the role of the modern day Sikh-entertainers-cum-singers. These Sikh entertainers, if one may categorize them as such, are mostly Sikhs, but only because they were born in the Sikh families. Promoting themselves as the role models for the Sikh youth and yet not having anything in common with the Sikh identity or Sikh articles of faith, truly adds insult to the injury. They often promote behaviors that are clearly contrary to the basic Sikh principles, thus causing aversion and disinterest among the youth against their own faith. Their rising negative influence upon the vulnerable Sikh youth, indeed, turns out to be the strongest. Consequently, many among the Sikh youth have started to turn their heads away from the established principles of Sikh faith including its ordained Sikh form.

With the exponential rise of Diaspora members in the countries of the West, there is a continuous stream of these entertainers bringing their road shows from Punjab to the West. This, in turn, has become a major culprit in leading to degeneration of Sikh faith and Sikh form among the Sikh youth abroad. Presenting themselves under the garb of promoting Punjabi and Bhangra - a unique gift of Punjab to the rest of the world - they somehow nurture a false-belief that they are here to serve their mother tongue Punjabi, not their faith.

Furthermore, these shows could have been graciously done through sober, serious and meaningful songs and actions. Instead, the emphasis in their lyrics is proudly placed upon vulgarity. Often their lyrics are full of the word 'Jutt' and not 'Sikh' and that too with a rather sense of pride, simply because most, but not all have such backgrounds. Equally emphasized and sanctified in their lyrics, is the word 'Sharraab.' Seen critically and on a fundamental level, both of these concepts contradict the basic principles of the very faith to which they belong.

Surrounded by and dancing with semi-clad models, at times, of the Western ethnicity, revealing all or almost all, they paint a picture of complete downfall of religious moral values. The gyrating bodies, both of men and women, full of sexual innuendos

accompanied by vulgar lyrics bordering on indecency, indeed, leave a lasting impression on susceptible tender and young minds. Many among the present day Sikh youth, at least among the Diaspora have come to think that this is what the Sikh faith and Punjabi culture is all about. However, it did not have to be this way. Dancing and singing *per se* is a form of exercise and a good vehicle of entertainment. As such, it could not be considered anti-faith, for, nowhere in our faith there seems to be such an injunction against playing and enjoying sensibly. However, when such actions are undertaken in a style that pollutes the minds of youth with lust and introduces an attitude of animalistic behaviors under the influence of intoxicants, caution needs to be exercised. All what was intended could have been done in a cultural format and with a language that avoids bordering on indecency.

Yet, somewhere in the deep corners of their hearts, these Sikh entertainers do carry a little weakness for the faith of their parents and grandparents. It shows up in the form of their attachment to a *Karrhaa* – another article or Sikh faith - which they still decide to wear on their right wrists. Here again, instead of having a *Karrhaa* made from *Sarbloh* or steel as ordained, unfortunately they end up exhibiting their newly acquired richness by adoring a one made of gold. They do so as nobody ever tried to inform them that the *Rehat Maryada* ordains a *Karrhaa* made of *Sarbloh* and not of shining gold.

Recent involvement of some of these groups into the act of 'Kabooter Baazi,' - a newly coined term for the smuggling of the human beings to Western nations - by these entertainers of the day has brought shame to the Sikh community at-large rather than laurels. But unfortunately, this illegal activity still keeps on going.

Here, it may be worthwhile to discuss also the state of affairs of ethnic Punjabi TV channels in the context of Punjabi entertainers. These Punjabi Channels originally came into being to help promote Punjabi language as well as the Sikh cause through a relay of 'Shabad Kirtan' from Golden Temple, which they certainly do for some limited time - early morning and evening. Instead of helping the cause, they rather hurt it by an onslaught of B class programming filled with sex and sleaze that further exerts continuous immoral pressure upon the youth. As a result, the teenagers stay hooked to the TV for almost all the twenty-four hours a day, much to the chagrin of their parents. The small screen is often busy with the kinds of video clips that make one truly uneasy watching with family or even alone. In fact, often times, I wonder that had they been Western TV programs, many would have been banned from the daytime and prime time showing much sooner or given an 'R' rating.

Another trend that forcefully tears apart any reasonable efforts in preservation of Sikh identity among the youth relates to the production of so-called Punjabi movies. Ironically, these movies are being continuously produced by none others than these Sikhs entertainers, producers and directors, yet the message they deliver happens to be certainly contrary to what was likely to help their faith. In many of these movies, the father of the hero is consistently depicted as a *Keshadhari* Sikh, whereas the rest of the family, including his hero son, is shown to proudly support a 'crew cut' and cut beard. The son, the hero may have a turban on his head on cut hair sometimes and other times he may not. Yet no evidence of resentment on the part of *Keshadhari* parents will ever be shown against hero's appearance. It is no brainer to realize that a hero in an Indian or Punjabi movie always implies, even by default, to be on the right side of the track despite his appearance.

Therefore, having no regard for 'saabat soorat' is bound to promote such behavior among the teenagers and denigrate the ordained Sikh identity. A community that, in the

past, took great pride in having its children maintain Sikh identity, even in the most trying of the circumstances, and never thought twice in offering personal sacrifices for its protection; doesn't seem to be bothered any more when the turban and hair are denigrated to the bottom. Rather, it appears that the Sikh community has resigned itself in accepting the *status quo* as 'a matter of fact'.

The serials that are being shown on Indian small screen, one after the other, willfully and intentionally broadcast turbaned Sikh fathers performing Pooja in their houses and having the marriages of their daughters with non-Sikh boys in a non-Sikh way and that too very proudly. It is all being done under the very eyes of the Sikh directors and producers. One often wonders, why could not Sikh organizations create a board well versed in Sikh Philosophy and Sikh way of life that in turn, could oversee and approve before such kinds of material get to see the light of the day? Crying over spilled milk or inciting the ordinary public later on to break cinema halls and divulge into other kinds of violence is not a Sikh way and must be avoided at all cost.

Furthermore, it has become a fashion now a day for Keshadhari Sikh parents and grandparents to proudly present their shaven grandchildren to the friends, relatives and to the media without any remorse whatsoever. The Sikh community has conveniently forgotten that the Sikh grandparents and parents of the times past emphasized and protected turbans and full-uncut hair of their children, more so than their lives. In fact, they would often refuse to meet and greet a son or grandson who decided to shun the Sikh identity.

Given a little deeper thought, it becomes quickly obvious that many young Sikhs, especially the Sikh entertainers, have placed the royal gift of Sikh identity blessed by Guru Gobind Singh Ji on the back burner. On top of it, their concept of serving mother Punjabi with indecent lyrics, at times contrary to the fundamentals of Sikh faith, unfortunately, is simply akin to a slap on the face of one's own mother.

Yet, I do carry a feeling that, in each and every corner of the world, where ever there happens to be a concerned Sikh, this downward trend in the preservation of Sikh faith and identity must be weighing heavily in his or her mind, and that too for the right reasons. If it were so, then there is a need of all of us to speak up. God and Guru will certainly help those who are willing to turn the wrong into right by bringing these issues at the forefront to the attention of the youth, their role models - and to the sleeping Sikh hierarchy, if there is such a thing.

