

## Sikhism - A Sovereign Faith

This is about the private Members' bill introduced by Sr. Tarlochan Singh, MP (RS). Under Article 25, sub-clause (b) and explanation II, of the Constitution of India, reference to Hindus is "construed as including the Sikhs as well as Buddhist and Jains." For five decades now the Sikhs have been demanding an amendment of this Article so as to restore the Sikhs' distinct identity as a sovereign world religion, recognised globally, including Encyclopedia Britannica.

A National Commission, headed by the former Justice of India, Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, was set up by the government of India to review the working of the Constitution. In its report submitted to the then Vajpayee government, because of persistent demand and representations by the Sikhs, while dealing with the question of the 'Right to Freedom of Religion' and the issue of Article 25 "diluting the identity" of the Sikhs, the commission has observed that the reference to "Hindus" construed as including a reference to Sikhs, etc was **inappropriate**. The recommendation of the commission in this regard is specified below:

"The commission, without going into the larger issue on which the contention is made, is of the opinion that the purpose of the representation would be served if explanation II to Article 25 is omitted and sub-clause (b) of clause (2) of this Article is reworded as follows:

'(b) providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu, Sikh, Jain, or Buddhist religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of these religions.'

So far the recommendation of the commission **to delete** explanation II to Article 25 and sub-clause (b) of clause (2) of this Article reworded, as suggested above in the report, has not been effected. The Sikh members of Parliament should now take up this matter with the government and get the necessary amendment in the Constitution carried out at the earliest.

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## Endowed Chairs in Sikhism in N. America

I don't know how I missed the opportunity to discuss this subject (SR: Feb. 2006) with Hew McLeod, whom I met while travelling in New Zealand last February.

First of all, my compliments to Editor of *The Sikh Review* for publishing the Note on the subject, and, more importantly for his comments.

Each word written by him is meaningful and relevant to the note of the Sikh Scholars. I wish they would respond to his comments. Unfortunately, the Note by the Scholars evades the issue which they themselves have raised, viz. expectations of the community Vs delivery by (or through) these Chairs ( I am not saying delivery through these scholars). The elaboration on appointment of incumbents to the Chairs, or independence of Universities, is taken as read and agreed. However, is there no drawing of the lines as to what is to be researched?

To state in layman's terms, should these Chairs research, say, "Existence of God in Sikh religion - evidence, theoretical or empirical?". There are some aspects which are essentially matters of faith. Do these need to be "researched" just because a Scholar wishes to do so?

The problem has arisen because subjects chosen have no relationship with what community considers is important. **In fact some research subjects have diverted the Community's attention to issues not relevant or important or "essential to satisfy neighbours' curiosity"**. I think the Chair Appointees have a responsibility to the sensitivities of the community. No one disagrees that once a subject is taken up for research, the study should be of highest academic standards.

Furthermore, I think as the note highlights "importance of research on Sikhism to satisfy neighbors' curiosity" does not mean that the Chairs should not then look at what is important to satisfy these neighbors' curiosity, or what are the community's needs for research and further scholarship? Have these aspects been given due weightage by the Scholars when choosing a subject of research?

In other words the Note gets lost in its own analysis by focussing on independence of "research and university" and talking little about why it has failed to match upto the Community's expectations.

**Can the Scholars not find subjects for research which satisfy their investigative urges and yet enhance knowledge of Sikhism to satisfy the neighbors' curiosity?**

Again, referring to Gurdwara as not being appropriate forum for the uninitiated, they fail to enlighten how the research undertaken by these chairs has succeeded to interest them in Sikhism directly or indirectly.

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I read with some interest the article – "Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities" by Prof R S Basi, Prof I J Singh, Prof H Lal and Dr Indarjit Singh, (*The Sikh Review*, February 2006). I like to point out the distinguishing features between externally funded Chair/Lecturer/ Research posts (Academic posts) at a university in North America and that in the United Kingdom.

When Academic posts in British universities are established, with funds from private donors or with funds from charitable/ non charitable organisations (e.g. UK Cancer Research, The British Heart Foundations, Unions, Government Agencies, Religious bodies/organisations and Industries), universities will invite them to become a member of the selection committee, although the final say in the selection of the actual candidate for the post is made by the selection committee as a whole.

Should the Academic post be established with funds from a person, or an organisation, to promote the teaching or research in subject which is not taught, **then the donor can tell the university the purpose of establishing the post and what is expected from the person appointed by the university. The appointee will have academic freedom, but has to always bear in mind the purpose of the post.** The duration of the post is also determined by the sponsors. Whilst universities need external funding, they have the choice over whether to accept or reject the funds, **but are happy to negotiate the terms and conditions of the contract with the donor.**

In respect of such contract, it is usual to insert a clause in the contract that it can be terminated by either party by giving three or (six months) notice as agreed, when it is exchanged. How the university offers the contract to the appointed person is university's business. Further, as far as the academic and intellectual freedom is concerned, there will be no compromise on it. There is thus complete freedom for contents of the course and publications.

On certain occasions, the donor will provide enough funding to the university such that the

interest earned on this amount is sufficient, in itself, to fully finance the post. After that, the donor will have no say over who the university appoints, as long as the Academic post is in their name. The funds are also managed by the university without interference from the donor.

I do not know in which UK University Dr Indarjit Singh is, or was, teaching, or what experience he has in this matter. If he is (or was) teaching at a UK university then he should know about how the Academic posts are established with external funds. Being co-author of the paper, he should have pointed out the differences in establishing externally funded posts in North America and the UK. I have taught at the University of Reading for a number of years, and have been involved in securing such external funding for teaching and research posts. I was also a member of the selection committees and during this time, sponsors were also invited to sit on them.

I hope the readers of your Journal will now appreciate that “Western” Universities do not have the same criteria in establishing externally funded Academic posts at the university.

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### **Behavioural Issues - Illiteracy is at the root**

Sociology was not taught during my school/college days. Subsequently I learnt about it when I met Professor Uberoi at Delhi University. Now I see a schoolteacher, Ms. Bhoopinder Kaur has written a very [SR: March 2006] lengthy article. The bottom line of her idea is Amrit- Sanchar as panacea if it is practiced at pre-puberty time. By its institution, it may prevent permissive sexual behavior, which she attributes to the imitation of the Western style living. I do not know how much living in West she has experienced before the accusation.

In my opinion, the biggest problem we Sikhs have is lack of literacy in rural Punjab. Long back it was known that Punjabis are most literate, after Kerala and Tamilnad, but recent reports show Punjab is down to 13<sup>th</sup> position, just above Bihar!

Perhaps, Bibi Ji means 3% Sikhs living in cities, who are educated, but the masses live in rural Punjab. Even those who are literate are rich and famous and their standard of living includes indulgence in luxury (Farm house and Mujras, late night parties, etc.). These rich folks have no time for their children. **The basic fact is children are true reflection of their parents.**

Finally, I would draw the attention of the opinion-makers, like Bibi Ji, problem of the Sikhs is illiteracy, in general, and clergy in particular, and addiction of the youth. Sikhs should be proud of Guru Granth. But most cannot read, neither understand, nor follow (Lack of time and semiliterate clergy) and corrupt, nepotistic and dishonest politicians who control gurdwaras and political affairs, and prefer to keep the masses illiterate.

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### **Glory of Sikh Dastar Denied in France**

During the last more than ten years, I have contested very serious litigation regarding the

distortion of History of the Sikhs and also written articles and books on various subjects, but the response of the Sikh Institutions to the issued raised was very poor. Even then we continued our struggle and now the turban case in France has become the main source of our worry as we have not the financial support of any big Sikh Institution to continue our struggle for long. At the same time, we do not want that such a serious issue of the Sikhs should go without determined fight up to the International Court of Justice. To my mind, this issue is a question of life and death for the Sikhs. The Sikhs all over the world would have to think seriously about this case, as a true Sikh without turban cannot be imagined, Ways and means would have to be thought about to make this issue a rallying point for the Sikhs. You and your magazine are in a position to do something substantial in this direction. I am sending herewith one of my articles – ‘Shame of Statue of Liberty’, which has been written to point out historical contradiction in the thinking of the French. It would put some psychological pressure on France to rethink about the whole issue once again regarding affixing of photograph with turban on the driving license. Incidentally, the first victory has been won in France as their highest Court has decided in favour of the Sikhs. I am sure that we would also win on the other legal issues related to turban in France, if the Sikhs persist in their struggle and play their cards well on the International scene.

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### **Rural suicides in Punjab: An open letter to President of India**

For past 18 years Movement Against State Repression has been collecting data on rural suicides in Punjab and pointing out the increasing number of suicides to the government. Our research study on his subject was not confined to Punjab, we request you to order an accurate and comprehensive investigation of rural suicides in Punjab. By showing concern for the deepening crisis of rural Punjab you will give hope to crores of desperate people across the country. Please direct the government to carry out a credible survey of rural suicides, provide rehabilitation to affected families and measures for sustainable development of rural sector through adequate allocation.

Your predecessor, President Narayanan, directed the state government to examine the suicide problem. This investigation became more urgent as, about this time, the media was focusing on suicides in Andhra and Karnataka. However, when government of Punjab finally presented a Status Report on suicides to the Government of India in 2005, it decided that between 1988 and 2004, only 2,116 farmers/farm labourers had committed suicide. This is ridiculous and belies the gravity of the situation. For this same period, from a cluster of approximately 100 villages in just one Subdivision of Punjab MASR has so far documented and verified 1,331 suicides. (Total number of village in Punjab number approximately 12,413). These villages are typical. With the exception of villages along the GT Road and in the Doaba region, acute economic distress is felt throughout rural Punjab.

**Both State Governments of Punjab and Haryana are deliberately attempting to play down the level of Rural suicides by Farmers in distress.** The states have entrusted the tusk of collecting suicide data through the police and CID. Since suicide is an offence, the next-of-kin do not speak truthfully, fearing harassment and intimidation. When police now go around villages taking suicide data, they take very few cases, and even in those cases they browbeat the villagers as to why they ‘concealed’ the matter earlier. As a matter of interest it may be pointed out that, a few years ago, the SSP of one district declared at a

press conference that 'as per my record, there are no suicides in this district.' For the sake of credibility, this census should be carried out by an impartial, professional organization insulated from pressures.

Once the most prosperous agricultural state; the rural population of present day Punjab is so impoverished that their options are starvation, migration or - suicide. Some farmers have sold out and migrated to states, like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh where they hope to survive through increased acreage. They are doing this even though they know that they will be 'outsiders' in their new homes and at risk of victimization. They have the examples of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and now Uttaranchal before them. For the overwhelming majority who leave their villages migration holds out no hope but only the prospect of homelessness and insecurity.

Employment opportunities for rural people are virtually nil in Punjab. Government school education in rural Punjab is in a state of collapse. Official figures on average land holding and number of persons below poverty line also need to be re-examined. Our observation is that more than 90 per cent holdings are at the small and marginal level as inherited holdings are further fragmented, although not recorded.

Suicide comes as the end of a long succession of distress. It is preceded by loss of mental balance and in nearly all cases the immediate trigger for the extreme step is mounting pressure to repay a loan. Death is an end of misery for the victim, but a deepening of misery for family. Next of kin are often so deeply traumatized that they too become mentally ill. In many families more than one person has committed suicide. Multiple suicides within the family are increasingly seen.

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### **Re-Defining A Sikh**

This refers to "The Future of Sikh youth" by H.H. Judge Mota Singh Q.C. [Sikh Review, September 2005]

I agree with the learned Judge's views in regard to the clause about "Dashmeshiji's *amrit* given in the definition of a Sikh, vide the *Rahit Maryada* issued by the SGPC. An Amritdhari Sikh is *ipso-facto* a Khalsa, i.e. a member of the Akal Purkh's army (*Khalsa Akal Purkh ki fauj*) and a reflection of Guru Gobind Singh (*Khalsa mero roop hai khas*). *Amrit* is special and one has to earn the right to receive it. *Amrit* is that sacred spark that ignites and illuminates an aspirant to ascend the spiritual height ready to become one with God.

Once, when Guru Gobind Singh was busy administering *amrit*, Bhai Nand Lal "Goya", [whose hymns are equated with Gurbani] and Bhai Kanhaiya, the famous saintly disciple presented themselves, with swords in their hands, for enrolment into the Khalsa fraternity. Seeing Them, Guru Gobind Singh smiled, took their swords into his hand saying that he would wield the swords on their behalf and offered them, instead, a pen and first-aid items, asking them to carry on with their respective noble profession of writing His praises and serving His humanity. Both these renowned Sikhs were fit in every respect to receive the *amrit*, but the Guru perhaps did not desire that every Sikh should be an *amritdhari* or a Khalsa.

Guru Gobind Singh also decried the ostentatious wearing of Khalsa symbols *without inner power and character*. To demonstrate this futility he attired a donkey with a tiger skin and let it loose in the streets of Anadpur Sahib. Seeing a tiger amidst them, the people got

scared till the donkey disclosed its identity by braying.

In the SGPC's definition of a Sikh there is another – discriminatory – clause which says that a Sikh “does not accept any other religion”. Sikhism is a universal Panth – a way of life, which is not bound by any strict code of conduct? Its broad outline is remembering God and doing of noble deeds – “*Harko naam jap, nirmal karam*”. The Gurus wanted to unite all people of all castes, creeds and nations into one family. Before commencement of his mission, Guru Nanak Dev made significant statements about unity of God and Oneness of humanity. In the first statement he recited the Mool Mantra, which delineates the attributes of the One creator, and in the second one he uttered that the Creator does not recognize any religious distinctions us all are one to Him, - There is no Hindu or Muslim. Guru Gobind Singh in his hymn “*Manas ki jat sabhe ek hi pehchanvo*” went beyond this by saying that “The temple and the mosque are the same, and so are Hindu worship and Muslim prayers”. Inclusion of other religion's seers' *bani* Sri Guru Granth Sahib; laying of foundation stone of Harmandir Sahib by a Muslim saint, and having the cult within Sikhism of *sahijdharis* who do not abide by the Sikh identity of keeping unshorn hair goes to show that Sikhism is a secular religion which embraces all of humanity. The world scholars and philosophers like Professor H.L. Bradshaw and Arnold Toynbee define Sikhism as the religion for the New Age, and that Adi Granth has something of special value to say to the rest of the World.

'*Mahankosh*' by Bhai Kahn Singh, the earliest Encyclopedia in Punjabi and the Delhi Gurdwara Act of 1971 are silent about the two clauses discussed above whilst giving the definition of a Sikh.

A Sikh, according to *Gurbani*, is the one who learns Guru's wisdom and teachings and moulds his life accordingly – “*Sikh sikhiya gur vichar*”. Not only does he learn but also abides by the Guru's will whole heartedly – “*So Sikh sakhâ bandhap hai bhai, jo gur ke bhane vich aave*”. Guru Ram Das, the fourth Nanak, explicitly says that who so ever calls himself as a Guru's Sikh should rise early in the morning, focus his attention on God's name after making his ablution, when the sun rises, he should recite *gurbani* and remember God while attending to his normal duties and assist others to do likewise... - “*Gur satgur ka jo Sikh akhaaye.....*” A Sikh is thus a person who subscribes to the Sikh ideology and lives according to the Sikh ethos and tenets. Definition of a Sikh given below fits in with the spirit of *Gurbani*:

“Any woman and man who believes in one Almighty God, the Ten Guru Sahiban, from Sri Guru Nanak Dev ji, to Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Guru Sahiban's *bani* and teachings is a Sikh.”

The above definition is the copy of the SGPC's version without the two clauses discussed above, but corresponds to the Delhi Gurdwara Act of 1971.

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### **Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities:**

Sr. Baldev Singh's rejoinder (SR, April 2006, pages 71-74) to our essay on Sikh studies is provocative, but it is a gross misreading of our position.

Our essay was NOT intended to analyze the idea of Sikh Chairs, much less to evaluate their achievements, or to promote the model. Its primary purpose was quite narrow – to look at what the expectations of American/UK universities - and community - are, when chairs are established. If chairs are to be established, we need to understand **how the system works**. My views on the whole issue of Sikh studies and how they should be structured – not how they are modeled at present – was published in the Sikh Review as an article (*I.J. Singh &*

*Hakam Singh, Chairs in Sikh Studies in America: Problems and Solutions*, Sikh Review, pages 43-51, May 1996.) One of the current holders of a Chair became displeased because he thought I was trying to do him out of a job; however, my views remain unchanged.

Sr. Baldev Singh asks if I have taken any critical note of the writings of Hew McLeod, or any of the Chairs. Let me point out to him that I published lengthy reviews of Harjot Oberoi's and Pashaura Singh's theses. Neither their supporters nor their detractors were pleased. As the Editor pointed out in a footnote to Baldev Singh's article, the same issue (Sikh Review, April 2006) that published his challenge also contains my review (co-authored with Laurie Bolger) of Hew McLeod's recent book,

*Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, on pages 89-93. Our review takes critical note of McLeod's work where it is appropriate, and lauds it where we think that is called for. I suggest that Sr. Baldev Singh rereads what I have written; it is available on public record.

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