

Role Model for Sikh Youth

T.S. MADAN*

* Coordinator : Khalsa Model Senior Secondary School, 135, B.T.Road, (Dunlop Bridge), Kolkata. Email: pinktochemicals@yahoo.co.in

THE NEW GENERATION seems drifting away from Sikh Saroop. The essential criteria to be called a Sikh is to preserve *kesh* in natural form. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh Religion advocated to be in absolute harmony with *Karta* (creator) and respect his *kirit* (creation) in totality. God has gifted the hair to human beings, then why challenge his design and wisdom by disowning them? It is unethical to crop *Keshas*. This is prohibited in Sikh Religion.

Kavi-guru Rabindranath Tagore, a Noble Laureate has beautifully written in his poem: "For a Sikh to cut his tress knot (hair) amounts to discarding his Dharma".

Further, describing the heart rending episode of Bhai Taru he writes that he preferred to be cut his head instead of hair.

"O Nawab, I comply with your request
And liberally give you more than
What you demand from me:
My Head with my tress knot"

Recently, the High Court of Punjab & Haryana has given a verdict adjudicating "A true Sikh is Keshadhari" (Reference Editorial SR August '09) thus the moral and personal belief of Sikhs has now judicial sanction as well.

In modern real life we find that on one hand several TV channels, including a few airing Kirtan & Sikh history, are available for spiritual guidance which the youth hardly views and, on the other hand, innumerable music and fashion channels attract the youth as natural affinity for glamour. Talking about specific problem for Sikh youth when young talented artist, belonging to Sikh family background, appear in his/her programme with shorn hairs make a negative impact on the psyche of Sikh youth who tend to follow them in his/her life style.

Some children of our preachers and leaders of Sikh religious institutions are also seen to cut hair, on one pretext or the other, and that is a matter of great concern. With the exception of few, generally when a Sikh excels in any field, be it art, literature, sports or industry, he is tempted to renounce his hair, giving stereo-type excuse that it is the professional need, or it is for health concern. These reasons are not valid nor can these be substantiated. To such children any amount of wise counseling does not dissuade them to go apostate.

Rather, real challenge to our children is from those peers who coax them, label them orthodox and persuade them to join their bandwagon. This is due to sheer lack of knowledge and understanding about the evolution of this modern religion. For a Sikh, it is a proud privilege to have distinct identity "*Lakhon me ek*": one in a million. It is the Sikh religion alone which has made it mandatory to keep hair in natural form the whole life time. No other religion has made it so explicit though most prophets generally maintained natural hair and found it helpful in pursuing their meditation and divine union with God. It is our duty

to equip our children with awareness and knowledge of our rich, heritage, history and teaching of Gurbani so that they can effectively and with firmness face an assault on their BANA and reply who dissuade them appropriately.

In this context, it is important to search for them a Role Model to whom they can look upon and say – “This is what I want to be”.

Guru Gobind Singh’s all aspects of life are fountain of inspiration; his activities and achievements are thrilling and infuse tremendous confidence for all who study his way of life and deeds with love and devotion. In his short life span of 43 years only his contribution to mankind is unique. Armed with the divine preaching of Guru Nanak, (i) to worship one God, (ii) universality of brotherhood, (iii) righteous living and (iv) personal bravery, he rescued the then Hindus from mental slavery and political enslavement, saving them from the brink of annihilation. This makes him an Immortal Role Model, for Sikhs in particular and the whole humanity in general.

He was a Prophet with **deep divine refulgence on one hand and warrior whose dauntless spirit and unyielding courage as True Warrior of God, on the other hand, has no match in the world history.**

Briefly going through his biography, we learn that at the age of nine when he was just a child, playful in nature, he displayed rare champion of democracy, persuaded his father, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur for an ultimate sacrifice, for the freedom of Kashmiri Pandits and their right to worship. He showed versatile genius of the highest order, a keen student who knew many languages, a passionate poet who sang songs in praise and gratitude of God with masterly skill, fond of horse riding and archery.

In hours of extreme stress and crisis, Guru Gobind Singh showed amazing endurance and sang songs in praise and gratitude to God which later on has become a universal prayer to seek inspiration and strength to lead virtuous life and die fearlessly for the noble cause.

dyh iSvw br moih iehY suB krmn qy kbhUM n tro]
n fro Airso jb jwie lro inscY kr Apnl jlq kro]
Aru isK ho Apny hl mn ko ieh lwlc hau gun qau aucro]
jb Awv kl AauD lnDwn bnY hY Aq hl rn mY qb jUJ mro]
gurU goibMd isMG (cMfl cirqR)

At the age of 33 he performed the most soul-stirring act of miraculous vision and created a new Panth called Khalsa. He played an unique role of religious Guru and a determined strategist to execute his mission to separate the Sikhs from all possibility of confusion with men of any other faith. This is the history of our commitment to respect Hair (KESHAS) and preserve them in the natural form along with four other Kakaars, viz. *Kara, Kange, Kirpan* and *Kachhera*.

At the age of 43 he passed on the authority of eternal sacred Guru to Sri Guru Granth Sahib and forbade his Sikhs from worshipping any personified or living guru. The divine values enshrined in the Holy Granth have been preached and practiced for 239 years by our Ten masters with exemplary sacrifices.

In modern times, the community leaders and management of every Gurudwara and shrine should take initiative to encourage and mobilize Satsangs where young generation can interact amongst themselves, and with elders who are willing to meet at least once in a

week, on regular basis, to share their experiences and knowledge on Sikhism, the Gurmat way of life, history of our martyrs and “Gurbani Vichar”.

The beauty of such Satsang is that you develop your own personality in such a way that any one who comes to your contact gets inspired and that makes every young Sikh individual a role model for others.



Need of the Hour

SAWAN SINGH GOGIA *

* 10561 Brier Lane, Santa Ana, CA. USA. Email: sawansingh85@gmail.com

MOST OF THE SIKH CHILDREN AND many adults living outside Punjab do not understand Punjabi. An increasing number of Gurdwaras are using projectors to project *Gurbani* and its translation in English onto a screen. This has helped increase attendance. Outside Punjab, use of Punjabi alone in the Gurdwaras is certainly a disincentive for our youth to go to the Gurdwara. Most of them are fluent in the local language but do not understand much Punjabi, the language of a vast majority of our *Kathakars* and *Granthis*.

If we, the Sikhs residing outside the Punjab especially in foreign countries, want that our coming generation should willingly follow Sikh faith, we must produce Sikh missionaries, *Granthis* and *Raagis* who can effectively talk about Sikhism in English or the language of the state where they preach. They should have sound knowledge of the Sikh history and be able to correctly translate Gurbani in the local language.

Most of the Sikh children and adults living outside the Punjab do not visit Gurdwaras and those who visit avoid sitting and listening to the Raagis or the speakers as they cannot understand what is said there in Punjabi. They are not to be blamed for their indifference to our religious prayers and lectures. We, mostly, do not communicate with them in Punjabi even at home. Our children also talk, or listen to, a language other than Punjabi while they are in their schools or playing with their friends. A devoted Gursikh insisted on taking his 12 years old son with him to the Gurdwara. The boy sat for a while with his father and when he felt bored, he whispered in the ear of his father that he could no longer sit there as he could not understand even a word of what was being said, and left to play outside with other similarly bored children. Sunday Schools being run in some Gurdwaras serve a useful purpose, but with limited time at their disposal they cannot enable a student to understand hymns sung by our Raagis or the lectures and sermons delivered in Punjabi inside the Gurdwaras .

Consequently, most children are ignorant of our glorious heritage and our religious education. Due to the influence of the majority, they do not care for keeping long hair, going to the Gurdwaras or meditating at home. For them these things do not carry any value. Many of them do not know the exact number of the Sikh Gurus, much less their names or teachings.

Need of the hour is that our *Raagis and Granthis* besides knowing Punjabi must be able to speak fluently in the language of the state where they live. Lectures and preaching done inside the Gurdwaras should be in the language of the state in which the Gurdwara is situated as well as in Punjabi so that those who know only Punjabi should not feel bored.

To achieve this objective, we will have to raise the standard of our missionary schools. Minimum qualification for a new entrant should be a college graduate. Their teachers should be also learned persons. It is easier said than done. I know it is difficult to attract graduates to become missionaries unless we give them some incentives. To begin with, these schools should be evening schools in the Punjab. Minimum qualification for admission should be a college graduate who has studied English and Punjabi up to B.A. Graduates who have passed Honors in Punjabi should be preferred. SGPC should run these missionary schools at different places in Khalsa schools so that the students can stay at home and work during daytime. Retired scholars should offer their services for one or two hour to teach. Rich Sikhs living outside India should volunteer to help SGPC with funds to run these institutions and train *Granthis*, *Raagis* and *Parcharks*, who know history and can translate Gurbani in English.

Every Gurdwara in a foreign country must have a library with books in English about Sikhism for the youth. English knowing trained missionaries should run these libraries and use videos and slides to attract and educate Sikh adults.



The Right Path for Panth

PAWANBIR SINGH*

* Pawan is clinician presently pursuing a PhD in biomedicine from UK. He also holds a Masters degree in bioengineering from Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. His interests include travelling, outdoor photography and cooking north Indian cuisine. He is the great grandson of Bhai Hira Singhji the legendary Ragi.
Email:pawanbir@gmail.com

JUST BEFORE THE TURN OF 20TH century, the Khalsa Panth celebrated on a global scale the tercentenary of the advent of Khalsa. The significance of this milestone is beyond description, as the sheer emotion left us overwhelmed - and in a blissful state. Such was the magnitude and fervour in the air that an overpowering spirit of religion swept throughout the globe wherever the Sikhs have maintained their presence. At the focal points of celebration, it seemed like a procession of compassion and humility on the path of our panth dedicated to *sarbat da bhala* and to the commitment to engage with the omnipresent *shabad* guru.

Today, ten years down the line thence, certain incidents have come before me which, if not sorted at the earliest, might blur the path of our Panth, and thus need serious deliberation. At a time where the Sikh *rehat* is facing constant challenges, this milestone opens the doors to not only rejuvenate our belief system but also to strengthen the foundations laid by our distinguished gurus while conceiving our panth.

Unique Identity:

My high school education was in a Sikh school in New Delhi where the entire flock comprised of turbaned Sikhs. From there I moved into a completely different environment where I was constantly questioned about my faith as I was the only Sikh, not only in my batch but on the entire campus for almost three straight years. Further, I proceeded to the West where individuals like me are aplenty but often we are confronted with queries about the belief system we uphold, and also sometimes mistaken for another set of people. Unfortunately, some of my brothers have borne the brunt due to this mistaken identity. I took on these state of affairs as a challenge and tried my level best to put forth my point

with utmost humility to make them understand what we strive for, and to be honest by His grace I was successful at times. However, when I come across certain developments contrary to our Gurus teachings which have their origin within the Sikh diaspora, I feel strongly to reflect on these.

Though such developments have associated history, their visibility has increased lately due to the extensive communicative channels which have turned this planet into a global village and therefore, these incidents from different parts of the world come before us on a very regular basis. From having faith in numerous heretic misleading babas but the ultimate one to intra-community differences, from designating various scriptures as the *shabad* guru to probing the basic tenets of Sikhism, there are varied question marks in my mind and - I believe - of the present youth too.

Blasphemy & Divisive Tactics:

Using the names of our historical shrines or phrases from the *Janamsakhis* of our Gurus to create a *Dera* (Centre) and then, alleging it as a distinct entity, is simply nothing but misleading and confusing some of our community. Further, having sects within Sikhism in itself is a deviation from the basic tenets and including a separate individual guru to lead us is a further divergence. We do not mind and only respect their presence however, when ideals and teachings bring in contrary statements, sentiments are hurt and it can lead to no good.

The controversial 'Dasam Granth' purporting to contain the writings of most revered Guru Gobind Singhji is another impediment in our path of educating not only the coming generation but other communities as well. We don't have to debate the legitimacy of its entire text; let's leave that to the scholars. But what we do want is proper respect showered to the single scripture in which we have unconditional faith and which is our true *Shabad* Guru. Guru Gobind Singhji's last sermon that presently is a part of everyday routine of Sikhs, after *Ardaas*, distinctly states Guru Granth Sahib being the ultimate Guru:

“aagya bhai Akal ki, tabhi chalayo Panth, Sab Sikhian ko hukam hai Guru Manyo Granth.”

Under orders of the Immortal being the Panth was started. All the Sikhs are enjoined to accept the Granth as their Guru. Consider Guru Granth as representing Guru's body. Those who wish to meet God can find the way in its hymns.

Let us not speculate:

Why do we leave any room for our Sikhs or others to question our faith? Why cannot we live under His *hukam* and inculcate the similar conviction in the coming generations as well? Why can't we dig into our scripture and read the *shabad*, appreciate its message and pursue its direction to enlighten our soul? Why cannot we focus our lives around portraying our gratitude towards the relationship with Him and base our actions on our belief in the ultimate truth? Why do we have to bring out self proclaimed meanings of the teachings of our Gurus and impose them on anyone to everyone? Is it because our gurus entrusted and empowered us to reflect, deliberate and decipher His *hukam*; and through our own sound judgement make ethical decisions out of it. At present, this seems to be the most apt reason as unlike Christianity we have not been given a set of rules to follow. Our guru has shown faith and he believed in us but what are we doing in return, questioning his basic teachings or rather simply overlooking. Such issues if not resolved at the earliest might lead to detrimental consequences thereby bringing disrepute to our eminent religion.

Need for Discipline & Conviction:

The future generations need to be educated about the Sikh tenets along with their importance proactively and it would be juvenile to expect them to remain under the shadow of Sikhism merely by amalgamation. The exposure which they gain from their own experiences brings forth uncertainties in their mind, which if not answered diligently might turn them in the wrong direction. The need of the hour is not just their education but to educate the global community about our identity and belief system. The education about Sikh doctrines along with its ideals is absolutely essential. This will assist in establishing the imperative feeling of our identity not just on the surface but down to the core and this identity is primarily the foremost thing which defines us. The question is not who will accomplish this but how we will accomplish. Is it just the sole responsibility of parents or the whole community has to come forward to set a precedent? Why can not the highest Sikh temporal authority, the Akal Takht step up its activities to educate the youth similar to issuing the latest clarion call of respecting the environment to Sikhs around the globe to support the 'save the environment' message. If this is our moral duty to care for the environment then it is also our devout and spiritual obligation to direct the future generations and Sikh youth on the path of our panth. There is no deficiency of Sikhs who can take up the challenge; lack of motivation and the right attitude along with self-indulgence are the real hurdles to overcome.

This is the time to exploit the factors which are presently in our favour. The fact that we are dispersed over the entire globe can make things easier for us to voice our concerns and reach each and every individual. The basic principle of Sikhism can have a deepening affect irrespective of one's identity or location, and therefore should be used towards universalising the religion. However, subtlety is the key as this might complicate the situation if other communities see this as an imposition. Our belief in the single supernatural power, meditating His *naam*, honest living and sharing has universal appeal. The challenge, however, comes in the interpretation of these doctrines and putting them into perspective in front of the Sikh community as well as others in a way comprehensible to all. Such intellectual understanding of what Sikhism stands for can be a way forward.

The need of the hour is to come forth as a cohesive unified community with a single belief system. The Gurus' teachings which impart a constitution on how to lead our lives clearly showcase, if we delve deeper, each of us have been bestowed with an individual blueprint for direction through our everyday choices and challenges. Finding the direction towards the right path towards which the panth guides is everything but easy; however a truthful and sincere effort towards getting close to Him can go a long way to make us realise the depth of our relationship with the eternal truth. Guru Gobind Singhji himself declared that where we cannot uncover the truth in Guru Granth Sahib, we should resolve those concerns as a community, based on the principles laid in the eternal scripture. Therefore, if we do not take stock of the present situation in unison, we could be facing tough times ahead. Our destiny is in our hands, the question is do we want to return 'again' to wash our hands or want to unite with the eternal light this time itself.

*Bhai prapat manukh dehuria
Gobind milan kee eh teree buriaa*

The human body has been bestowed on you. This is your chance to meet the Lord!

