

## Achievement: First US Pilot in Turban

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San Antonio, Texas – In March 2008, Arpinder Kaur, 28, was hired by American Airlines Corporation (AMR) as a First Officer. Kaur flies Embraer Jets for American Eagle, a regional airline that is part of AMR and she is now based out of the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. The Sikh Research Institute is proud to share the news that Arpinder is now the first turbaned Sikh pilot to fly for a commercial airline in the United States. **“Two of the reasons I did this were: first, my love of flying and, second, to set a precedent for the community so they know you can be in your Sikh appearance and do *anything* out there; so that my younger brothers and sisters [the rising generation] will pursue their passions while practicing their Sikh faith,”** Kaur said.

Kaur said that she knew she wanted to be a pilot the very first time she was in an airplane. She was 14 and moving from the Panjab (since 1947 the region is divided between India and Pakistan) to the United States. The crew let her sit in the cockpit and see everything that they did. “That is the day I found in me this passion for flying,” Kaur said.

She lived in Virginia after the move and attended George Mason University (VA) where she graduated with a degree in information systems. **She did not forget her dream of flying over the years, though her mother told her that girls should not be pilots because it was too dangerous.**

Kaur said it was the love and support of her husband, Pritpal Singh that pushed her forward on the path toward becoming a pilot. Kulbir Singh Sandhu, captain with AMR mentored her throughout her aviation career. From 2003 to 2005 Kaur was trained by Jesse Sherwood in Kansas. “I had the passion for flying but he [Sherwood] really instilled the professionalism of flying through the time I was training with him,” Kaur said.

In 2005, Kaur moved to San Antonio and spent two more years as a flight instructor at Wright Flyers Aviation at the San Antonio International Airport. In January of 2008 she applied to be a pilot at American Airlines; her application was accepted in March and from 17 March through 7 June 2008, she underwent their pilot training program.

**Kaur said that she just recently resolved the issue of her flying turbaned – the American Airlines manual allows “regulation approved hats” – by filling out an Accommodation Form. Kaur received help from The Sikh Coalition (SC), while she was planning the best way to secure an accommodation agreement about her turban. Harsimran Kaur, a staff attorney who consulted with Kaur said that, “the Sikh Coalition appreciates American Eagle’s willingness to accommodate Ms. Kaur’s religiously-mandated turban consistent with state and federal anti-discrimination law.”**

Harinder Singh, executive director of the Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI) in San Antonio, Texas said, **“This is a great day for the Sikhs in America. Religious accommodation, not assimilation, is what the founders of this great nation envisioned and we are thrilled American Airlines celebrates the rich religious and cultural diversity of all American populations.”** SikhRI helped Arpinder through the process of becoming a pilot through the use of educational and community building tools. SikhRI facilitates Sikh-Americans in integrating the Sikh Ideals with American values.



## Soulful Music of Rabbi Singh Shergill

Arindam Chatterjee

Sitting in his hotel room, minutes before a performance at Planet M, singer-songwriter Rabbi Shergill epitomises the calmness that one expects from him. His songs, emblematic of that cucumber-coolness, add to the aura around him.

It's when he starts to speak those reticent but sharp sentences that one glimpses despondency within.

His apprehension is not restricted to the fate of his second album, *Avengi Ja Nahin*, but mirrors a larger concern that Rabbi is beset with. Drawing a parallel with the success of *Bulla* across the country in 2004, Rabbi draws attention to the total 'Bollywoodisation' of music on channels that have stopped playing indie music.

Not that Rabbi is indie in any way since he telescoped to national fame with his debut album. In his own words, he was coming from nowhere then, with an album of eclectic sounds that was only slowly warming the cockles of music aficionados' hearts. The music channel didn't waste a moment in picking up the vide of *Bulla* and giving it ample airtime, thereby transporting the self-titled (then known as Rabbi Shergill) album to the top of the heap.

Four years on, Rabbi says, the airtime devoted to indie music has been slashed. "As artists, our job is to mirror society. But what kind of a society is this where elements of culture are being corporatised?"

Tongue firmly in cheek, the singer-songwriter calls for the local-reasoning faculties of a business anthropologist to define this condition. "Most music channels are interested only in short-term profit... so content must nosedive."

The way out, Rabbi figures, is to have a cooperative of artists. "Otherwise how can one survive?? Why not subsidise television, radio channels?" he simultaneously mentioning the entrepreneurial skills of ringtone providers "who will wake up and start their own record label". However, despite comments like "music is dead", Rabbi is not part of the league of gentleman continuously evoking memories of past triumphs and eyeing everything with a tinge of cynicism. **"The bleaker it gets, the more challenging it becomes. We need to fight back," he says.**

To keep his sanity in check and the lyrics flowing, Rabbi spends a large part of the year in the lap of nature. "Otherwise I shrivel," he laughs. Which is why he shuttles between Europe and India, meeting musicians, some of whom played on *Avengi* ... which was recorded and produced by Mauro Pagani in Italy. Despite digs at music channels, or the ironic headline he provides for the current situation - 'Capital looms large over culture' - he has the courage to not repeat *Bulla* in his new album, and to retain the musical integrity that sets him apart.

(Courtesy: Hindustan Times)



## A Sikh Officer in Pak army

Imtiaz Gul

The Sikh turban and beard of Harcharan Singh, the first Pakistani Sikh who was commissioned in the army in 2007, was the centre of attention at the Pakistan Military Academy parade ground in Kâkûl.

Lt. Singh matched the steps of the graduating cadets as they marched past the saluting

dias for the last time at the academy before getting commission as second lieutenant.

Traditionally, junior cadets in the academy join their graduating colleagues in the parade on the passing out day. Singh is the second term of the academy's Long Course-116, which graduated in October 2007.

"I am also proud to be a Pakistani and to join the Pakistan army," Singh said after meeting Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, who was the chief guest at the parade.

The military academy is the prime training institution of the Pakistan army, which was set up by the British rulers before the Partition.

**Born in the mid-1980s in Pakistan's Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, Harcharan said his selection in the army has come as an encouragement for his friends and relatives, who are now also eager to join the Pakistani armed forces.**

"I would like to see more people from my community here, Singh said.

Non-Muslim minorities make 3 percent of Pakistan's roughly 155-million population, consisting mostly of Sunnis. Minorities' representation in the armed forces is low and only a few Christian officers and soldiers are serving in the forces.

**In 2005, Justice Rana Bhagwandas had become the first Hindu to take over as chief justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court. As the seniormost judge of the court, he acted as the chief justice in absence of the incumbent, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, who was on a foreign visit.**



## Distinction for Hardeep

Saswati Mukherjee

With an international award in his kitty, Hardeep Singh Gill [Jamshedpur] is a happy man. For him, it is realisation of a dream, which he nursed since his growing up days in the steel city.

His animation institute - Pumpkin Academy of Digital Arts - has won the Best International Animation School Reel award at the South Beach International Animation Film Festival at Miami in United States. The award was given for four short movies.

Among the four films, one is based on Amitabh Bachchan's song: *Mere paas aao mere dosto* in the film *Mr Natwarlal*. The second and the third are based on the topics of female foeticide and effects of no smoking.

"The fourth film is very close to my heart as it is based on one of my favourite songs *Lakdi ki kathi* from the film *Masoom*," said Gill.

With approximately 10 countries competing for top slots at the prestigious event, it came as a pleasant surprise to Hardeep when his students were declared the winners in the Best International Animation School Reel category.

The other category was Professional Filmmakers and Student Films.

Started seven years ago, the Pumpkin Academy of Digital Arts is a division of Pumpkin Studio Private Limited which specialises in 3D animation and computer graphics.

"It was the dearth of quality animation institutes in the country that made me come up with one. I wanted to learn animation but I could not find an institute which would give a comprehensive knowledge on the subject. So, I thought of coming up with an institute myself," said Hardeep, the chairman and managing director of the company.

Hardeep did his schooling from the steel city before moving to Chandigarh for further studies. He started his own animation and compute graphics institute in Delhi at the age of 22.

[Courtesy: The Telegraph]



## Boys in turban kept out of class in Paris

France's small Sikh community is in uproar after five of its boys were refused entry to state schools under a new law barring pupils from wearing conspicuous religious symbols in class.

Sikh community leaders were negotiating with school officials trying to convince them the ban, aimed mostly at Muslim headscarves, did not rule Sikh boys wearing a small cloth to cover their uncut hair.

Sikh leaders say the law does not apply to them because their turbans and patkas are practical hair coverings rather than religious symbols. Only their uncut hair was a religious symbol, they argued.

The Sikhs, who number about 50,000 living mostly in the Paris region, say national education authorities agreed to this but some schools are strictly applying the ban to all.

Unlike other minorities, Sikhs were not consulted before the law was passed.

"The teachers wouldn't let them into class, community spokesman Chain Singh said. "They don't understand".

"This was resolved at the government level," said Jasdev Singh Rai, director of the London-based Sikh Human Rights Group. "Maybe there wasn't enough effort to educate the teachers."

The controversial law, which banned conspicuous religious symbols but left each school to decide how strictly to apply this, went into effect with apparent success. Far fewer Muslims girls turned up with headscarves than usually do.

About 80 Sikh boys were allowed into their schools wearing *patkas*. But five were left out, including two going into their final year at lycee and preparing for their baccalaureate exam.

"They were convinced their issue was resolved," said Monique Crinon of One School for Everyone, a group campaigning against excluding pupils from school under the ban.

"But there is the issue of equality if they can wear something and others can't."

**The Sikhs have mobilised Indian leaders for their cause. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he expects the issue to be resolved soon.**

**His national security adviser Jyotindra Nath Dixit said he got "a positive response" when he brought the issue up with French officials in Paris.**

France's efforts to explain that barring religious symbols from state schools would reinforce tolerance for all faiths have fallen on deaf ears abroad, where commentators and churchmen see the idea as a secular push to suppress a religious freedom.

Islamic, Christian and Jewish leaders opposed the ban before it was passed but said afterwards they would respect it.

Sikhs wear turbans in armies and police forces on motorcycles in Britain, Canada and the US. Germany also lets them ride motorcycles without helmets.

