

## **Panel to Ponder Women's Role in Golden Temple**

Controversy within the Sikh clergy arose last April over allowing women to perform *seva* inside the Golden Temple.

Faced with a revolt from community members, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, a body entrusted with the task of managing Sikh religious affairs, has been forced to form a panel to suggest remedies.

The five-member panel, including two gurdwara committee women members, met representatives of Sikh organisations on April 25 to discuss the issue.

The Sikh clergy is vehemently opposed to letting women perform *seva* in the sanctum sanctorum because, according to some among the clergy, they are "dirty" during menstrual cycles.

"The Committee has been called to discuss the issue in Chandigarh. They will hold discussions with all sections and come to an agreement. This should not be seen as a controversy," committee chief Kirpal Singh Badungar said. Though he said, "women can even now perform *seva* inside the temple", a walk around the premises proved otherwise.

The row began earlier this year when a London-based criminal lawyer Mejjinderpal Kaur and her friend Lakhbir Kaur were rudely told by volunteers they could not take part in the procession that carries the Guru Granth Sahib to the Akal Takht each night and back the next morning. The Sikhs consider the ritual sacred.

The two women had enthusiastically tried to lend their shoulders to the palanquin carrying the holy book when they were pushed aside by the volunteers and told, "only men could perform *seva*."

They decided then to launch a campaign to assert their rights as promised by their religion. "I am a Sikh and had taken my equality for granted because my religion promised me just that," Mejjinderpal said.

The Sikh code of conduct does not discriminate between the genders, but women have been kept away from performing rituals and rites inside the temple.

Mejjinderpal, who attended the April 25 discussions, has since been moving from place to place in the state with just a shoulder bag to educate Sikh women and give concrete shape to their rights as enshrined in the religion.

She is not seeking the dismissal of the volunteers who rebuked her, but the immediate restoration of Sikh women's rights to participate in *seva*.

On Feb. 9, 1996, the Akal Takht had issued an edict allowing Sikh women to volunteer their services. The edict said: "According to Sikh principles, men and women have been given equal status in the guru's house. In all Sikh institutions, for the purpose of performing any religious rites, every human being is considered equal."

"Keeping in view the Sikh principles, the undersigned five Singh Sahibs (head priests of five most important Sikh gurdwaras in the country) unanimously support that every human being has the right to do *seva* in the morning in the precincts of the Harmander Sahib (Golden Temple). The manager is directed that he should execute the following conditions strictly without any delay."

One of the conditions laid down was that all those who would come to participate in the morning seva should be baptized Sikhs and above 30 years old.

Women were also asked to come with their heads completely covered with a blue cloth. All men and women were told to wear white dress with saffron-coloured waistbands while performing the seva.

Golden Temple officials, however, said they could not trace a copy of the edict.

“You cannot have one set of rules here and another in the West. I have been a granthi (priest) in a London gurdwara,” Mejjinderpal said.

Sikh women’s organisations have offered busloads of volunteers to converge on Chandigarh on April 25. “We will not tolerate this gender discrimination. We want our rights to be restored by a male dominated society which cares little for rights,” a social activist said.

[Courtesy: *The Telegraph*]

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## **The Kamagata Maru Anniversary: 1914-2003**

The tale of a bloody battle a small group of brave Sikhs fought against the mighty British police on the spot that is Netaji Subhas Road is now legendary.

Way back on September 29, 1914, 372 Sikhs - most of them carrying one-shot pistols and kripans only - challenged a huge contingent of British Police armed to the teeth. Police fired about 177 rounds and fifty of the Sikhs were shot down instantly and a majority of them were injured grievously.

A pillar, called Kamagata Maru Smritistambha, now stands in the memory of the brave men. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the memorial on January 1, 1952, in the presence of the West Bengal Chief Minister.

The story of Kamagata Maru goes like this: Just after the start of the 1st World War, Baba Gurujit Singh, a rich Singapore-based businessman, hired a boat called Kamagata Maru and invited people of the Sikh community to visit Canada. 372 men volunteered. But it so happened that the Canadian Government changed its immigration policy right after the Indians landed on Canadian shores.

The Sikhs were kept jailed for days before being asked to leave. Battered, starving and tired to the bone after months of sailing, the Sikhs landed in Budge Budge.

The British Police accosted them and asked them to go to Punjab by train. The Sikhs, undeterred by the British policemen’s might, refused and started walking towards Kolkata. The ruthless cops, headed by Kolkata Commissioner Sir Fredrick and 24 Paraganas Magistrate Sir Donald, started firing indiscriminately.

Not a single Sikh fled the spot. With only battle cries to match the British’s guns, the Sikhs fought till the end.

[Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*]

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## 92-year-old Sikh on marathon trail-blazer

London: Age was certainly not a barrier for 92-year-old NRI Fauja Singh as he set a world best time in the over-90 age group in the London Marathon, which was won by Britain's Paula Radcliffe.

It is the indomitable spirit that guided Fauja Singh to create a niche for himself in the London Marathon last summer finishing ahead of almost 10,000 younger men and women to finish 22,870th in 6:11:09 seconds.

After giving up running at 36 and returning to it at 89, he runs about 15 km every day and relaxes with warm baths, ginger curries and meditation.

Fauja Singh has now set eyes on the next marathon in Toronto in September, followed by the one in New York in November and London again next April.

He is not concerned that such strenuous exercise may be too much for him. "You only die once, so you might as well put your life to good use," Fauja Singh said.

When his training was interrupted in February due to personal reasons, he was less than pleased. "He did not train for two weeks and that upset him," Harmander Singh, his coach said.

Fauja Singh came to Britain ten years ago to join his son and family.

"His wife had passed away and he came here to live," Amarjit, his daughter-in-law, said. "He watched other old people going to community centers and playing cards and said he did not want to do that."

Seeking a hobby, Fauja Singh returned to the running conquests of his youth.

His coach said: "Fauja Singh started taking part in Sikh sports days, challenging pensioners to sprints, then five and 10-km races. The marathon was the next step."

A father of four, with 13 grandchildren and five great grandchildren, Fauja Singh has also ran in aid of "Bliss", a charity for premature births.

## CBSE textbook angers Sikhs at 'disrespect' to Guru Gobind Singh Ji

An Indore-based Sikh organisation has raised serious objections to a chapter in the Central Board of Secondary Education's Class VI Hindi textbook for "using disrespectful language against Guru Gobind Singh and publishing the Guru's sketch showing him brandishing a sword".

The Khalsa Academy has recently written to the Prime Minister, Union HRD minister, and 300 Members of Parliament pointing out the "offensive portions" and urging the withdrawal of the chapter.

The academy, which claims support from several Sikh organisations in the country, has objected to the chapter *Baisakhi phir aa gayi* (Baisakhi has come, again). Specifically, the portion that reads: "... *samne manch par khada, kisi unmad mein duba, aankhon se chingariya bikherta, nangi chamchamati talwar ghumata hua, taitis varshiya yuva vyakti kah raha tha .... mujhe sir chahiye... mujhe sir chahiye ...* (A 33-year-old man in a crazed state stands on the podium, fire in his

eyes and brandishing a naked, shining sword ... saying I want (their) head, I want (their) head...)"

Though the academy has objections to the language used in the entire chapter, "serious reservations" have also been expressed about the following lines: "... *bheed ke lehren par se utarta hua wah Jat us talwar ko chume is tarah ja raha hai jaise bhangre wale ki toli me koi boli bolne ja raha ho* (riding the crest of the wave formed by the crowds, this Jat was kissing his sword as if in preparation for a bhangra.)"

Speaking to *The Statesman*, the Khalsa Academy secretary, Mr Ranvir Singh Hora, asked "Does the Central government want children to read a gory and distorted Sikh history?" Portraying the Sikh Guru in "such a fashion" and publishing an "imaginary sketch" suggested that the Central government was out to "subvert" history, he said.

Mr Hora alleged that the government's "nefarious designs to alter history" stood exposed as the same textbook used "respectable and appropriate language vis-a-vis Lord Rama and Lord Krishna". He added that the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee had recently issued a circular to several schools asking them not to teach from the textbook. About 15 Indore schools too had assured the academy that they would "ban" the controversial chapter.

The chapter - introduced in the CBSE's text in 2003 - is written by Mr Mahip Singh. According to a rough estimate, the textbook is studied by about 200,000 children all over the country. The Khalsa Academy was instrumental in getting a controversial Class XI textbook reference to Guru Teg Bahadur banned in 2002.

[Courtesy: *The Statesman*]

### **SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB - TRANSLATION IN INDIAN LANGUAGES**

Sri Guru Granth Sahib, one of the finest jewels of the world's spiritual treasures is one of the few celestial scriptures which has universal and global appeal. Its message of love for God and humanity, truth and goodness, beauty and charity, is a soothing balm for all.

With your blessings and co-operation, the task, which I have undertaken shall indeed be completed. I shall remain grateful to all those who graciously dedicate their offerings for completing this priceless project. Each volume consists of some 750 pages in the following format:

- Volume I Japji Sahib, Rahras, Kirtan Sohala, Bara Maha Majh, Bavanakhri, Sukhmani Sahib and hymns in Sri Rag, Majh Rag, and Gauri Rag musical measures.\* (AG, pl-296)
- Volume II Hymns in Gauri Rag, Gujari Rag, Devgandari Rag, Bihagra Rag, and Vadhans Rag.\* (AG, p 296-594)
- Volume III Hymns in Sorath Rag, Jaitsari Rag, Todi Rag, Bairaree Rag, Tilang Rag, Soohi Rag, Bilaval Rag, and Gond Rag. \* (AGP, 595-875)
- Volume IV Hymns in Ramkali Rag, Nat Narayan Rag, Mallee Gauda Rag, Maru Rag, Tukhari Rag, Kedara Rag, and Bhairon Rag. \* (AG, p 876-1167)
- Volume V Hymns in Basant Rag, Sarang Rag, Malar Rag, Kanada Rag, Kalyan Rag, Prabhati Rag, Jaijwanti Rag, Salok Sankriti Mahala Pahla, Salok Sahaskriti Mahala Panjwa, Mahala Panjwa Gatha, Phunahe Mahala Panjwa, Chaubole Mahala Panjwa, Salok Bhagat Kabirji, Salok Sheikh Farid Ke, Swaiye Sri Mukhvaak Mahala Panjwa, Salok Vaaran Te Vadhik, Salok Mahala Navan,

Mundavani Mahala Panjwa, Salok Mahala Navan & Ragmala. \* (AG, p 1168-1430).

Sri Guru Granth Sahib was first installed at the Golden Temple, Amritsar in 1604 AD. We shall be celebrating the 400th anniversary in 2004 A.D. On this unique occasion Dada Chellaram Publications expects to offer translations of the holy text in several languages, including English, Sindhi, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali and Urdu. A set of five volumes will be published in each language. Each volume is estimated to cost about Rs. 2,50,000/-. Three volumes in Gujarati, and one each in Punjabi, Marathi, Bengali and Urdu are out. We are keen to bring out remaining volumes in the near future.

I owe this love for Gurbani to my father Rev. Dada Chellaram Ji who inspired me to read, recite, sing, understand and translate the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. During our 'Kirtan Yatras' around the world, we felt that the Ambrosial Bani of SGGGS should reach the common man across the globe so that its messages imparted by 36 Gurus and saints should become accessible to all. It is unfortunate that, until the 20th century, this Divine Scripture had not been completely explicated in India, what to speak of the world.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS THE PROJECT ARE WELCOME**

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