

Visiting Amritsar: A matter of heart

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THE HOLIEST CITY OF AMRITSAR, the abode of the God “Hari Mandir” has sublime effect on anyone visiting the shrine. This experience is not limited to the Sikhs alone; persons from different religions have experienced the cosmic and divine presence in this holy place. The history of the place makes you bow your head in reverence to all that has happened in this place.

The place where Guru Ram Dass spent his time in meditation besides the small pool; the unique architecture, which only the Divine spirit of, Guru Arjun could have planned. One can see the efforts of millions of Sikhs who, over a period of many years, built this sacred place through voluntary efforts. When Massa Ranghar, the Kotwal of Amritsar violated the sanctity of the shrine, daredevil Sikh warriors, Sukha Singh and Mehatab Singh cut off his head in punishment, and carried it on a spear. Some 7000 Sikhs laid down their lives to take over the control of the “Hari Mandir” from Lakhpat Rai. 3000 of these Sikhs were martyred publicly at Lahore. Baba Deep Singh, fought all the way to the “Hari Mandir” with his head almost severed, before he breathed his last. Countless Sikhs laid down their lives fighting with Ahmed Shah Abdali during his three attacks on the “Hari Mandir”. The history of “Hari Mandir” is virtually the history of the Sikhs.

Sikhs visiting the shrine experience different emotions. Some have tears in their eyes; others are just swept off their feet by the sheer sublimity and nobleness of the place.

A six feet tall, fair, well-built Sikh was outstanding among the pilgrims. His long flowing beard, lustrous eyes, glowing face and majestic turban reminded one of the true image of a Sikh. A beautiful wife and a small child in her lap completed the vision of an ideal Sikh family.

The Sikh, having completed his pilgrimage, boarded the SGPC bus for the General Bus Stand to return to his native place. When the Sikh family boarded the bus it was only half full. The couple put the child in between them and settled down comfortably in their seats. On the way the bus stopped frequently to pick up more passengers and soon it was full.

The bus stopped again, this time, to pick up an elderly man. Having boarded the bus, he looked for a vacant seat. From his position he could see a seat vacant where the Sikh was sitting. He stopped near the Sikh and seeing the small child, he hesitated. The journey was long and he was not in very good health, the small child would be equally comfortable in mother’s lap. The Sikh seeing his hesitation glowered at him, his eyes flashing, “How dare you disturb his precious dear one?” The elderly man nervously retreated to the rear of the bus. The bus conductor saw what had happened but he had no courage to urge the Sikh with the towering personality to give the seat to the old man. Suddenly the Sikh appeared to have lost his majestic turban, his flowing beard disappeared and the face appeared black and hollow.

The bus stopped again to pick up another passenger. A diminutive man, hailing from outside the state, boarded the bus. His searching eyes again centred on the

Sikh and he walked up to him and quietly pointed to the seat where the small baby was sleeping. The Sikh was furious, it appeared that the diminutive man was going to be in trouble, but he appeared unruffled. He again requested for the seat politely. The bus conductor, who was watching from a distance, now took courage and urged the Sikh to give the seat to the diminutive man. A few passengers also intervened; the Sikh had no alternative but to give up the seat.

By this time the diminutive man had seen the elderly person crouching at the back. He motioned him to come and occupy the seat and then leaned comfortably against the iron rod supporting the roof of the bus. He was a mason and was used to standing the whole day.

Suddenly, a vision appeared before me: the majestic turban of the Sikh seemed to appear on his head with Guru smiling at him.

“Was I hallucinating?” I told myself. Nevertheless, one thing was certain, ‘helping others in distress is certainly a trait which our Gurus wanted his Sikhs to imbibe.’

