

Sikh becomes New York icon: 'Religion is fashion'

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One of the key attractions at New York's Rockefeller Centre is a life-size picture of a turbaned Sikh. The 20-foot high mural of the 20-year-old Sandeep Singh Caberwal has the Sikh community buzzing, with messages pouring in from across the globe that praise him **for turning his religious identity into a fashion statement.** It all began with an advertisement that caught the eye of Caberwal, born and raised in Asheboro in North Carolina. That was the beginning of a remarkable journey that culminated in Caberwal being honoured during the fifth annual Capitol Hill Dinner organized by the US-based Sikh Council On Religion & Education (**Score**) on June 11, 2008.

In October 2007, Caberwal, a graduate of the Law School at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, came across this advertisement by fashion designer Kenneth Cole: "A Sikh male, about 25 to 35 years old, who is 'attractive'. If this works for you, please e-mail your picture at the very latest by 10.00 am on Thursday morning." Cole was looking for a fresh face for a worldwide campaign titled 'Non Uniform Thinker' to mark the brand's 25th anniversary. The focus of the ad campaign: "We all walk in different shoes." Caberwal, who was running the Tavalon Tea Company in New York, responded to the advertisement and turned into an overnight celebrity and a sought-after model. His friend Inni Kaur said: "That naughty look, with a beautiful face that rarely smiles is, in my opinion, the right image for Kenneth Cole."

And it seems to have worked, for Sikhs from as near as Canada and as far as India have written in to congratulate Caberwal - who currently lives in San Francisco with his wife Dilpreet Kaur - on his achievement, especially at a time when the community feels it is being racially profiled in post-9/11 US. India-based Inderjeet Singh Chadha wrote to Caberwal, saying: "We're all proud of you. You have represented the true image of Sikhism. It is a lesson for the French and Indian governments. And it serves as a great role model for young Sikhs." Bakhsish Singh of Canada agreed: "Indeed a proud moment. It will be an inspiration for others."

