

‘Pagri Sambhal, Beta’ - A Plea

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FOR THE SIKHS THEIR TURBAN is a crown bestowed by the Guru. They wear it on their head with pride. Turban adds dignity and grace to the Sikh personality. It is an essential part of Sikh wear and dress. Without his turban a Sikh is not fully dressed. In modern times people are conscious of their dress and the impression it makes on others. The Sikhs are outgoing by nature and more conscious about their dress. In public places, social and religious gatherings, you find them in much higher proportion than their relative numbers. If in such places a Sikh is seen without his turban the perception created is that he is incomplete. It diminishes his personality and lowers the prestige of the community.

Keshas and turban are sacred to us. They represent Guru’s seal on our persons. We, as Sikhs, are fighting in foreign lands for our right to wear turbans in all places and in all situations. But this is what is happening in our own backyard ? Quite a large number of Sikhs have stopped wearing turbans as part of their normal dress. They are not only youngsters. They are persons of all ages. The Sikhs in their fifties, sixties even seventies are seen without their turbans. Instead they wear small patkas. Even worse, some wear a small piece of cloth tailored to cover their head like the one we provide to non-sikh visitors to Gurdwaras. The strangest part of this story is that most of them are persons who support uncut hair and uncut beards (*Sabat Surat*).

This growing trend is very visible now. My observations are based on several months of personally seeing large number of such persons at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, New Delhi. Thousands of devotees from all communities come there daily. A number of such persons, without turbans, are regulars at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib and are seen with the ‘contrived substitutes’ of turban on their heads!

Patkas were used by caring mothers for their small children. The purpose was to convey to the small child the importance of hair on his head. This mini turban was supposed to grow into a full size regular turban with the passage of time. With Guru’s Grace the child grows into handsome youngman with beautiful beard but alas the mini turban,(patka), does not grow into a full fledged turban in many cases. The youngman continues to wear a child’s patka .It is a distressing sight to see a large number of full grown young men without the turbans on their heads and wearing a patch of cloth or a small child’s patka instead... The pain and distress is compounded when persons of their father’s and grandfather’s age, some of them with flowing beards, don the same patkas on their heads.

This is not confined only to people visiting Gurdwaras. Sikhs without their turbans are seen everywhere, in streets, in markets, schools, colleges, hotels, restaurants, offices, social gatherings, public places, on roads – walking, driving. One only wonders that one has all the time to choose shirts, trousers, belts, shoes, perfumes etc to go with the dress but no time to tie matching turbans on our heads.

When we are ourselves voluntarily surrendering our turbans and discarding them for a small piece of cloth to cover our hair and head do we have a moral right to fight with the foreigners, in foreign lands, for our right to wear a turban? One can understand the action of doing away with their turbans on the part of such Sikhs who have already discarded their

hair and beard. They no more subscribe to the basics of Sikh way of life.. But where do we fit these Sabat Surat Sikhs of mature age and full grown young men who obviously still have a living connection with Sikh way of life? If they are discarding their turbans how can their children and grand children wear them? What message are we sending to our younger generations? That wearing of turban is not an essential part of a Sikh's dress? Think of consequences if this growing trend is not stemmed. We need to take steps, without further delay, to bring mass awareness about this unfortunate development.

We are already helplessly crying hoarse about discarding of hair and beards by our youth. Finding Sabat Surat young men in rural and urban Punjab needs efforts now. If we lose our turban among the youth and youth plus as well, who will identify and recognize us as Sikhs?

We lost our youth to apostasy as a result of our failure as parents. We did not nurture love for Sikh way of life in our children during their impressionable phase of life. We did not fill them with a sense of pride on their being a Sikh. We did not provide them the knowledge and literature relating to Sikh philosophy and Sikh history ..We did not, ourselves, live and practice Sikh values and Sikh way of life. We were so engrossed in our own self that we did not have the time, energy and inclination to lead them on the path to Sikh way of life We failed. So, they failed. Without our support and nurturing they could not climb even the first step of Sikh way of life i.e. keeping visible symbols of hair and beard intact. The wave of apostasy among the Sikh youth is a result of parental failure.

The need of the hour is to wake up and take steps to protect the turban, the important symbol of Sikh visibility and identity. The Sikh families and Sikh parents have a role to play. If each one of us takes care of his family, the rot can be stemmed. Till now we have been shifting the blame on Sikh leadership, organizations or institutions for widespread apostasy among the Sikhs conveniently ignoring our own role as parents and family. If we accept our role and responsibility in the Turban Crisis we will have no need to find a scapegoat for this trend of "Sikhs without Turbans". We must set an example before our own children and youth. We must practice what we preach. We should convey to our children the importance of turban and instill in them a sense of pride in wearing the same. Each one of us has a duty to perform in this regard.

Gurdwaras and Sikh schools can supplement these efforts. The management committees of Gurdwaras should print and distribute literature dwelling on the importance of turban as a visible symbol of Sikh identity and as an essential part of Sikh dress. Without turban Sikh dress is not complete. They should speak from Gurdwara stages on the subject. Our preachers and Kathakars should also propagate importance of turban as a part of Sikh way of life.



Gurbani Kirtan Competition at Noida's Guru Nanak Mission

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The Guru Nanak Mission Gurdwara (Sector 37, Noida) has been training young children in singing and reciting Gurbani on regular basis.

For the first time, 45 children from Hindu, Muslim and Christian families, besides Sikh children, have been participating in the kirtan conducted by Mrs Amrik Kaur Dhani, herself a versatile musician and known singer of *Gurbani*.

Thirty seven children took part in the final competition held at Guru Nanak Mission on 23 July 2009 to mark the birthday of Guru Har Krishan Sahib ji (who is also known as Bala Pritam since he had died at the young age of 8 years). The Sangat and judges lauded the small children presenting Shabad kirtan and recitation of Gurbani in an impressive way.

The participating children were divided into three categories, from 3 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years and 11 to 15 years of age. The competition included recitation *Mool Mantra* (Preamble of Sikhism as enunciated by Guru Nanak Dev ji), for children upto 5 years, recitation of first Pauris of Japji Sahib for children between 6 and 10 years and Gurbani singing competition for those between 11 and 15 years of age. It was heartening to see some of the participating children playing various musical instruments themselves while some rendered their Shabads in classical music.

The participating children in Gurbani singing were awarded a certificate and a prize each by the management of the Guru Nanak Mission Gurdwara.

Mrs Amrik kaur Dhani, who is the general secretary of the Guru Nank Mission and President, retired Colonel Sohan Singh said that Gurbani singing and music training for children will be made a regular activity in Guru Nanak Mission Gurdwara.

Toppers: The following were the award winning children in each category.

Mool Mantra Recitation — Gur Ashish Singh-1st, Dev Meet Singh 2nd, and Karina-3rd prize. **Japji Sahib**- Harleen Kaur Anand – 1st, Nehar Singh – 2nd, & Kumar Chugh – 3rd. **Shabad Kirtan** – Shivam Khanna, 1st, Satnam Singh – 2nd, & Jasleen Kaur – 3rd.



Blessed are the Youth who learn Gurbani in early years

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As a teenager I got interested in learning Gurbani. This love for Gurbani was created by my Gurbani teacher Bibi Satnam Kaurji. She has been conducting Gurbani classes for children over many years. Indeed it was her father who taught her Gurbani from the age of three. She was keenly interested in the literature of Bhai Vir Singhji. While teaching us Gurbani, she used to relate stories and incidents from Bhai Sahib's life which changed our lives.

She has been telling children the benefits of Gurbani and how much she has gained from it. Her emphasis is on reading, singing, understanding Gurbani and putting it into our daily life. She not only gives speeches on Sikh philosophy in Gurdwaras and schools but

has also been invited by various other religious organisations. This way she is spreading the message of Guru Nanak Devji.

It is her burning desire to tell every child the miracles of Gurbani.

We should all try to take benefits of Gurbani from a guiding star like her.

