

# EDITORIAL FROM ACROSS THE WORLD

## 1. PUNJAB: THE SIEGE WITHIN

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**B**y a malevolent fate the Sikhs face multiple moral challenges in their own homeland. A doddering and befuddled Akali government not only remains indifferent to the basic Sikh ethics within its ranks and service formations, it has signally failed to grant amnesty to hundreds of TADA prisoners, under the false pretext that terrorism will raise its ugly head again.

In the larger context, Punjab continues to suffer the aged-old aspirational deprivations which had compelled the Akali Dal in 1980's to launch the *dharamyudh*. The central government has conveniently forgotten that Chandigarh belongs to Punjab; and it continues to control the river-waters, as well as power, in the truncated state, now virtually reduced to *Do-ab*.

As if that was not enough, the adverse publicity concerning SGPC President refuses to go away, bringing in its wake acute embarrassment, if not necessary, to the premier Sikh institution. Bibi Jagir Kaur should have shown her bona fide by resigning on moral grounds. During her tenure, and earlier, a succession of ill-conceived edicts and gratuitous statements, issued by an assortment of Jathedars occupying the highest seat of temporal authority, had caused needless controversy and dissension among Sikhs at home and abroad.

Most of these negative developments, coming on the heels of the glorious Tercentennial of Khalsa Panth, could have been avoided only if the leadership had shown the foresight and wisdom to read the signs of the time, as also are integral to the *Gurmat* way of life. Simple truths, like service before self, decision by *Gurmatta* or consensus, and a vision of the nation's future could have served as lodestar to shape the policies of the SGPC and the Akali Dal. The gains of the 1995 Vishwa Sikh Sammelan have been frittered away. World Sikh Council has been left battered and bruised; and the counsel of the Core Group ignored. Initiative to evolve mechanism for Nanakana Sahib and other historic Gurdwaras have been scuttled. Thoughtless controversy surrounding Dasam Granth is being allowed to fester by dithering. The list is chillingly long.

Meanwhile, challenges to the sovereignty and integrity of the Sikh doctrine continue apace. In Dhaliwal, Gur-

daspur, the RSS emulated the Sikh tradition of Akhand Path and invited a Sikh minister as the star guest for the 501 Ramayan Paths last October. A massive Radha Soami Bhandara in Solan was thronged by truckloads of turbaned Sikhs from Punjab's hinter land, even as Hindutva proponents – propped by the Tribune trust – exulted at the burgeoning controversy among the Sikh scholars. The state authority remained unmoved by the powerful plea of a conclave of premier Sikh institutes which met at holy Akal Takht on 14 May 2000.

The vulgarity and indifference of the elite class of Sikhs adds to the agony. The urban rich are busy indulging in consumerism, willingly subjecting their children to the forbidden hair-cut that mocks at divine dispensation that *Kesh* – unshorn hair – is integral to the Sikh *persona* – indeed to all human beings. Ignorance of Gurmukhi/Gurbani, and use of hybrid Hindi is symptomatic of irresponsible parenting. Schools pay scant attention to moral science and religious discipline – on the grounds that government institutions must be secular. In consequence DAV schools and colleges are on an upsurge, as are other denominational institutions.

The youth awaits to discover the glory of Gurmat way of life. Education is concerned with the heart as well as the mind. A loving commitment to the timeless message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the best guarantee of a happy future. It is in childhood that seeds of a heroic inspiration are implanted in the mind and good habits are formed. It is in the early youth that the deeds of great martyrs of Sikh history become objects of emulation.

The sensitive youth today feels let down and alienated, unable to reconcile the conduct and practices of their parents with the basic doctrine of Sikhism – which, indeed, combines spiritual power with success in today's competitive world, and which had helped Sikhs in preceding centuries to survive brutal repression and barbaric massacres, aptly called by historians as *ghalugharas* or holocausts. In the present times the danger comes masked under subtler forms – of brain – washing by massive media propaganda and covert discrimination against Keshadhari/Amritdhari youngsters.

But the womb of Sikh glory rests in the reverence for Guru Granth Sahib and in the saga and songs of the lives of ten Gurus who met all sorts of challenges across two centuries and half. Reverence, in this context, implies – and includes – respect and pride in our own heritage, our tradition and the history's heroic exemplars – from Baba Buddha, Bhai Mani Singh, Baba Deep Singh, Akali Phula Singh, General Hari Singh Nalwa, to Bhais Vir Singh, Randhir Singh and Bhagat Puran Singh.

Let us not underestimate the corrosive effect of false values engendered by consumerism and a hostile environment. Life is not a bed of roses; it is a ceaseless struggle for higher moral values that need guarding. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty inherent in the Gurmat belief system which confers on all Sikhs a distinctive stature and doctrinal identity.

**It is yet time to reawaken Sikhism's collective consciousness in India and across the world.**

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