

From: Gurtej Singh
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Chandigarh-160008

To: The Editor,
The Hindu
Kasturi Building,
859 & 860, Anna Salai,
Chennai-600002

E-mail: letters@thehindu.co.in

June 2, 2007,

Dear Sir,

The article below is self-explanatory. It would be in the interest of objectivity if *The Hindu* could carry it. The paper generally enjoys good reputation for representing all points of view.

I need hardly to point out that the Sikhs in general and students of Sikh history, in particular, are painfully aware of the subjective opinions expressed by your paper, particularly by Mr. Madanjeet Singh in his grossly misleading article published on May 30, 2007.

I have seen your two editorials dated May 18, and May 31, 2007 on the subject of the recent turmoil in the Punjab. They do not appear as objective as the readers have a right to expect, particularly from *The Hindu*. The constitution that you cite in favour of the *dera* appears to have taken the *dera* head under its wings and is protecting him against prosecution in several cases of rape and murder among a host of lesser crimes like land grabbing and drug pedalling.

With Regards,

Yours truly,

(Gurtej Singh)

[A hard copy of the letter and the article has also been sent by speed post.]

Inadequacies of the Hindu perception of the Sacha Sauda mischief

Gurtej Singh

The Sikhs have always felt disappointed that the rest of India, particularly the Media, has consistently failed to appreciate their point of view regarding any crisis confronting the Sikhs, or at least, even for the sake of record, to understand it. The opposite party has always been endowed with reasonability even without their taking the trouble to explain themselves. The real issues are glossed over and transformed by the magic wand of the Media into ones denying any degree of legitimacy to the Sikh side of the story. That this happens regularly should be a cause of concern to all enlightened citizens.

In this context, the three instances quoted by Media (such as *The Hindu* in its editorial of May 18, 2007), may be briefly analysed. The Sikhs believe that the launching of the casteless, seamless Order of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh on the Baisakhi day of 1699 was a great event in human history as it initiated a well founded process to realise the dream of universal human brotherhood capable of affording solace to the entire humankind. The import of what happened on the occasion may be recalled. The great Guru abolished personal *guruship* by substituting it with that of the Divine Word (the *Guru Granth*) and that of the Guru Panth (the people collectively). He emphasised thereby that every human being was capable of achieving the highest spiritual development under the guidance of truthful philosophy. This was a revolutionary step in

every conceivable way in a country preoccupied with Manu's Code reserving the privilege to a miniscule minority of Brahmins. Not only that, it is demonstrably a revolutionary act in all other cultures divided between 'ours' and 'others,' or to be more precise between, 'momins' and 'kafirs', between 'Jews' and 'gentiles,' and between 'Christians' 'heathens.' The other hostile divisions among humans that account for most of the mundane misery are racial divisions, caste and gender inequalities, national pride and a host of other evils were sunk by the Guru in that great steel bowl and consciously stirred away to evaporation by him with his double-edged sword.

The Guru administered this nectar to the first five persons (coming from the so-called low castes) to whom he applied, thereafter, the exalted epithet of the 'beloved of God.' This was the end product of the self-sacrificing ten Gurus' striving of two centuries. Guru Gobind Singh himself was the most self-sacrificing of prophets (having sacrificed his entire family of mother, father and four sons at the alter of causes dearest to humanity) and by the administration of *amrit* called into existence a 'voluntary society of God's warriors' to serve humanity following his own model, to counter and combat fear and tyrannical imposition of any kind at all future times. To always keep them on the straight path, he prescribed a strict ethical code, combining personal purity of thought and action of the highest order with social responsibility in the fullest measure. In the most potent gesture in spiritual history, he bowed humbly to these five he had pulled right out of his heart to emphasise the importance he gave to their mission and their status as the 'army of God' (*akalpurakh ki fauj*).

It is written all over subsequent history that the great Guru's efforts were not wasted. The Order of the Khalsa maintained the confidence reposed in it by their incomparable spiritual guide and performed altruistic deeds that are truly without a parallel in the social, spiritual and military history of humankind. Details are edifying in every way and make a wonderful narration but do not concern us here.

It does not strike any one in the Media that both the Nirankaris and the Sirsa *dera* aimed at caricaturing the *amrit* ceremony, at ridiculing the most potent human force ever created for common good and at mimicking the Guru whom the Sikhs regard as the greatest human of all times. The Bhaniaranwala tried to denigrate the *Guru Granth* the embodiment of the Whole Truth, enthroned by the same Guru, the inspiration for the noblest deeds in history and capable of transforming the human society. The Order of the Khalsa is the custodian of the thought of the *Guru Granth* and is the carrier of the immortal and the most benign universal message ever delivered. By implication all the duties cast upon the Order of the Khalsa are also cast upon the Sikh society in particular and the society of right thinking human beings in general. It is the duty of the Sikh people to protest and to protest with all their might, when they see deliberate acts being committed to denigrate, ridicule the values and cultural mores codified in the *Granth*, held so dear by their Gurus and furthered by them at the cost of their very lives. No society could look at a situation like that with equanimity.

An example or two will come in handy to illustrate the point being made. Suppose a couple of long bearded *mullas* complete with Taliban headgear, decided to display a sacred thread by baring their torsos, adorned the unstitched cloth of a *hotra* and proceeded to perform a *gomedh yajna*, what would be the Hindu reaction to the act? Suppose they decided to do this on the banks of the holy Ganges, the Telugu Ganga or at Benaras, Kashi or Ayodhia, would not the whole of Hindustan burn down to ashes by the evening? If these *hotra mullas* decided to roast that meat of the sacrificed animal in public view and prepared propaganda compact discs and photographs depicting particularly the Hindu public consuming it, would they be allowed to proceed even for a single minute? A similar image concerning hog meat being prepared in a holy place by a Brahmin with a sacred thread acting as a fake *mullah*, could be projected to illustrate the expected Muslim outrage. None can have doubt that the entire world would be aflame at the attempt.

The false images of caste war being conjured up by certain journalists and TV personnel are the product of their monumental ignorance. Unfortunately, the caste war is now on in Rajasthan. It is soon to spread to most of the north Indian states. The toll today is 15 innocent people dead and will cross a score tomorrow, promising to reach a century mark before long. The worst fears of these sanguine media-persons obsessed with 'caste war,' are about to be realised and then, perhaps, they will be able to discern a caste war when they are able to see it without blinkers of Sikh hatred on their eyes.

The Sikhs have no words to describe their outrage when they are counselled restraint on the plea that their religion, as preached by Guru Nanak is the embodiment of tolerance. They feel all the more disgusted when they see those accused of rape, murder and much more, wearing the robes that their Guru, undoubtedly the noblest human of all times, is represented as having adorned. Contempt of the Sikhs knows no bounds

when they are represented as violent, unreasonable and ridiculous, while their adversaries who actually fit the description are described as peaceful and washed in cow's milk (see, "The sword and the olive branch," *The Hindu*, May 31, 2007). In the present case, the Sirsa *dera* initiated violence in Bhatinda when they attacked the Sikhs peacefully proceeding to present a memorandum to the authorities. The *dera* followers descended upon the unarmed Sikhs and injured at least fifteen of them. They came in trucks and can be seen to be holding bamboo sticks of a uniform length and thickness. This suggests pre-planning and deliberate attempt to disturb the peace. They went on a rampage burning police vehicles, ransacking government offices and setting everything they could, on fire. The only person to have died so far is Kanwaljit Singh who opposed such elements. Until yesterday the score of those seriously injured by the *dera* followers was fifty. Today it is fifty two as the *dera* followers have, according to today's papers, injured two more Sikh travellers proceeding to their homes on a public road in a village near Moga. Not even for the sake of form can the other side show a single individual who has so much as has received a discernable bruise at the hands of a Sikh. In spite of all this the Sikhs are portrayed as aggressive and violent just because they carry *kirpans* for self defence as any society not sure whether the police will protect them, is bound by normal prudence to carry.

Media reaction was the same when the Nirankaris, on that fateful Baisakhi day of 1978 killed thirteen peacefully protesting Sikhs at Amritsar. The Nirankari head was let off by the courts, just as Bhaniaranwala was later and just as *dera* Sirsa head will be let off in the days to come. The Sikhs know that as a mature people and law abiding citizens they are to maintain their cool. Will any one tell them why the law has always turned a blind eye to drug peddling, intimidation, extortion, forcible occupation of land, repeated rapes and murders, committed by the *dera* head at Sirsa? How are these heinous crimes being buried under delay by agencies such as the CBI that has been on the job of investigating them for the last five years. It has as yet produced no discernible result despite repeated severe admonitions by the High Court which entrusted the investigation to it under its own supervision? None of the, glibly talking, bewitchingly smiling female anchors of various TV channels who believe their brightly clad anatomy is a part of the argument and the most honourable editors drawing fat salaries at public expense, say why this is happening.

In the absence of any credible explanation being offered by anyone in the last half a century since India's decolonisation, to bring about which the Sikhs played a pre-eminent role, the aggrieved party is left free to prospect for possible answers. What the Sikhs clearly see in all this is the constant Media support that the Sikh baiters are always able to rely upon. They have also noticed that the law which throws a Sikh into the gaol at the slightest pretext and retains him there even after the end of the prescribed term of incarceration (as is the position even as these lines are being typed), the law that commits a 'judicial murder of Kehar Singh' merely on the suspicion of involvement, has a magnanimously large blind spot when it comes to punishing those who are perceived to be actively engaged in trying to dismantle the Order of the Khalsa. All crimes are forgiven to them. In fact the *dera* heads commits them with impunity and a glee knowing full well that as long as they are seriously engaged in inflicting harm on the Sikhs and their religion, they will remain secure in an assiduously created psychological sanctuary where neither law nor constitution will apply to them.

The feeling that it gives to the aggrieved can be best understood if a concerned Hindu can imagine himself witnessing an attack on the temple of Somnath at Kathiawar, or if a Jew can see himself being present at the fall of Masada. Without doubt the attempts of the pseudo saints are no sporadic cultural attacks by individuals with over inflated egos and insufficient intelligence quotient. To the Sikhs, the Nirankaris, the *dera* Sirsa people, the Bhaniarianwalas et al represent a concerted onslaught on Sikh thought, culture, identity and the Sikh way of life by organisations not merely supported by the government at the Centre, but clearly sponsored by the parties forming it. It is in this belief that the Sikhs react to situations created for them by individuals and organisations crawling out of the witch's cauldron kept on the boil for at least the last sixty years and carefully nurtured by the obliging Media more loyal than the king. Those who would judge them would do better to judge them in this context if they care about being true to their profession, to the salt they eat, to the mother earth in whose lap they must seek final refuge and above all, to their boldly underlined vows of commitment to Truth.

[About the author: The author, a post graduate in history, a former IAS man, is a student of history and is an author of eight books on history, religion and politics. He writes both in Punjabi and English and has contributed scores of articles to reputed papers, magazines and research journals].

