

Inside Sikhism

The Challenge Facing the Sikh Nation

BY RANVIR SINGH MAHIL

THERE are numerous and varied challenges facing the Sikh nation worldwide. The challenges will confront the very essence of Sikhi and the response to these challenges will determine the exact role that the Sikh people will encompass in the next millennium.

One of the greatest challenges facing the Sikhs is APATHY. Currently this debilitating disease is draining the life force from the Sikh people. Where once stood a protean, dynamic Nation ready to confront all that was thrown at them



and more, now stand a meek people ready to ignore the challenges before them. Apathy is preventing the discovery of guiding principles that will protect an individual through the trials and tribulations of life. To develop a character that is both strong and versatile. In short the embrace of Sikhi itself and retaining Gods love within an individual.

After centuries of religious and political persecution we still find a physical challenge posed to the Sikhs. In society there are some that wish to physically harm the Sikh Nation. To this end they attack us under the guise of race or religion or political. Our ancestors have always resisted this threat. Thanks to their courage we are alive today. Part of Sikhism is the Martial aspect, not for offence but for the defence of the self and the persecuted. Yet we have abandoned the Martial Arts. Why? The world, unfortunately, is still a violent, dangerous place. Martial Arts develop confidence and character that is transferable to other aspects of life.

In addition to being exceptional warriors our Sikh ancestors were Social and Political REVOLUTIONARY'S, albeit GODS Revolutionary's. From Guru

Nanak Dev Ji to Guru Gobind Singh Ji each challenged society's conscience. Whether it was the ruling (Social) classes attitude toward the downtrodden, to women or the might of the (Political) Mogul Empire's bloody disdain for minorities, to democracy (the Misl system as introduced by Guru Gobind Singh Ji). The foresight of our Gurujis is beyond comprehension if minutely analysed. They were visionaries.

Those who live in the west are at times perplexed as to the challenges. I hear some of you think, what challenges? There is economic prosperity and politi-

cal stability. Our time is peaceful and challenges non-existent. Why not just enjoy life? We embrace business globalisation yet reject social justice globalisation. What of the challenge posed by eradicating poverty? The challenge of war in a distant country? The challenge of greater inclusion in society for all? The challenge of social; economic; political justice? Fortunately we live in a democracy, how about those (Sikh or otherwise) who do not? Where standing for your beliefs will result in a knock at the door at midnight, to be dragged off to who knows where? Looking after the self is the first step, but is intrinsically linked to looking after our fellow human being.

Why does the concept of Sikh Nationhood stick so violently in the throats of our people? Opposing vehemently to their last breath any utterance of a United Sikh Nation. Only 16 years have passed since it was open season on the murder, robbery and rape of Sikhs in New Delhi. Yet most have "forgiven" that period of "Indian democracy" and regard themselves first and foremost Indian/Asian. Who remembers the dead of New Delhi? Who will do something in their memory? To ensure their loved

ones are able to live a fruitful life?

We are now scattered to the four-corners of the world; this has led to greater opportunities for future generations. Sikhs must involve themselves in all aspects of life (not just IT, law and medicine, noble as they are); political; social; local community; the arts, thus stimulating the proselytization of Sikhi whilst suffusing a greater understanding of Sikhi to the wider community. To connect all the Sikh people from California to London to Panjab to Singapore City.

Sikhism is the best kept secret in the world, but we must no longer hide Sikhism but share this great religion with all those around us.

I shall quote Guru Gobind Singh Ji as he spoke with Baba Banda Singh Bahadur in their Dialogue of Destiny.

"It is only when men like you fail to perform their function in life that the world truly becomes a wicked place. When men of ability, strength, passion and courage such as yourself run into the woods and worry only about their own stake in life, the world is overcome by the tyranny and injustice of ruthless



kings. Old men and women cannot live their lives with dignity. Children cannot enjoy the riches of their own culture and are forced by the threat of death to renounce their faith. God did not create men like you to worship him and seek his salvation, but, rather to live life with conviction and protect his children."

These words were spoken hundreds of years previous to the year 2000. Yet their potency has increased over time. The "ruthless kings" have become apathy and the insatiable quest to disregard our heritage. We hide not in the "woods" but within the confines of our homes. Our children still cannot enjoy the "riches of their own culture" for they have never been taught it!! Alas death (and in the West persecution by some) still casts a sinister shadow over our nation.

Guru Gobind Singh Jis words are relevant for ALL men AND women of

today, regardless of faith. We sit smugly in our BMW's, drenched in the success of gold. Yet what have we achieved in the time we have been in the West? Yes there are some Sikhs who have surged ahead economically but there are many that are left behind. Rather than abandon our brothers and sisters we should provide time to share our skills and knowledge. Thus enabling another segment of our community to advance economically.

What of our brothers and sisters in India? What of the land of Panjab? Sikhs from all over the world should co-ordinate themselves to promote prosperity among our nation. The need to transfer our expertise back to Panjab is paramount, otherwise we may have to bid farewell to the last Sikh as he/she leaves Panjab.

A personal challenge many must overcome is our petty jealousies that seem perpetually prevalent in some Sikhs psyche. After all, when Sikhs are being targeted, whom do we turn to? Our Sikh brethren!

This is the surmountable challenge of UNITY, a half-understood concept. Unity is greater than just "standing" together; it is about Sacrificing for the greater good of the community.

Many Sikhs are ashamed of how they look. Girls will not marry men with Turbans and boys want the latest hairstyle. All want to be "cool". They attend weddings for the

Party; the first inconvenient part of the Gurdwara ceremony is usually skipped. Yet these are the very same people who are the first to shout and sing with joy at Baisakhi.

These are the very same people who live off the achievements of the past, forever bathing in the golden glow of a glorious past. Yet who were the people who forged that past? So that a Sikh with a Turban is instantly recognisable. It was men who had long beards and Turbans. Women who cared not to change their suits twice during the course of a wedding but to stand alongside their Sikh men and challenge all the persecution and injustice that the Sikh nation faced. In short they were the True Sikhs.

They lived Sikhi.

Do you think you can stand amongst them as equals?

The greatest challenge facing the Sikhs is to rediscover and re-embrace the values of the Khalsa. This rejuvenates the soul, the body and spirit. Preparing an individual to face any challenges that this world may pose.