

# Rallying for a 'revival of spirit'

## Organizers encourage knowledge of Sikhism

Haloona. It means to shake, really a wake-up call.

"Haloona means to shake the Sikhs (globally) by creating awareness of 'Sikhi' ideas, ideals and principles," says Windsor-based engineer Harjinder Singh, 40, chief co-ordinator of The Haloona Project.

"We think the community is in a sleeping mode at this time and they are becoming ignorant of the principles of Sikhism," Singh says, explaining why a group of young Sikhs in Canada and the U.S. have joined hands to establish "Haloona" with the objectives of organizing workshops, seminars and discussions at various levels to create awareness of what would it take for the Sikh community to wake up and be counted.

Harjinder, Satwant Singh, an engineer with Ontario Power Generation, and Gurpreet Singh, who has a master's degree in science from India but currently works in a factory in Toronto, are at the helm of establishing Haloona.

Their counterpart in the U.S. is Harinder Singh of Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI).

They were encouraged when they sponsored an event last July at the Royal Banquet Hall in Brampton, which 1,000 people turned up for.

"That gave us confidence we are on the right track," Harjinder says.

More recently, on June 28, with the support of Houston-based SikhRI, they organized two educational sessions at the Sikh Spiritual Centre in Rexdale with 85 participants.

"We discussed solutions to prevailing problems within the Sikh nation," Harjinder tells me.

### Not political

Sikh nation? Is it independent of India, independent of Canada in Canada?

Harjinder is quick to respond in Punjabi: "The word Sikh nation is like Qoum (word in Urdu, Punjabi) and it is not used in the political context."

All people (Sikhs in this context) "who believe in the teachings of the Sikh gurus

(their 10 high priests and founders of the faith) are part of the Sikh nation. It has no political connotation," he emphasized.

Sikhs are champions of human rights "whether it is their human rights or of other groups. We are talking of rights of everybody," Harjinder says.

At their seminar in Rexdale, participants also identified "unification, education and sovereignty" as the three highest priorities facing the Sikh nation.

This Haloona group will continue discussion on these

very important aspects on Aug. 9 when it is scheduled to meet at Khalsa Community School, part of the Sikh gurdwara (temple) in Malton.

The chosen theme is "Sevadar Becoming an Inspiring Activist."

Sevadar means the person who serves, a volunteer.

But for me it was intriguing to hear, along with Sikh nation, the word "sovereignty."

For Harjinder, sovereignty means ensuring basic rights for the Sikhs in Canada and elsewhere.

"You are saying your rights are not protected in Canada under the Charter of Rights and Freedom?" I ask.

"We are implying this word sovereignty in the Canadian context also as our religious rights, rights to our five symbols, are not fully protected in Canada, as in many jurisdictions in the country our people are not allowed to wear kirpan or in circumstances even the turban," he said.

The Sikh faith was founded by their first guru, Guru Nanak (1469-1539) but their five basic symbols were ordained by Guru Govind (1666-1708). Those five symbols are uncut hair (kes), comb (kangha), steel bangle (kara), a sword (kirpan), and undergarment (kachcha).

"Our Prophets have ordained us to always wear these five symbols," he explains. "It is like wearing a wedding ring, which is a sense of belonging for your spouse. It is like the



**HARJINDER SINGH**  
"On the right track"

cross for Christians or a sacred thread for the Hindus. Similarly these five symbols represent a sense of belonging."

Harjinder takes great pain to explain "for the past 25 years, worldwide Sikh activities and events have effectively created an awareness of the Sikh faith" but mere "awareness of Sikhi (Sikhism) is no longer enough" as, the faith requires "engaged leadership ... to re-establish the Sikh spirit within our youth and throughout our nation."

### 'Grave' crisis

Discussing the origin of Haloona, Harjinder and his fellow volunteers say they believe the "Sikh nation (Quoum) is going through a grave internal and external crisis recently."

They believe it is happening as Sikhs themselves have "certain misconceptions about the past and its present" and so, "to restore a deep sense of identity, the global Sikh community must keep alive the spirit of Sikh sovereignty and prosperity through an understanding and practice of the faith."

For this, Haloona promoters are imploring "every Sikh ... (to) contribute toward revival of the spirit in the community."

They should also "strive to follow basic Sikh principles Naam Japna (remembering God), Kirt Karni (make honest earnings) and Wand Shakna (first share with others and then eat yourself)."

Harjinder is suggesting to his fellow Sikhs that they should "rejuvenate Chardi Kala (high spirit) and Sarbat Da Bhalla (goodwill for all)."



**Ajit Jain**