

Dear Takuya... Letters of a Sikh Boy

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INDIA POST

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Letters from a Sikh boy

Sikh parents living in the Diaspora have for a long time felt the need of a book that would explain the message of Sikhi in simple terms to the friends and teachers of their school going children. Recently I picked up a lovely book, Dear Takuya, Letters of a Sikh boy at the local Gurdwara. The protagonist of the book Simar is a nine-year-old California kid who during his summer break shares his story as a Sikh boy with Takuya, a pen friend in Japan.

In sixteen, simple and tenderly voiced letters, Simar sums up his own struggle for acceptance as well as the principles of tolerance, forgiveness and love for everyone that he learns at a Sikh youth camp. Reading Simar's letters is like reading the journal of your own child. Jessi Kaur has shown a keen understanding of how young boys think. September 11th has changed United States in many ways. It has particularly impacted the Sikhs who live here.

Numerous Sikhs have been targets of misdirected hate and violence. Sikh children are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and bullying in schools. It is of utmost important to educate the students about cultural diversity and religious tolerance. Cultural awareness cultivates understanding and friendship between children. Simar, in one of his letters shares with Takuya that he was bullied by a big kid in the school playground.

A girl named Patty reaches out to him. She ties his patka and makes him feel cared for. Patty has felt the pain of being teased herself on account of being chubby. The author Jessi Kaur is not unknown to the community. She has often been heard at Darbare- E- Khalsa, the largest gathering of Sikhs in South land. Those who have attended the camps held by International Institute of Gurmat Studies have come to know Ms. Kaur as an inspired teacher and counselor. Perhaps it is her experience gained through her association with these camps, that has given her book an authentic voice. She is also a frequent speaker at Interfaith Conferences and a strong believer that multicultural understanding is the cornerstone of harmony in the world.

In 'Dear Takuya' Ms. Kaur's desire to share the basic principles of Guru Nanak's teachings to the Sikh children in the Diaspora is obvious. This book is not only a simple and powerful tool for the Sikh parents to meet the challenge of teaching their own children about Sikhi and instill pride about their heritage; but it also makes a wonderful gift to their non-Sikh friends to acquaint them with Sikh values and culture. In an exclusive interview with India Post Jessi Kaur said that it tears her inside out when she hears news stories of the harassment of Sikh boys. Recently in New Jersey a Sikh boy's patka was set on fire in by a fellow student.

In another incident in a New York school, a Sikh boy was punched in the face. "These assaults underscore the importance of educating the mainstream about the identity and history of the Sikhs, she said. As parents of Sikh boys, many of us have visited their schools and made presentations on Sikh Culture and history and even demonstrated the hair beneath the patka to demystify the appearance of our boys. (Kesh Darshan.) Dear Takuya will make the task of the parents on such missions easier. With reference to the letter format of the book, which incidentally, works beautifully, Ms. Kaur said that she wanted to have Simar's voice speak to the children at a personal level.

The success of Dear Takuya lies in the fact that it shares Simar's learning about his culture without getting preachy at any point. It comes across more as a dialogue with a friend. I mentioned to Ms. Kaur that I would love to hear the story of Jasmine Kaur, Simar's sister as a sequel to the book. She said that for right now she is putting her energy in spreading the word about Dear Takuya and hopes that it makes the passage of Sikh children in the Diaspora easier in their elementary years.

Nikki Merrick, a High School teacher's trainer and an erstwhile High School English teacher, is amongst several educators who have endorsed Dear Takuya as a valuable tool for teachers, "I think Dear Takuya would be a valuable addition to classrooms and libraries as it demystifies a culture that many people don't know much about.

Kids are quick to judge on outward appearances and make fun of what they don't understand; Dear Takuya provides insight and understanding." The beautiful illustrations by Brian Johnston and flawless editing by Manjot Kaur make this book one that you will want share. As a parent of three children, I strongly recommend that each Sikh family buys multiple copies to give as gifts to their children's teachers and friends. All proceeds from the book shall go to International Institute of Gurmat Studies, a non-profit organization.

For more information and to buy the book, please go to www.deartakuya.com

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