

Dear Takuya... Letters of a Sikh Boy

BY JESSI KAUR

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INDIA-WEST

Pen Pal's Letters Give Insight to Sikh Youth Issues

By a Staff Reporter

A nine-year-old Sikh boy's struggle for acceptance by his peers is vividly chronicled in "Dear Takuya... Letters of a Sikh Boy," by San Francisco Bay Area resident Jessi Kaur.

Kaur is the founder of the International Institute of Gurmat Studies in Tustin, Calif., and a frequent speaker at interfaith conferences. The protagonist of her fictional work is Simar, a patka-wearing third-grader in Sunnyvale, Calif., who begins a pen-pal correspondence with 'Takuya' from Japan. The letters are a summation of the many struggles the optimistic Simar faces daily at school, where few of his peers understand his culture.

In his second letter, Simar tells Takuya about his classmates teasing him about his turban, taunting him for being a girl. The next letter details his confrontation with Alan, the class bully who trips Simar on the playground and grabs his hair.

"Everyone was looking at me," says Simar, a soccer player. "I wanted to kick Alan, but I couldn't move," he writes.

Simar eventually befriends Patty, a third grader who reties Simar's patka after his confrontation with Alan. The two become good friends and Patty eventually visits the local gurdwara with Simar.

Simar's letters to Takuya continue after the school year ends, as the young boy goes off to a Sikh cultural camp. There Simar meets other kids like himself and learns the value of his culture in the contemporary world.

In his foreword to "Dear Takuya," Dr. I.J. Singh - director of United Sikhs and a professor of anatomy at New York University - writes: "Sikhs who live outside Punjab and India are keenly aware of the problems they and their children face in this highly complex society in which they are so little known and so poorly understood."

"Our young children see a hostile world of strangers to whom they can barely explain who they are and why they are the way they are," he said.

Nikki Merrick, a high school teacher trainer, said in a review: "'Dear Takuya' would be a valuable addition to classrooms and libraries as it demystifies a culture that many people don't know much about."

More than 60 percent of Sikh students have been victims of violence or harassment, concluded a report issued by the Sikh Coalition last June.

"These attacks on Sikh children are extremely disturbing," said Amardeep Singh, executive director of the Sikh Coalition, when the report was released. "Sikh children and their articles of faith continue to be the special targets of attack," he said.

The book can be ordered online at www.deartakuya.com.

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[The review on India-West website](#)