

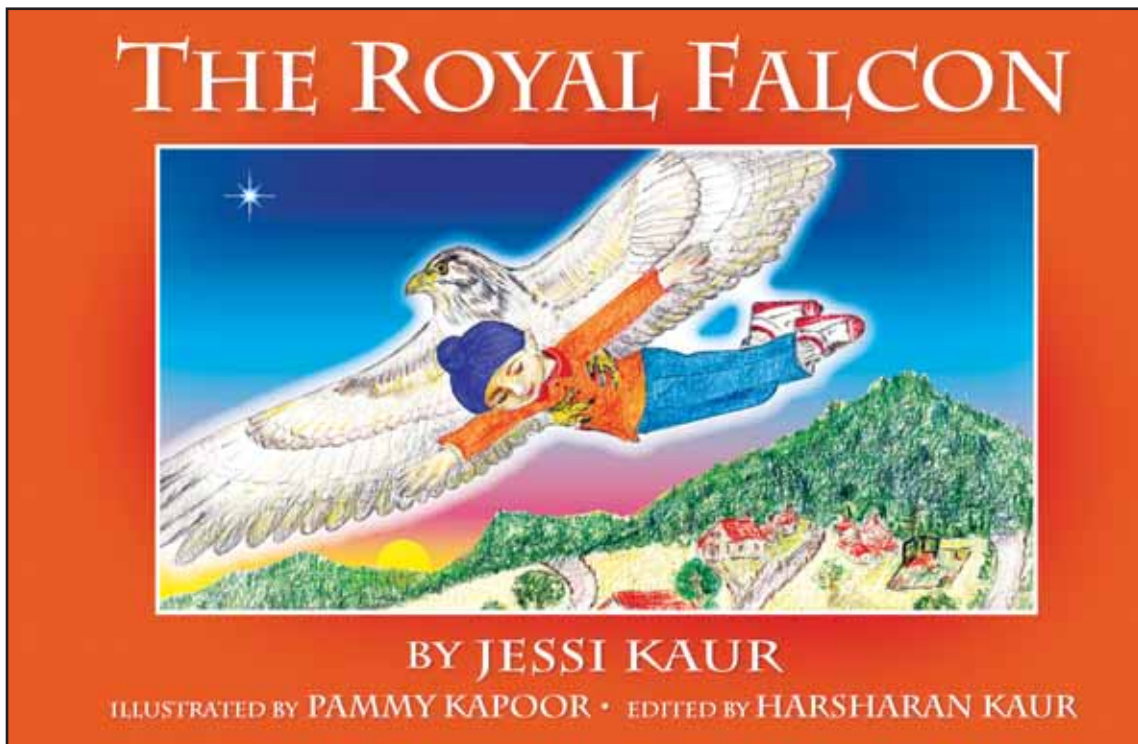
Those members of the Sikh Diaspora who have faced problems faced by their children regarding their unique Sikh identity in school

and society are well aware of Dear Takuya, an awe-inspiring book written in the format of letters by an eight year old California Sikh boy to

his Japanese pen-pal, Takuya. Now, author Jesse Kaur has come up with her new book. We present a review and an interview.

# The Royal Falcon

## A children's book embraces empathy and forgiveness



**T**he Royal Falcon, by Jessi Kaur, is at once light, lyrical, and inspirational. The story that unfolds is of a young Sikh boy, Arjan, who in a private moment of distress conjures the falcon of the 10<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs. As Arjan grapples with anger and frustration over losing something that is precious to him, the majestic bird, whom Arjan names Khushi, steps out of a picture of Guru Gobind Singh ji. Arjan is thrilled and the two friends embark on a dream quest that helps Arjan move beyond hatred and resentment to empathy, forgiveness, and ultimately joy.

In a world that too often seems filled with distrust and misunderstanding, Arjan's adventure is the story of emotional redemption and personal growth. Arjan's journey with Khushi - simultaneously euphoric and exciting - gently nudges the reader towards a journey we must all embark on if we are to master our fears and hubris in order to create a better world.

The modern re-telling of the Bhai Kanhaiya story, a traditional Sikh homily, resonates with the values of the Sikh Gurus: love, humility, and peace through a fundamental respect for all humanity. All we have to do, as young Arjan so charmingly does, is embrace the values and feel the joy.

The illustrations run the gamut of the story and are appealing. It is heartwarming to see images of a Sikh boy in books based in the North American milieu. The cover illustration like the story that ensures is bound to lure readers of all ages.

The Royal Falcon was celebrated and showcased at the recent Parliament of World Religions held in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009. It was selected on the

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basis of the universal appeal of the book.

Jessi Kaur's mission as a storyteller began in 2008 with her first children's book, *Dear Takuya ... Letters of a Sikh Boy*. In it she chronicles, the life of a young Sikh boy growing up in the U.S. The young boy, Simar, describes his life - the good and the bad - to his Japanese pen pal, Takuya. The story explores the ways in which Simar's family is just like any other American family and yet it is not.

Simar is like any other American boy, but who has also been mistaken for a girl. While the reader can certainly empathize with the protagonist, the double-edged nature of these stories is what gives them their true power. In a single stroke, she speaks to the Sikh community and its self-image, and to those

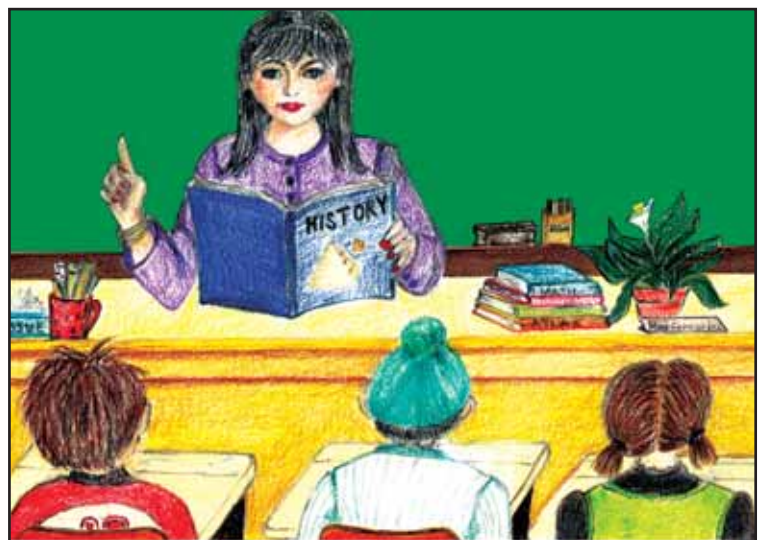
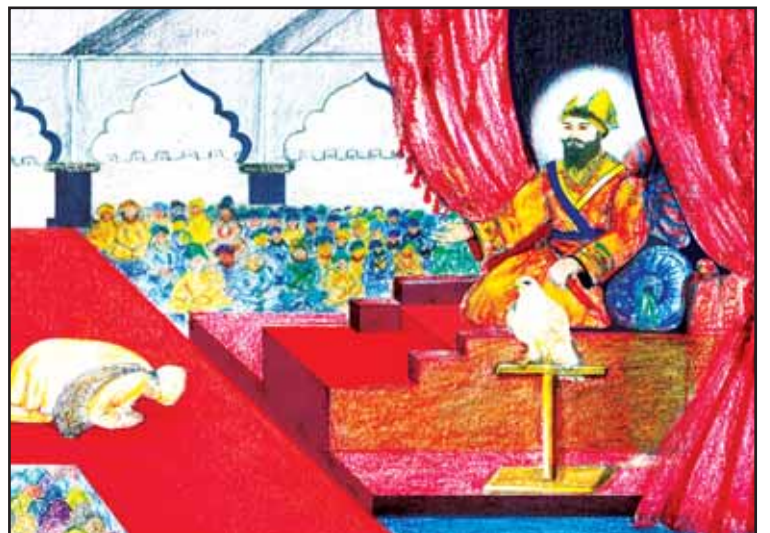
on the outside, 'normal' Americans, who are often puzzled by the outer appearance of the Sikhs and seek to understand them.

The characters in Jessi's stories simply and effectively explain the iconic symbols of Sikh identity - the long hair of Sikh girls and women, and topknot and turbans of Sikh boys and men. Her characters become even more poignant when viewed in the backdrop of the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the racial profiling of Sikhs that has ensued.

*Dear Takuya* was very well received among educators in California and throughout the country, who want students to value and learn from the diversity that is all around them.

Ultimately, Jessi Kaur is not content to simply catalogue the physical appearance, symbols, or customs of Sikhs, rather her real focus is exploring and explaining how a Sikh persona and lifestyle nurtures a deep yet engaged spirituality.

Reviewed by **Sangeeta Luthra**, Los Altos



### Jessi Kaur's Interview with WSN

**WSN:** Congratulations on the launch of your second book, "The Royal Falcon." It is a great honor for the Sikh community that it a story from the Sikh tradition was selected to be celebrated and showcased at the Parliament of World Religions (PWR) held in Melbourne, Australia recently. What does this mean to you and to the community?

**JK:** Thank you. It was a very gratifying moment for me when I heard that The Royal Falcon has been selected as one of 8 books to be showcased and sold at the PWR in Melbourne. The PWR is dedicated to bringing peace and harmony in the world through respect and understanding amidst followers of diverse faiths. The selection of the book means that it crosses barriers of race and religion, and that it is viewed as a tool for bringing home to young children the importance of sharing and forgiveness, the core messages of the book. It also means that 300 years later the story of Bhai Kanhaiya still touches the heart in a profound way.

**WSN:** In a short span of a year and a half, your first book Dear Takuya, Letters of A Sikh Boy has received praise from Sikhs

across the world. What do you attribute its success to?

Yes, Dear Takuya has been embraced beyond my wildest dreams by educators and the Sikh community all over the World. I think there was a dire need for the mainstream communities to know about the topknot bearing, patka clad young boys and the girls with long braids. Our kids stand out wherever they go but their peers know little or nothing about them. Very often it results in incidents of bullying. Dear Takuya in an epistolary format shares the basis of Sikhi. Simar, the protagonist also seeks to learn about his pen friend's culture.

**WSN:** Are you going to write more books for children? Is anything in the works for adults?  
If all goes well, my next book will be for adults. It expounds on the basic aspects of Sikhi in lyrical prose. I am also mulling over a couple of different ideas for the next children's books. Right now, I will be focused on promoting The Royal Falcon. If anyone would like to donate these books to school/public libraries, they may contact me through my website: [www.jessikaur.com](http://www.jessikaur.com).