

A STUDY OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB: Doctrine, Social Content, History Structure & Status

By JS Grewal

Published by Singh Bros. Amritsar 143006.

Pages: 272, Price: Rs. 395

Celebrated social scientist and former Vice Chancellor GND University has come up with a succinct and incisive analysis of the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Formidable as the task may seem at first glance, the author has deftly delved into the distinct aspects - as well as the universality - of the great scripture - which is Supreme Guru of the Sikhs.

Broadly divided into seven eloquent chapters, the author dwells on the nobility of *Gurbâni* in its historical context, followed by glimpses into the philosophy of the Divine Being/Shabad Guru/Naam - as the pervasive powers of God. The third chapter focuses on the ideology - of how human spirit is guided towards 'Liberation' in SGGS. This rather esoteric aspect has been closely examined in the last chapter, with specific references to basic *Banis* - from *Japuji* to *Sukhmani*.

Pre-eminently suitable as intelligent person's guide to ecumenical Sikhism.

- S.S.

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EAST OF INDUS: My Memories of Old Punjab

By Gurnam S.S. Brard

Published by Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi.

Page: 440. Price: US\$ 30 (South Asia Books, USA)

A Review by Jagpal Singh Tiwana

You can take a Jat out of his village, but you cannot take his village out of him. Dr. Gurnam Singh Brard, now settled in Nevada, USA, left Punjab about half a century ago, but the early years of his life spent in his village in Punjab have haunted him all these years. Despite a successful career in America, Dr. Brard's passion for his village is still intact. "In old age, riches in America cannot make up the loss of separation from extended family and break from the ancestral village land", he expresses his feelings thus. The result is his book *East of Indus, My memories of Old Punjab*, which covers all that has been on his mind for years.

Gurnam was born and raised in the historic village, Mehraj, Distt, Bhatinda, hub of the famous Bahia (22) villages which, with blessings of Guru Hargobind Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji, gave rise to Phulkian states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind. Gurnam makes no claim to his princely origin as his grandfather was an ordinary farmer, though - as member of the royal clan - the family was invited to special occasions of the Patiala state.

Gurnam loved farming and the carefree life of the cattle grazers, but his father and his elder brother kept pressing him to get an education. In 1946 he was admitted to Khalsa College Amritsar, but when he came back to his village in the summer break, he changed his mind to stay back, then his father took him back to Amritsar. As soon as his father left Amritsar, he took a train to his married sister's place. His heart was in the village. Later

when he returned to his folks, he was again pressed to go back to college. This time his elder brother, Kartar, took him to Amritsar, but again the same story. As his brother left, Gurnam went to his Massi's (mother's sister) village.

Gurnam enjoyed the next three years back in his village and records vivid memories of his life in Mehraj. "For many years, every day in the village was a pleasurable adventure for me. I did not mind the heat, the dirt and the harsh life of the farmer; I never wanted to leave that life" writes Gurnam. Now young Gurnam had his first taste of fights among Jats, himself challenged an unfriendly neighbor with naked sword in hand, and learned all about farming and rural life.

Finally in 1949 he took a 'reluctant break from the village'. His brother Kartar who was an army officer, took him to Ahmednagar and put him in a local college. This was the turning point in his career. He started liking college life. From Ahmednagar, he moved to Punjab University College, Hoshiarpur. He was smart in studies and became a favourite of his teachers. Here, he met Manmohan Singh the present Prime Minister of India who was a student there. After doing an M.Sc. in Physics and working as college lecturer, Gurnam came to the University of Washington, on a fellowship, and did his Ph.D there. Although he got married and settled in the United States, yet he could not forget his village and the simple life of rural Punjab.

In *East of Indus*, he covers a broad range of topics closely associated with village life - joint family, caste system, sexual mores, superstitions, marriage customs, death and mourning rituals, festivals, fairs, food, entertainment, leisure and pastime activities, etc.

Nothing escapes his notice from women fights, *Deor- Bhabi* relation, farmer-sharecropper deal and dependence of menial castes on land owning Jats. Many forgotten house hold items like *chati, taura, kujja, magha, Chhanna, Hara, Chakki, Ukhali* etc come to mind. A *Jalsa* (function) of *Nachar* (dancer) or *Naqalis* (comedians) were sources of great amusements.

Autobiographical accounts normally portray the bright side of the author and his family. Dr. Brard, however, is open and forthright; he does not hide his or his family's seamy side. His father was disappointed with him when he showed no interest in education. "I have been blessed with very good children, except this one, Gurnam, who ruined my life." And Gurnam could not accept the physical abuse his father inflicted on his mother. He was closer to his kind Taya (uncle) Tiloka than his disciplinary father. Gurnam comes out as a typical Jat boy, loyal to the family, though defiant, and independent who started drinking liquor in his teens, provoked physical fights, hated going to school, but loved hard work on the farm.

The book is not just a narration of incidents, he discusses religion and philosophy too. His interpretation of Sikh religion and Sikh history is pretty liberal. "Nanak did not repudiate all Hindu traditions, but did speak against superstitious practices, corrupted ways, and the caste system..." observes Dr. Brard. In early 20th century Jat families in his area still followed Hindu ceremonies and rituals. His parents were married by a Brahmin priest around fire. Her mother's name was Bhag Bhari and her Maternal uncle was Ganga Ram, though they were Sikhs. Sikh scholar Harjot Singh Oberoi, author of "*Construction of Religious Boundaries*", gets a lot of support for his thesis that Khalsa identity before Singh Sabha movement was one of the many Sikh identities.

According to Dr. Brard, though many Jat houses continued Hindu practices, but once Jats joined Sikh religion, there was no going back to Hinduism. On the other hand, many Sehajdhari Khatri Sikh families were drawn back into the Hindu fold.

His family's attitude towards **the** Sikh religion was typical of a Jat family. The family patriarch uncle Tiloka and others went to the Gurdwara only on Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh's birthdays and were pretty superstitious. As a child though, Gurnam equated Sikh Gurus with Gods and prayed to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, but in real difficulty, he would even remember Ram, Krishna or Buddha. "it did not hurt to ask for additional help" as young Gurnam rationalized. Even now Gurnam would not wash his hair on a Tuesday. His father, however, was influenced by Singh Sabha reforms. He was an Amritdhari Sikh, regular in his *nitnem* and Gurdwara visits. He wanted to give the best education to his children.

The book, however, is not free from some flaws. Chapter 9, "A Dialogue About Spiritual Matters," does not go well with "My Memories of Old Punjab". It could have been avoided to reduce the bulk of the book. His graphic description and details of sexual practices and the adventures of his friends do not fit well either. You would be reluctant to recommend it to a female relative, or put it in a Gurdwara Library, which was perhaps not the intention of the author. A little more attention to proof reading could have been helpful.

These are, however, only minor irritants compared to a mine of information in the book on rural Punjab. One does feel nostalgic about one's village after reading it. Here it comes close to Giani Gurdit Singh's classic '*Mera Pind*'. Highly recommended to public, private and academic libraries. It **would be a welcome addition to** the list of 'required reading' for courses in Punjab studies. [List Price at Amazon is \$37.50, **and** the book is available from South Asia Books for \$30 including shipping.]

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PRECIOUS GEMS OF WISDOM: GURU NANAK

Compiled by Renuka Vishwanathan

Published by Magna Publishing Co. Ltd. Prabha Devi, Mumbai 400025, Page: IX + 114 Price: Rs. 225 (Paperback)

Copiously illustrated this paper back contains not only enchanting stories (bakhis) associated with the illustrious Guru Nanak, but also recalls hundreds of fascinating gems of wisdom culled from Guruvani of the Guru-prophet in short, pithy selections which command attention and elevate the spirit at the same time.

The translator has perhaps been too modest to furnish her bio-data, but her style is disarmingly simple and direct. Most quotations from Guru-Vani are meticulously selected for their relevance to human affairs and their appeal to the readers's heart and mind. Since no cross-reference has been given to specific shabda (or page of Sri Guru Granth Sahib) the book would appeal to the lay reader more than to a hard boiled scholar/researcher.

In so far as the Guru-Vani a treasure house of wisdom and spiritual solace, even a random reading is revelatory: e.g "All truth, all austerities, all goodness and the greatness of the Siddhas - the beings of perfect spiritual powers - without you, O Lord, none has attained such spiritual powers. They are obtained by your grace; their flow cannot be blocked."

Notwithstanding relatively high price, it is highly recommended for intelligent readers - of all denominations.

- S. S.

A PATH TO FOLLOW - A Life to Lead

By Ralph Singh (with a Foreword by Kuldip Nayar)

Published by Sterling Paperbacks, New Delhi 110020.

Pages: 352. Price: Rs. 300

This book is - in more than one sense - a voyage of discovery. The handsome New Yorker, Ralph Singh who embraced Sikhism years ago, remained an earnest student of Sikhism and a close confidante of the late Baba Virsa Singh of Gobind Sadan, in New Delhi until Babaji 'shuffled his mortal coil'. This comprehensive volume by him is a testimony to his love of the saintly Baba and devotion for the Sikh faith in all its pristine nobility.

The narrative is a spiritual voyage of discovery, aptly ascending in stages - from Path I to Path VIII. Part biographical and part inspirational, Ralph Singh recounts his quest for truth, via meditation and the happy mixture of community service and spiritual quest. His reference to Baba's favourite Bani (the Power of Jaap Sahib) and the healing of the horrendous - 11 hurt show the author at his truly inspirational best. The candid and breezy, autobiographical prose make the book a joy to read. Kuldip Nayar's Foreword sums up this labour of love.



1. 'PRAYER AT DAWN': Japji of Guru Nanak

By Kamaljeet Singh Dogra

Publisher: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi.

Pages: 130. Price: Rs. 125. (US\$ 7.95).

2. JAPJI: First Hymn of Adi Granth - A Presentation in English

By Man Mohan Singh

Publisher: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi.

Pages: 48 Price. Rs. 50.

3. REHRAAS: Capital for Life's Journey

By Bhupinder Singh

Publisher: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi.

Pages: 68. Price: Rs. 125

4. MODEL MEDITATION

By Giani (Capt) Nasib Singh Dhillon

Publisher: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi.

Pages: 70. Price: Rs. 75.

5. SERVICE AS A VEHICLE FOR SELF REALIZATION

By Bhai Jaspal Singh (USA)

Publisher: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi.

Pages: 76. Price: Rs. 75.

6. THE BLUE SAGA

By Kamal Gurtaj Singh

Publisher: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi.

Pages: 44 Price: Rs. 50. (US\$ 7).

Our children deserve to be enriched with the wisdom of Guru-Bani. These paper-back handbooks bear the hallmark of the up-and-coming publisher, Sanbun's enterprise.

The books are meant for children and beginners, being short, pithy and pious expressions of the writers' vision and embodying our soulful scripture as well as the Sikh moral tradition. It is gratifying that non professional men and women of faith have chosen to write about basic Gurbani in the English language - a medium our youth is fairly familiar with universally.

The twentieth century's celebrated scientist, Albert Einstein once said: 'It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education.' If any - or all - of these slim volumes succeed in arousing curiosity among young boys and girls, then the treasure that is Japji or Reh-ras could greatly enrich our new generation. Whether it is stories of valour and sacrifice, by Kamal G. Singh, or the philosophic treatise on 'seva' from the pen of Bhai Sahib Jaspal Singh, readers of all ages have a choice of good reading material. Of course, the relatively high prices could discourage those with modest budgets in these hard times.

- S.S.