

## Tributes to Dr. W. H. McLeod (1932-2009)

Sir, I have gone through the number of articles with interest published in The Sikh Review, September 2009 paying tributes to the above historian. There is no doubt the he has done an extensive research in the Sikh History and philosophy. Besides his research work, he did establish the credit and identity of the Sikhs in the western world, appearing as an expert witness in the RCMP case over the right of Sikhs to serve with turban and long unshorn hair in the court. The learned Professor I. J. Singh has eulogized his contributions well in the Sikh literature. I appreciate the same.

He came to India as a Christian missionary from New Zealand, but got deeply interested in the Sikh religion claiming himself as atheist or a missionary turned "*Sahajdhari*", as says the learned Professor I. J. Singh. I think during his Sikh studies, he continued to hold his portfolio as a Christian Missionary, though he claimed himself as atheist. Despite his disclaims to being a Christian missionary W.H. McLeod continued his association with the Christian institutions throughout his life, including application to the 'World council of Churches' for expenses to complete his doctoral in Sikh studies in London.

I personally would not like to criticize (or pass any adverse remarks about) the person who is no more with us. But, definitely, I would like to say that, he had misrepresented and misinterpreted certain historical facts regarding the life of Guru Nanak and Sikh philosophy. While he criticized Sikh Religion (and Guru Nanak's visits to various places) he did not write anything critical about Christianity (e.g. the unbelievable virgin birth, resurrection, second coming, etc.) as also that God made the world in six days, made man in His image and woman from man's rib, and claims that a Minister can forgive someone's sins.

Today we know well how proslytising activities are going on in the Punjab.

Yet, let us pray for the departed soul!

**TEJA SINGH**

Canada

Email: tsinghz@hotmail.com

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir: The tribute paid to Dr. McLeod (SR: September 2009) is impressive and appropriate.

Dr I.J.Singh has written eloquently on the contribution of Dr. McLeod. It is evident that Dr. McLeod also got blessed to earn the Title of "Sehjdhari": starting from being a Christian preacher to atheist to agnostic and then a Sehjdhari. (Pilgrim's Progress)

*"It is not the end of an era."* It is the dawn of a new era ushered in by Dr. Macleod. His unmatched service to Sikhs of coming generations is invaluable. ***His selfless efforts, created opportunities to establish a number of Sikh Studies Chairs in Western World.*** No doubt "the contributions of these chairs, so far can be written on the back of a postage stamp", but these institutions (Chairs) are like new born babies in a very foreign environment. Have patience, we will have Gold Medal Olympians. Like a newly planted saplings, they need loving nurture (like water and manure not wind from hot blowers) of the community to mature fast and start giving fragrance of Sikhism to the world.

Prof. Himadari Banerjee has thrown ample light on 'new ground'. This evokes sympathy towards the critics and detractors of Dr. McLeod. They seem to have, probably, reacted,

based on a limited grasp of the larger, long range picture. He also projects a burden on Sikh Diaspora to catch the ball and run.

Dr. McLeod, through his persistence, (a Sikh-like courage), kept on his life long mission with courage and candour. Like most researchers, he did make mistakes, but sportingly admitted them. He certainly woke up many Sikh scholars with a jolt, to come out of their “comfort zones” and take up with zeal and passion exhibited by him, their destined role of bringing Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s message before the entire world. Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s message has finally a chance to come out of the shackles of Punjab. In Dr Sir Mohd Iqbal’s words: iPr auTI Awi^r-sdw qOhld kl pMjwb sy [ ihMd ko iek mrd-ey-kwiml ny jgwXw K`vwb sy [

***The Sikh Foundation, Palo Alto, California, with its motto of “Empowering Sikh Youth”*** is pioneering the work of creating and planting such saplings. Establishment of these Chairs is creating prestigious positions to attract brilliant young brains to take up Sikh Studies as a life long career. So far, the only alternative is becoming a “Granthi in a Gurdawara”. Now, with the efforts of The Sikh Foundation and many forward looking concerned Sikhs, there are EIGHT Chairs of Sikh Studies in USA, Canada and Europe. The Sikh Foundation has already committed to four – UCSB (University of California Santa Barbara), UCR (University of California Riverside), USSC (University of California Santa Cruz), CSEB (California State East Bay) and negotiating Two more.

They say, time is ripe for a dialogue between religions; the good work that will come from these Chairs will help present Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s message to the world.

As a student under the illustrious Prof. Sahib Singh in Khalsa College, Amritsar, one crucial point that he drilled in us was: ***that Guru Granth Sahib is the only authentic Scripture that mankind has.*** Sikh History and all other sources do have spurious or apocryphal stories and ideologies. So before accepting any such thing, a test must be applied that is not contrary to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib. In fact, Prof. Sahib Singh himself started this tradition of critical examination of history. His touchstones are *Gurbani* and *logic*. Western tradition, followed by Dr. McLeod, relies more on tools like archaeology, artefacts, documentations, carbon dating and other corroborating evidence.

**Is it not regrettable that we seem to be on a ‘self destruct’ path? Most of our original architectural monuments, and historical evidence have been obliterated by the craze for marble all over. Preservation of documentation? Well, the whole of Sikh Reference Library was torched by Indian Army in 1984!**

The sapling of Sikhi has been transplanted in the West. I believe, now the future Sikh scholars have a lot of work cut out for them – to weed out spurious, un-sikh-like and undesirable weeds, and present to the world, the pristine beauty of Sikhism. Guru Granth Sahib is for the whole of humanity. Its message of Freedom, Love, Equality with dignity, Without Fear and Enmity towards None, must now reach the humanity.

**JASBIR SINGH SETHI**  
Houston, USA  
Email: [jssethi@sbec.com](mailto:jssethi@sbec.com)

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just read your response to Sardar Gurmit Singh of Australia about the use of term “Sahajdhari” for Dr McLeod. It is unfortunate that the Sikhs at large are still unaware about

the real definition of a "SIKH". You would remember I wrote an article "*Defining a Sikh*" in *Sikh Review* since a long. Since then it has not been settled that who is a Sikh.

I sometime wonder how long the term "SIKH" as understood by the SGPC, Amritsar and other Sikh theologians will continue?

I have read some of the writings of McLeod. There are many points he raised are to be learnt, although there are many other points which go against the basic principles of philosophy of Guru Nanak, and that too are based on the information written by our Sikh theologians. Similarly, many Sikh theologians and university scholars are also doing great damage to Sikhi being Sikh, which is usually ignored.

The need of the hour is that Sikh scholars with open mind and excellent knowledge of various sciences, Gurbani, Punjabi Language, Sikh History, etc. could get together and **re-discover the philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in the Bani of Guru Nanak** and then proceed further to formulate an integrated and comprehensive philosophy of Sikhism.

**PROF. DEVINDER SINGH CHAHAL, PHD**

Institute for Understanding Sikhism  
4418 Rue Martin Plouffe,  
Laval, QC, Canada  
Email: iuscanada@gmail.com

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Tribute to Hew McLeod: SR Sept. 2009**

I read all the five articles, on great historian Dr W.H. McLeod by eminent persons and I am inspired to read more about the late scholar. So far I have gone through his only one book on Sikhs.

**SD PANESAR**

601, Nilkanth Heights,  
Near Modi Bunglow, Parle Point  
Surat - 395007

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Appreciation from USA**

Sir, The Sikh community of city of Kerman thanks you for sending "***The Sikh Review***", with compliments of SGPC, Sri Amritsar, to the local branch of Fresno Country Library Kerman. As per information from branch librarian, the magazine issues are highly checked out. It is the only Sikh Religion standard magazine following true Sikh traditions.

Kerman is a small town of Fresno County of California with population of about 15,000 Sikhs. The community consists 12% of the whole population with 250 families. In the City Council, out of four members two are Sikhs and Mayor is of Spanish origin. With the help of City Council, a plot of five acres was purchased for Gurdwara Sahib and building was completed about 2½ years ago.

**Kerman is the second school dist. in California where Punjabi is taught in government schools as a foreign language.**

The Punjabi book section was established in local library Kerman in 1999 and consists hundred of books of Sikh Religion and History. Now Punjabi book section has been

established in 13 branches in different cities with Sikh population. The SGPC has also donated about 110 books for Kerman branch. *The Sikh Review* is very popular in local Sunday Sikh Dharmic School of Kerman.

Again thanks from the Sikh community of city of Kerman.

**JAGJIT SINGH THIND**  
14320 West "E" Street  
Kerman. Calif 93630-1961. USA

\* \* \* \* \*

### **"1947: Remembrance of Things Past" by I.J. Singh**

Reading through the sad stories of Partition which are well narrated by Mr. I. J. Singh, (SR: Oct. 2009) he writes - "seven days after Partition, they were driven to "Mughal Serai" Rail station of Lahore. Evidently, this station is *Mughal Pura*, and not Mughal Serai [which incidentally is the largest Railway Junction, near Benaras, in U.P.]

This came to my mind immediately as I too was at Mughal Pura station on 10th August 1947! I started my journey with my family on that morning from Rawalpindi, and the train stopped at Lahore main station and did not move for *six hours*. It moved at midnight and stopped at Mughal Pura station for a couple of hours.

There was no hope that the train will move any further, and every one in the train was expecting the worst as a train before us that morning, was attacked and all Hindu and Sikh passengers were killed by Muslim mobs. From Gujranwala till Lahore we saw scores of houses burning every where our sight could reach.

With the Grace of Waheguru we crossed the border and reached Amritsar in the early morning of 11th August 1947.

**RANBIR SINGH SURI, J.P.**  
Mercury House, London W5 3BF. UK

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Unhappy with SR Tribute to McLeod!**

I was not happy to receive the September 2009 issue of Sikh Review as a tribute to Dr. McLeod and I am further distressed at your emphasis in Nov'09 issue.

Dr. McLeod came to India as Christian Missionary to propagate and convert people to Christianity and saw Sikhs for the first time, and was attracted to study Sikh religion. In doing so he not only gave up his faith, but he became agnostic. Sikh teaching and history is all in praise of Almighty. Every line in Guru Granth Sahib is in tribute to the God. Naturally, an agnostic, however honest he may be, cannot appreciate, understand and communicate the true spirit of the Sikh religion. In your, Bir Memorial Lecture in October 2009, you had given an example, that a Librarian in a University in USA, where Sikh Review was available, became a Sikh after reading articles in *The Sikh Review*. I am afraid, that now many young Sikhs, will be questioning themselves, whether Sikh religion, will lead them to become agnostic and on the other hand, non-sikhs, who will come across your issue of September 2009, may infer that Sikhism does not believe in the existence of God.

The least that you can do now is, to withdraw the September 09 issue.

**RANDHIR SINGH CHHATWAL**

Email: randhir\_chhatwal@yahoo.co.in

**Editor's Reply:**

Dear Sir - Thank you for your email dtd. 11, Nov. 2009. I am sorry to note your reaction to the Sept. issue. Your sentiments will be published in the Readers' Forum.

Following McLeod's death, after protracted illness, we felt he had earned a 'critical appreciation' for introducing Sikhism to the Western scholarship - in some depth. Dr Banerjee's & Dr I.J. Singh's tributes try to balance the pluses & minuses! I thought enlightened Sikhs can afford to be generous - in death: ਨਾ ਕੋ ਬੈਰੀ ਨਹੀ ਬਿਗਾਨਾ ਸਗਲ ਸੰਗਿ ਹਮ ਕਉ ਬਨਿ ਆਈ ॥

From your adverse reaction, I realise that such a sentiment is not shared by many of distinguished readers like you. Since an issue cannot be withdrawn (as you suggest) I am considering how best I can withdraw from this (largely thankless) responsibility. Do bear with us!