

TRANSLATING GOD'S WORD

By Khushwant Singh

It is a daunting task, translating the *Adi Granth*, with its nearly 6,000 hymns which would take a relay of reciters, reading nonstop, two days and nights to finish. For the Sikhs it is the word of God, told through six of their ten *Gurus and sants*, both Hindu and Muslim.

Many people have translated the more popular portions: Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Osho Rajnish did a commendable job rendering the morning prayer, *Japji*, in Hindi and English. The first to try his hand at translating the entire *Adi Granth* was the German scholar Trumpp. He gave up after a few pages. The task was taken up by M.A. Macauliffe who had Sikh scholars to assist him. All his translations are incorporated in his six volumes on the Sikh religion. The translation, though literal, read poorly.

The first Sikh to undertake the task was Manmohan Singh of Amritsar. He translated the Scriptures into Punjabi and English prose. They were accurate but no attempts had been made to capture the melodic element in the hymns. Next came Gopal Singh Dardi who had undoubted ability to handle the task. He presented his translations to the Pope, claimed to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and persuaded Indira Gandhi to nominate him as a member of the Rajya Sabha and then the governor of Goa and Nagaland. Somehow I felt that anyone who could do that sort of thing could not have imbibed very much from the Gurus' teachings. I did not read his translation.

The SGPC then commissioned Gurbachan Singh Talib, a professor of English, to do the translation and published them. They too are lacking in poetic content. Two years ago, G.S. Maken of Chandigarh published four volumes of his translations. I went through them, cover to cover, and learnt a lot about the faith I was born into without knowing much about it. Maken too did not try to capture the poetry of the original.

The most recent translation is by Kartar Singh Duggal, published by Hemkunt Press in four volumes: *The Holy Granth – Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Duggal has written scores of novels and collections of poetry, won many awards and been a member of the Rajya Sabha. He rightly describes his rendering as 'transcreation' instead of translation, and has done his best to convey the meaning of the hymns in verse. His work is bound to be more acceptable to readers than any of the others. His volumes should find a place in every public library in the country and abroad, and hopefully in some private homes as well.

[Courtesy: *The Telegraph*]

A SIKH BOY (A Novel)

By Mohinder Singh

Published by Harper Collins India Ltd. (2006), 1A, Hamilton House,
Connaught Place, New Delhi 110 001

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We at **The Sikh Review** have had few, if any, occasions to take note of – a novel in English simply because none had come to our notice since Khushwant Singh's stirring *Train to Pakistan*, that recalled gruesome details about the brutal communal killings in the wake of partition of India in 1947.

Although set in the same troubled territory *A SIKH BOY* is a captivating story, mostly autobiographical, of the author's heart warming adolescent years as the son of an influential school headmaster in the fascinating – if fictional – town of Sripur nestling in the cool plateau of what used to be the Northwest Frontier Province, not far from Haripur Hazara and Punja Sahib.

Not unlike *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth, a wry sense of humour permeates the narrative which bristles with fascinating details of people and places. The facile prose is laced with tales of juvenile exuberance, homosexual escapades and even a short lived 'affair' with the teenage maid, which stop short of prurience.

The novel makes occasional references to religious tradition and social customs of the Sikhs, juxtaposed as they were with the Hindu and Muslim communities during pre independence period of the British rule. The transition, from the innocence of a pastoral setting, where all three communities co-existed in reasonable harmony, to the stirrings of inter-religious discord, and finally the tragic vivisection, massacres and wholesale migrations, the fictional account comes alive with incredible – even heart-rending – suddenness, shattering the laid-back idyllic perspective.

Yet the homespun charm of language, the author's penchant for detail and vivid characterization remain the novel's chief merits. This is, in short, a moving and spirited story of a Sikh family's struggle, laced with good cheer as well as tinged with toil and tears, told in intimate detail by a sensitive narrator who later blossomed into a distinguished member of Indian Administrative Service.

- Saran Singh