

the four pillars of sikhism

By Gurbachan Singh Makin

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sardar gurbachan singh MAKIN is a well known thinker-writer with about a dozen books to his credit. He accomplished the translation of the entire corpus of Sri Guru Granth Sahib into English, in ten years of arduous labour of love and devotion. Unlike other writers who endeavoured to match poetic expression of the original as their main aim, he wrote in prose, explaining the central thought of each hymn which clarified the theme and purport of the sabd. His other major works are English rendering of the famous epistle, Zaffarname of Guru Gobind Singh and translation of Anand Sahib of Guru Amar Das in simple English prose.

The present volume of 184 pages has fulfilled a long felt need to explain the basic structure of Sikhism and its values in a logical sequence. As the title of the book proclaims, the author bases the Sikh philosophy of truth on its four planks, supporting the edifice and culture of the Sikh thought, from Guru Nanak Dev successively to Guru Gobind Singh who put the final seal of completion of the grand mission.

The four pillars identified by the author are, a) the role of the Guru; b) the mystique of the Lord's Will, hukam, c) the importance of the holy congregation in Sikhism, *sadh sangat* and, d) meditation of the true name, which is aptly referred to as *Naam*.

The subject-matter of each foundation is further sub-divided in order to carry out an in-depth study of each pillar to its logical conclusion. Thus, under the title, the Guru, the role of the sabd-Guru is discussed in detail in comparison to the living Guru. The study of truth-minded person against the materialist is undertaken and how and when the Grace may be showered on the emancipated soul. Under the caption, Lord's Will, *Hukam*, the learned author explores the Mind and maya, self pride - *homain*, the anguish of a disfavoured spouse and the bliss of the favourite in the company of the Lord. He carries the argument to the spiritual death of man in reference to his physical demise.

Similarly the other pillars of Sikhism are discussed convincingly in detail, imbued appropriately with copious quotes from gurbani. The book serves, therefore, as a reference book to be read and re-read to explore the depth of his argument.

As a consequence of the study of the four pillars of Sikhism, the benevolence of the Omni-present God is revealed to the scholar who wishes to go deep in search of the philosophy of Sikhism. The book commended as useful text for the scholarly as well as lay reader, keen to develop an in-depth appreciation of the Sikh religion.

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JAPU: AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

By Dr. Sarjit Singh Sandhu

Publisher: International Sikh Institute for Research and Teaching,

433 Grenadine Way, Hercules, Ca-94547, USA

Pp. 127, Paperback Edition 2006, Price: Free for seekers

A Review by Professor Hardev Singh Virk*

According to an estimate given by Prof. D.S. Chahal, Japu of Guru Nanak Dev is the most translated sacred text in Guru Granth Sahib and nearly 250 versions appear in different

languages of the world. I believe the translation by Dr. Sandhu is the latest version in the series. The author is a renowned chemist, who retired from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and immigrated to USA. His research activities were well known in India but nobody could imagine that he will undergo a phase shift from Chemistry to Sikh religion in USA. In the preface to Japu, the author mentions the name of Bhai Narain Singh, a granthi in the local gurdwara of Durham, NC; as the prime motivator. In Chapter 1(p.5), the author also gives credit to Prof. Sahib Singh as 'another inspirational and contributing factor to the decision of undertaking this translation of Japu.' Dr. Sandhu feels an inner urge to interpret gurbaani for the diaspora in a new medium as mentioned in the preface (p.2): "This translation of Japu is an attempt to interpret gurbaani for Sikhs of 21st century."

The translation by Sandhu consists of four chapters. The author explains his line of action and approach in the introductory chapter 1, which is an essential part of the book. In fact, the author candidly explains his thesis and unique approach to interpret *gurbaani* in view of historical, cultural, linguistic and scientific backgrounds. The author claims to use 'hermeneutics' as a tool for interpretation of *gurbaani* in the translation of Japu.

Chapter 2 is the main/core chapter of this book. The author has adopted a new approach; Japu text in Gurmukhi/Punjabi is followed by its transliteration in *gurbaani lipi*, a commonly used font developed by Dr. Kulbir Singh Thind of USA for *gurbaani* text, following the rules of phonetics. According to the author: "*Gurmukhi lipi* is best suited for the expression of pronunciation of *gurbaani* with modern sounds wherever necessary." Another unique feature of this book is that author's own translation of Japu is followed by translations by six different authors, namely, DS Chahal, Gopal Singh, GS Talib, Iqbal Singh, Jaswinder Chadha and KS Khokhar, in that order. This inter-comparison of translations may be a useful exercise for linguistic analysis but it is quite boring to read all versions to find some shade of difference in the approaches adopted by different authors. Chapter 3 "Essence of Japu" sums up the conclusions arrived at by the author. Chapter 4 gives glossary of terms used in *gurbaani*, end-notes and references.

After reading this translation of Japu, I feel a little baffled to compare and classify this version with many others which already exist in the world. In my review of D.S. Chahal's translation of Japu, I referred to the new school of *gurbaani* interpreters, namely, 'The School of Scientists.' Professor Puran Singh, a chemist by training, is acknowledged as the founder of this school and now we have a galaxy of scientists engaged in the scientific and logical interpretation of *gurbaani*, including this reviewer. Broadly speaking, the author seems to follow the approach adopted by Kala Afgana and DS Chahal in translation of Japu. Some of the most uncommon features of this translation are given below:

- (a) According to Sandhu, 'Ik Omkar' needs to be pronounced as 'IkOh', The Only One. The author claims: "Guru Nanak gives the most important and an all inclusive name of Akalpurkh, the God, as IkOh! In this simple way Guru Nanak qualifies and quantifies It in Sikhism with the only One, IkOh meaning the Primal entity." The author seems to issue a warning: "The Sikhs who, without any concrete evidence or logic, follow other pronunciations than IkOh, are they committing an act of profanity towards Sikh religion and Guru Nanak?" I consider this as an indictment of Sikh *sangat* by the author. How can he consider his pronunciation (IkOh) as final and revelatory, I fail to understand?
- (b) According to accepted Indian tradition of 'shravan' and 'manan', almost all translators of Japu have rendered the four pauris of 'sunie' and 'manie'. However, Sandhu gives a twist to the meaning of 'sunie' on the basis of some vague arguments found in Punjabi folklore. Punjabi linguists need to explore this new interpretation of Sandhu, on its own merit, I believe.

(c) According to Sandhu, the most sacred word in Sikh religion, 'Waheguru' has been used in Guru Granth Sahib by Bhatt Gaiind 16 times in addressing Guru Ramdas as Waheguru. This word has never been used for Akalpurkh by any Guru or Bhagat in the whole of Guru Granth Sahib. I consider it as a logical interpretation of the term 'Waheguru' by the author.

(d) According to established tradition, 'Aai Panth' was an elite branch/sect of Siddh-yogis in Punjab/India at the time of Guru Nanak. However, Sandhu traces the origin of this term in Egyptian mythology. I consider it as a mere stretch of his imagination but at the same time pointing to his erudite scholarship.

(e) To create something unique, Sandhu takes liberty with meaning and interpretation of some standard terms used in *gurbaani*. For example, he translates (*pauris*17-19) 'Asankh' as 'numerous', which is inexact. All students of science know that this term means beyond the limit of counting, i.e., countless. He gives his own connotation of the term (*pauri* 37), 'sitosita' as 'cold and hot'. But in interpreting the term (*pauri* 4) 'Amrit vela', he toes the line of Kala Afgana, using the same technique to justify his claim.

I also find some spelling mistakes in Punjabi text. A disturbing feature is lack of proper references, despite the errata given to improve the situation. I hope there will be more translations of Japu in future to clear the cobwebs created by the school of scientists, including that by Dr.SS Sandhu.

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SRI GUR-PANTH PRAKASH (Vol. I)

By Rattan Singh Bhangoo. Text & TR in English by Kulwant Singh

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A Review by Saran Singh

The romance of history of the Sikhs never ceases to amaze and fascinate. As observed by late Prof. Anil Chandra Banerjee: "In the early writings on Guru Nanak the role assigned to him is that of a Deliverer and Saviour."

In 1969, the quinentennial year of Guru Nanak's advent on earth, *The Sikh Review* had the privilege to publish an authentic account of Guru Nanak's visit to Sri Lanka written by the noted Buddhist scholar, Saddhamangala Karunaratna. In the recent past, Dr. Devinder Singh Chahal of Canada, an entomologist by profession, came upon evidence that points to Guru Nanak's journey to Constantinople – the modern Istanbul.

New vistas are opening in the Sikh religion's incredible history. While keen students have been familiar with the felicitous *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, with the post-1708 writings of Kavi Santokh Singh in 'Sri Gur-Pratap Suraj Granth', Kavi Sainapat's Sri Guru-Sobha and Koer Singh's *Gurbilas Patshahi Dus*

, (in original and translation) we now have Rattan Singh Bhangoo's picturesque epic: *Sri Gur Panth Prakash* handily available, thanks to the bold initiative of Institute of Sikh Studies, based in Chandigarh, embodying a refreshingly vibrant translation by Professor Kulwant Singh.

Sample this from EPISODE 14 (P. 81) in Dohira format:

"The Khalsa must be as autonomous and self respecting,
As embodiment of all the Divine attributes in plenty.
Never submitting to the sovereignty of anyone else,
Except the sovereignty and autonomy of God alone." (35)

The original text, essentially in epic verse and, couched in classical - if archaic - Punjabi,

does not fall in the category of popular reading. Its episodic structure and fanciful diction call for enormous patience that the modern-day scholar does not often possess. Digressions and deviations, peculiar to medieval epics, also tax the patience of a work-a-day reader. Yet the compelling saga of the birth, struggle and growth of the Sikh nation, in all its pathos and glory, deserves to be read – if not in the original Punjabi then at least in Prof. Kulwant Singh's elegant translation, so that we become aware of the agony and ecstasy of the emergent Khalsa Panth. This volume covers translation of 81 Episodes, with excellent reference sheets at the tail-end.

The moving account of the 18th Century history has been translated in poetic English, with monumental patience, and a remarkable perception and empathy. Indeed the translation acquires an enchantment of its own in way that most history books cannot dream of. If Rattan Singh Bhangoo was a poet-chronicler, then the translator, in his own way, gives intimations of a philosopher of rare sensitivity and depth. The spirit of Rattan Singh Bhangoo would surely be pleased to discover this latest resurgence of interest in his remarkable work. We owe Prof. Kulwant Singh and Dr. Kharak Singh a debt of gratitude for bringing '*Sri Gur Panth Prakash*' into limelight for the English knowing history scholars. The translation also unfolds a major primary source of Sikh history. The second volume will doubtless be keenly awaited.

Meanwhile, *The Sikh Review* has also been serializing the translation of the same epic, in prose, by an equally dedicated scholar, Sr. Gurtej Singh.

