

**SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB:
MOOL PAATH EVAM HINDI ANUVAD (Part I)**

By Dr. Jodh Singh

Published by The Sikh Heritage Publications, Patiala. 147 002.

Pages: 82+350 Price: Rs. 450

The eminent orientalist philosopher Dr. Jodh Singh has performed yeoman's service by writing a comprehensive commentary, in Hindi, on the text and meaning of the holy Gurubani embodied in Sri Guru Granth Sahib – The universal Gospel. A Hindi version of the holy scripture has long been overdue. The first 82 pages of Volume I provides an introduction, in chaste Hindi, covering the concept of Dharma, universality of the Gurubani, the basic postulates of Sikhism and its sociology and, more importantly, the place of the Sikh doctrine in Indian philosophy within its diverse ramifications. The present age of cynicism and disillusion only underlines the need for a firm mooring in the root message of the illustrious Gurus and Bhaktas who realised the Divine Spirit in effulgent glory.

While the exegesis is aimed at the scholar and specialist, the text, meaning and commentary fulfill a long felt need of making the Gurubani treasure available to a vast populace of north India whose mother tongue is Hindi in devanagari script. Parts II to IV are expected to be published later this year to coincide with the quatercentennial of Guru Granth Sahib's installation by Guru Arjun Dev at Amritsar in Late 1604.

S. S.

**SIKHS OF THE KHALSA: A HISTORY OF THE KHALSA
RAHIT**

By W.H. McLeod

Published by Oxford University Press (2003)

p. 282 \$ 49.95

A Review by Jagpal Singh Tiwana

The New Zealand-based scholar, Dr. Hew McLeod has published about two dozen well researched books on Sikhism. At present he is easily the known scholar of Sikhism in the Western world. His research on Guru Nanak, origins of Sikh thought, philosophy and heritage has influenced many Sikh scholars. The renowned scholar, Khushwant Singh has publicly acknowledged that he changed his earlier syncretic view that Sikhism combines both Hinduism and Sufism after reading McLeod's works. Every book that comes from McLeod's pen is eagerly awaited and keenly read as he always has something new and original to say. In this latest work "*Sikhs of the Khalsa; A History of the Khalsa Rahit*", he has again given us something which was not dealt and delivered in such depth and detail before.

The book under review is the result of his hard work and research for the last 30 years ever since he came across Chaupa Singh's *Rahit-nama* in 1972. To trace the history of *Khalsa rahit*, he read almost every *Rahitnama*, and related document on the subject, took pains to establish its date, studied the prose or poetic style of the author and checked if it fitted into the period he was writing of and examined if the text was original or some interpolations had been made later. This book is indeed a great lesson for budding scholars to learn on how to conduct a research.

The book consists of two parts. In Part one, McLeod traces proto-*rahit* in the hymns of Gurus Ram Das and Arjun Dev, *Vars* of Bhai Gurdas, *hukamnamas* of Guru Hargobind and Guru Tegh Bahadur, *pothi* Bibi Rup Kaur, Granth Bhai Pinda, and *Prashan –Uttar* of Bhai Nand Lal . Then he proceeds to documents and *Rahitnamas* of the 18th and 19th centuries: *Gur Sobha*, *Dasam Granth*, *Bhat Vahis*, *Guru kian Sakhian*, *Tankhanama of Nand Lal*, *Prahlad Rai Rahitnama*, *Sakhian Rahit ki*, *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*, *Desa Singh Rahitnama*, *Daya Singh Rahitnama*, *Sarab Loh Granth*, *Sau Sakhi*, *Prem Sumarag*, *Namdhari Rahitnama*, *Nirankari Hukamnama*, *Vajib-u'l-Araz*, and the *Sikh Rahit Maryada*. McLeod examines each document critically from all sides and angles, establishes their dates, checks their veracity and analyses various issues that arise from them.

Part two of the book has translations of all the *Rahitnamas* and related material. Some provisions in the *Rahitnamas* are good injunctions for the Khalsa Sikhs to practice religion in full sincerity and devotion. They all lay great stress on the importance of *kes* (hair) and the duties of a true Sikh to rise at dawn, take a bath, and then meditate on the divine Name. In some others, however, some items are quite ridiculous, if not also embarrassing : “treat Muslims as disease” ‘do not bathe naked’; ‘never trust a woman’; ‘avoid tobacco, hemp, charas; but opium and bhang are allowed.’ Desa Singh went to the extent of allowing consuming alcohol before going to fight in the battlefield.

They evidently do not represent the views of the Guru, but reflect on the practices prevalent at that time, and the beliefs of their authors.

One feels relieved to read the modern ideas of Singh Sabha leaders in the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* (1950). McLeod duly recognizes the contribution of the *Tat Khalsa* who worked hard for several years to produce this document and to them *Panth* owes a considerable debt. “ The *Tat Khalsa* deserves commendation for eliminating superstition, granting at least theoretical equality to women, opposing most caste differences, calming feelings towards the Muslims, and reducing the jumble of inherited traditions to a systematic pattern,” remarks McLeod.

McLeod is a trained historian. He believes that things are not suddenly created; they evolve over a period of time, taking shape according to the influence of the environments, beliefs and forces of the time at play. McLeod differs with most of the modern scholars who believe that the *Sikh Rahit Maryada* of 1950 is exactly what Guru Gobind Singh gave to the *Panth*. Instead, he claims that only a portion of the *Rahit* dates from the time of Guru Gobind Singh ; “most of it evolved according to the conditions of the time, producing significantly different patterns as the circumstances of the Sikh *Panth* changed.”

Sikh Rahit Maryada (SGPC Document) has survived for about half a century and has served the community well. If we apply McLeod's understanding of the historic development of *Rahit* to it, we find a few provisions in the SRM getting out - dated and need revision, or omission. *Benati Chaupai* is arguable. Chairs for the handicapped in the *divan* hall and in the *Langar* hall have started entering in some Gurdwaras. Non-Sikhs (Muslims in Nankana Sahib) are allowed to sing *kirtan* in some gurdwaras, almost all Sikh women get their ears pierced, many Sikhs dye their beards or trim them, imbibe alcoholic drinks, especially at weddings, turban is gradually giving place to *patka*, baseball cap in summer and woolen cap (*Topa*) in winter. Occasionally shaven Sikhs have received *Siropas* on their visits to gurdwaras. Politically correct terms should be used. 'Men and women' should be replaced by 'persons' and Khalsa brotherhood by Khalsa order.

Evidently, McLeod's study and analysis will further contribute to some of the controversies that are currently taking place in the *Panth*. He makes a distinction between a Sikh and a *Khalsa*. All Sikhs are not *Khalsa*, but all *Khalsas* are Sikhs. *Rahit* covers only the *Khalsa* and to be a Sikh of the *Khalsa* one must observe it. According to McLeod, only a small portion, (about 15 % of the *Panth*) strictly follow *Rahit*, or are *Amritdharis*.

On *Dasam Granth*, he claims that only a small portion of *Dasam Granth* is the work of the Guru. He is fully aware of the present controversy on the subject and takes due notice of protests coming from a section of the Sikhs (Pritpal Singh Bindra and S. S. Sodhi).

On Five K's, McLeod carefully examines each document to establish that no *Rahitnama* or book before the Singh Sabha period list them as Five Ks. He tends to agree with J. S. Grewal that Five Ks were there as part of the Khalsa initiation in 1699, though not called Five Ks, as we understand them now. They started appearing as Five Ks in the last quarter of the 19th century in the works of the Singh Sabha leaders. The first to mention them as requirement for the Khalsa was Sumer Singh, author of *Khalsa Panchasika*, published in 1883.

In this book, there is enough evidence to an unbiased mind to reject the allegation that McLeod "is a part of Christian conspiracy to damage and malign Sikhism." Though Piara Singh Padam, an authority on *Rahitnamas*, accepts Chaupa Singh's *Rahitnama* to be the one approved by Guru Gobind Singh himself in 1700, McLeod rejects it as "hopelessly confused and corrupted" due to its *Brahmanical* contents and adoration of goddess Durga. Chaupa Singh went so far as to claim that he was the first to take *Amrit* from Guru Gobind Singh and *patashas*(candies) in *Amrit* were mixed by "two Brahmins", not by Mata Jito. McLeod has been pointing a finger at the obscene portion in *Dasam Granth* since 1975 when he published his second book: "*The Evolution of the Sikh Community*". He also finds *Prem Sumarg* as unreliable as it is full of Hindu influence. He questions the date of its origin which some claim to be the time of Guru Gobind Singh or closer to him. He disfavors the Nirankari *Hukamnama* or *Rahitnama* as Nirankaris believe that the line of Gurus continued after the Tenth Guru.

McLeod has done a yeoman's service to authenticity of the Sikh community by collecting all of the *rahitnamas*, which were lying hidden or scattered, into one book. **Chaupa Singh's *rahitnama* was consumed by fire that engulfed the Reference**

Library during the *Operation Bluestar* in 1984, but McLeod had already made a copy, which is the only version now available.

“*Sikhs of the Khalsa*” is a valuable reference book on the subject of *rahitnamas* for all time to come. It is a deluxe-bound edition with a color picture of an imposing *Nihang Singh* on its title. It has a useful glossary, a helpful index and a resourceful bibliography. Highly recommended for individual and library collections.



BHAI GURDAS: SANDRABH KOSH

By Gurmukh Singh

Published by Amarjit Sahit Prakashan, Patiala, 2003

Pages: 192 Price: Rs. 200.00

A Review by Dharam Singh*

** Dept. of Encyclopedia of Sikhism, Punjabi University, Patiala. 147002.*

Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636) is a much revered name in Sikh learning and piety. A leading figure in early Sikhism, Bhai Gurdas was a nephew of Guru Amar Das, was initiated into Sikhism by Guru Ram Das in 1579 and enjoyed the patronage of Guru Arjun with whom he worked as an amanuensis when the first recension of the Adi Granth (later Guru Granth Sahib) was compiled. He contributed the labour of his hands in the excavation of the sacred pool at Amritsar (1577), was selected, along with Baba Buddha, to raise the platform later named as Sri Akal Takht Sahib (1606), was the first *granthi* at the Takht and then assigned the responsibility of teaching ancient classics to the young (Guru) Tegh Bahadur. A man of wide learning in ancient texts and philosophy, Bhai Gurdas also composed verse which is valued for its racy style and vivid exposition of the teaching of the Gurus as contained in their hymns included in Guru Granth Sahib His *Varan* and *Kabitt* and *Swaiyye* form part of the approved Sikh canon and have been called by Guru Arjun himself as key to the Holy Scripture.

Although Bhai Gurdas has generally been accepted the first exegete in Sikh tradition and his verses are taken as exposition of the scripture, yet these verses are rich in historical and mythological allusions, contain a critique of most of the prevalent religious doctrines and rituals and gives valuable details about contemporary traditions and sects. All this makes the understanding of these verses a bit difficult, especially for the modern-day youth. Gone are the good old days when various seminaries and *gurdwaras* taught such texts to the young Sikh children. The upcoming teachers and scholars in the field of Sikh studies find it difficult to fully comprehend the nuances of these verses without the help of a *tika*.

The book under review fulfils the long-felt need of students and scholars in the field of Sikh studies as it provides very valuable information on all the historical and mythological allusions, clarifies and provides a critique on concepts and doctrines of various different traditions as found discussed in his verses, provides interpretation and exposition of various Sikh doctrines and gives information of immense historical importance about important contemporary Sikhs just referred to by Bhai Gurdas. It contains about 700 entries on diverse topics and the author's ability to provide brief, but comprehensive, information about each such topic speaks of his deep

scholarship and commitment. The book covers a wide range of topics including historical, mythological, geographical, philosophical, theological, linguistic, mystical, metaphysical, ritualistic and folk-lore.

There is, for example, an entry on *ausian* which is a folk-loric belief in Punjab: accepting earth as Mother goddess, lines are drawn with a finger as a couplet is sung and, as soon as the couplet ends, drawing of lines is stopped, and the drawn lines are counted. It is popularly believed that if the number of lines is even the wish in the heart is fulfilled, and if it is odd there are bound to be problems in its fulfillment. There are entries on the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses, places of pilgrimage and even on birds (e.g. entry on *anal*, an imaginary bird, or perhaps the other name of the bird which is known as *anaka* in Arabic and Persian, provides quite interesting information) and animals (e.g. on hare killing of which is a taboo for Jews and even Zoroastrians, Armenians, many Muslims and also the Valmiki avoid eating its meat). The entry on *Khat sastra* discusses all the six schools in a cryptic yet comprehensive manner.

Dr. Gurmukh Singh, who is the eminent author of more than a score of books on different aspects of Sikh religion, literature and thought, has always shied away from limelight. Interestingly, he has done most of his research work, including the search and editing of voluminous manuscripts, without any sort of help from any academic or government organization. His commitment to academics and scholarship has produced many brilliant reference works, including the book under review, which I am sure will be widely acclaimed among scholarly circles.

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