

Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur : Distortion in History Text Books

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There are two types of writers of history. First, those who before writing presuppose a conclusion and accordingly they look for material evidence to argue their point. They ignore the material evidence that goes against their pre-set conclusion. Second, those writers who take all the material evidence on record and believe that, "history is a science of fine principles, manifold uses and noble purposes.

The writer of history requires many sources and varied knowledge; he also requires keen judgement and careful scrutiny to lead him to the truth, and away from lapses and errors. If reliance is placed on simple narrative as transmitted without studying the roots of custom, and foundation of polities, the nature of civilisation and the circumstances of human society, and without comparing past with present – then there will often be "danger of slipping and stumbling and straying from the Rod" (Ibni Khaldun, 1332-1406, al-Muqqadameh). There is no difficulty in dealing with second type of writers of history. It is the first type of writers of history who create difficulty for the society and even create unrest amongst different communities which may create conflict. Without naming any particular author or writer of history I want to put forth before the readers my arguments for their dispassionate and impartial consideration.

It has been alleged by a few writers of history that Tegh Bahadur, Ninth Guru of the Sikhs subsisted on 'plunder and rapine'. This 'new look' at the martyrdom of the Guru in the year 1675 during Mughal Empire is recent creation. The alleged 'clinching evidence' with these writers is the English translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* (p.401) by an Englishman named Raymond (p.85). The original work is in Persian and it was written over a hundred year after the event and was first published in 1897. Reputed historians like M. A. Macauliffe and Dr. Indu Bhushan Banerjee rejected the contents of English translation with following arguments: "we find it difficult to accept the statements of a writer, who wrote more than hundred years after the event, and whose story that the Guru was executed 'as a disturber of the public peace and as an aspirant to power' finds no corroboration elsewhere. As Macauliffe says: "**....the circumstances related by the Mohammadan writer are utterly incompatible with the whole tenor of Guru Tegh Bahadur's life and writings, and cannot be accepted as even an approach to history**". We may take it, therefore, that the Guru fell a victim to religious bigotry and it is understandable why later Muhammadan writers sought to cloud the issue giving it a political colour". (*Evolution of the Khalsa Vol-II, page 6*).

Now we come to the most important and crucial argument against 'plunder and rapine' allegations against the Ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur. Prof. Teja Singh and Dr. Ganda Singh's book titled '*A Short History of the Sikhs*' was published by Orient Longman Ltd., Madras, in the year 1950. This book has been deliberately ignored by the 'new look' writers of history because it does

not fit into their pre-supposed conclusion of 'plunder and rapine' allegations. In this book, at page 57, the authors assert:-

"The reason for the Guru's arrest, as given by the Sikh chronicles, was that he had taken up the cause of the Kashmiri Hindus who were being persecuted by Aurangzeb (see Macauliffe, IV, 371-72). This is supported by Guru Gobind Singh's words quoted at the end of this chapter. Malcolm and Cunningham, however, give a different reason. Basing their allegations on a wrong translation of *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* (p.401) by Raymond (p.85) who is mostly followed by Briggs, they accuse the Guru of living on plunder and making a common cause with a Mohammedan zealot named Hafiz Adam, in extorting money from Hindus as his colleagues did from Muslims (as if robbers ever made communal distinction between their victims). A look at the original reveals that there is nothing like it in the text, which simply says: *"Tegh Bahadur gathering many disciples became powerful, and thousands of people accompanied him. A contemporary of his, Hafiz Adam who was a Fakir belonging to the order of Shiekh Ahmed Sarhandi, had gathered about him a great multitude of followers. Both of these took to the practice of levying forcible exactions, and moved about in the land of the Punjab. Tegh Bahadur took money from Hindus and Hafiz Adam from Mussulmans. The Royal newswriters wrote to the emperor those two Fakirs, one Hindu and the other Muslim had taken to that practice. It would not be strange if, with the increase of their influence, they created trouble"*.

There is nothing here to justify the words: *'he subsisted himself and his disciples by plunder'*. Bute Shah also refers to the same complaint in his *Tarikh-I-Punjab*. I.393". It is evident that the whole controversy is created due to wrong translation of original text, which is in Persian and translated by an Englishman. The 'new look' writers of history should have either challenged the version of Teja Singh/Ganda Singh and rejected it, giving their own arguments, or should have abstained from creating controversy. This action of 'new look' authors of history is tantamount to academic dishonesty.

