

Dr. Manmohan Singh as PM – Spur to Scriptural Literature

RAJESHWARI SHARMA

* Courtesy: *Economic Times*.

THE SIKH COMMUNITY IS ON A NEW high ever since India got a Sikh Prime Minister. As India was dithering over a shift from *paratha* to pasta, the Chatwals and Singhs waited with bated breath, secretly hoping to see their man take over. So, be it food or literature, presently '*sadda Punjab*' is ruling the roost. The publishing industry too is riding high on the popularity wave and plans are afoot to come out with more books on Sikhism and Punjab to cash in on the buoyant trend.

"The renewed interest in books on the Sikh faith and Punjab can be attributed to the 400th anniversary of the installation of Guru Granth Sahib in September, the 20th anniversary of the Golden Temple massacre in June as well as *pogroms* against the Sikhs across India in November. Interestingly, in a post 9/11 world, there has been a surge in interest to learn more about Sikhs and their history," says Tarunjit Singh Butalia, secretary general of World Sikh Council, America Region, whose book called *Religion in Ohio: Profiles of Faith Communities*, got published two weeks ago.

This time round, there is also a huge demand for Guru Granth Sahib from Sikhs all over the world, especially, Canada, US, and UK. Recently, a chartered aircraft took off to Canada with 150 Sikh holy books or *birs* of the Guru Granth Sahib. More such flights are likely to take off from India given the spurt in demand.

The Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) is working overtime to meet the demand ever since the frontal religious organisation of Sikhs had, last year, banned the publication of the Guru Granth Sahib by any other publication house. Meanwhile, Sikh organisation have asked SGPC to set up offset printing press in Canada, US and Britain to fulfill the demand for these holy books abroad. All this have led to spiraling of prices.

In fact, the prices of antiquarian books on Punjab and Sikhism have appreciated by leaps and bounds. Any one for that matter can bet big on books on Punjab or Sikhism, says a city-based antiquarian dealer.

The upward trend is remarkably strong overseas. "Here in the US, we have seen a significant increase in the demand and availability of resources to study and understand Sikhs and their religion, says Butalia. Marketing, too, has changed, with the focus shifting to the international market. Rajiv Kaul of Chandigarh, who conceived <gianigurditsingh.com>, says the website has been designed to reach out to NRIs. We get orders for these books every week from places as diverse as the US and Malaysia."

Experts feel this trend will last because the Sikh faith is recognized now as one of the major world religions and not just a faith limited to South Asia. "The interest to understand Sikh beliefs and history will be a sustained one, adds Butalia.

Back home, publishers, like Rupa & Co and Wisdom Tree see an unmistakable surge in interest. "Interest in Sikhism and Punjab has always been there, but in the past two-three years it has considerably increased. We have come out with books

like **The Rise of Sikhs Abroad by Gurmukh Singh and Ranjit Singh: The Lion of the Punjab** by W.S. Osborne. There's a lavish book on the lives of Sikhs in the pipeline, says Kapish G. Mehra, MD, Rupa & Co.

However, some don't quite see this as a new trend. "Renewed interest has certainly led to a surge in demand, but I do not see it as something that can be attributed to the timing of the events. I think the interest is old since 1969, during the quincentenary celebrations of the birth of Guru Nanak. It is cyclical, though now the interest has been triggered by various factors, including the diaspora, which is in a position to fund research on Sikhism. It accounts for a number of important chairs on Sikhism in western universities, including University of California at Santa Barbara, California and University of Ann Arbor, Michigan. There is academic interest in Sikhism in Canada, the UK, and even New Zealand. Now that the Sikhs are well established abroad, there is great demand for books in Punjabi from those settled abroad, says senior journalist and author Roopinder Singh.

And the trend is not restricted to English only. There is a growing demand for well-produced Punjabi books and old classics like Giani Gurdit Singh's *Mera Pind* are being redone," adds Singh. Punjabi was surely never this fashionable!

□