

# **Jakobsh's distortion masquerading as Research: "Relocating Gender in Sikh History"**

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THE STANCE, TONE AND TENOR of Doris R. Jakobsh in her book *Relocating Gender in Sikh History* is biased. It seems to aim at negating or denigrating the pure khalsa traditions. She gleefully highlights the negative and anti-Sikh viewpoints with great gusto, brushing aside the Sikh viewpoint summarily.

She does not relish the consolidation of Sikh customs and rites, and dubs it as an attempt to establish separate identity of Sikhism. Her remarks about the Anand Marriage Bill as "novel Sikh identity marker and ritual" are also in the same direction. It is in spite of her quoting Petrie that "there is no community that is not fired with the idea of consolidating and improving itself to the utmost of power".

She discusses the Anand Marriage Bill in Chapter Six of her book which is entitled as 'Extending Male Control'. It is, however, difficult to understand how Anand Marriage Act extended the male control. She comments that Anand Marriages were mainly associated with Namdhari and Nirankari Sikhs and both were well outside of the Tat Khalsa realms. It is submitted that no doubt Namdharis and Nirankaris had taken the lead to popularize the Anand Marriages but these ceremonies were a part of general Sikh tradition from the right beginning and were not peculiar to these sects alone.

In fact Guru Amar Das, a great social reformer, had simplified the Sikh marriage by dispensing with the vedic rituals. He ordained his successor Guru Ram Das to preside over some marriage ceremonies when Brahmins had refused to conduct the same. The Sixth and Tenth Gurus had also popularized the Anand marriages. This customary rite had fallen into some disuse because the Sikhs had to pass through the difficult times. Later Maharaja Ranjit Singh had also not taken sufficient interest to revive and popularize it.

Jakobsh gleefully quotes anti-Sikh elements to call off-springs of Anand Marriages as bastards and illegitimates in the same breath. No doubt that the basic reason to get this Act passed was to shut up the Brahmins who were propagating that Anand marriages were not valid marriages and their off-springs are illegitimate. In fact their earnings from solemnization of marriage were being adversely affected due to the popularity of Anand Marriages. So those Brahmins along with other Sikh baiters started a campaign against Anand marriages. The Sikhs asserted the passage of the Act so that no body could question validity of a marriage solemnized through Anand ceremony and legitimacy of children of such marriages.

The Sikhs certainly wanted to demonstrate the independent and separate status of Sikhism by getting Anand Marriage Act, meant exclusively for the Sikhs, passed. Doris says that the "proponents initially found support for the Bill among the populace; the acclamation, however, quickly dissipated as the actual wording came to be analysed (p. 180). The fact of dissipating the support of the Bill is incorrect. Actually resolutions came in thousands from various Sikh organisations, village Panchayats and Sikhs in India and abroad supporting the Bill after it was published in the Gazette of India and the local official gazettes. There was a wide spread

support for the Bill from all sections of the Sikhs. The author herself quotes Lt. Governor of Punjab's speech, though to draw a totally different conclusion, wherein he noted, "the Tikka Sahib's Bill has behind it the popular support of the vast majority of the Sikh Community". She herself notes the zeal and mobilization for the Bill as petitions poured from all over the world. Doris quotes anti-Sikh sources to present frivolous arguments that Anand Marriage Act will be used by the wealthy Sikhs to marry Muslim and Christian ladies and their non-Sikh children will ultimately take over all the landed properties and jagirs etc. She is unaware that marriages of Sikh males with non-Sikhs were judicially upheld by the Punjab Chief Court in *Dhalip Kanwar v. Fatti* 1913 PR 99; *Sodlic v. Sher Singh* 1895 PR 50)

She states that some Tat Khalsa members were taken aback by the charges of marriage with foreign ladies, and they distanced from the mover of the Bill; and Singh Sabha leader came to know about the Bill only after its introduction in the Council. These statements lack substance.

Jakobsh is critical of the Act that it did nothing to improve the precarious position of women in Sikh society. She refers to criticism by others for non-inclusion of provisions as to age limit, divorce, monogamy, registration of marriages, etc. Further, she comments that Act was clearly problematic to large number of Sikhs and Hindus and it widened the rifts amongst the Sikhs also.

She fails to note that the Preamble mentions that the Act was passed only to remove doubts as to the validity of the Anand Marriage ceremony. So it was meant only to confirm the marriages solemnized through Anand ceremony. The Act was not meant to codify the whole law relating to Sikh marriages. It is clearly mentioned in the speech of S. Sunder Singh which she herself has quoted. Section 3(a) lays down, "Nothing in this Act shall apply to marriages between persons not professing the Sikh religion." Further it is not clear how and what problem the Act created for Hindus who were supposed to have no concern. Besides, the Sikhs were happy and satisfied on the passing of the Act.

Jakobsh wrongly assumes collusion between the British and the Sikhs in passing this Act. She also alleges that it deepened communal rivalry between Arya Samaj and Singh Sabha. Perhaps she wants that the Sikhs should have sacrificed their interests at the altar of communal harmony. She also does not seem to relish the separate Sikh identity in the Indian Army. Then she makes an about- turn saying that the Government acquiesced to the passing of the Bill for the fear that Tat Khalsa may mobilise against it. Political stability is cited as the reason to pass the Act and not the merit of the Sikh cause.

She tries to highlight the failure of the Bill after 20 years of its working without noting its successful working even after the passing of a full century. She further finds fault for not prescribing the exact mode of actual form of Anand Ceremony in the Act, it is submitted that there is no ambiguity in this regard amongst the Sikhs thus there was no necessity for the same.

She laments that women's cause was deemed insignificant in the whole process. She ignores the fact that the Act was specifically meant to serve the women's cause by silencing those who were calling women married through Anand ceremonies as keeps or concubines.

She wrongly dubs the whole process concerning the Act as an effort to promote Singh Sabha political designs.

On the whole her purpose seems to criticize and denigrate the Sikhs and their institutions. Too much space is devoted to some nasty arguments having no relevance and substance.

The concluding chapter of most books is usually meant to consolidate the results and findings in the preceding chapters. Hardly any new topic is touched upon in the last chapter. But Doris refers to an entirely new thing in the last chapter entitled as "conclusions" in the last two pages of the book. Quite insensitive to the sensibility of the Sikhs she quotes an insignificant and perfidious booklet depicting Mata Ganga asking Bhai Budha for *niyoga*. She seems to mention this insinuating falsehood to defame Sikhism and the Sikh Gurus and to show that the Sikhs are part of Hindus as they followed their customary rules. She mentions it under the lame excuse that Sikh women had vehemently opposed these remarks. Then she goes on to explain how Swami Dayanand defined and explained *niyoga* and wasted almost a full page of the book on this while it is totally out of context.

Following *niyoga* in Sikh Guru's families is beyond imagination. Recognition of *niyoga* even by Hindus is ironical and astounding as the principles of morality and chastity are sacrificed for fulfilling the desire to have a son. *Niyoga* custom has only been in name and it was rejected even by the Hindus. It has never been prevalent among them, rather it is obsolete since long (see Mayne's Hindu Law, 13th ed., p. 104). To allege such practices in the families of Sikh Gurus who condemned all unholy and immoral practices prevalent amongst Hindus, is totally blasphemous.

The author is not familiar with Indian traditions. She may not be knowing that people approach religious places and personalities to seek their blessings for progeny. Various historians have mentioned that Mata Ganga got the blessings of Baba Budha ji, a highly pious and respected authority, before the birth of Guru Hargobind.

Aspersions like *niyoga* on Guru's spouse and pious personality were simply to defame Sikh and Sikhism. The pamphlet she is referring to, was written in those days when Swami Dayanand had started a campaign against Sikhism and staged "Shudhi" by publicly cutting the hair of some Sikhs and included negative remarks against Guru Nanak Dev ji in his book *Satyarth Prakash*. As Swami Dayanand withdrew those remarks later on, it is likely the remarks in the said pamphlet might have also been withdrawn.

An author of a book on religion needs to tread cautiously with due regard to sentiment. The author seems to have purposely included such a blasphemous reference in the book.

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