

BABA DAYAL JI: BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS [2003]

By J.S. Grewal, Foreword: Dr. Man Singh Nirankari

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Arguably the Nirankari movement of late 19th Century, coming long after the Udasi and Nirmalas inspirational era, can be fairly regarded as the front runner of the Nirguna School of Sikh philosophy.

With the acrimonious debate between mainstream Sikhism and the Nirankari Babas of 1970's behind us, it is time to look back at the basic dynamics of the 19th century reformist movement spearheaded by the gentle Baba Dayal (1783-1855). The opportunity was provided, in 2003 when the eminent medical scientist turned theologian, Dr. Man Singh Nirankari organized a Seminar at Chandigarh.

The slim volume under review is the outcome of that rare conclave of contemporary scholars: DR. JS Grewal, Prof. Pritam Singh, Dr. Harnam Singh Shan, Dharam Singh, and Kirpal Singh. In their own characteristic style they dwell on the life and times of Baba Dayal whose practice of piety popularized Guru Nanak's teachings, dwelling on his intense monotheism.

The contributors are scholars of impeccable credentials, and the five essays, along with the preface and Dr. Nirankar's Foreword, shed light on the chaotic 19th century milieu in which Baba Dayal practised and preached the essential monotheist faith of Guru Nanak. The fact that Baba Dayal was born in Peshawar – the ancient frontier city, on the route of Guru Nanak's travels to West Asia, is pregnant with meaning and mystery. The NWFP and bordering Afghanistan are hallowed grounds trod by Guru Nanak and dotted with historic sangats and holy Shrines, echoing the victorious march of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army, reminiscent of Hari Singh Nalwa's exploits and Akali Baba Phula Singh's valour. Indeed it is significant that Baba Dayal's mother was grand daughter of Bhai Bhagwant Singh ji who served the court of the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh ji as Treasurer. Baba Dayal's Loyalty to the Gurus, was rooted in 'Nirankar' the Formless Divinity revealed by Guru Nanak in JAPJI. Hence the term Nirankari – the title first associated with the Glorious Guru, and adopted in the 19th Century for the puritanical cult started by Baba Dayal.

The essays mostly probe the historical background rather than examine the doctrinal, theological and sociological aspects of the Sikh philosophy which the Nirankari Movement came to symbolize. The collection of essays is a fair if not full acknowledgement of the modern Sikhism's debt to Baba Dayal who effectively stemmed the Christian proselytisation close on the heels of British colonialism and annexation of the Punjab in 1849.

Saran Singh



CINEMA

AMU: Emotional Look At Scars of 1984

Cast: Konkona SenSharma, Brinda Karat, Ankur Khanna

Dir: Shonali Bose

The horrors of 1984 back on screen – this would be the best way to sum up *Amu*, director Shonali Bose's film that is not directly about the anti Sikh riots, but about its aftermath. The director has handled the delicate subject with perfection.

Amu tells the story of Kaju, a young Sikh girl who lost her father and brother in the anti-Sikh riots after the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. After the riots, social worker Keya, who works in the relief camps, adopts her. Kaju then goes to the US and settles there with her adopted mother.

Years later, when she comes to Delhi to meet her maternal grandmother, she discovers that she is not who she think she is. The grown-up young girl, played by Konkona Sen-Sharma, then starts looking for her real mother. Politician and social worker Brinda Karat makes her debut as Keya, the adopted mother.

The best part of the film is that nowhere does it seem to rake up controversy. Bose has avoided any scathing attack on politicians, though in one screen she does show a person wearing sunglasses ordering the killings (an obvious reference to former union minister HKL Bhagat we think). The story revolves around *Amu*'s sorrow and it is the emotional scars of people who were affected in the riots that are highlighted.

Amu belongs to Konkona. She shows us once again why critics rate her so highly. The film starts off by showing her as a modern, NRI girl who is proud of her country. After she learns of her origins and the gruesome fate of her family, she is transformed. Konkona handles this change superbly. Karat is also good.

The confrontational scene between Karat and Konkona leaves you riveted. Newcomer Ankur Khanna, who plays Kabir, Konkona's friend in need, also impresses.

In fact, the director deserves praise for having used her actors to perfection. *Amu* makes an impact and is important enough for anyone to watch.

Gurinder Chadha takes her pride of place:

Gurinder Kaur Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*, a Bollywood-style screen adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, has elevated her to the level of an international filmmaker, a report said here today.

Gurinder, who once dreamed of circling the globe, has become a mainstream international film maker with the £12 million musical *Bride and Prejudice*, to be released next month, the *Observer* reported. The *Newsweek* puts Chadha, producer-director of her most popular film to date, *Bend It Like Beckham*, at the head of a new breed of talented women directors who are increasingly being trusted with star names and hefty studio projects.

However, Chadha asserts that her Aishwarya Rai starrer is not a simple parody. "What I've ended up with is nods to Bollywood and to Hollywood and elements of it feel like the movie *Grease*. But it is actually a very British movie."

The film revolves around one Bakshi family from Amritsar with four daughters – Lalita, Maya, Lucky and Jaya. In this interpretation of Austen's best-known work, race has to some extent taken the thematic place of class. In the musical, which is

set in India, Los Angeles and Britain, the lead role of Lalita (Elizabeth Bennett) is taken by Aishwarya Rai, in her first English speaking part. She has been tipped as a future Bond girl and sparkled brighter than most on the Croisette at the Cannes Film Festival last May.

The part of Darcy – here US hotelier Will Darcy – is played by Martin Henderson, a US actor previously seen in *The Ring*.

[Courtesy: *The Statesman*]