

'SIKHISM: ANTI-SIKHISM'

By Charanjit Singh Bal, Canada

Published by: SB Publishers, New Delhi

Pages: 159 Price: Rs. 150 US\$ 5.99

A Review by Prof. Hardev Singh Virk*

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The book under review consists of 19 essays. I was attracted to read and review it because of its title which is quite fascinating. I was curious to explore something unique in the essays under section Anti-Sikhism but to my dismay I found most of the articles a recount of the material already published. Charanjit Singh Bal belongs to a new genre of Diaspora Sikh writers who want to promote Sikhism in the western hemisphere; who are well versed in using new tools of IT world but who lack vision and insight of a mature writer. The author writes in the preface: "This book is a composition of my articles and virtually verbatim print media news reports and cyber messages pertaining to noble Sikhism and ignoble Anti-Sikhism. It is my humble endeavor to propagate quintessential concepts, egalitarian doctrines, pragmatic practice and authentic history of universal Sikhism."

In Chapter 1, the author reports what many others have already written, namely, "Views of prominent non-Sikh writers about Sikhs and Sikhism". I wonder why the author fails to cite the references where these quotations occur. I remember my own predicament when I quoted the views of Reverend H.L. Bradshaw about Sikhism in my article and the Editor pulled me up for not giving reference to his quote. I believe the author has not made an attempt to look up and research original sources of these quotations.

Chapter 2-4 are the most important chapters of this book. The author gives a vivid account of the religious situation in India at the time of advent of Guru Nanak in Punjab, in Chapter 2. He tries to establish Sikhism as a pragmatic faith in Chapter 3, calling it a unique and practical religion. The author is at his best in Chapter 4, "Concepts of Sikhism". He defines concept of God, Guru, Origin of Universe, Creator, Human Virtues and many other concepts in a nut-shell manner, quoting relevant *shabads* from Guru Granth Sahib. He succeeds in proving the rational approach of Sikhism which rejects dogmatism, ritualism and asceticism. However, the author commits some blunders in Chapter 2(p.24) calling Shiva's consort (wife) Sita, instead of Parvati and locating Younepeeth shrine in Gauhati in Bihar(p.25), instead of Assam. A *shabad* of Guru Ramdas (p.60) is attributed to Guru Amardas.

Chapter 7 deals with Sikh Rehat Maryada (Code and Conventions). The author traces the historical evolution of Sikh Rehat Maryada and its implications. The author is critical of the Amrit Sunskar ceremony as practiced today (p.84-85): "Guru Gobind Singh's concept of Amrit has apparently been misconstrued and ritualized. Amrit Sunskar reads like creed of dogmas from Hindu Simritis. There has to be greater emphasis on preparedness and determination of worthiness of a Sikh prior to Amrit Sunskar." In Chapter 8, "Khalsa Panth", the author goes into background of the need for creating the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in a logical manner. However, his definition of Khalsa as pure is too literal. In fact, Khalsa is a Persian word which means crown property that belongs directly to the King. Hence, Khalsa belongs to the Guru/God. The author is advised to check up historical facts regarding Iftar Khan as governor of Punjab (p.91) and correct his date/year of baptismal ceremony which was held in March 1699, and not in March 1669 as mentioned by the author (p.96).

In the Chapter 5, 'Guru's Langar', the author remarks, "Guru's Langar combines three noble principles of Sikhism: charity, community service and social equality." The author is highly

critical of the priestly class, Jathedars and their *hukamnamas*. He refers to the ongoing tussle between Sikh intelligentsia and Akal Takhat Jathedar in view of *hukamnamas* issued against Kala Afgana and Joginder Singh, Editor Spokesman. The author also condemns fake Khalsa (p.100): 'Although the identity is an integral part of a religion, it does not enhance a man's spiritual consciousness. But the zealous orthodox religionists profess that the religious garb takes precedence over exalted spiritual consciousness.'

Chapter 12 "Anti-Sikhism" traces the history of persons and movements which were inimical towards the revolutionary religion of Sikh Gurus and tried to create schisms in it. Anti-Sikh movements started during the Guru period and continued unabated till date. The author displays wonderful sense of history in this chapter and narrates all the events which tried to torpedo the Sikh movement. Role of RSS, both the Hindu and its counterpart, the Sikh organization, is criticized. The author does not spare some of the authors, like Rattan Singh Jaggi, who change their stand without bothering about their conscience. I do not know why the author considers it obligatory to include Chapters on Air India Massacre and on Homosexuality under the Anti-Sikhism section? The book ends with an interesting Chapter on Nankana's Endowment Lands, which has no relevance to the theme of the book, and is based on the narration given by Harpal Singh Pannu in his article published in Sikh Shahadat.

It seems the author has made his first attempt in writing this book in English language, which is not his mother tongue. The publisher is equally responsible for ignoring the editorial/vetting work. There are all types of errors, rather howlers, incomplete sentences (p.143, 146), spelling mistakes (quakes for quacks, p.69) and all types of flaws which one expects from a novice, not well versed in English language. Despite all its short comings, the book can serve as a reference material for those interested in the study of Sikhism.

SALUTING SIKH SOLDIERS OF WORLD WARS I & II

- A Comprehensive list of the Sikh soldiers who died in World Wars I & II,

commemorated in Cemeteries and on Memorials in various parts of the world

Compiled & edited by Surjan Singh, PBM, PBS, FRSG, BA (London) Singapore

**Published by Naranjan Trading (Naranjan Singh Brahmputra), 158 Race Course Road,
Singapore. 218 601**

Pages 1066 Price: (not stated)

A Review by Saran Singh

There is a profusion of publications on the lives and works of famous people who have shaped the events and history of the world. Library shelves are bulging with how the Indian subcontinent gained independence in 1947. Revolutions and the emergence of new nations have been variously and copiously chronicled.

But virtually no one has gone to the trouble of visiting cemeteries and memorials across Asia, Africa and Europe to ascertain – and verify – the names of the soldiers who lost their lives continents away from their homes, in the unspoken hope that, somehow, their bravery and sacrifice would hasten the liberation of their Motherland.

This stupendous labour of love has been rendered by Sardar Surjan Singh, a scholar and veteran educator possessing a monumental patience, who lives in Singapore. He had, in early 2003, compiled and published a more compact volume 'THEY DIED FOR ALL FREE MEN', which memorialized gallant Sikh soldiers of World War II (1939-45). **This journal had recognized (SR: July 2003) the work as a 'rare chronicle of the tragedy and triumph' of War in the Far East.**

The present work surpasses anything we know of in that genre. Enormous research has

gone into its documentation. Broadly, Part one largely covers World War I (1914-18) and Part Two deals with World War II (1939-45). as observed by Brigadier Ravinder Singh, of Singapore army, in his illuminating Forward; "The nature of war and conflict is very complex and no single factor can explain why human societies engage in war". The author has, therefore, wisely eschewed the politics of warfare. Instead, he dwells on the human appeal, the dauntless courage and the spirit of sacrifice that Sikhs in particular have imbibed from the lives and teachings of the Gurus (1469-1708) epitomized in Guru Nanak's call to action: "*Jau tau prem khelan ka chao sir dhar tali gali meri aao*", and Guru Gobind Singh's prayers: "*Na daro aaree sio jab jae laron / nischai kar apni jeet karon*", and "*Jab ave ki avadh nidaan bane / att hi rann mein tab joojh maron*".

The book mainly comprising the Roll of Honour, symbolizes the Sikh spirit of daring and devotion to duty in modern warfare, often against the most overwhelming odds. Its sweep from Papua New Guinea and Malaysia, through India, Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Libya to Italy's Casino Memorial, Pas de Calais in France – is truly mind boggling. War Memorials across three continents (Asia Africa and Europe) recall the names of soldiers (some of them barely out of teens) who laid down their lives in the name of freedom and peace. Two pictures of Japanese occupation of Singapore show blindfolded Sikh prisoners of war waiting to be shot!

Some of the rarest and most evocative pictures enhance the worth of this extraordinary publication. Indeed one marvels at the painstaking endeavours of the author who first assembled and then collated the black-and-white photographs of a century ago, from many sources, including Britain's Imperial War Museum, and Malaysia's illustrious *Khalsa Diwan*. It is equally heartening that these pictures have been meticulously preserved by the Websites www.sikh_spectrum.com and www.info.sikh.com.

Many gems of information and wisdom are scattered across the thousand pages which surprise the lay-reader: of the 22 Victoria Crosses awarded to Indians upto 1945, thirteen were won by the Sikhs. The author's aphorist comment that **a nation is the poorer if it does not take its history and heritage seriously** deserves to be inscribed on the portals of every educational institution. It goes to the credit of the Singaporean *Sangat* that, over the six decades since 1945, it has made matchless contribution to the Sikh lore and liturgy, producing kirtan audio and video tapes and a treasury of Gurbani booklets. The literature on Sikh history and heritage has been enriched by the courageous writings of Justice Choor Singh, formerly of the Supreme Court of Singapore, and Sr. Santokh Singh's hand books of 'Quotable Quotes' from SGGS.

In this context, one is struck by the post 1947 scenario of the composition of India's armed forces. The proportion of Sikhs has been steadily declining. Indeed there was a time in 1960's and 1970's, when the government considered that Sikhs should be recruited in proportion to their population (which hovers around 2%)! The malaise has not been reversed.

While the Orwellian year 1984 was the watershed, the Punjabi youth also drifted away from a career in the army, in desperate forays to emigrate – legally or illegally – to foreign countries. Even among families with a martial tradition, army has not been the first choice for a career. Authorities too have been apathetic, making no special efforts to attract young male Sikhs to join the rank and file of armed forces, even as the state governments in Punjab and Haryana remain abysmally indifferent. No wonder there is a stalemate in Kashmir and elsewhere. The spirit of chivalry and heroism urgently needs to be revived across the board.

In so far as this two - volume work is at once inspirational and enriching in its sweep and

scope, the public libraries and educational institutions may be keen to obtain copies. It is therefore suggested that the philanthropist-publisher may fix a reasonable price for libraries and individual readers.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

(1) **SAROD-é-SAKOON: Being versified translation of SUKHMANI SAHIB in Persian (FARSI)**

Tr. In Farsi by (Late) Sr. Gulwant Singh

Publisher: Publication Deptt. Punjabi University, Patiala. 147 002 (PB)

(Special Paper) Pages: 120. Price: Rs. 200.

The late Prof Gulwant Singh has left behind a rare gem of poetics in FARSI consisting of a translation of 24 cantos (*Slokas & Ashtpadis*) of Guru Arjun Dev Ji's inspirational scripture, Sukhmani, or Psalm of Peace. Because of the shrinking scope of *Farsi* as a classical language, this valuable publication must be specially promoted in selected universities in India and West Asia to disseminate the meaning and spirit of the celestial *Bani*.

(2) **ESSAYS ON SIKH VALUES: By Dr. Kulwant Singh Khokhar (USA)**

Published by GS Khokhar, 15703 Rowland View Dr., Chester. VA 23831. USA

Pages 264. Price (Hard Cover) Rs. 80 [Available from Gurbani iss Jag meh Chanan, Kothi No. 254, Phase 2, Mohali 160 055.

(3) **WAY OF THE SAFFRON CLOUD: By Dr. Kulwant Singh (Khokhar)**

Published by GS Khokhar, 15703 Rowland View Dr., Chester. VA 23831. USA

Pages 160, Price (Paper back) Rs. 45. [Available from Gurbani iss Jag meh Chanan, Kothi No. 254, Phase 2, Mohali 160 055.

The octogenarian author is no stranger to readers of *The Sikh Review*. Longtime resident of USA, he has not lost touch with the heritage, and indeed has a dozen and more publications to his credit. As a profound scholar and medical scientist his interpretation of the Gurbani, the Sikh ethos and history have a special appeal for every intelligent reader. These well-produced publications are a welcome addition to the growing literature on Sikhism.

(4) **“PRABH KAY SIMRAN SABH KICHH SUJHEY? (PUNJABI) By (Late) Bhagat Puran Singh**

Publisher: Dr. Inderjit Kaur, A-I Pingalwara Society. Amritsar 143 001

Pages 312. Price (Free on request)

This is a delightful collection of over 50 Essays, in chaste Punjabi, by the legendary 'Saint of Amritsar' who personified compassion. His themes and thoughts are derived from *Gurbani* as well as history, even as he shows rare insights into the causes of human suffering.

(5) **LOVING GOD: Practical Teachings of Baba Virsa Singh (of Gobind Sadan, New Delhi)**

(A Sterling Paperback)

Pages 88. Price Rs 75.

Baba Virsa Singh reminds one of prophet Moses of blessed memory. This slim volume, in chaste English, represents his observations on a variety of basic sacred themes: God, Naam, Dharam, Healing, Seva and so on. For all people of faith this uncomplicated collection opens the door to God's love.

(6) **AWAKENING OF SOUL, by Sardara Singh (Former Ed. 'Gurbani iss jag meh chanan')**

English Tr, (from original in Punjabi) by Dawinder Singh Pal. "Gurbani....Chanan" Sanstha, 254. Phase 2. Mohali. 160 055

Page 92. Price: Rs 30 (Paper back)

This booklet discuss prime questions of theology in simple language. Each theme springs from the scriptural text from *SGGS*, and calls upon the seeker to probe the depth of his/her soul, while affirming faith in its abiding moral and spiritual values.

– S.S.