

MYSTIQUE MAGIC MIRACLE

By Gajindar Singh

Published by MS Manbir G Singh, # 2983 Sector 61, Mohali 62

Page: 182, Price: Rs. 220/- (\$ 18/=)

A Review by Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh *

The philosophy of the hymn,

ਘਾਲ ਨ ਮਿਲਿਓ ਸੇਵ ਨ ਮਿਲਿਓ ਮਿਲਿਓ ਆਇ ਅਚਿਤਾ ॥ ਜਾ ਕਉ ਦਇਆ ਕਰੀ ਮੇਰੇ ਠਾਕੁਰਿ ਤਿਨਿ ਗੁਰਹਿ ਕਮਾਨੇ ਮੰਤਾ ॥
[SGGS: 672] given at the head of the book, explains the key message of *gurbani*, the Sikh faith; it is His grace that puts an individual on the path of peace and His realization. It saves the believers of this philosophy from self-imposed fears. The hymn also outlines the objective of writing this book, that is, to guide an individual suffering from baseless fears of the Unknown and get him out of practising the hollow rites and rituals.

It was a great reward for me to study the *gurmat* philosophy as explained by the author; every page keeps the student interested in the subject to read further to benefit himself from his analysis of the prevalent social and religious rituals and rites.

The study of the origin of the major religions practised by us today anywhere in the world tells the same story. Early humans assumed some gods (*devtas*) as favourable and some other gods as unfavourable (demons). They worshipped *devtas* to obtain spiritual and worldly gains from them. Demons were propitiated to protect themselves from their bad influence. This culture has more or less stuck in the psychology of the faithfuls all over the world.

The book explains that contrary to the latest scientific *gian* and spiritual awareness, some rites and rituals were introduced to overcome the fears and harms likely to be done from the un-known powers (spirits). The purpose of adopting those rituals by the common man was to live a peaceful and happy life. Their actions were not based on any Truth but were misguided because of the mindset of the social leaders of those days of early human history. Such assumptions ingrained in their psychology interfered and impeded the development of an individual.

The present publication *Mystique Magic Miracle* by the author discusses this complex phenomenon. He has written half a dozen such interesting titles including *In the Witches' Cauldron*, *A God made to Order*, etc.

For elucidating his message, making it clear and understandable to the readers, the author has quoted many episodes of his personal life. For introducing the reader to the subject, he refers to the common experience of all people, believers and non-believers alike, who undergo many good and bad incidences in their lives. They attribute most of those happenings to their good or bad luck because they cannot assign any rational explanation or a logical cause for those happenings.

To be able to face such happenings, human beings designed some magical methods, *mantras*, *tantras*, *jantras*. Such rituals have been in vogue since the known history of man in case of all cultures, ethnic groups and nations. People worshipped *sakar* objects, visible and physical entities, like sun, moon, fire and also some trees, animals, birds, etc. Worship of graves and statues in one or the other form are also practised all over the world.

The purpose of the author to pen down his interpretation of *Gurmat* philosophy is to guide people and thus help them to overcome such unfounded inhibitions, fears, and dogmas, etc.

After reading the index, I jumped to the chapter titled *Five plus Five*, page 141. It was

not clear to me what the author wants to tell the readers. We all know the importance of five but I never heard of the philosophy of *Five Plus Five* in the Sikh faith. It is really interesting to read it. The author has ably shared with the reader the message of *gurbani*. *Gurmat* guides us to live a life of *Charhdi Kala*, optimistic attitude and not to suffer from *Dhenhdi kala*, pessimistic attitude. This principle has been well-explained, it is refreshing to go through it because one is reminded of his /her own experiences.

The same is the case with other chapters; not just a look at the title of the chapters but one has to read them to know their contents.

The author justifiably regrets the immense tensions and bloodshed caused by the politicians for the desire to increase the sphere of their authority over a larger territory and more people. He also regrets the claim of those fighters who end their present life as a *ghazi*, *vir*, *yodha*, or *soora*, hoping to be honored after death and provided with *swarg*, *bahisht*.

However, he justifies the similar death of a Sikh martyr because, ".....he dies as and when necessary as a matter of *shahadat* for the cause of a perfect society and social and political justice as intended by his Masters." The readers will not agree with his observation that only a Sikh martyr dies for freedom and justice. There were and are such martyrs in every nation and religion. Sikhs are not the only community who can claim this great honour. Along with this, the author should have also referred to the sacrifices made by members of other nations and communities for the protection of their human rights. There are some other statements in the book which will be more acceptable if qualified. In the end one feels satisfied that the time spent for the study of this book was fully justified.

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East of Indus: My Memories of Old Punjab

By Gurnam Singh Brard

Published by Hemkunt Publishers, New Delhi.

Page: 440, Price: US\$ 30 (South Asia Books, USA)

*A Review of Jagpal Singh Tiwana**

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You can take a Jat out of his village, but you cannot take his village out of him. Dr. Gurnam Singh Brard, now settled in Nevada, USA, left Punjab about half a century ago, but the early years of his life spent in his village in Punjab have haunted him all these years. Despite a successful career in America, Dr. Brard's passion for his village is still intact. "In old age, riches in America cannot make up the loss of separation from extended family and break from the ancestral village land", he expresses his feelings thus. The result is his book ***East of Indus, My memories of Old Punjab***, which covers all that has been on his mind for years.

Gurnam was born and raised in the historic village, Mehraj, Distt, Bhatinda, hub of the famous Bahia (22) villages which, with blessings of Guru Hargobind Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji, gave rise to Phulkian states of Patiala, Nabha and Jind. Gurnam makes no claim to his princely origin as his grandfather was an ordinary farmer, though as member of the royal clan the family was invited to special occasions of the Patiala state.

Gurnam loved farming and the carefree life of the cattle grazers, but his father and his

elder brother kept pressing him to get an education. In 1946 he was admitted to Khalsa College Amritsar, but when he came back to his village in the summer break, he changed his mind to stay back, then his father took him back to Amritsar. As soon as his father left Amritsar, he took a train to his married sister's place. His heart was in the village. Later when he returned to his folks, he was again pressed to go back to college. This time his elder brother, Kartar, took him to Amritsar, but again the same story. As his brother left, Gurnam went to his Massi's (mother's sister) village.

Gurnam enjoyed the next three years back in his village and records vivid memories of his life in Mehraj. "For many years, every day in the village was a pleasurable adventure for me. I did not mind the heat, the dirt and the harsh life of the farmer; I never wanted to leave that life" writes Gurnam. Now young Gurnam had his first taste of liquor, witnessed fights among Jats, himself challenged an unfriendly neighbour with a naked sword in hand, and learned all about farming and rural life.

Finally in 1949 he took a 'reluctant break from the village'. His brother Kartar who was an army officer, took him to Ahmednagar and put him in a local college. This was the turning point in his career. He started liking college life. From Ahmednagar, he was moved to Punjab University College, Hoshiarpur. He was smart in studies and became a favourite of his teachers. Here he met Manmohan Singh the present Prime Minister of India who was a student there. After doing an M.Sc. in Physics and working as college lecturer, Gurnam came to the University of Washington on a fellowship and did his Ph.D there. Although he got married and settled in the United States, yet he could not forget his village and the simple life of rural Punjab.

In *East of Indus*, he covers a broad range of topics closely associated with village life - joint family, caste system, sexual mores, superstitions, marriage customs, death and mourning rituals, festivals, fairs, food, entertainment, leisure and pastime activities, etc. Nothing escapes his notice from women fights, *Deor- Bhabi* relation, farmer-sharecropper deal and dependence of menial castes on land owning Jats. Many forgotten household items like *chati, taura, kujja, magha, Chhanna, Hara, Chakki, Ukhali* etc come to mind. A *Jalsa* (function) of *Nachar* (dancer) or *Naqalis* (comedians) were sources of great amusements.

Autobiographical accounts normally portray the bright side of the author and his family. Dr. Brard, however, is open and forthright; he does not hide his or his family's seamy side. His father was disappointed in him when he showed no interest in education. "I have been blessed with very good children, except this one, Gurnam, who ruined my life." And Gurnam could not accept the physical abuse his father afflicted on his mother. He was closer to his kind Taya (uncle) Tiloka than his disciplinary father. Gurnam comes out as a typical Jat boy, loyal to the family, though defiant, and independent who started drinking liquor in his teens, provoked physical fights, hated going to school, but loved hard work on the farm.

The book is not just a narration of incidents, he discusses religion and philosophy too. His interpretation of Sikh religion and Sikh history is pretty liberal. "Nanak did not repudiate all Hindu traditions, but did speak against superstitious practices, corrupted ways, and the caste system..." observes Dr. Brard. In early 20

th century Jat families in his area still followed Hindu ceremonies and rituals. His parents were married by a Brahmin priest around the fire. Her mother's name was Bhag Bhari and her Maternal uncle was Ganga Ram, though they were Sikhs. Sikh scholar Harjot Singh Oberoi, author of "*Construction of Religious Boundaries*", gets a lot of support for his thesis that Khalsa identity before Singh Sabha movement was

one of the many Sikh identities.

According to Dr. Brard, though many Jat houses continued Hindu practices, but once Jats joined the Sikh religion, there was no going back to Hinduism. On the other hand, many Sehajdhari Khatri Sikh families were drawn back into the Hindu fold.

His family's attitude towards **the** Sikh religion was typical of a Jat family. The family patriarch uncle Tiloka and others went to the Gurdwara only on Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh's birthdays and were pretty superstitious. As a child though Gurnam equated Sikh Gurus with Gods and prayed to Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, but in real difficulty, he would even remember Ram, Krishna or Buddha. "It did not hurt to ask for additional help" as young Gurnam rationalized. Even now Gurnam would not wash his hair on a Tuesday. His father, however, was influenced by Singh Sabha reforms. He was an Amritdhari Sikh, regular in his *nitnem* and Gurdwara visits. He wanted to give the best education to his children.

The book, however, is not free from some flaws. Chapter 9, "A Dialogue About Spiritual Matters," does not go well with "My Memories of Old Punjab". It could have been avoided to reduce the bulk of the book. His graphic description and details of sexual practices and the adventures of his friends do not fit well either. You would be reluctant to recommend it to a female relative or put it in a Gurdwara Library which was perhaps not the intention of the author. A little more attention to proof reading could have been helpful.

These are, however, only minor irritants compared to a mine of information in the book on rural Punjab. One does feel nostalgic about his village after reading it. Here it comes close to Giani Gurdit Singh's classic '*Mera Pind*'. Highly recommended to public, private and academic libraries. It **would be a welcome addition** to the list of required reading on courses on Punjab studies. List Price at Amazon is \$37.50, **and** the book is available from South Asia Books for \$30 including shipping.



MY OTHER TWO DAUGHTERS

By Surjit Singh Barnala

Published by Vetri Publishers, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. 110057.

Pages: 120 Price: (Paperback) Rs. 200

A Review by Saran Singh

Sr. Surjit Singh Barnala, currently two-term Governor of Tamil Nadu, may, at first instance, seem to be an unlikely writer and artist. Most people - including readers of *The Sikh Review* - know him as the Shiromani Akali Dal's, Chief Minister of the Punjab and - earlier in 1977-80 - as the union minister for Agriculture & Irrigation, during the brief spell of the Janata Party rule under Prime Minister Morarji Desai. Indeed few would recall his solitary confinement in Patiala Jail during 1975-77 Emergency precipitated by the late Indira Gandhi, or that he 'went underground' in 1980's, disguised as a mendicant and pursued as a militant: experiences that he has narrated in his first popular paper-back '*Story of an Escape*' [My Tryst with Freedom] - which we had reviewed in this Journal over a decade ago.

This sequel, in charming unadorned prose, tells the true tale of two girls whom he 'adopted' as his daughters, in entirely contrasting circumstances. The first, a frail little Kashmiri girl, Naseem, whom he met during his visit to Srinagar in the summer of 1949, daughter of a Shikara boatman, Rahman. He became her '*Chote Abbu*' desperately keen to arrange her schooling, only to be frustrated by her family's poverty and traditional neglect of the girl child. His regular visits and generosity for the 'Boat family' could not avert the double tragedy: First, Naseem's mother passed away when she was barely 13. Then, as the family coped with sickness, the Chote Abbu's 'little girl' simply faded away - but not before she sent a Farewell note in Urdu, to the Barnala home in

Punjab. The distraught 'Father' hastened to Srinagar to trace her grave and adorn it with an epitaph in stone.

The second 'daughter' is a white American who embraced the Sikh Dharma out of love for the wife of the (late) Singh Sahib Yogi Harbhajan Singh. The author first met her in Los Angeles in 1974 during a group tour of SGPC bigwigs. The tall, while-clad Kiran Jot Kaur was a volunteer in the Yogi's 3HO movement. She even had a boyfriend - also initiated - into Sikh Dharma, was given the honorific: Bhai Sahib Dial Singh. As fate would have it, the youth died in a road accident. His ashes were brought to India by the distraught Kiran Jot in the summer of 1975 for immersion in Kiratpur. KiranJot had also lost her father - a pilot - in an air crash and her mother had remarried, leaving her 'virtually orphaned'. Yogi Ji's wife - Bibiji - had become her foster parent.

While in Amritsar, she learned to recite *Sukhmani* and *Jaap Sahib* from Mr. Barnala and, in devotion, sought his permission to call him Papa. That bonding grew stronger after her return to USA, where she kept in touch even as Barnala was detained during the Indian Emergency! She returned to India in 1979 when, under the Janata government, Barnala rose to become India's Agriculture Minister. In mid-1980's she kept in touch from USA, when she had left '3HO' and married a Mr. Kelly D. Day. But for her 'Papa' she would always be *Kiran*. 25 years passed before she re-visited India - at Chennai - for (of all things) treatment of cancer! The story of her fight against cancer, her disillusionment with a fake Indian 'Bhagavan' (godman) and her eventual death at Chennai's Apollo Hospital - in late 2005 makes poignant reading. Her husband Kelly's letter to the author makes a sombre epilogue to the book.

A sentimental narrative, symbolic of the author's genuine humanity and his adherence to the Sikh virtue of unconditional love, Mr Barnala's book is brimful with pathos. The artist in him also finds an expression in some water colours, including a portrait of the Kashmiri lass, Naseem. Not many public figures can be credited with the deep compassion that emerges from the pages of this slim volume of humanist reminiscences.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

'GURMAT QUOTIENT' (Spiritual Flight to Ethereal Plane)

By Bhupinder Singh (Pub: Sanbun Publishers, New Delhi. 110020

Pp. 108. Price: (Paperback) Rs. 125/-.

This highly readable work, of considerable moral and spiritual depth, probes the oceanic wisdom of Guru Granth Sahib from several aspects and angles of human psyche. A widely travelled scholar/engineer, the author uses the holy text and scientific methodology to help connect the reader with his Creator.

GURU DARYAO

(Punjabi) [River of Guru's wisdom]

By Dr. Paramjit Kaur (Published by author: Guru Nanak Girl's College, Santpura, Yamuna Nagar. 135001 (Haryana)

Pp. 106. Price: (Paperback) Gift on 3rd Centenary of SGGS (Gurgadi)

A collection of 17 sentient essays devoted to aspects of Sikh Gurus and their sacred writings, concluding with a delightful discourse on Baba Farid's life and thought.

A DIRECTORY OF FAUNA & FLORA

(Punjabi)

By Dr. Jasbir Singh Sarna

Pub: Prof. Sahib Singh Gurmat Trust (Patiala) Anandpur

Pp. 88. Price: (not mentioned)

The indefatigable Kashmiri scholar serves the cause of our endangered eco-system by probing Gurbani for the copious references to the flora and fauna - Nature's treasury -

which the human race has long frittered away. The carefully researched Directory serves a double purpose: connecting us with the holy text, while also stressing the need to understand and marvel at the miracle of all-pervading life in its infinite variety.

SIKHISM & ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN SOCIETY

By Prof. Hazara Singh (Published by author from 3-C, Udham Singh Nagar, Ludhiana 141001).

Pp. 36. Price: Rs. 15/-.

In seven short and succinct essays, the untiring Prof. Hazara Singh gives a comparative - if concise - viewpoint on the highroad to Sikh religion: probing the times and teachings of Guru Nanak, placing in perspective the unique sacrifice of Guru Arjun Dev, the sovereignty (*Miri*) concept in the context of *Piri* or moral and spiritual domain, concluding with a note on the impact of Sikhism on Indian history and culture.

- S.S.