

THE SIKHS: IDEOLOGY, INSTITUTIONS & IDENTITY

By (Padamshri) Dr. J S Grewal

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*A Review by Gurmukh Singh (UK)**

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Padmashree, Dr J S Grewal, has updated and summarized his research in 14 essays this year. These cover three related themes: **Sikh ideology, institutions and identity**. His leading item, following the introductory essay on the revolutionary nature of Guru Nanak Sahib's egalitarian mission with its monotheistic God-loving message, is "**Raj karega Khalsa**" (The Khalsa shall rule). This is brought out as the political (*miri*) objective of Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji – to crush the oppressors of the Sikhs and to establish a benevolent egalitarian Khalsa society, in which no one inflicted pain on another.

Such an unequivocal conclusion by a top scholar, much acclaimed by the Indian establishment and recognized with the highest award, is most refreshing. Clearly, in his usual objective style, Grewal has gone where his dedicated research has taken him.

Dr Grewal follows the logical unfolding of Guru Nanak Sahib's revolutionary ideology, which so annoyed the rulers of the time – both, Muslim and Hindu. This rebellion against religious, social and political persecution was, to some extent, anticipated by the new awakening through the Indian *bhagti* movement, which included reformists from diverse backgrounds. Some of them speak to us through Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. There were similar reformation movements elsewhere e.g. in Europe. However, so far as India's *bhagti* movement is concerned, only Guru Nanak's ideology could lay the foundation of a new order, which grew in organization and political strength and was ultimately victorious over the worst trials and tribulations that any world community has experienced in the history of humankind.

Dr Grewal's research, based on contemporary evidence, shows the unbroken continuity of Sikh ideology up to Guru Gobind Singh, climaxing in armed defence of Guru Nanak's mission and the "political" objective of the Guru (as "Raj Karega Khalsa"). A supporting essay, "Martyrdom in Sikh History and Literature" brings out martyrdom (*shahidee*) as a uniquely Sikh concept introduced by Guru Nanak Sahib.

Guru Nanak's challenge to every Indian was to overcome the fear of death. His challenge to the followers of his path was: "*Jau tau prem khelan ka chao, sir dhar tali gali mori aao*" – if you wish to play the game of love, place your head on the palm of your hand and come my way." Some Sikhs confuse this quotation from Guru Nanak Sahib (Sri Guru Granth Sahib p. 1412), with Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who, no doubt, would have repeated the same challenge at Anandpur Sahib in 1699. There is no ambiguity here about the nature of the sacrifice demanded by the Guru. The eighteenth century saw this tradition of inner victory over self, also defeating the oppressor. **The sword of the Khalsa and the martyrdom tradition went together as two sides of the same coin (and therefore can be distinguished from the Gandhian "ahimsa" and the Islamic "shahidi" traditions).**

Grewal shows that the objective of Khalsa raj, predicted during Guru Gobind Singh ji's time, was achieved. Even as early as 1710, the inscription on the coins struck by the Khalsa led by Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, reveal the true nature of his mission.

The following are the main points made by Dr Grewal:-

Guru Gobind Singh identified himself with the unbroken Guru line in the "**Jot oha jugat sai**" tradition from Guru Nanak Sahib to himself. Contemporary evidence, including that by the "author" of Dasam Granth, shows that Guru Sahib was very much aware of the great threat to Guru Nanak's mission after Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom. Guru Gobind Singh saw his own mission as the defence of Guru Nanak's ideology at all costs.

Guru Gobind Singh believed in one Supreme Being, "The epical avatars like Rama and Krishna [and there were countless such] were human beings". The stories associated with them merely showed that "power of good used physical force against the forces of evil, and showed martial prowess. These aspects were relevant for Guru Gobind Singh's own position." Thus, Guru Gobind Singh was, "divinely commissioned to spread this dharm [of Guru Nanak for Kaliyuga] and to destroy its enemies." Guru Gobind Singh was supported by the Khalsa. These were the "Sikhs who had been initiated into the faith by Guru Nanak and his acknowledged successors and whose descendants were linked with Guru Gobind Singh directly...Their welfare and their future was his primary concern."

Again, quoting cotemporary sources including the Hukamnamas and works like *Dabistan-e-Mazahib*, Grewal shows the evolution of the term "Khalsa". With the elimination of the middlemen called "masands" and the sectarian Sikhs associated with other descendants of earlier Gurus, the Khalsa attached directly to the Guru remained as the true Sikhs. They were the Khalsa. "The stanzas written in praise of the Sikhs embody Guru Gobind Singh's appreciation for this category of Sikhs." They were the main concern of Guru Gobind Singh. They were going to defeat the evil forces and become the rulers of a free land.

Grewal brings out a most interesting change in the manner in which the Guru's sangats were addressed. In earlier Hukamnamas the Guru addressed the sangats as "my" Khalsa. But Grewal points out that , "The evidence of a hukamnama of Guru Gobind Singh shows that "the Khalsa of the Guru" had become "the Khalsa of Sri Vaheguruji" before his death. The ultimate victory of Vaheguruji's Khalsa was certain. This is confirmed by the hukamnamas of Banda Bahadur, Mata Sundari, Mata Sahib Deva and the Khalsa. The "Nasihatnama" indicates that the establishment of Sikh rule had become a belief of the Khalsa during the lifetime of Guru Gobind Singh. The "*Gursobha*" by Sainapat Singh, a contemporary of Guru Gobind Singh ji mentions recapture of Anandpur. "The Khalsa were meant to be sovereign".

Guru Gobind Singh Ji's own mission was clear in order to conclude the personal Guru line. To uproot the forces of oppressions, which threatened the very existence of the Khalsa of Guru Nanak Sahib. "The chances of success lay in transforming his followers into a political community....a new form of initiation, a new appearance, new aspirations, and a new sense of unity transformed the Khalsa into a political community with a strong conviction that their destiny was to hold political power for protecting and promoting the dispensation of Guru Nanak. The end of personal Guruship with the vesting of Guruship in Shabad-Bani and Khalsa came as the culmination of the Sikh movement to enable the Khalsa to stand on their feet as political community committed to uphold and propagate the Sikh tradition in the world."

In conclusion, as we celebrate Vaisakhi 2009, we need to be clear about “Raj karega Khalsa” aspiration of the Sikhs as recited in conclusion of Sikh Ardaas. The “miri” (temporal) aspect is an inseparable part of Sikh ideology and identity. It is meant to be a political statement and needs to be interpreted accordingly, albeit not in a narrow sense. **Wherever they live, as a theo-political community, the Sikhs are duty bound to be active participants in the establishment of a just society which accords with the egalitarian ideology of Guru Nanak. The Khalsa of the Guru supports such regimes and opposes oppressive regimes. And in this struggle between good and evil, the Khalsa of Sri Vaheguruji shall always be victorious.**



SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB JI - Guriyai Nirnay (in Punjabi)

By Dr. Rajinder Singh

Published by Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle

Page: 72, Price: Rs. 20/-

*A Review by Avtar Singh**

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At a time when the Sikhs across the world are celebrating the 300th Anniversary of Gurtagaddi of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the author of this slim volume has done a commendable job by penning down interesting facts and historical references - about Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, while clearing certain doubts about the historical event - by some errant sects within the Sikhism.

Ever since Guru Nanak started his mission through extensive journeys thorough South and West Asia, to awaken the humanity about the Universality of God through, soulful *gurbani*, many challenges and obstacles were put up on his way by the entrenched orthodox priesthood. The priestly class of various religions had vested interests and were incapable of understanding the uniquely practical religion initiated by Guru Nanak, they continued their obscurantist rituals during the period of successive Guruship.

Finally, the Tenth Master Guru Gobind Singh, following the tradition set up by Guru Nanak, formally declared that, thenceforth, Shabd Guru “Guru Granth Sahib” shall be the only True Spiritual guide for the followers of Sikh Faith. Thus the tradition of human guruship was terminated, to enthrone the Holy Word.

Despite this historical declaration by Guru Gobind Singh, an important sect of Sikhism, namely “*Naamdhari*” still adhere to the old tradition of physical *guruship* by denying to the historical tradition. The followers of this sect have invented stories – without any historical reference – such as Guru Gobind Singh survived beyond 1708 upto the age of 146 years, and gave guruship to Baba Balak Singh - instead of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. They even started a parallel guruship through Baba Ram Singh (who was otherwise a true follower and preacher of Shabad Guru) Baba Hari Singh. Their present religious head is Baba Jagjit Singh (Satguru Jagjit Singh) with headquarters at Bhaini Sahib in Punjab. Naamdharis not only believe in physical guruship but also follow rituals that Gurus have discarded.

The author has made a sincere effort to bring the truth forward about the historicity of Guru Granth Sahib, and exposed motivated self-serving 'guruship'. The book has six well researched sections supported with detailed historical information. While presenting the truth, the author has shown all humility towards the deviant sect and has even made a polite appeal that they should accept the historical incidence of 1708, which is in accordance with Gurmat, and join the mainstream Sikhism.

By publishing this informative book, the Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle has shown its commitment to Gurmat and authentic history, in the right perspective. At a time when fake Babas and Saints- are emerging like mushrooms, and becoming a challenge, this book should be compulsory reading.



OPERATION BLUESTAR A HOLY WAR OF THE SIKHS?

By Dr. Bhagwant Singh Mokol

Published by author

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*A Review by Prof. Hardev Singh Virk**

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The book under review is a collection of essays published by the author in ***The Sikh Review*** and other magazines. It is a strange mix of three essays on Operation Blue Star and the remaining three, on a 'Peep into the North-East'. Perhaps, the author wants to highlight his contribution of starting a dialogue between Sikh Students Federation and the Militant organizations of North-East. The six essays are followed by four Appendices. There have been about half a dozen books on 'Operation Blue Star' both in English and Punjabi. The only justification for this booklet may be author's claim of being an eye-witness to the Operation Blue Star in the capacity of a close confidant of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwala. My only motivation in reviewing this book is that I know some of the key-players who participated in the action along with Bhagwan Singh.

In the Introduction, the author pleads the case of Dalits and other minorities who are facing a threat from Hindutva forces let loose during the rule of BJP from 1996 to 2004. He compares BJP policies to the Nazi policies of the Second World War time. The author considers position of India's national integration as alarming in face of threats posed by various militant organisations operating from Assam right upto Tamilnadu. The author repeats the old argument that the Sikhs were a third party during transfer of power by the British but they felt cheated by the Congress leaders. It seems the author supports the thesis of Sirdar Kapoor Singh regarding partition of India.

Chapter 1 deals with the causes and ramification of Operation Blue Star. It is mostly rehash of old facts published in magazines and known to most awakened readers in Punjab. Chapter 2 is repeat of an article published in ***The Sikh Review*** (June 2003). The author recounts his eye-witness account of the events that took place in Golden Temple

complex from 4th to 6th June, 1984. In author's own words: "I always feel that my providential duty to be there at this very sensitive and hectic period of Sikh history was to depict these events as an eyewitness account in writing for the posterity". It makes interesting reading how the author and his comrades fought with Indian military under the command of General Subeg Singh. It is true that Sant Bhindranwala acted as a role model for Sikh youth defending Golden Temple complex during Operation Blue Star, but I fail to appreciate why the author and his comrades ran away from the field of action without facing the bullets in the spirit of true Khalsa!

Chapter 3 recounts the impact of Operation Blue Star on the Sikh psyche. The author makes a correct assessment: "What happened in Delhi and other places to the Sikhs after Indira Gandhi's assassination simply added oil to the already burning fire and it filled the hearts of the Sikh youth to take revenge". Many young Sikh students ran away from their homes and joined militant ranks during this phase. The author is at his best when he narrates his escapades from Punjab, Calcutta and Ranchi, dodging CID and police following him day and night. On page 31, the author remarks: "Sikhs everywhere in the world were first shaken by the attack on Golden Temple and then after assassination of Indira Gandhi, by their massacre. The Sikhs came to know that they were slaves in India. But how to break the chains of this slavery? This appeared to be a million dollar question."

The author narrates how Mr. Mann panicked and failed to muster enough moral courage to accept his proposal to become legitimate political leader of the Sikh militant organizations. On page 38, the author laments : "I have not yet found any logic behind his (Mann's) act of refusal to take command of the Sikh militant organizations. Mann also squandered chance to become chief minister of Punjab and of rehabilitation of the militants, and the history of Punjab and the Sikhs would have been different now".

Despite a long list of mis-spelt words given in corrigendum, I advise the author to get his story checked and corrected by a subject expert for removing the flaws in his English version. No reviewer will take the trouble of recording mistakes and howlers found almost on every page of the book.

