

# SO SPAKE KABIRA

By Kartar Singh Duggal

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*A Review by Dr. J.S. Neki\**

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Kabir (1398-?1495 AD) was a great medieval saint who contributed considerably to the spread of *Bhakti* movement in North India. According to one tradition, he was born to a Brahmin widow who abandoned him, soon after his birth. A Muslim weaver couple rescued him and adopted him as their child. However, nothing much is known for sure about his life.

His works, however, are considered to be extant. There are two independent collections of his works - *Kabir Bijak* of Dharam Das and *Kabir Granthavali*. However, there is considerable doubt among scholars about the veracity of the authorship of much of the content of both these texts. It is believed that much of their content is counterfeit material not really Kabir's but erroneously ascribed to him. The most authentic source of his genuine compositions is the Sikh holy book, *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*. Not only was this scripture compiled closest to Kabir's time (in 1604 AD), but the most competent compiler-cum-editor of that celebrated holy book, Guru Arjun Dev, could not have let any counterfeit stuff get into his *Pothi*. Kabir's 227 *padas* and 237 *slokas* that found a place in that pluralist scripture are undoubtedly the most outstanding of Kabir's genuine works. That seems to be the reason why Kartar Singh Duggal has chosen that text for translation into English.

Kabir has already been translated into the English language by scores of writers some of whom have been considered highly competent. They include Prabhakar Machwe, Nirmal Das, V K Sethi, Krishna P Bahadur, W M Callewaert, I A Ezekiel, Monica Hortsman, Muhammad Hedayatullah. Even Rabindranath Tagore has translated a sizable portion of Kabir's works. It would surely require considerable courage to attempt yet another translation because it would be judged in comparison with the already available translations. Duggal seems to have mustered the required courage.

Kartar Singh Duggal (born 1917) is one of our most outstanding writers. He has been severally and copiously decorated by academies of letters, universities, and academic departments of some state governments. His stature, however, is much beyond the decorations that he has received. Besides being a man of letters, he is also a scholar of the Sikh lore. His four volumes of 'Select Sikh Scriptures' amply testify that.

His translation of Kabir's work seems to have been part of a much bigger undertaking, namely, translation of the entire text of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In that also, Duggal is preceded by Dr. Gopal Singh, Gurbachan Singh Talib, Manmohan Singh and the author of 'Gurbani Researcher'. It may be of interest to see how Duggal's translation compares with that of some of his predecessors. A couple of Kabir's *slokas* sprang up in my mind and I looked up how they have been variously translated.

*A. Sloka 55 on page 1367 of SGGS:*

Duggal            Says: Kabir, my mind is clean

Like the holy Ganges water,

Calling 'Kabir, Oh Kabir'.

The Lord is now seeking me after.

Gopal Singh: Kabir, Pure is now my mind like Ganges water.

And lo, the Lord followeth me, saying "Though art mine, Thou art mine".

GS Talib: Saith Kabir: Purified is the heart like Ganges water

Then follows after him God, shouting, 'Kabir! Kabir!'

G. Researcher: Kabeer, my mind has become immaculate, like the water of the Ganges. The Lord follows after me, calling "Kabeer! Kabeer!"

*B. Sloka 120 on page 1370 of SGGS*

Duggal            Says: Kabir, with the Guru's Grace.

To the thoughts of heaven and hell I am not tied.

From the outset till the end,

At the feat of His lotus feet I abide.

Gopal Singh: Kabir hath risen above heaven and hell by the Guru's Grace.

And now he liveth intoxicated with the Lord's Lotus Feet, in the beginning as at the end.

GS Talib Saith: Kabir: by grace of the holy Preceptor have

I discarded thoughts of heaven and hell,

Ever in joy of God's lotus feet abiding.

G Researcher: Kabeer, I have been spared from heaven and hell, by the Grace of the True Guru.

From beginning to end, I abide in the joy of the Lord's Lotus Feet.

It is not our intention to go over the relative merits and demerits of these translators. They would be evident to discerning readers. We only wish to bring out some of the characteristics of Duggal's translation as they emerge in contradistinction to the others. Duggal does not employ archaic expressions like 'saith' or 'hath' or 'thou' and 'art' but employs simple language. The simplicity of his linguistic expression almost matches that of Gurbani Researcher. I have said 'almost' because Duggal has attempted rhyming; and rhyming imposes its own limitations. None the less, rhyming makes the translation recitable more or less like the original. Where exact rhyming has not been possible, Duggal has tried to manage with assonance, or near assonance. However, it is clear that Duggal empathises well with the *spirit* of the original.

The book has been well brought out and has a befitting get-up. This is in keeping with the excellent tradition of the publishers.



## **GURU GRANTH SAHIB: GURU OF HUMANITY**

**By Dr. Kuldip Singh, FRCS**

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***A critical appreciation by Dr. Noel Q King\****

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A scholar who has, for many years now, studied the history and heart-rhythms of Sikhism as a major religion of world standing, will tell you that **it is in the face of its worst challenges that Sikhism rises to its strongest and**

**most remarkable achievements.** Thus we can see how much it suffered in those years between the institution of the Khalsa at Anandpur Sahib in 1699 CE, and the passing of the Tenth Master. Even so, in 1708, in answer to the untold suffering undergone before the setting up of the kingdom of Lahore in 1799, it was the Sikhs that drove back finally the invasions from central Asia to beyond the mountain rim. Then, when the British had, by treachery, suborned the family of Maharajah Ranjit Singh and taken over the Punjab, the Sikh faith rallied. By 1870 Sikhism was able to go on to a magnificent renewal of the faith. It was able to provide the blood sacrifice which the attainment of Indian independence demanded. In 1947, and the following years, without clear sighted and firm leadership, it was subjected to the atrocities of 1984, the Delhi riots and the decimation of the young manhood which occurred in the next ten years.

In the meantime, and in these years since then, Sikhism has gone forward to a Diaspora, "a seed scattered abroad," which reaches into every country in the world. Again, we have been beset by bad leadership and corruption in high places. We have looked inwards and wondered who we are.

Now, from Dr. Kuldip Singh, FRCS and his distinguished wife, there comes a clarion call to the Sikhs to turn outwards to the whole world and tell other religions that Sikhism has entered their fraternity and is making itself known to all.

It is beyond belief to have to behold examples of atrocious ignorance of Sikhism - both up and down India as well as abroad. An honest dealer in gasoline in the USA, because he is wearing a turban and beard, is shot in the head and the miscreant, as he gives himself up, says, "I love America." (It is perhaps significant that the victim had the surname "Sodhi.") It needed the wide publication of photos of the president at an affable meeting with Sikhs to try and dispel this kind of miasma of darkness and ignorance, but the true and effective telling forth of Sikhism will be proclaimed by hard work and dedication on our part.

The booklet published by Dr. Kuldip Singh, FRCS ("Nanaksdas") shows us the way ahead. First, that the great teachings of the other major religions like Hinduism and Islam, Christianity and Judaism, are accepted by Sikhs and each truth is represented in Sikhism. Then there is also a summary of Sikh teaching and a call to study the primary scripture of the Sikhs, that is the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. When there are five Sikhs gathered together and the Guru Granth Sahib is present, then the living Guru, the Eternal One, is among us and speaks to us.

This is a world mission that we have to carry to all human kind and indeed to every creature, animate and inanimate, to the end of the Cosmos. Herein the Gurus gave us our marching orders. We must proceed to the work - or we will be guilty of a most heinous dereliction of duty.

