

THE SIKHS: THEIR RELIGION, SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND WAY OF LIFE

By Jasbir Singh Khurana

Published by Angus & Grapher

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*A Review by H.S. Sodhi**

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The author is a retired army officer who has travelled abroad and had the opportunity to meet the younger generation of Sikhs, who appear estranged from their religion and customs because of the Western influences they live under, and also parental lack of time/inclination to impart the needed knowledge. He finds that the younger generation is keen to learn. That becomes his motivation for writing this book, to provide the essential knowledge in all spheres of a Sikh's life, in an easily readable manner. The book will also be of use in India.

The author plans to write three books to cover his entire project. In this his first book of the trilogy, he deals with the lives and teachings of the Gurus; the various Sikh orders; Sikh philosophy and theology; way of life; status of women's religious and domestic ceremonies; festivals, emerging trends and the need for reform. Book Two will be a historical perspective, including the Sikh empire and battles. Book Three will deal with historical Gurdwaras.

The author has provided relevant information on all the aspects, as laid down and formulated by the Sikh religious authorities. These are set down in easily understandable terms and should be a good guide to those interested in this. **The book has turned out to be a 'coffee table' type which has one basic problem in trying to read it: the size is not too convenient for reading, especially for the younger generation with their normal contortionist reading positions! But the author certainly achieves his aim of imparting the needed knowledge.** He gives due importance to the status of women in the Sikh religion by quoting : "Of women we are born, of women conceived; to women engaged, to women married. By women that the entire social order is maintained. Then why call her evil, of whom are great men born?" He describes all ceremonies connected with the Sikh way of life, which should prove most useful.

Without being explicit, the author has managed to point out some major aspects needing attention. Dr. Gopal Singh, in his book, "**History of the Sikh People**" uses the term 'Sikh Khalsa' which appears to be most appropriate to denote the major segments of the religious adherents and needs to be used more often, especially now that the outward shape of Sikhs is evolving into many contours.

The book contains photographs of paintings of the Gurus displayed in some museums set up by various Gurdwaras; the author also gives the Rahat Maryada in some detail. **On page 277 is the injunction "worshipping of statues or even bowing to pictures of Gurus is strictly forbidden."** Are the religious authorities exercising the required supervision and even practicing it themselves? An actual incident is pertinent. A renowned

Sikh artist happened to have a Sikh battalion located near his place. He approached the Commanding Officer and got permission to inspect the entire parade to select men who he thought could represent the Gurus! And the paintings of the same Guru are not the same. Is this not idol worship? The only painting which may turn out to be actual is that of Guru Gobind Singh, (which is included in the book "The Sikh Heritage" by Dr. Daljeet Singh) when he was supposed to have visited Mandi state, as a guest of Raja Siddhwan and the state artists made his paintings. This would, of course, need further investigation to confirm its authenticity.

The book is a most welcome addition to the material available of the Sikh religion, which will surely be of much use to all, being one of the very few with so much detail of every day life and practices.



SIKH TWAREEKH: HISTORY OF THE SIKHS (in Punjabi)

By Harjinder Singh Dilgeer

Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar

Pages: 1790 (5 Vols.) Price: Not Mentioned

A Review by Dr. Gurdev Singh Sidhu*

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Dr Harjinder Singh Dilgeer's comprehensive chronicle in Punjabi - runs into a monumental 1922 pages, including illustrations. The first volume (*Nanak Raaj Chalaya*) covers the life & times of ten Gurus: 1469 to 1708, earlier history of the Punjab and the land of south Asia from the Indus Valley Civilization is briefly covered. This part has further been divided into geographical, political and religious history of the sub continent. The 2nd volume (*Khalsa Ji De Bol Balei*) covers 1708 to 1849. It highlights the exploits of Baba Banda Singh Bahadur and the role of Nawab Kapur Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and other Misl leaders and the era of the magnificent Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

The 3rd volume (*Sikh Qaum Di Dooji Jadojehad*) covers the British period i.e. 1849 to 1947, and includes a detailed account of the Singh Sabha movement, the Ghadr Party, the Akali and Babar Akali movement. The 4th volume covers 1947 to 1984, while the 5th volume depicts the events from of 1984 to 2007.

There are several remarkable aspects about this monumental work by a widely respected scholar of history. Dr. Dilgeer lives abroad. He came to Punjab to write and publish this book. This done, he is gone back. It goes to the credit of Dr Dilgeer who achieved it single-handedly. The book has over 600 pictures, many rare and hitherto unpublished. The author has, in the beginning, given a highly compressed and readable summary. Similarly, at the close he gives an assessment of the leadership of the Sikhs. There are more than 40 maps and about 50 documents, including letters of Mahatma Gandhi, Jathedar Kartar Singh Jhabbar, as also fascimiles from Bhatt Vahis and newspapers depicting news about the birth of Sikh League, SGPC and other historical events. The bibliography is of great benefit for students and reserachers.

Dr Dilgeer deserves universal appreciation for his insight and devotion.



NANAKIAN PHILOSOPHY: BASICS FOR HUMANITY

By Devinder Singh Chahal

Published by Institute for Understanding Sikhism
4418 Rue Martin-Plouffe, LAVAL, Quebec. H7W 5L9 Canada

Pages: 384 Price: Rs. 450 [US\$ 30.00]

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A Review by Saran Singh

The author is a scholar's scholar. As one opens the covers of this voluminous book, one is struck by a breathtaking set of pictures (not listed in "Contents") among these is the Gurmukhi Mulmatra, inscribed in stone, in Azerbaijan's capital city Baku.

The choice of the above title for an exposition of basic principles of Sikhism is apt, if not felicitous. It is no coincidence that the distinguished author of this remarkable book, on the philosophy of the world's youngest and most vibrant religion, as embodied in the work and lives of Guru Nanak and his nine successors, served a full term as Professor of Applied Microbiology at University of Quebec, Canada. He is deeply devout. By his own admission he applies a scientific methodology to explore the theological and moral basis of Guru Nanak's message.

The relevance of this book irresistibly reminds one of the eminent 20th Century historian, Prof. Arnold Toynbee's famous pronouncement in his Foreword to the UNESCO's 'Sacred Writings of the Sikhs': "Mankind's religious future may be obscure; yet one thing can be foreseen: In this coming debate, the Sikh religion, and its scriptures the Adi Granth, will have something of special value to say to the rest of the world..." It is time the Sikhs - at the least - re-discover this truth.

The advent of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) doubtless coincided with the state of supine pacifism in India which gave every invader a cakewalk across this ancient land. The polytheism of the ancient Hindu ideology, that spurred the series of invasions from Northwest, even as Islam had already made inroads into Sind to subdue the Indo-Gangetic plains, right upto Bengal. Indeed Hinduism riven by caste and preoccupied with ascetism and concern for liberation of the individual soul - become introspective, leaving the masses dangerously vulnerable.

With the series of centenaries 1999-2009, the Sikh faith has been on a fast track, each event spurring scholars to delve deep into the tutology and heiroglyphics. To some of our readers, this might sound as hyperbolic because the mass of Punjabi Sikhs treat SGGS as a glorified idol - an object of ritualist worship - read by uniligingual Granthi.

But alongside this sterile system, there has been a forward movement on world canvas: The Parliament of World's Religions, Chicago 1993. It's session at Barcelona - 2004 has made scholars/theologians sit up and take notice. In a bizarre reaction, Christian missions have moved into rural Punjab to convert Sikhs! The irony is that Indian Constitution (formulated in 1950) studiously ties Sikhism to the Hindu apron strings.

A chapter is devoted to placing Guru Nanak's philosophy in the perspective of Semitic religions: Jewish faith, Christianity and Islam, as also in Hinduism - We find Brahma mentioned so often in Gurbani.