

## **HYMNS OF THE GURUS**

**By Khushwant Singh**

**Published by Viking (Penguin Books India)**

**Pages 222 Price: (Hard Cover) Rs. 250.**

Khushwant Singh invariably writes with deep insights and superb aplomb. He may be best known for his irreverent column ("This Above All" / 'With Malice Towards One & All') or his 424 page autobiography: "Truth, Love & A Little Malice" (Viking / Ravi Dayal). But the most durable of his works would always be: A History of the Sikhs (two vols.) and his evocative translations of Gurbani – in UNESCO "Selections from Sacred Writings of the Sikhs" (with other eminent scholars). The present handy volume is an extension of the same.

A 23-page introduction provides the background of Sikhism's foundation – mainly in unadorned, impersonal prose. A new feature of this translation from the holy Guru Granth is that the selections of hymns follows the chronological order of the Gurus, with the hymns of Guru Nanak's taking 149 pages, followed with Guru Angad (three hymns), Guru Amar Das (ten hymns out of 907 in SGGs), Guru Ram Das 9 hymns out of 679) Guru Arjun Dev (45 out of 2218 hymns) Guru Tegh Bahadur 11 out of 115), concluding with a selection of 27 hymns of Guru Gobind Singh – from the Tenth Master's Divinely inspired poetry culled from the "Dasam Granth".

Doubtless the Guru Vani in original is truly inspirational, when sung in the given Ragas. But for those who are unfamiliar with (or unable to decipher the Gurmukhi / Devnagari / Sindhi text of) Guru Granth Sahib the English translation – by the master-craftsman that is Khushwant Singh – should be a boon. He can command the right terminology, and create the ambience for conveying the spirit of Guru Vani message – if not the cadence.

The minor errors [e.g. *Sabhna marna aya vichhoda Sabhna* – page 118] must be the outcome of oversight or hurry in meeting the deadlines!

This handy volume is indeed a golden treasury of the Sikh lore.

**- Saran Singh**

## **JAPJI: The Spiritual Message of Guru Nanak**

**By Dr. Wazir Singh**

**Published by National Book Shop, Chandni Chowk, Delhi 110006.**

**Pages: 128 Price: (Hard Cover) Rs. 200.**

Guru Nanak's Japji encapsulates the elemental wisdom of the Guru Granth Sahib for the benefit of humanity as a whole, irrespective of religious boundaries. Its cryptic text is studded with eternal truths. While most Gurbani is set to musical measures (Ragas) Japji consists of 38 capsules, in simple verse, that embody profound philosophy.

A teacher of philosophy, Dr. Wazir Singh has long served as Head of Religious Studies in Punjabi University. His in-depth exposition of Guruvani metaphysics has benefited hundreds of students and scholars of theology. His 'version' on Japji is a straightforward presentation of the sacred text, stanza-by-stanza, with an unpretentious rendering into English.

Curiously, however, the book also incorporate essays by Prof. Teja Singh, Duncan Greenlees' explanatory Note on Japji, and Dr. Gopal Singh's 'Notes', as also annotations from other earlier translators, like Gurbachan Singh Talib, G.S. Randhawa and Ram Singh. This churning - and overload - makes for an unnecessary obfuscation.

- Saran Singh

## **'ta m{ kihAa khNu'/ Ta Mein Kahiya Kahen**

**By Kartar Singh Duggal**

**Published by Nav-Yug Publishers, K-24 Hauz Khas, New Delhi 110016**

**Pages: 64 [in Coffee Table size] Price (Hard Cover) Rs. 175.**

The legendary Punjabi writer and senior Fellow, Sahitya Academy, Kartar Singh Duggal has been a brilliant story-teller and novelist, a scintillating prose writer as well as a down to earth interpreter of the Sikh scriptures [*"Guru-Vak – the Word Divine"*] for over half a century.

In this slim volume, the much-mellowed Octogenarian is at his mystical best, in soulful Punjabi poetry, mainly inspired by Gurbani's oceanic wisdom. He acknowledges the source of his inspiration to the inimitable Guru Nanak whose enduring wisdom never ceases to amaze students of Gurbani: 'e[klzl bn mah]' – for instance – represents the melancholy fate of the modern man lost in the hedonic jungle! Each lyric (if one can characterize blank verse as such) harks back to Gurbani [hxu AaieAa wUrhu cil k{] and then lingers on the theme: 'Allah pank-n-pak', 'do not touch the kusum buds', 'twinkling stars on moonless night', thoughts on the infinite, and such other phenomena.

Altogether a chastening, elemental experience.

- Saran Singh

## **History of the Punjabees**

**By J N Nanda**

**Published by Concept Publishing Co. (P.) Ltd.,**

**A/15-16, Mohan Garden, New Delhi 110059**

**Pages: 136 Price: Rs. 350**

The irrepressible nonagenarian Jatinder Nath Nanda (born 1920) has come up with a challenging treatise on the domain and the identity of the robust race who are recognizable as Punjabis. He traces their hoary origin (to stone age?), in the valley of Five Rivers. He celebrates their sense of pride (like Scottish clans) and their valour. Tracing the distinctive culture from Taxila (Harappan period) through the Vedic era, the Mahabharata site of Kurukshetra (between 2500 to 1400 BC) – upto the invasion of Alexander, and his retreat in 323 BC.

The author races through the Sultanate, and the advent of Guru Nanak in the background of the Mughal invasion. He observes: "Hindus of the Punjab are the chastised remnants of ancient Punjabees" – whatever that might imply. Chapter 6 focuses on the Sikhs: "The Hindus soon began to regard Guru Nanak as an incarnation of Lord Rama ..."

The Hindus' disowning Punjabi language is explained thus: "The Punjabi Hindus, frightened by the Communist leaning of the Akali leadership and insistence on the definition of a Sikh to be strictly one with unshorn hair and not just a claim to be a disciple of the Gurus, had started claiming Hindi to be their mother-tongue like the non-Sikhs of Haryana."

The journalist jargon and the volatile thought sequence, randomly travelling back and forth in Time, make the book easy to read – and easier to forget.

- Saran Singh

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## **Swami Agnivesh: Religion, Spirituality & Social Action: A New Agenda for Humanity**

**By Swami Agnivesh with a Foreword by Justice VR Krishna Iyer**

**Published by HOPE INDIA PUBLICATIONS for Dharma Pratisthan. 7 Jantar Mantar,  
New Delhi.**

**Pages: 192 Price: Rs. 149**

Called the “cyclonic Sadhu”, Swami Agnivesh defies description or categorization. Starting as an activist preacher for the Arya Samaj, he is evidently a peripatetic and popular social worker – crusading for many social causes, with the vermilion robes as his trademark.

