

Sikhs and Sikhism in Eastern India: (c.1600-1950) A Research Project

Sir: I have been to Assam recently to have a glimpse of the Assamese Sikhs from a close quarter. This prompts me to write about my experiences with them. The Assamese-Sikhs' lifestyle and language, food habit and nature of worship in places far away from Punjab keeps us aware of the richness and variety of the legacy of Sikhism. We often highlight Sikh diaspora in the countries *beyond* India. Their wide economic success and rich intellectual contributions might have made us increasingly *lyrical* about their success story. But the process of Sikh migration had its earlier beginning within India in the medieval days, which we tend to ignore.

The Assamese-Sikhs who are broadly of two distinct groups, provide us a two tier composite world of Sikhism which we may be missing in the West. One is the local Sikhs who regard Assam to be their home, and Assamese their mother-tongue, have not generally been to Punjab, while those successful Punjabi-Sikh contractors, owners of fleets of trucks and running factories for repairing tea-industry machinery or other jobs, who run the Gurdwaras in major urban centres, generally look to Punjab for emotional support. There are many other forms of levels of interaction and distinctiveness which I have been studying in my visits to Assam.

From my new position at Jadavpur University, I hope shortly to complete my ongoing work (stretching over more than two decades). I may not say anything significant about Guru Nanak Dev's visit to Orissa and Assam, but I expect to record and present something significant and meaningful about Guru's disciples in eastern region.

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“Sikh Stereotyping” & “The Sikhs & Mainstream”

Sir: I have watched with interest the recent *mega Parvasi mela* in Delhi and am struck with another area where we, and this time the Sikh Diaspora itself, have been found napping. Sikhs have been amongst the *earliest immigrants* from India and their contribution to the Indian Diaspora in history, as well as contemporaneously, has been significantly more than what one would gather from the reported proceedings of this event.

Unfortunately, we are not getting any mileage out of major spending by the Indian Govt. on programs intended to promote India to the rest of the world or to reach out to and mobilise the NRI's/PIO's. I have briefly reflected on these aspects in my article 'Sikhs and Mainstream America' awaiting publication with *The Sikh Review*.

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“1984” - Sympathy from the Vatican: Role of Siri Singh Sahib Yogiji

Sir: “The soul searching” editorial in *The Sikh Review* (January 2003) recalls Pope John Paul II’s timely plea on behalf of the innocents during the 1984 massacre at Harimandir Sahib. As Siri Singh Sahib Ji’s official biographer, I believe it deserves mention that it was he who cultivated the relationship with the Pontiff and increased his awareness of the Sikhs and Sikhism. Siri Singh Sahib Ji’s first visit to the Vatican was in 1972. At that time, he recommended the Pope Paul VI, as the leader of the world’s largest religious denomination to convene an inter-religious gathering for peace.

Siri Singh Sahib Ji then met Pope John Paul II twice before the 1984 holocaust in Amritsar, when both their homelands - Poland and Punjab - were under threat of violence. They met once again, when Siri Singh Sahib Ji presented the Pontiff with a six foot tall silver crucifix as a token of thanks for his prayers. This is all documented in various issues of the magazine *Beads of Truth*.

Finally, in 1986, Pope John Paul II did convene an international gathering of religious leaders at Assisi, Italy. In that same year, at the summer solstice, Siri Singh Sahib Ji began the Peace Prayer Day tradition at Ram Das Puri, in northern New Mexico., USA.

A number of Sikh representatives have since engaged the Pontiff, but I believe it important that everyone have a proper grasp of the historic details of the initial relations between a representative of Akal Takht Sahib and the Holy See.

Truly, blessings abound...Waheguruji ka Khalsa! Waheguruji ki Fateh!

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Sir: The February issue of *The Sikh Review* (dedicated to the historian, Sr. Khushwant Singh) made absorbing reading, especially the article on the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh Ji. I seem to be far behind in my history since I never came across this stirring account. One wonders where could be the said version of the Adi Granth in which the writings of each Guru were produced under separate chapters! Can it be traced, or is it just a legend?

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Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Respected dear Satsangee,

In 1604 A.D. Sri Guru Granth Sahib was installed in the Golden Temple Amritsar. We shall be celebrating the anniversary of its 400 years, by the year 2004 A.D. On this unique occasion Dada Chellaram Publications will be offering translation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in several languages, including English, Sindhi, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Marathi, Bangali and Urdu. A set of five volumes will be published in each language. In this way total 40 volumes are to be brought out and each volume will cost us about Rs. 2,50,000/- In this connection three volumes in Gujarati, and one each in Punjabi, Marathi, Bangali and Urdu will be out soon. I am keenly anxious to bring out remaining volumes in near future.

My father, Rev. Dada Chellaram Ji had inspired me to read, recite, sing, understand and translate the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib. During our '*kirtan Yatras*' around the world, we felt that the Amrosial Bani of Sri Guru Granth Sahib should reach the common man everywhere so that the precious gift imparted by 36 composers of this wonderful spiritual Scripture should not remain inaccessible on account of language problem. It is unfortunate that until the 20th century, this Divine Scripture had not been completely explored within India what to speak of the world!

Sri Guru Granth Sahib is one of the finest jewels of the spiritual treasures. It is one of those celestial texts which has universal and global appeal. Its message of love for God and humanity, truth and goodness, beauty and charity is a soothing balm for the suffering humanity.

With your blessings and co-operation, I am anxious to complete the task, which I have undertaken. I shall remain grateful to all those who graciously dedicate their offerings for completing this priceless project.

As usual, this year also, we will be visiting Dubai, U.K., U.S.A. and Canada from April onwards for "*Aap Japo Avrah Naam Japavo*" spreading the eternal message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib for the welfare of one and all.

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