

Science and Religion

Sir, Thank you for publishing my article on the **Identity Crisis** [SR: March 07, pp. 59-63]. I have two observations. One, the issues to be deliberated are summarized in one para. That may not be enough for readers to reflect. Two, I did not mention Operation Blue Star. A true Sikh is different in actions because he has faith in Akal Purkh. I think the Sikh security guard was emotionally disturbed. I may be wrong.

In the same issue I read **Science and Religion** (by Inder Mohan Singh of USA) with interest, I look at science and religion from angles of Guru Nanak's Philosophy. I believe **science seeks truth and harmony in Nature, so does religion, but we look at them with our own biased perceptions.**

Comparisons are perhaps rather contrary to the philosophy of Guru Nanak as enshrined in Japuji. **In this perspective, unlike revelations, Guru Granth embodies a collection of universal truths.** So, a true Sikh does not require external forms of Waheguru, or supernatural happenings.

I am a Physics teacher, but I do not seek 'hard science' in the voice of Nanak. Science implies scientific thinking also. **Guru Nanak has used the contemporary knowledge to explain his views on spiritual, moral and social problems.** His views are based on two premises, namely, truth and harmony in Nature, of course, in conformity with values of science like open mind, fair justice and acceptance of truth.

Guru Nanak's method is simple enquiry and discussion –twin pillars of science- on the principle of benign to one and all. For example, Guru Nanak raises pertinent questions in **Japuji**. How can we lead a truthful life? How can we break the wall of untruth? Then he begins to answer it. The laws of Nature are absolute. Let us accept that simple truth without any doubts. Guru Nanak says: **Manne pavey mokh dwar.** Who accepts Lord's fiat, shall find the deliverance gate open.

It is in this respect that I agree with Inder Mohan Singh that Guru Nanak encouraged questioning of irrational beliefs and practices for discovering perennial truths. Seeking hard science as explained by the learned author appears an exercise entering into revelations / metaphysics.

Guru Nanak's thinking reflects a dynamic Sikh way of life, not a religion founded on rituals, traditions and dogmas. A religion is stagnant if it does not accept universal condition of love for fellow beings—the fabric of harmony in Nature.

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Miracle of Gurbani

Thanks for reprinting 'A Personal Testament' of the Scientist Mr. Vasu Bhardwaj [**The Sikh Review**, March 2007, pp 31-35].

Truly, the Almighty God is a Great Healer. Sometime GOD is explained as "Generator, Operater, Developer". It is good to know that all his ills were cured five years ago. I am sure before printing this true episode, you must have talked to him on phone. If so, will you share with your readers, where he is posted and what kind of work he has been doing?*

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@ We understand that Mr Bhardwaj passed peacefully away a few months ago.

The ETC Punjabi channel has recorded his testament during one of the early 2004 episode of the late Gyani Sant Singh Maskin's Katha at Gurdwara Manji Sahib, Amritsar.

- Ed SR

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A Response to Dr. Amarjit Singh's article "Bona-Fides of Dr. Mooney Dhillon and Dr Doris Jakobsh"

In his article "Bona-Fides of Dr. Nicola Mooney Dhillon and Dr Doris Jakobsh" [SR March 2007] Dr Amarjit Singh takes exception to my introducing Dr. Nicola Mooney as a "budding Sikh scholar", as also to part of my interview with Dr. Doris Jakobsh.

I regret to say that Dr. Amarjit Singh's comments on Dr. Mooney are both unfair and uncalled for. As an ethnographer married into the Sikh community, her understanding of the community is based on both her fieldwork and her existing connection to the community. She did her Ph.D on Jats, a major ethnic group of the Sikhs, from University of Toronto. She was teaching Anthropology at the Mount Allison University, Sackville, N.B., a place at least 200 KM away from our Gurdwara, when she brought a bus load of her students to our Gurdwara in Halifax. It was no casual visit, but an educational trip. All students were white. They got an excellent exposure to Sikhism in times when Sikhs are often confused with the Muslims, or misunderstood in 'terrorist contexts' following the verdict in the 1985 Air India trial.

During her second visit to our Gurdwara she discussed Sikhism with me at length, as she and her Sikh husband stayed at our place. For her interest in Sikhism, she is listed along with Sikh scholars, Nikky Guninder Kaur, I J Singh, artists Amrit & Rabindra Kaur Singh and others, by Sardar T Sher Singh on his web site <http://sikhchic.com>. Her article "Charkha Spins in Toronto", (<http://www.sikhchic.com/article-detail.php?id=1&cat=2>) is related to a new research project she is undertaking on the image of Sikhs in films. If I introduced her as a budding scholar of Sikh Studies, on her second visit to our Gurdwara when she was invited to address the sangat, I do not understand why it so upset Dr. Amarjit Singh. Although Dr. Mooney is a junior scholar, she has begun to publish and had an article on Sikh transnational marriage in last October's edition of the respected peer-reviewed journal *Global Networks: A Journal of Transnational Affairs*.

I do not know how Dr. Amarjit Singh feels about the remarkable research of Dr. Cynthia Mahmood, Dr. Joyce Pettigrew, Eleanor Nesbitt (and other white women who write on Sikh issues. Regrettably he has declared all research by Western writers on Sikh studies as 'superficial.' I do not understand why some Sikhs are determined to discourage non-Sikhs to study Sikhism and then claim that Sikhism is a universal religion.

Dr. Amarjit Singh's statement that Dr. Doris Jakobsh has not mentioned any Indian Sikh historian in the interview except Khushwant Singh is both biased and incorrect. In fairness to Dr. Jakobsh I must say that she has quite respectfully mentioned the names of the distinguished Sikh historians, Harbans Singh, J S Grewal, Kirpal Singh, Ganda Singh and Fauja Singh. I wonder how he missed their names.

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Sikh Studies in N. America: Dr. Nicola Mooney speaks her mind

I was both surprised and dismayed to read Dr. Amarjit Singh's response (SR March 2007)

to Mr. Jagpal Tiwana's kind article (SR July 2006) about my visit to the Maritime Sikh Society in Canada. Although I am indeed an anthropologist, as Dr. Singh surmised, I am very curious as to why he feels that **anthropology** cannot be included in the purview of the Sikh studies? While anthropology is not primarily concerned with the **textual traditions** of religion and culture, in being focused on what people say, do and experience in their everyday - and religious - lives, **it can be an important corollary resource to theology and history in understanding both culture and religion.** A number of ethnographers have written illuminatingly on Sikhs - including notably - Joyce Pettigrew, Paul Hershman, Murray Leaf, Karen Leonard, Arthur Helweg, Verne Dusenberry, Roger Ballard, Eleanor Nesbitt, Parminder Bhachu, Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, Dipankar Gupta, and Brian Keith Axel. While these authors are perhaps not at the forefront of Sikh studies, read in conjunction with works in Sikh history and theology, their writings can contribute a great deal to an understanding of Sikhs and Sikhism.

In fact, all the above-noted authors are listed in the 'International Bibliography of Sikh Studies', edited by Rajwant Singh Chilana (2005). As for my own work on Sikhs, this is hardly a passing fancy, as Dr. Singh infers. I have conducted over 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in India. Moreover, as Mr. Tiwana's article reveals, I have participated in - and observed - the Sikh community by virtue of my marriage within it, for well over a decade. My forthcoming book *'Rural Nostalgias and Transnational Dreams: Identity and Modernity among Jat Sikhs'* will shortly join that anthropological literature that hopes to contribute beyond disciplinary confines to both ethnography and Sikh studies.

Meanwhile, as a teacher, I value the opportunity afforded by the humanistic ideals of the liberal arts approach, and here too the unique qualities of my own discipline, to expose students - whether Sikh or not - to a range of world societies, in order that their own no longer appear quite so 'natural' or 'superior'. The anthropology students group that I took to the Maritime Sikh Society, being largely from small towns in eastern Canada, had few (if any) experiences of Punjabi or indeed South Asian culture; thus there were several purposes in our visit to the gurdwara, including **furthering their multicultural and civic understanding, and disproving media stereotypes of Sikhs** (as most students had never met Sikhs before and the media in those days was replete with the negative press of the Air India trial verdict), **by giving the students some understanding of the religious and cultural meanings of Sikhism and Sikh practice.**

The intent was not to present an exhaustive, nor highly textualized, version of Sikhism but to give anthropology students from very different cultures some sense of the **potential meanings** of being Sikh to an immigrant community in the Maritimes, meanings which rest - as for all Sikhs - on equality, humanitarianism, and the struggle for peace. While this type of pedagogical and scholarly inquiry may sit uneasily against both belief and enculturation, and the issue of who can appropriately research and teach religion and culture may well be intractable - as the numerous attacks on Dr. Jakobsh sadly suggest - it is my understanding that such educational and scholarly exercises in the realization of universal equality are well in keeping with Sikh values.

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