

# **BEING & BECOMING A SIKH**

**By I.J. SINGH (NEW YORK UNIVERSITY)**

**Published by The Centennial Foundation, Canada**

**Pages: 176 Price: not stated**

## ***A Review by Saran Singh***

“To find your soul do not look for an anatomical location....”. “Sikhism has a unique message for humanity: it provides us with a Way of Life....” An enlightened mind is “brain, heart and soul working in unison.” A few of the gems of wisdom characterize this latest work of I. J. Singh.” Besides being a personal testament this book is an endeavour to sharing our rich moral values and good historical culture. Even human failings are uncovered in gentle, elegant prose. Writing on “FAITH IN FIVE ARTICLES” The author who is among Sikhism’s foremost protagonists and noted medical scientist argues: “No one can make me feel small without my consent.” It is up to us to feel at home with our Five K’s, for then they “become integrated into our lives and embedded in our psyche such that they DEFINE US”.... And “acquire value that is often greater than life itself.”

But, one must go through his compelling to gain an insight into the transcendental spirit of the Sikh belief system.

This book is third in a trilogy devoted by I. J. Singh’s to self discovery”. This journal was privileged to publish a review of his first book “*Sikhs & Sikhism: A View with a Bias*” some ten years ago (SR Aug. 1994) his second book, “*The Sikh Way: A Pilgrims Progress*”, became a best seller in its genre, and was featured in our book section in Oct. 2001. I. J. Singh’s favourite author is the poet, critic and Nobel Laureate TS Eliot. His own writings seem to reflect Eliot’s wisdom, as in one of latter’s Essay: “Tradition and Individual Talent”, : wherein Eliot writes “Every nation, every race has not only its own creative but critical turn of mind, and is even more oblivious of the shortcoming and limitations of its critical habits than those of its creative genius.” In this book the author explains his objective thus: “to explore the idea of becoming a Sikh in its many splendoured reality”. He makes a distinction between having formal affinities and undertaking “a conscious journey of self discovery”. The latter objective is encapsulated in *Gurvani’s* dictum: “*Mann to joti-sarup hain/apna mool pachhan;*” i.e. know thyself.

Every essay is an affirmation of faith and stands by itself and is not a sequel to the earlier one though the Chapters are numbered Serially, 1 to 23. Random reading is therefore as rewarding. Diversity enhances their appeal, rivets the reader’s attention and stimulates the mind to focus on some of the present day problems that affect Sikhism, and indeed all institutionalized religions of the world. In the context of Sikh institutions, the author gently guides us to the – “foundational principles of participatory governance that we know as Sarbat Khalsa.” An essay midway through the book revisits the “Orwellian 1984” and juxtaposes its psyche with the American disaster of 9/11/2001, and the hate crimes, warning people against complacency. The “mistaken” identity issue has been traced to the “introduced Sikhs in the Diaspora”, unwilling to inform and educate their neighbours.

Troubled by the tribalist casteist culture and the growing number of those who find safety in anonymity of hairless heads and shaven faces, I. J. Singh recalls the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin: “ They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary Safety deserve neither liberty nor Safety”.

Despite these negative trends, the success achieved by Sikhism in North America gives us a cause to celebrate. It goes to the credit of the Sikh Diaspora (and Singh Sahib Harbhajan Singh Yogi’s Khalsa of the Western Hemisphere) that AMID hardship and ethnic stereotyping discrimination they had by and large flourished by dint of a robust work culture and optimistic outlook, making significant contribution to North America’s ethos, interweaving into the complex economic social and political patterns, while vigorously and proudly retaining and pursuing their own distinctive moral and cultural values.

For holding a panoramic mirror for the Sikhs in North America, the global Sikh Community owes I J Singh a debt of gratitude. As the wise counsel, critic and guide he is God’s gift to faith. In the past when Sikhism faced crisis the Sikh cause had been well served by enlightened scholars like Gyani Ditt Singh, Bhai Vir Singh, Prof. Puran Singh, Sr. Kapur Singh, and many others. The new millennium needs sage scholars of the calibre of I J Singh to reinterpret the wisdom of Great Gurus in modern idiom, reasonable persuasive and free from formal liturgies. A charmingly perceptive introduction by Satwant Singh Gosal of Canada sets the tone for the reader: “Do not let the (Sikh) articles of faith diminish into mere symbols.” The vitality of a living faith pours forth from these writings. An Indian edition of the book should be doubly welcome, indeed obligatory.

## **CHARHDI KALA ATE CHARHDI KALA DE PUNJ**

**By Harnam Singh Shan, M.A., Ph.D., London, Ditt**

**Published by S.G.P.C., Amritsar**

**Pages: 272 Price: Rs. 45/- (Hardbound)**

***A Review by Dr. Kuldip Singh***

**This is a unique book in Punjabi.** Dr. Shan portrays that the aim of our Gurus was to create a body of people who would enjoy a special type of mental make up, spiritual state, physical power and character. Sikhi is a way for creation of the spirit of *Charhdi Kala*. (*Sikhi Hai Balwaan Karna Surat Noon “Charhdi Kala” Niwas Sad Hi Rakhna – Bhai Vir Singh*) Guru Nanak commenced this through his remarkable “*Mool Mantra*”. By constant repetition of the *Mool Mantra*, the Sikh becomes fearless and free from enmity and hatred towards any one. Prof. Shan traces the development of this feeling of *Charhdi Kala* by contemplating on the *bani* of Guru Nanak. Daily reading of “*Hukam Razai Chalna*”, “*Jo Tudh Bhavai Sai Bhali Kaar*”, “*Nanak Bhagtan Sada Vigas*”, “*Sunai Dookh Paap Ka Naas*” removes all types of worry and fear from the mind of the Sikh. Castigating useless customs of plastering of cooking place, idol worship and cruelty perpetrated by those wearing sacred thread inculcated spirit of exaltedness in those abandoning these customs.

Although a book of 272 pages, it is a monumental treatise on the subject fit for award of Doctorate of Literature by several universities of the world. It deserves to be published in English so that the world comes to know about the inculcation of the

special quality by the Gurus over a period of 209 years (1499-1708). Dr. Shan discusses in detail the individual contribution of each Guru in the transformation and creation of this *Panth of Charhdi Kala*. Our Gurus did not propound a philosophy but showed it in action including Martyrdoms of Guru Arjan Dev Ji and Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and thousands of Sikhs during the Guru period.

“*Pinnacle of Charhdi Kala – Life of Guru Gobind Singh*”, is the second part of the book. This deserves to be translated into Hindi and distributed in lakhs all over the country.

For the scholars of Sikh history and thought, Dr. Shan gives important quotations by several authors whose books are not easily available. The appropriate quotations are given in original whether in Persian, Urdu or English with their Punjabi translation. The Sikh reader of today would be amazed to read the tribute by Qazi Noor Mohammad about the Sikhs of 18<sup>th</sup> Century: “The body of a Sikh is like a piece of rock and one Sikh is equal to 50 other Men. They enter the battlefield like lions but they possess unique character as fighting men.... They never rob or dishonour a woman and have exemplary moral character.”

Sikh scholars going through the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the book would start thinking that whereas Bradshaw remarks: .... “The Sikh faith is the universal religion for the present space age.”... How are the Sikhs projecting themselves in this space era? Have they any duty to pull up our religious and political leaders?

**The book deserves to be read by every Punjabi scholar and SGPC should present the same to all teachers of secondary schools and colleges of Punjab.**

Dr. Shan has authored 80 books, 197 research papers, in addition to book reviews and forwards. Dr. Shan has been in demand for his skill as a master orator in English as well as Punjabi and has traveled all over the globe for this purpose. Prof. Shan is also a Fellow & Member of our 100 societies. It is time that some university conducts research and produces an Abhinandan Granth to highlight and project the sum total of Prof. Shan’s research conclusions.

□