

# **MY GURMUKHI KHAZANA: A GURMAT BASED PRIMER**

By Harliv Kaur, Jasmine Kaur and Harinder Singh; illustrated by Navneet Kaur

The Sikh Research Institute, Sant Antonio, TX, 2007.

Pages: ii + 43. Price: \$ 13

*A Review by Manjyot Kaur\**

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This is a lovely children's book, meant to introduce youngsters to the letters of the Gurmukhi alphabet through the use of Gurmat-based vocabulary. Words used in this *Qaida* (Gurmukhi alphabet primer) were chosen from the Guru Granth Sahib, as well as several other Gurmat sources. According to the book's creators, this was deemed an important way of familiarizing children with terminology from the Sikh sacred scriptures.

The illustrations depicting each word are beautifully rendered in an appealingly child-like fashion. Not surprisingly, they emphasize Sikh principles and traditional lifestyle. All the people are shown as observant Sikhs, with suitable head-coverings and dress, beards where appropriate, etc. In keeping with the gender equality inherent to Sikhi, many gender-inclusive touches were included. For example, a woman is among the three soldiers in "army", the police officer in "stick" is a female, and the "warrior" is a Mai Bhago look-alike.

Words not depicted through the use of human beings are also shown in a uniquely Sikh way. For example, "enemy" is represented by the *Panj Doot*, while "duty" enumerates *Nitnem*, *Seva*, and helping others. Ideas embodying more abstract qualities, such as "emotional pain", and concepts of a strictly Sikh nature, such as "Name" (i.e., *Naam*) and "*Vahguru*" are graced with especially sensitive illustrations.

A page of suggested activities is placed in a prominent place, right before the start of the main section of the book. This is an imaginative and comprehensive list of instructions, which adults will find easy to comply with; children will surely enjoy the results!

Regarding matters of a more technical nature, the explanation on the "colophon" page about transliteration may, in some cases, assume too much background in linguistics on the part of the adult facilitators. (It will certainly be unintelligible to the young children, themselves.) Furthermore, its physical placement, in small-sized type on the bottom of a left-hand page, may result in this important explanation being entirely overlooked.

Similar difficulties might be encountered with the Appendix. The effort on the part of the book's creators to locate each word as used in Guru Granth Sahib is laudatory. However, as with the previously-mentioned segment, this section may not get the adult usage it deserves. While the considerable motivation it assumes on the part of the adults may indeed be present, this may not be the case with the Gurmukhi reading ability and access to Guru Granth Sahib also required.

These caveats aside, *My Gurmukhi Khazana* remains an undoubtedly valuable book, especially when used, as its creators intended, as a supplemental resource

with the ‘Sohji’ elementary school curriculum. *Sojhi* - Gurmat and Panjabi Education Resource, is a project of the San Antonio, Texas-based Sikh Research Institute. Its goal is to “improve the effectiveness of Sikh education by developing high standards of learning with comprehensive teaching materials”.

This book can be obtained by contacting: [sojhi@sikhri.org](mailto:sojhi@sikhri.org)

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## **KABIT SAWAYYE BHAI GURDAS JI**

**Translation & Annotation by Shamsher Singh Puri**

**Published by Singh Brothers, Amritsar**

**Pages: 703. Price: Rs. 550/-**

**A Review by J.S. Neki,\* Ph.D. (Hons.)**

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Bhai Gurdas (1551-1636) has been the outstanding Sikh scholar of early Sikhism. This is evidenced from the fact that he was chosen as the chief scribe of the first compilation of Guru Granth Sahib by Guru Arjun Dev. He was an accomplished poet himself and produced two voluminous works: the *Vars* and the *Kabitt-Sawayye*. The former work is in Punjabi language and the latter in *Brij Bhasha*, the lingua franca of medieval times for spiritual works by Bhaktas of Northern India. These works present standard exposition of Sikh thought.

These works are voluminous and there isn't much expository endeavour relating to them in English. *Kabitts-Sawayye* is a work rather difficult to translate as there are very few scholars well versed in Brij Bhasha who are proficient in English as well. S. Shamsher Singh, President, Academy of Sikh Studies Inc. has produced a very much needed translation of this important text.

His work is no literal translation, it is an exposition cum translation. That seems to have been undertaken to make it better understandable than a literal rendering of this text. However, what we miss in the translation is the metre, the cadence and the lilt of the original. But to capture these would have made the undertaking well nigh impossible. Prose translation of a poetic work essentially deprives the reader of the evidence of the artistic and prosodic skill of the poet.

Er. Shamsher Singh has good prowess in the English language and his translation-exposition is faithful. Some scholars might have occasional reservations about the meaning of some verses that Shamsher Singh has accepted. However, this is inevitable when one is breaking ground of such a voluminous work for the first time. By and large, he captures even the subtle connotations, and the significance of metaphors and the mythological allusions that stud the work generously.

The translator deserves gratitude of students of Sikh learning who would now be able to empathise with the spirit of this important Sikh text. The publication has an excellent get-up.

# Documentary on Centennial of Shahid Bhagat Singh

**BY SRINANDA JHA**

Shaheed Bhagat Singh - the legend that continues to rouse passions in the minds and hearts of millions of Indians - may have been singularly unfortunate in being denied official recognition of the kind he deserves, but some damage control is being attempted on the occasion of his 100th birth anniversary.

Prasar Bharati's first in-house documentary on the life and times of Bhagat Singh was telecast on September 28 on Doordarshan National hookup. The 30-minute documentary offers a fascinating insight into the makings of Bhagat Singh, the man and revolutionary.

His apprenticeship at Kanpur as a compositor and reporter with *Pratap* (a newspaper, edited by the legendary Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi); his interactions with other revolutionaries of the times, including Chandrashekhar Azad; his years of incarceration; the murder plot of Lahore police chief J.D. Saunders - these and other incidents have been creatively and brilliantly recaptured.

Ravindra Jain has composed music free of charge. The title song has been taken from a poem composed in Bhagat Singh's honour by freedom fighter Pandit Baichain Sharma Ugra.

Bhagat Singh was no ordinary brave patriot who differed with Mahatma Gandhi and hurled bombs at the national assembly. He was an extraordinary thinker and scholar who delved deep into Marxist ideology and had a vision of an alternative development model for Indian masses.

Almost every moment of his life in prison was devoted to the pursuit of reading and writing.

The documentary was telecast on DD National last September 27 and 28, while DD News showed it on September 30.

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## **A SIKH PARADIGM FOR UNIVERSAL PEACE**

**By Meji Singh, Ph.D.**

**Published by Pavior, 2810 Camino Diablo # 10, Walnut Creek, CA 94596, USA**

**Pages: 227. Price: US\$ 21.95**

***A Review by Kulwant Singh\****

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This book is a compilation of a brief History of the Ten Gurus and the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib, which dwells on the basic characteristics of a Gurmukh as compared to a Manmukh, and finally evaluates the life of a 'True Sikh' who can be portrayed as a Universal Peace model. The writer himself being an activist of the Interfaith organization has portrayed a 'Sikh' who is basically above the worldly notions of the so called religions, and yet a truly religious person whom the world can rely on as the leader of the Universal Peace and who is above conflicts.

At a time when we are striving towards a more peaceful world, an expression of the absolute One, 'IK ONKAR', comes as a compelling force to the unity of religions and cultures. A force that moves one to look inward, it appeals as much to the mystic eye as to the modern seeker of metaphysical truth, inspiring one and all to lead meaningful lives.

The writer, R. K. Janmeja Singh, is the president of the 'Ik Onkar Peace Foundation' and also a member of the Board of Directors of **Interfaith Center** at the Presidio in San Francisco. Also on the basis of his experience as a clinical psychologist and an organizational consultant, along with his study of Sikh Scripture, he has presented a Paradigm for Peace and Harmony and the character of his presentation is a 'True Sikh', who is truly living to the philosophy and the teachings of Sikhism.

The Preface by Rev. Paul Chaffee, Executive Director, Interfaith Center at the Presidio, San Francisco, says that most Americans, including with some Sikh Parents, do not know **that Sikhism is a religion of the heart, that its founder was a poet-singer and its Scripture comes in the form of devotional hymns, that is one of the world's most interfaith friendly religions.**

In the words of the writer, while giving introduction of the book, he has 'attempted to take another look at the Sikh spiritual revolution that culminated in the manifestation of The Khalsa 300 years ago. It began with the advent of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, followed with the nine Gurus and finally Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji created Khalsa in his own image.'

Chapter Four of the book comprising 50 pages contains the basic concepts of a Sikh's Paradigm for Universal Peace. Here the writer describes those Sikh terminology like '**Waheguru**', '**Ik Onkar**', '**Naam**'-'**Gurmukh**': as '**Divine Consciousness**.' '**Haumain**'-'**Manmukh**': as '**I-am Consciousness**'. These concepts are well explained and especially in a style that can be easily grasped by most Americans, who understand through their interest in learning of Indian cultures, which is visibly a good trend in the present day American Society including the native born Sikh Americans. This chapter with its fourteen sub-items culminates in portraying 'Manmukh' and 'Gurmukh' in a tabular form, and identically he has created a beautiful table of contrasts in the seventh chapter, where he summaries consciousness as the loving devotion to Naam that motivated 'Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji'.

Chapter seven contains the brief history of each Guru, with their specific teachings and the associated stories of their life time. Ample quotations are given from Gurbani to support the background of all events in the life time of the Gurus. However the Gurbani lines are mostly cut short to single starting line perhaps to save the space, but the translation in English is that of the complete hymn (Shabad).

The book ends with three appendices. 1. Feedback Questionnaire, 2. Ik Onkar Peace Foundation Preamble and 3. Peace Resolution. This resolution is prepared by Ralf Wolff and unanimously adapted by the Ik Onkar Peace Foundation Board of Trustees on May 17, 2003. Email: meji@pavior.com

The foundation is going to hold a 'Sikh Leadership Workshop' on December 8 and 9, 2007 and will be discussing some subjects like – How to translate Sikh Vision into practice personally as well as in relationship to the current issues with the Sikh

community and international context, and also to develop a common understanding of what it means to be a Sikh.

