

PRAYER AT DAWN: **An interpretation of Japujee Sahib of Guru Nanak**

By Kamaljeet Singh Dogra

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To translate Gurbani - God inspired text - especially in a language of the West, for a person born and raised in East, is a Herculean task. Kamaljeet Singh Dogra has made an inspired translation of Japujee Sahib in 'PRAYER AT DAWN.'

Brief yet all encompassing, precise yet reasonably in-depth, easy to read yet literally solid, in simple understandable 'American' English (as writer puts it) but fairly sophisticated, in the verse form, yet within the context, is what this book is all about. One would think that a person of Indian origin who spent a major part of his life in the West, would have lost contact with the deeper understanding and mystique of Gurbani, at least to the extent required to attempt such an undertaking. This certainly doesn't appear to be the case for this interpreter-translator. One must have extraordinary understanding of Punjabi, its script Gurumukhee as well as an in-depth comprehension of the grammars of both the languages, i.e. Gurmukhee as well as English for such a feat. We are told that Mr. Dogra is an engineer by profession but based on the work he has produced, he is certainly much more than that.

After introduction, author has provided a key to Punjabi alphabet and pronunciation. The author then divides this book into three parts. In part 1, he writes each proclamation (Tukk) in its original form on the left page and then underneath it, he romanizes it according to Gurumukhee spelling. His style of Romanization, i.e. spelling 'Gurbani' as 'Gurubaanee', Gurmukhi as Gurumukhee and so on, is uniquely thought-provoking and arguably more in tune with his reasoning. Such methodology is based on his desire to be in close proximity to the pronunciation of Gurubaanee by someone not familiar with original script. At the same time, it spares him from following myriad dialects of phonetic pronunciations of Punjabi, depending upon one's place of residence. Having been fairly familiar with Western-born Sikhs, the so-called American Sikhs for almost over a quarter century, it is my personal opinion that this is the only way one could loop in our Western-born Sikh youth, both of Indian and non-Indian heritage as well as non-Punjabi Indian Sikh youth.

Right across, on the opposite page, in part 1, a simplified translation of each line is provided in English verse. Here, the author himself admits of taking a bit of liberty in deviating from literality but without hurting the implied concept. He, very humbly but interestingly, has labeled this deviation, as a 'poetic license' from Nanak and Waheguru. In fact going through the verse, I was awestruck about the clarity in author's mind in comprehending the 'Word of Guru' and then skillfully translating it in verse. It was intentionally kept line to line and word to word so as to rhyme.

In Part 2, Sardar Kamaljeet Singh further shows his refined skills in bringing forth additional translation and commentary in prose form. He has done so to further clarify Guru's thought expressed therein, for the translation done earlier in the verse

understandably has to be to the point, succinct and without added details. Each stanza represents one Pauri of Japujee Sahib. Author's suggestion to first read the verse in Part 1, and then corresponding stanza of elaborate translation and commentary in part 2, definitely makes good sense. As to the qualitative depth and comparison with other translations produced by many men of letters, both in India and abroad, it is certainly out of place for a person like me to make a fair judgment without deep knowledge of Gurubaanee and without studying them all. Therefore, I have intentionally tried to maintain silence on that score. If there is any deficiency left in the translation of God's word (*Dhur Ki Baani*), one must take solace in the fact that being Waheguru's worldly children, our unintended deficiencies are bound to be covered by our ever all-loving father. I also believe that had author translated the word 'God' in a gender-neutral pronoun instead of 'Him' or 'His', the modern young gender-sensitive mind might have found it easier to internalize. Yet the difficulty in finding an appropriate and equivalent neuter gender pronoun for covering 'He' or 'She' in either of the languages is fairly obvious to us all.

The most impressive, unique and laborious work in this book relates to Part 3, where author has appended Glossary. It provides us with simple English translation of each sequential word throughout Japujee Sahib. First the word is written in Romanized Gurumukhee, then in Gurumukhee itself, as it appears in Japujee Sahib followed by what part of speech that word belongs to, such as a noun, verb or adjective and lastly its translation. In order to further expand the horizon of a reader, the author also mentions the origin of a particular word from another language or culture, if any, and provides its literal as well as abstract or translational meaning. If a word has more than one meaning, he numbered them one after the other. Additionally, he includes all forms of a given word such as primary, subjective and possessive along with their interpretation. All of this is exhaustive, time consuming and laborious, demanding an extreme degree of concentration; Sardar Kamaljeet Singh Dogra deserves special recognition.

The front cover of the book comes with a snap of Palm imprint of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's right hand in the rock at Gurdwara Panja Sahib. The get-up of the book is pleasant to the eyes and easy on hands given only 129 pages altogether. This book will be greatly useful for amateur Sikh youth, both in India and abroad, as well as for those who are regular with Nitnem but wish to polish their understanding of Japujee Sahib further. Easy to handle, one could always keep it close by for daily reading, rather than leaving it on the shelf with collections of other elaborate translations of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Published by Trafford publishing, it is produced in Victoria, BC, and is easily available *on line*, and *via email*.

