

INNER DYNAMICS OF GURU GRANTH SAHIB

By Dr. S.P. SINGH (Vice Chancellor GNDU)

Published by Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar 143 005

Pages: 192 Price: (Hard Cover) Rs. 300.00

This attractive volume is a collection of outstanding papers on the spiritual and philosophical verities reflected in hymns of celestial beauty embodied in Guru Granth Sahib.

The year 2004 which marked the Quadri-centennial of the installation of Adi Sri Granth Sahib at Harmandir Sahib by the illustrious Fifth Master, Guru Arjun Devji, was celebrated across the globe in multifarious ceremonies. It was celebrated by the Parliament of the World's Religions at Barcelona, Spain, in July 2004, in a spectacular week-long sessions of kirtan, langar, exhibitions and philanthropy, thanks mainly to the Birmingham based Guru Nanak Niskam Sewak Jatha, under guidance of Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singhji. Thousands of Europeans and conference delegates watched the spectacle, listened to the mystic music and partook of Langar – on the Mediterranean Sea beach.

Then, of course, these was the incredible celebration in the Holy Darbar Sahib Present where holy men of all faiths congregated on Sept. 01, 2004 and delivered sermons in praise of the wisdom of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, an historic occasion relayed LIVE on television.

But the sylvan campus of Guru Nanak Dev University was host to about a score of learned theologians historians and philosophers who dwelt on the UNIVERSAL message of Guru Granth Sahib – a marvelous antheology, embodying poetry of epic proportions and profundity. Listening to them must have been an experience and music of the sublime kind.

The Vice chancellor, as the host, has done well to publish a compendium of the papers presented at the symposium. Each presentation has it own stamp of sincerity and needs to be deliberated on.



katha-KAHANI (An Autobiography)

By Dr. Man Singh Nirankari

Published by author (add: Bunglow No. 9, Sector 4, Chandigarh 160 001)

Pages: 316 Price: Rs. 250.00 (Hard Cover)

This is a rare autobiography, in chaste homespun Punjabi, by a prolific writer and, importantly a many splendoured careerist medical scientist. Significantly Dr. Man Singh Nirankari is the son of none other than Baba Hara Singhji Nirankari whose piety and dedication to *Gurmat* is the stuff of which legends are made.

To a striking extent, the life and experiences of the author encapsulate the basic philosophy of 'Simran – Seva' – which remains the sheet-anchor of Sikhism in its most catholic sense. The life story of Dr. Man Singh is a saga of struggle and achievement, of travels across the continents, in particular USA, for medical studies, studded with vignettes – sometimes witty, at others painful – the inevitable result of human discourse.

The reader becomes 'involved' in the compelling value-system around which the Indian (particularly Sikh) society has evolved. Time and again the author dwells on these values and commits himself to the teachings and fundamental truths of the great Sikh Gurus who inspired his own ancestor Baba Sahib Hara Singh and the Nirankari movement – as a puritanical out crop of the Sikh faith.

Selection of photographs brings the narrative alive, besides focusing on the personal achievements of the author as a medical scientist specialist and administrative, or careerist. In every sphere his humanism and the moral commitment come out clearly – often in modest and self-effacing diction. In dwelling on these various details, he attempts to stimulate thought on a variety of issues. He stops short of enunciating any judgement. To

do so would amount to a doctor removing his own appendix under local an aesthesia! Above all, the writer's transparent sincerity emerges from the narrative; as also a sense of wonder how minor details linger on in ones memory long after the event.

Punjabi Literature is vastly enriched by this genre of autobiography writing. One would commend the book to every library worth the name – if only for the style, clarity and integrity of the narrative.



THE ARMCHAIR SIKH

By S. Gajinder Singh

Published by Mrs. Manbir G. Singh, Mohali

Pp: 186 Price: Rs. 220 (Paperback) Rs. 285 (Deluxe Edition)

A Review by Dr. H.S. Virk*

Sardar Gajinder Singh is a prolific writer and may be counted amongst one of the few contemporary creative writers of Sikh literature. He has completed the trilogy of his critical essays in Sikhism by publishing three books during the past three years. I had the privilege to review his book "In the Witches Cauldron" for The Sikh Review and Abstracts of Sikh Studies last year. From a professional in an Oil Company, Gajinder Singh now gracefully wears the mantle of a professional writer after his retirement.

I was fascinated by the title of the book "The Armchair Sikh" and the cover design of the book by Sukirat Singh, the artist son of the author. I have been familiar with the term 'arm-chair philosopher' but never heard of the exotic term 'arm-chair Sikh'; hence my curiosity to read the chapter with this title to understand and appreciate the critical approach of the learned author. The author states: "There are arm-chair politicians, arm-chair socialists, arm-chair preachers and arm-chair critics. Such people like to raise issues in order to impress others of their knowledge and study, with the primary aim to clinch the lime light of notoriety based publicity".

The author is highly critical of McLeodian School of Writers (without naming them) and their pseudo-analytical approach to Sikh studies. On page 83 of this chapter he writes: "The western scholar keeps two targets in view with one shot. He has shown his impatience and ignorance with Divine experience and disregarded the spiritual intensity of the Guru's concern. In stead of rising to the spiritual level of the Guru's erudition, he exploits the common arm-chair Sikhs' ineptitude by instigating them to look at matters of divinity from their level of mundane reasoning, in order to confuse the issue. The western writers found it easy to transplant Guru Nanak and his successors in place of Jesus and his apostles, keeping the basic format intact." Again on page 88, he is highly critical of the approach adopted by the western writer to Sikh Gurus: "The study of Guru Nanak – born Hindu, Nanak – in History, Nanak – the man, Nanak – the God, Nanak – the Prophet tows the same line as was adopted to lay bare Jesus – the son of God, Jesus- the Jew, Jesus-the man, Jesus – in History".

The author laments that the real purpose of Gursikhi is lost while the arm-chair Sikh and his colleague, the doubting critic, make mountain of a mole hill. The problem with the Sikhs stems from the distortions crated by ill-groomed *granthis* and *babas* of popular deras in Punjab and elsewhere. In fact, Guru Nanak chose to call his followers by the nomenclature of the Sikh, a disciple perpetually engaged in advancement of his mental faculties, and with no room for dogmatic speculation as in the ancient religions.

In the chapter "Divine and Mundane", the author differentiates between spiritual realm and the material world of man. He has shown his vast knowledge of other belief systems for the liberation of man. For sake of comparison the author recounts: "Buddhist and Jain systems

acknowledge that man's good and bad actions are inadvertently mixed up with their good and bad rewards. Holy Koran has assurance of rewards, for the faithful after judgement on Doomsday, while the Indian theory of transmigration holds out a distant green light, provided the person keeps on the right track. Sikhism, however promises total deliverance here and now, all previous records obliterated by total obedience and surrender of *haus-me*, the ego (I-ness)".

On page 103 of this book, the author demonstrates his grasp of Sikh ideals: "Guru Nanak did not dwell strictly on any one formula but counselled people to be truthful, honest in their dealings, remain good citizens and actively serve the society to which they belonged. He denounced the corrupt political and social administration, vicious officials, greedy and ruthless rulers, a familiar scenario to us in the modern age".

"Elements of Idolatory in Sikhism" is another valuable chapter of this book. The author brings out clearly the message of Sikh Gurus in unambiguous terms. Guru Nanak's total rejection of the prevalent Hindu religion and its rituals was a revolutionary step in Indian society. The author deplores that many historians and scholars of comparative religion fail to understand the import of Sikh religion and its revolutionary tendencies and interpret it as a mere synthesis of Hindu and Muslim beliefs. The author makes a common cause for derailment of Sikhism by vested interests (page 149) : "With the usurpation of their Gurudwaras by Brahmins and *Udasies*, whatever was discarded about the old dogmas and rituals became reinforced and brought back into practice. It was then claimed that there was no difference in the Sikh point of view from the Hindu mainstream. Brahminical priests and *Udasies* did its utmost to dilute the intellectual base of the Sikh dogma by reintroducing the role of priestly class and encouraging blind following in the *sangat*. As matters stand today, those Sikhs aping the ancient religious traditions may revere Guru Granth more in form than in spirit".

Some of the other noteworthy chapters of this book on which I focused my attention are: Meditation: Call of the Divine, Man and God, Discipline and Freewill- A Paradox, Importance of Identity to the Sikhs and I, Me, Mine: An Introduction. In all these chapters, author advocates the superiority of the Sikh dogma vis a vis other dogmas both of the East and the West. The author cautions the Sikhs to maintain their separate religious and cultural identity intact (page 55): " Sikhs are located in Hindu majority dominated country that is subtly nibbling at their roots to envelop them. Under such compelling conditions which continue to harass the Sikhs on their philosophy, culture and their very existence, Identity as formulated by Guru Gobind Singh remains a dire necessity".

In the introductory chapter of the book, I find the author somewhat lopsided in his criticism of the Western world. He considers the western method, education and technology faulty and even barbaric which has dehumanised the society. He acclaims the superiority of Eastern methodology to unravel the nature of reality. The author may not be aware of the paradigm shift in Western methodology during the recent years under different nomenclatures, viz; Post-modern interpretation of Reality, Holistic approach, Science-religion dialogue and globalization. I wonder why he believes in the dictum: "East is East and West is West and the twain shall never meet", as advocated by the English poet (Rudyard Kipling).

I congratulate the author for his consistent approach in all three books. Essay writing is the most difficult task and it demands a vast study of scriptures, literature, philosophy and history. The author displays his skill in handling such wide range of phenomenology by his erudite scholarship. The rendering of Gurbani text into English is so convincing that the reader feels intoxicated by his translation and transliteration.

