

THE SIKHS: FAITH, PHILOSOPHY & FOLK

Text by Gurbachan Singh, photographs by Sondeep Shankar

Published by Roli Books, M-75, Gr. Kailash II Market New Delhi 110 048

Pages: ('Coffee-table' size, colour pictures) 96. Price: Rs. 450

A Treat for Youth

The Sikh faith knows no frontiers. Its gospel, *Adi Granth* is universal in appeal, its poetry and music bear a stamp of eternity.

Unburdened by esoteric abstractions, this magnum size publication, with stunningly beautiful pictures, is strictly meant for the younger generation. Its transparently sincere text informs, while the illustrations enchant the reader who can indeed breeze through the Sikh history, thought and culture in a matter of hours!

At the same time, one can delve deeper, dwell longer and get drenched in the glorious passages of *Guru-vani*, feeling a sense of good cheer and a glow of universal love.

No wonder the author personally represents the quintessential Sikhism: a globetrotter (as the distinguished ambassador of India to several countries) his high lineage is matched by his humility and love of the Sikh lore.

This volume, however, gains from the vastly evocative and skilful photography by one of India's most eminent camera-men. At 46, Sondeep Shankar brings inspirational beauty to the book. The three-dimensional panel of Guru Nanak from Harimandir's interior is breathtaking. The smiling Nihangs, the pious worshippers, the 19th century art, wedding celebrations and other pictures seem to cast a spell on the reader. No wonder it has gone into the third edition.

- Saran Singh

THE SINGER DIVINE:

Poetic Rendering of stories from the Life of Guru Nanak

By (Ms) Satjit Wadva

Published by Shrishti Publishers, N-16 Chitra Ranjan Park, New Delhi 110 019

Pages: 166. Price: Rs. 195

A novel "Janam Sakhi" in English Verse!

The Sikh traditional lore is at once modern as well as ancient in its thought provoking wisdom and devotional mysticism. Indeed the 'Janam Sakhi' biographic stories are indelible allegories of perennial relevance for the post-modern man adrift without God.

This fascinating book of versified stories from the Life of Guru Baba Nanak carries forward the tradition with eloquence and devotion, and (as observed by Prof. Harbhajan Singh Deol in his Introduction) fill the hiatus existing between history and legend".

There was a time when the Janam Sakhi episodes were hugely popular. The older generations of 19th and 20th Century Punjab (as also NWFP, Sind and Afghanistan) were enthralled by the picturesque stories of the legendary Guru's travels to distant lands accompanied by Bhai (brother) Bala and Mardana. Over time, Max Arthur Macauliffe (1837-1913) brought out his famous account of the history and religion of the Sikhs, in 1909, to bring Guru Nanak's life and teachings to the notice of the Western people. In subsequent decades Guru Nanak's (Life and teachings) were embodied in popular works by Raja Sir Daljit Singh (of Kapurthala) and BPL Bedi's 'Collection of stories from Janam Sakhi', in chaste prose.

Satjit Wadva's "Divine Singer" stands apart for her evocative style. She has adapted over 150 stories into lyrical verse that is at once ennobling and evocative. 'The Singer Divine' lovingly traces the times and episodes of Guru Nanak: his fascinating childhood at school,

his work experience at Daulat Khan Lodhi's 'Modikhana', the visits to Jagannath Puri and Mecca, discourses with the Siddhas and the historic encounter with Babar, founder of Mughal dynasty, at Eminabad, and many more. The *Sakhis* have been transformed in the lyrical poetry of devotion and sensitivity. Discerning readers are bound to benefit from this extraordinary presentation.

- S.S.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Dasam Granth di Vichar (Punjabi)

By Dr. Gurmukh Singh

Published from B-6/58 Safdargunj Encl. New Delhi. 110 029

Pp. 174 Price: Rs. 150 or US\$ 8 (Hard Cover).

A courageous and balanced critique of the Dasam Granth, the author strikes a note of caution against ascribing the authorship of dasam granth in its totality to the Tenth Master. He firmly brands the voluminous Triya - Charitra ((pp. 809-1388 in D.G.) as a disingenuous interpolation wholly uncharacteristic of the great Master's life and philosophy.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTION OF SABDA IN GURU GRANTH SÂHIB

By Himat Singh, M.A., Gyani

Published by Sanbun Publishers, A/78, Naraina Indl. Area (I) New Delhi. 110028.

Pp 224, Price: Rs. 200.

A profoundly complex study of the Guru-Vâni which, the author claims, is in a 'mega philosophical mode' - whatever that might mean! Sample some sub-titles: "Rooted Essentiality", or 'Semantics of the Manifest'. The author has even coined quite a few pseudo-philosophical terms that defy comprehension by a lay reader.

ik`Qy igAw myrw SihrlwhOr ? (Punjabi) [Where has gone my native Lahore?]

By Som Anand (Tr. from Urdu by Joginder Shamsher)

Published by "Navyug", K-24, Hauz Khas. New Delhi. 110 016.

Pp. 290. Price. Rs. 300.

Highly evocative reminiscences of a dedicated true-blue Punjabi, who chose to write in Urdu, about his nostalgic pre-partition Lahore. He (or rather the translator) recalls Kapurthala di Bhâbô,, the early RSS volunteers of 1940's, his many Muslim neighbours and friends, and the hugely popular romantic poet Fiaz Ahmed Faiz. This is a fascinating study in the social mores of a lost era.

jru Awel jobin hwirAw (Punjabi) [Beware! Youth is transient?]

By Gyani Swinder Singh

Published by Sanbun Publishers, A/78, Naraina Indl. Area (I) New Delhi. 110028.

Pp. 130. Price: Rs. 125.

Octogenarian Gyani Swinder Singh of Chandigarh pays tribute to his pious parents by assembling a dozen of his essays (in Punjabi) into this handy volume. The title may suggest a rather pessimist viewpoint of the Sikh doctrine. But every essay, in elegant prose, is sweetly persuasive, rooted in *Gurû-Vâni*, and its soul stirring message. Interspersing his argument with moral and spiritual illustrations, the author steers the seeker on to the path of righteousness.

CONNECTING WITH THE MASTER

By Bhupinder Singh

Published by Sanbun Publishers, A/78, Naraina Indl. Area (I) New Delhi. 110028.

Pp. 90. Price: Rs. 100.

The author of this slim volume, born in Burma and domiciled in Japan and Korea, now calls

USA his home. He calls the book a 'fruit salad' of moral and spiritual verities. His writings are derived from the oceanic wisdom of Guru Granth Sahib - the holy testament of inspirational poetry of great Masters and saints of the Orient who mostly lived during middle ages - 12th to 16th centuries AD. Herein, moral verities intermingle with worldly wisdom, useful in our contemporary setting.

17 TOMATOES: TALES FROM KASHMIR

By Jaspreet Singh

Published by Indialnk - Roli Books, M-75 (Market) Gr. Kailash II, New Delhi 110048.

Pp. 152. Price: Rs. 225.

This collection of stories by a Canadian Sikh revolve around two youths in the Kashmir Valley, known as much for its beautiful gardens, crystal lakes and springs as for the long and bitter war against raiders from bordering Pakistan. No wonder the writer's tender childhood was spangled with subtle humour and stark tragedy; delineated sensitively in elegant - but quaint - conversational prose. The boy's unpretentious innocence and the work-a-day events seem to make light of the Kashmir tragedy - accentuated by the Valley's *Sufiana* past, including redolent poetry of Habba Khatoon. The story of 'Captain Faiz' strikes the saddest note: "I will die, in autumn, in Kashmir"! Silence is all.

- S.S.