

ME JUDICE - A Miscellany

By (Late Sirdar) Kapur Singh

Edited by Baldev Singh

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'*Me Judice*' translates roughly as "*In my judgment*". The term is typical of the author. It is hard to evaluate the legendary Kapur Singh (1909-86). His classical ambiance is reflected in this collection of his essays and shorter writings, lovingly assembled by Sr. Baldev Singh who, evidently, cherished and preserved many of Kapur Singh's papers, mostly traced to-and gleaned from - old issues of *The Sikh Review*.

It is no coincidence that the author, himself a legend, gelled with another legend, Captain Bhag Singh, MBE who edited the Journal from the start in 1953 far 1980's, even as Kapur Singh pre-deceased him in 1986. *The Sikh Review* paid a tribute to Kapur Singh by dedicating the August 1992 Issue to him – a rather modest and inadequate homage to the many splendoured scholar.

Endowed with the intellect of a genius, Kapur Singh felt embittered because he was treated harshly, not only by the rulers of his time, but also by the top brass of the Sikh leadership. Even at present few seem to heed his prophetic warnings, or care to propagate his philosophy.

Indeed, we are not sure if the universities in Punjab (now a territory shrunken beyond recognition) have prescribed Kapur Singh's writings for compulsory study at least at the post-graduate stage of philosophy or sociology.

The present Volume reflects his profound scholarship, dwelling on historical, political and theological themes, some lengthy treatises, others short essays, covering close to 500 pages. The subjects he tackles in this Miscellany range from "The Golden Temple: its theo-political status" and "Sri Guru Granth Darpan" to "Vulgarisation of Sikh doctrines", and "Vegetable Ghee in *Karah Prasad* under fire".

One of the most prolific writers on Sikhism, many, if not most – of Kapur Singh's Essays now published have been featured in *The Sikh Review*. Several of them deal with contemporary events and their impact on Sikh politics. As such they mirror the strength and weaknesses Sikh politics of 1950's and subsequent decades.

Kapur Singh was at his best in the exposition of exegetical and abtuse study of religions – Semitic as well as Oriental. He revelled in his exceptional insight into classical lore and doctrine. This is precisely what makes his writings more challenging – fit for the connoisseur. Every *Qadar-dan* of *Sikhi* should benefit from this collection of his Essays.

- S.S.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO SIKHI

By I.J.Singh

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www.centennialfoundation.org

Pages: 172 (Price not Mentioned)

This (fourth) book from Dr. I. J. Singh's pen brings together an illuminating set of 25 Essays that outline the essential philosophy, mores and sociology of the Sikhs in the context of present day world. The second half of 20th century has witnessed a vigorous emergence of Sikhism in India as well as Britain and North America. The fundamentalist upsurge of 1980s has given way to sober reflection and the desire to delve deeper in the meaning and

purpose of life in all its splendour and mystery. Indeed IJ Singh traverses the transition - from despair and anguish of global Sikhs to the brilliant economist statesman Dr. Manmohan Singh assuming the office of India's Prime Minister - in his stride.

On the philosophic level, I. J. Singh has an uncanny knack of exploring the spiritual and temporal aspects of life of a Sikh - 'The learner', in foreign lands and alien cultures. Basically a teacher and an anatomist – he is well equipped to explain how we can develop a sense of security and gain insight in a world that is becoming increasingly insecure. He does it with elegance and eloquence, with minimum fuss and utmost assurance. His Essay on Guru Granth Sahib, for instance, reinforces faith even as it illumines our mind: how we can discover within us a perennial source of strength by dwelling on the Holy Word. As a thinker, he enriches us with his own experience, even as he compels introspection on how we can harness *Sikhi* – The spirit of Sikhism – for a productive and happy life anywhere on earth.

Serious minded readers should find the essays stimulating, often challenging, free from both jargon and dogma. Most readers of this Journal are already familiar with I. J. Singh's writings. Indeed *The Sikh Review* has been the principal beneficiary of his prolific pen: some of the essays in his earlier books* first appeared in this Journal, which helped elevate the level of understanding of the essential doctrines of Sikh faith. His lucid prose invariably blends hope with realism.

The Essay on Guru Granth is typical: a comparative study that touches upon the Scriptural authenticity, musicology and universal appeal. It speaks of *Gurbani* revealing a 'loving God who can be experienced in one's heart and soul'; of *Hukam*, the divine Order; of *Nadar* (*nazar*) or Grace, as an affirmative beneficent power guiding our psyche; of Natural Justice: "In Guru Granth the emphasis is not on a God who micro-manages our lives, but on providing the spiritual basis for a moral and ethical framework around which purposeful lives can be fashioned."

"*The shelf life of a Book*" deplores the new generation's aversion to the printed word and its distinct preference for the "hazy glow of computer science", and recalls his own experience of how the reading habit shaped his thought. He goes on to urge the reader to study the *Gurbani* in original because translation "fails to capture the magic". He concludes on a despairing note: How few Gurdwaras have a Library"! Remember that the U.S. and Canada have close to 250 Gurdwaras. The example of dedication and unity set by the late Singh Sahib Harbhajan Singhji Khalsa (Yogi Ji) readily comes to mind through not mentioned by I.J. Singh. The Sikh Movement has gained an unrivalled moral stature by the pure life style of thousands of Khalsa Sikhs across the Americas and some of the European countries like Netherlands. They optimize the spirit of *Sikhi* in all its magnificence.

Other Essays examine a host of key concepts: the generational gap, (The old are 'intolerant and preachy', the young often direction-less and obdurate) and need for patience and example. The issue of IDENTITY is broad-based and dealt with sympathetic logic. So also the various "shades" of the Sikh *swaroop*. The observation (in "The Numbers Racket") "it is not important to count noses. What is crucial is the quality" -should appeal to all except the demographer. "Are we (an) endangered species", he asks in this context, and then clinches the issue with": To me, the path of becoming a Sikh is a privilege"! One cannot agree more!

There is a wistful melancholy in his Essay: "*Lines drawn in the Sand*" because *Sehajdhari*s no longer frequent Gurdwaras, Sindhis juxtapose a variety of idols alongside Guru Granth Sahib and the Sikhs in diaspora have abandoned articles of their Faith. In the very next Essay, I. J. Singh draws solace from *Sangat* and its ambiance of purity and spiritual power, adoption of the *Sikhi* 'at one's pace' and progression in the pilgrim's journey.

Every intelligent reader would share his deep disappointment with the feuds and litigation over Gurdwaras – The ‘Bermuda Triangle’ of an ill qualified Granthi caught between warring cliques out to assert control over The House of Guru! Equally valid is his argument in “*Cobwebs of Mind*” that the wisdom of Guru Granth Sahib must be studied in reverence rather than treated as an idol wrapped in finery. ‘*Some Wars are Just*’ acquires urgency in the context of the conflict raging in the Middle East. Quoting Thomas Aquinas and Guru Gobind Singh’s *Zafarnamah* reinforces the argument in *Sikhi*, of being prepared for the unexpected (*tyar-bar-tyar*) conspicuously absent. In 1984 when Sikhs in Delhi and elsewhere had been caught shockingly unawares.

On a different level, but same genre, I. J. Singh’s Essays remind one of the economist Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen’s illuminating book ‘*The Argumentative Indian*’ (Penguin Books) which dwells on the culture, history and identity of all Indians.

The book in hand indeed adds up as the intelligent man’s guide to Sikhism in the new Millennium. The publisher – a dedicated and enlightened outfit based in Toronto – would be well advised to tie-up with a reputed publishing house in India in order that libraries and readers in this country have easy access to Dr. I. J. Singh’s luminous wit and wisdom.

It is books like this one which help promote the system of values bequeathed to us by the Ten Gurus and inscribed in Guru Granth Sahib.

- S.S.

* 1. *Sikhs & Sikhism: A View with a Bias* (1998)

2. *The Sikh Way: A Pilgrim’s Progress* (2001) Reviewed in SR, Aug. Oct., Nov. & Dec. 2001.

3. *Being & Becoming a Sikh* (2003)