

BHAGAT SINGH: SELECT SPEECHES AND WRITINGS

By D.N. Gupta

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A Review by M.N. Chatterjee*

On Bhagat Singh's centennial year, words from the martyr himself!

While India is celebrating 150 years since the 1857 Mutiny, the landmarks and milestones that followed on the way to achieving freedom won 90 years later deserve due recognition. This path is dotted with sacrifices from countless souls who gave their all for the freedom they valued above everything else. This judicious selection of Bhagat Singh's speeches, writings and letters has been aptly brought out on the occasion of his ongoing birth centenary – he was born on September 27, 1907 – and also to mark the 75th year of his martyrdom.

Besides highlighting the multifaceted personality of Bhagat Singh, the book also throws light on the kind of underlying tussle between the upholders of non-violence and those against it during that time, both parties claiming superiority of their own approach.

As Bhagat Singh proceeds to lay bare the implications of the 'revolution' and its objectives, the reader is struck by his knowledge of the geopolitics of his time, coming as it does from a youth barely in his 20s. Better known as a firebrand revolutionary, he was an intellectual who had read his Marx, Bakunin, Lenin and Trotsky. A voracious reader, he wrote four books and numerous essays, letters and pamphlets even during his last days in the Lahore Central Jail. It may not be possible to agree with all his views, but the sincerity and passion with which he understood his commitment to the cause of freedom can never be questioned.

The terms 'violence' and 'non-violence', according to Bhagat Singh, have been bandied about so loosely that they have done grave injustice to both parties on the ideological fence. Violence, in his view, is physical force used for committing a wrong and the revolutionaries are totally against it. On the other hand, non-violence is backed by the theory of soul-force in which suffering is courted in the hope of ultimately winning over the opponent. But what happens when such an attempt fails to achieve the object? It is here that the soul-force has to be combined with physical force so as not to remain at the mercy of a tyrannical and ruthless enemy.

If Satyagraha is insistence on truth, why press for its acceptance by soul-force alone when frustration is starting in the face? The question, therefore, really is not whether you will have violence, but whether you will rely on soul force alone to reach your goal.

While discouraging violence as a matter of policy, he refers to an article by M.K. Gandhi titled 'The Cult of the Bomb' and analyses its message by breaking it down into three parts: Gandhi's faith, his opinion and his arguments. Bhagat Singh refuses to be drawn into any squabble in the matter of faith because faith is something personal and has little in common with reason. Bhagat Singh and President of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association Kartar Singh take a close look at the ground realities, dwell at length on the complexities involved and conclude that an average Indian, like the average human being, understands little of "the fine theological niceties about Ahimsa" and the need to love one's enemy. The gospel of the revolutionaries is simple and straight as they value freedom over everything else. The masses understand their language better because their appeal is based on cogent reasoning Bhagat Singh's 'The Philosophy of the Bomb', written on the subject, is preserved at the National Archives of India.

Despite the sharp differences with Gandhi, Bhagat Singh held him in high esteem. In his

words, "Mahatma Gandhi is great and we mean no disrespect to him if we express our emphatic disapproval of the methods advocated by him for our country's emancipation." Almost similar sentiments were expressed by Subhas Chandra Bose later when he parted company with Gandhi after serious differences.

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 had a deep impact on Bhagat Singh and contributed to shaping the Marxian ideologue in him. If the workers and peasants could successfully organise a revolution, why can't the people of the colonial countries overthrow the imperialist power and establish a just social order? The hurt and humiliation caused by the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre, on the other hand, rankled with him.

Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were tried in the Lahore Conspiracy Case by a Special Magistrate. Declaring the trial as a farce, Bhagat Singh used the court proceedings as a forum for propagating his own ideas and highlighting the injustices perpetrated by the exploitative imperialistic regime. He also lodged a strong protest against the practice of treating political prisoners as criminals and the pathetic conditions in the courts and the jails. The Special Tribunal awarded death sentence to the three revolutionaries. They were hanged on March 23, 1931, a day before the death sentence was to be actually carried out. Bhagat Singh was then less than 24.

At the final stage of his trial, his father, Kishan Singh, wrote to the Viceroy pleading for Bhagat Singh's right to defend because of his innocence. Bhagat Singh reacted to such a move with anguish. In a letter to his father he criticised him for displaying "a weakness of the worst type". "My life is not so precious... it is not at all worth buying at the cost of my principles..... Let me say, father, you have failed. I know you are as sincere a patriot as one can be. I know you have devoted your life to the cause of Indian independence, but why, at this moment [have] you displayed such a weakness?"

The appendices incorporating the Constitution of the Hindustan Republican Association, the Manifesto of the Revolutionary Party of India and the connected letters have enriched this timely publication.

[Courtesy: *Hindustan Times*]

THE SIKHS IN BRITAIN

(150 years of Photographs)

By Peter Bance

Published by Sutton Publishing Ltd., UK 2007

Pages: 192. Price: £ 18.99 (Hard Bound)

*A Review by Prof. Hardev Singh Virk**

Peter Bance (*aka* Bhupinder Singh) is a Britain-based historian, young at 31 years, already an author of the celebrated book "*The Duleep Singhs*" reviewed by me in ***The Sikh Review***. The author is a keen collector of Sikh antiques. The present volume is the fascinating photographic history of the Sikhs and their contribution to British society from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. The author tells the story of the Sikhs from the first arrival in Britain to modern times illustrated by over 200 photographs drawn from private collections and museums.

The book under review is divided into 9 chapters. In the introduction, the author traces a brief history of Sikhism and Sikh kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. According to author, "The first Sikh in Britain, Maharaja Duleep Singh, made a symbolic but spectacular impact on British society when he arrived in 1854. Looked upon as 'an adopted son' by Queen Victoria, his children became the Queen's godchildren. Since then Sikhs have continued to make an impact, from a tartan Lord Sikh in a Scottish castle, a veteran record-breaking marathon runner (Fauza Singh) to an aspiring international cricket star (Monty Panesar), for

more than 150 years. Sikhs have been one of the most successful migrant races to settle in Britain.”

According to author (p.16) : “There were four significant periods of Sikh migration to Britain. The first was between the world wars, consisting of enterprising businessmen, students and pedlars. The second was after Indian independence in 1947 when significant numbers of young labourers came to fill the gap in the labour market from Punjab. The third phase saw the greatest number of Sikhs arrive via chain migration and from former British Colonies. The fourth was predominately from East Africa, after expulsion from Uganda in the 1970s. By 2001 over, 3,36,000 Sikhs had made Britain their home.”

Chapter 1 covers the period from 1854 to 1900 and traces the history of Maharaja Duleep Singh and his family. It vividly describes the roles played by Maharani Jind Kaur, Sardar Aroor Singh and Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhawalia in bringing back Duleep Singh into the Sikh fold. He appointed Thakur Singh, Prime Minister-in-exile, to regain his lost empire but the British were too tactful to allow his conspiracy to succeed. My review of ‘Maharaja’s Box’ by Christy Cambell describes the adventures of Maharaja Duleep Singh alongwith his frustrations. It is heartening to note that Sardar Balwant Singh Grewal was the first commoner Sikh student who reached London in 1894 to study law at Lincoln’s Inn. Since Balwant Singh, a total of eleven members of Grewal family became practising lawyers educated in Britain. Some of the photographs show Sikh officers at Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee celebrated in London during 1887. We also see Bhai Ram Singh, a Ramgarhia Sikh from Amritsar, who was invited to design the Durbar Room at Osborne House for Queen Victoria. Bhai Ram Singh reinvented modern Sikh architecture, of which one of the best examples is the Khalsa College, Amritsar.

Chapter 2 describes the visits of members of the royalty, particularly of the ruling houses of Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha and Jind. Maharaja Jagatjit Singh of Kapurthala made several visits to Britain on his way to USA and Europe. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala was the most famous of all Indian Maharajas to grace Britain with his presence. The famous ‘Patiala Necklace’, one of the most expensive pieces of jewellery ever made, was created for him by the house of Cartier in 1928. Besides his passions for beautiful women and sparkling gems, Maharaja’s addiction to the prestigious Rolls-Royce Motor car practically kept the firm in business. In his garage at Moti Bagh, Patiala, the Maharaja had 44 Rolls-Royces, all specially built for him. During his 1911 visit, the Maharaja was approached by Khalsa Jatha Members to set up a Gurdwara in London. He donated 1000 £ on the spot and performed the opening ceremony of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Dharamsala at 79 Sinclair Road, London. This became the nucleus of first Gurdwara in Britain.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the exploits of Sikh troops of the British Indian Army who fought for the British and their Allies during First and Second world wars. The photographs show Princess Sophia Duleep Singh nursing wounded Indian soldiers at a convalescent camp in 1917. Sikh soldiers from Punjab wrote back memories of grand daughter of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Sikh soldiers were always fighting in front rows as Vanguard and the British army in the Second Line of defence. As a consequence, thousands of Sikh soldiers were killed or maimed in action. Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala visited his forces in action to inspire them in the capacity of Major-General of British Indian army. The two memorable photographs of this chapter represent Hardit Singh Malik CIE, OBE, ICS in London (1918) and Squadran Leader Mohinder Singh Pujji of the RAF, London (1940). Both of them fought against the Germans and won laurels during first and second world wars, respectively.

Chapter 4 is devoted to early Sikh pedlars who migrated to Britain during 1930s. They filled the vacuum created by the migration of Jewish pedlars from Europe to USA. Sikh pedlars

mostly belonged to *Bhatra* sect who maintained their Sikh identity intact even under adverse circumstances. Lodging houses were set up in East End of London to accommodate pedlars and other new migrants from India. The most exciting photograph appears at page 74 of the book, where Shaheed Udham Singh is shown being escorted from Caxton Hall by Scotland Yard police after he shot dead Sir Michael O' Dwyer on 13 March, 1940.

Chapter 5 relates to the migration of Indian labour after 1947. Since the British market needed labour and immigration laws were liberal, many families from Punjab (Doaba area) sought refuge in Britain. Photograph at page 89 shows Master Tara Singh in a Manchester Gurdwara. He went to raise funds and canvass support for forthcoming SGPC election in Punjab. Master Akali Dal won a thumping majority by winning 126 of the 130 seats in the election and Congress sponsored party was routed. By 1946, there were 20 Indian restaurants in London and in 1947, Gurbachan Singh's Punjab Restaurant was founded. It is still being run by one of his grand sons. The chapter describes the working Sikhs plight and their movement to Southall after the East End, London. At present, Southall is the hub of activity of Sikh Diaspora in London and you will miss a chance to locate a white man in this locality.

The author highlights US based Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, father of fibre optics in the world, working in his research laboratory at Imperial College of Science and Technology, London. Another photograph on page 93 shows the couple (Narinder and Satinder) after the wedding ceremony solemnized in London according to the Sikh rites in 1954. There are some other photographs of Sikh marriages in this chapter.

Chapter 6 narrates the heroic deeds of Sikh struggle. The right to wear turban at the workplace was denied to Sikhs in Britain. Sundar Singh Sagar spearheaded the struggle for wearing turban on the Manchester buses while on duty as a driver or a conductor. Ultimately, the Sikhs won their battles in almost all big cities. As a consequence, the Sikhs were allowed to wear their turbans while on duty in buses, trains and even police force. The chapter includes a photograph depicting the weapons of Guru Gobind Singh displayed at India House, London, before these were brought to India as relics of Tenth Guru.

Chapter 7 gives the history of Sikh Gurdwaras in Britain. The author gives full credit to Sant Teja Singh, who was instrumental in setting up first Sikh Gurdwara (Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Dharamsala) in London. As a young student, Teja Singh became a role model for other Sikh students in Cambridge to keep the Sikh identity intact. He was acting as a Sikh missionary while losing some precious years at Cambridge. Teja Singh founded the Khalsa Jatha British Isles in Cambridge during 1908, paving the way for establishment of first Sikh Gurdwara in London. Ramgarhia Sikhs from East Africa formed the Ramgarhia Sabha Southall in the 1960s and built its own Gurdwara. Gurdwaras were built in all big and small cities of Britain to cater to the needs of growing Sikh *sangats*. London has nearly one dozen Gurdwaras at present.

The last two chapters describe the impact of Sikhs on the social and cultural life of Britain. Turbaned Sikhs began riding motorbikes after winning Turban – Helmet case in favour of Turban. The Sikhs started participating in local and national politics. The Sikh musical bands put Punjabi music on international map. Author has given some space to the proponents of Khalistan movement in England, showing Dr. Jagjit Singh addressing crowds at London's Hyde Park in 1984. With UK Sikh population of about 3,50,000, Sikhs have diversified into every field and industry in Britain. Thus, the Sikhs have proved themselves a worthy and successful community in Britain. All those achievements are depicted by photographs by the learned author. The Sikhs have come of age in Britain and find a niche in all walks of life. The last photograph shows Monty Panesar, the star cricketer of England,

a role model for Sikh youth of Britain.

The author deserves appreciation of Sikhs all over the globe for bringing out a pictorial biography of the Sikhs in Britain. Some of the observations made by the author are remarkable. For example, the photograph on page 121 shows a mixed gathering of English men and Sikhs in the Gurdwara during 1930s. Due to lack of preaching about Sikhism, we have only the presence of Sikh *sangat* in our Gurdwaras now. On page 121 & 122, Sikh Bibis are shown acting as priest in Gurdwara. The only other example I witnessed was in Rangoon Gurdwara of Myanmar. Our SGPC has to learn a lesson to give equal rights to Sikh women in the Gurdwara services at all levels. During Second World War when ration system was introduced in Britain, Sikh Gurdwara in Birmingham was serving *langgar* for 3 days per week to the needy.

I must point out to some serious mistakes that have crept into the text. On page 12 (caption of the top photo), it is wrongly mentioned that Golden Temple was 'built by the fifth Guru, Guru Angad' when it should be Guru Arjun Dev. In Chapter 3 (p.45, 4th para), I guess battle of Brittany (France) means the battle of Britain. In chapter 5 (p. 78, 3rd line from top), it should be border of West (not East) Pakistan, running through Punjab.

□

SIKHS - CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

By Nanak Singh Nishter

Published by author (Email: nanaknishter@hotmail.com)

Distributors: Singh Bros. Bazar Mai Sewan, Amritsar. 143006 (India)

Pages: 208. Price: Rs. 200/- (Hard cover)

The last time we reviewed a book of essays was precisely a year ago, vide *The Sikh Review*, September 2006, and the author was none other than New York-based Dr. I. J. Singh, the prolific and gifted commentator on Sikhism's ever-broadening perspectives. Its title: *The World According to Sikhi* (Centennial Foundation, Canada).

Now a *pukka* Hyderabad Sardar, Nanak Singh Nishter has put together 28 essays covering a wide range of thought – provoking themes: such as 'Bhagwat Gita to Dasam Granth', 'Khalsa and the Sahajdhari Sikhs', 'Hair: Bane or Boon', 'Sikh-Muslim Relations', as also a clutch of articles on Sri Guru Granth Sahib [Did Guru Arjun re-write Kabir & Namdev Bani? SGGS as the Interfaith Guide, and the Scripture's 'relevance for Muslims'.]

These are no juicy tales, but Nishter's writing are invariably outspoken, intimate and bold. Indeed the searing introduction sets the tone for the book.

The author traces his own roots to the valiant band of Sikh troops sent by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in typical response to the then embattled Nizam of Hyderabad's appeal. This piece of disclosure is significant: it not only explains the Deccan's colourful connection with Punjab, but also sheds light on a similar early 19th century influx of Sikhs in Assam in aid of the beleaguered Hindu king.

This romantic element shines through some of Nishter's essays, characterized as they are by a certain passion born of conviction and missionary zeal bordering on evangelism. It is also a sad commentary on the Indian and Andhra establishment that Nishter was subjected to prolonged persecution as a practising Sikh in 1980's.

There are many startling observations strewn across the 200 plus pages: "About half of the Sikh population (in India) is living at – or below – the poverty line; they are ranked third *from the bottom*, slightly better off than "the people who do not have shelter... or one square meal a day."

Diverse subjects – Scriptures, history, tradition and sociology – have been handled deftly, with conviction and sensibility. It is immensely gratifying to note that the author has focused

on the need for a greater Sikh – Muslim understanding. Particularly striking are his essays: ‘SGGS – Relevance for Muslims’, and ‘Maulana Rumi & Sikhism’ – the latter dwelling on the long Sufi tradition which monotheistic Sikhism shares with Islam – thanks to the wide-ranging travels (*Udasi*) of Guru Nanak – God’s ‘lone ranger’ who traveled to Mecca, Baghdad and (according to some researchers) Constantinople – The modern Istanbul.

At a more pedestrian level, Nishter engages the enlightened reader in serious reflection on the sanctity of human body and hair, including the male beard. His essay: ‘Hair – Bane or Boon’ should be compulsory reading for our youth. Those who think *Kesh* is a sign of orthodoxy must think again!

No wonder this provocative, down-to-earth book of commentary had to be published by the author personally, rather than by the money spinning commercial publishers.

Everyone who values the ethos and cultural values of Sikh faith will find this slim volume a most rewarding experience. Having regard to the cost: benefit ratio, a concessional cover price for the younger generation is called for.

- Saran Singh

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A Review by Ek Ongkaar Kaur Khalsa

During his over 30 years of teaching Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma in the West, Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Sahib Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji, also known as Yogi Bhajan, used many different methods to convey his unique perspective on God and the purpose of life.

Two of his favorite tools were to draw pictures and write poetry that conveyed lessons about human nature and the human relationship with the Divine.

Sikh Dharma International has now released a collection of these poems and pictures in a single volume titled ***The Game of Love***. The volume is 270 pages long and includes an audio CD of Yogi Bhajan himself speaking one of the great poems included in the book: *The Dungeon of the Ribcage*.

Witty, mystical, and deeply observant – ***The Game of Love*** is unlike the mystical poetry of many of today’s spiritual writers. In it, Yogi Bhajan pulls no punches. He is as quick to point out the problems of consciousness in today’s modern society as he is to praise the experience of God. Each of the poems and drawings in the book are meant as teaching tools. They confront the reader and ask the reader to stretch his or her mind into new dimensions – considering life and love from new perspectives.

The Game of Love is a sister volume to ***Furmaan Khalsa***, an earlier work by the Siri Singh Sahib published in 1987. While ***The Game of Love*** contains Yogi Bhajan’s English poetry and his own artwork, ***Furmaan Khalsa*** is a very special group of poems written by him in Gurmukhi with artwork by Seva Singh Khalsa. Yogi Bhajan once said that if his teachings were ever lost – all of them could be rediscovered through the Gurmukhi poems published in ***Furmaan Khalsa***.

Both volumes of poetry give a rare insight into the mind and art of one of the foremost spiritual masters of the 20th century.

Yogi Bhajan came to the West in the late 1960’s, eventually settling in Espanola, New

Mexico. He traveled and taught for over 30 years before his death on October 6, 2004. During his travels, he shared the ancient practice of Kundalini Yoga and the universal path of Sikh Dharma with people from every continent.

