

Master Tara Singh and His Reminiscences

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Master Tara Singh and His Reminiscences (Prithipal Singh Kapur), 2015, Amritsar, Singh Brothers, pp. 325

The present book *Master Tara Singh and His Reminiscences* is a treasure for history and political science scholars. Its author Prof. Prithipal Singh Kapur is a biography of Master Tara Singh, a legendary figure in recent Sikh history and Indian politics. He is a historian, and educationist, and also served as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopedia of Sikhism* at Punjabi University, Patiala. It is structured into twenty-three chapters, covering comprehensively every aspect of Master Tara Singh's life. Beginning with an introduction and appraisal, it carries Master Tara Singh's "Meri Yaad" divided into two parts.

The book offers an elaborate and complex exploration of the life and legacy of Master Tara Singh. Through meticulous research and an engaging narrative, Kapur provides a detailed account that not only chronicles Singh's contributions but also delves deeply into the historical context that shaped his actions and beliefs. The book is structured chronologically, beginning with Master Tara Singh's early life and education, moving through his political and religious activism, and culminating in his later years and lasting legacy. Each chapter is carefully crafted to provide depth and context, making it accessible to both scholars and general readers interested in Sikh history and Indian political movements.

The author begins with a detailed exploration of Master Tara Singh's early years in Rawalpindi, where he was born in 1885. The narrative paints a lively picture of his upbringing and the influences that shaped his character. His education at Khalsa School and later at Khalsa College, Amritsar, is portrayed as a critical period where he absorbed Sikh values and traditions, which would later guide his political and religious endeavors.

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The main part of the book is devoted to Master Tara Singh's political activism and leadership within the Sikh community. Prof. Kapur takes a deep look at his involvement in the Akali movement and the Gurdwara reform movement and the *Jaito Morcha* in particular, highlighting his efforts to free Sikh gurdwaras from corrupt mahants and establish a democratic management system. These sections are rich in historical detail, demonstrating Singh's strategic thinking and unwavering commitment to Sikh reform.

Prof. Kapur also discusses Master Tara Singh's complex relationship with the Indian National Congress and his eventual shift towards advocating for Sikh-specific issues. This transition is explored with nuance, reflecting the broader political dynamics of the time and Singh's strategic decisions in navigating them. He explained why and how Master Tara Singh, despite supporting Gandhian movements, chose a different path regarding the enlistment of troops for the British during World War II. As Prof. Kapur emphasized, Tara Singh's dedication to the cause of the *Panth* is evident in an exchange with Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi told him, "You have to be either a full nationalist or frankly communal." Tara Singh responded, "I am a Sikh and only a Sikh, no more, no less."

In March 1940, The Lahore Resolution (Pakistan Resolution), marked a pivotal moment in Tara Singh's political journey, according to Kapur. From that point on, he viewed the Congress with apprehension and suspicion regarding Punjab. On the other hand, Congress considered Master Tara Singh as an indispensable leader despite their dislike for him. Ironically, given the choice, Congress would have preferred a political landscape without him. Tara Singh was a pragmatist; despite what Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress thought of him. They feared him because he had a good understanding of the political game being played, better than anyone else on his side. This fact grants Tara Singh a significant place in the history of that era.

One of the most poignant sections of the book covers the partition of India in 1947. Kapur describes the chaos, violence, and displacement that accompanied this seismic event. Master Tara Singh's leadership during this period is portrayed with empathy and detail, highlighting his efforts to organize relief and rehabilitation for the Sikhs affected by the calamitous partition. These narratives are moving, providing a humanizing glimpse into Singh's compassionate and resilient nature.

The author ably traces Tara Singh's career during the post-partition era, demonstrating his deep understanding of the subject. He highlights the evolving political landscape within the Akali Dal and the Congress's relentless efforts to undermine it. Unsurprisingly, the foundations of Punjab's current political situation can be linked back to the era of Master Tara Singh. Prof. Kapur gives attention to Master Tara Singh's tireless campaign for the establishment of a Punjabi-speaking state, known as *Punjabi Suba*. This detailed section showcases Singh's vision for maintaining Sikh identity and culture through a linguistic framework. Kapur chronicles the political negotiations, challenges, and ultimate success in creating the state of Punjab in 1966, portraying this accomplishment as a testament to Tara Singh's determination and strategic expertise.

The most important aspect of this biography is the inclusion of Master Tara Singh's personal reminiscences.

These reflections provide invaluable insights into his thoughts, motivations, and the emotional challenges he encountered. Kapur expertly weaves these personal anecdotes into the larger historical context, adding intimacy and depth to the biography. This approach offers readers a rare glimpse into the personal life of a public figure, making the book both engaging and relatable. Kapur concludes the book by reflecting on Master Tara Singh's enduring legacy. His advocacy for Sikh rights, leadership during the partition, and efforts in establishing Punjabi Suba are presented as monumental contributions that have left a lasting impact on the Sikh community and the political landscape of Punjab. Kapur's analysis of Singh's legacy is thoughtful and balanced, acknowledging both his achievements and the controversies that marked his career.

Finally, one can say that the book is both scholarly and interesting. It has balanced historical research with a narrative that is engaging and readable. The book is well-organized, with apt headings and subheadings, guiding the reader through the complex historical events and personal stories. The author has contextualized Master Tara Singh's life within the broader socio-political landscape of India. It makes the book a valuable resource for students, historians, and general readers alike.