

The Khalsa

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The book is one in a series of books published by the Punjabi University, Patiala, on the eve of the tercentenary year of the birth of the Khalsa. It examines the events from the advent of the Sikh faith to the creation of the Khalsa. The authors have rightly pointed out that the creation of the Khalsa by the tenth Sikh Guru was a culmination of the movement started by the first Guru, Nanak. They have endeavoured to study the Sikh doctrine in its fullness. This is a commendable approach as it is the Sikh doctrine which provides the basis and essentials for the creation of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh.

In the beginning of the book, the authors have brought to light some of the unique features of Guru Nanak's mission like the unity of God and brotherhood of mankind.

But an in-depth study of the Khalsa in its ideological and historical perspective must include a detailed exposition of Guru Nanak's world-view, his vision of God and his approach to life. The Guru, an apostle of peace, justice and harmony, was a great revolutionary who reflected intense concern with the socio-political problems confronted by the people of his times. He took a strong note of the tyranny of the rulers and the priests to which the people were being subjected. He made religion a potent instrument of socio-political change. The Guru appeared at a crucial time in Indian history when Indian religious tradition emphasised individual salvation. No importance was attached to the social aspect of man, of man's duty to society. This tendency was sought to be curbed by the Guru. He stressed that salvation could not be an individual affair. He sought to subordinate the individual to the claims of the society. In a religious

milieu marked with negative and complacent trends, the Guru's positive message of social and religious uplift assumed great significance and relevance. He widened the realm of religion to cover social responsibilities and worldly concerns. He ignited that spark in human nature which impelled men to suffer and make sacrifices for the cause for truth and justice. It is necessary for scholars to gauge the full range of the Guru's mission and then put across the true import of his teachings before the readers.

The authors, in the preface to the book, claim to take cognisance of the ideological cord emphasising the underlying unity of the ten Gurus but at the same time they entangle themselves in a web of self-contradiction when they state that 'the first nine Gurus had helped man develop from within by cultivating a set of metaphysical and moral values. Thereafter the Tenth Master prescribed external symbols reflective of these inner values'. In the vision of the Gurus, there is no dichotomy between the inner and the outer dimensions of life. The sacred and the empirical are not two opposed spheres of action. They are complementary to each other. It was in tune with the basic orientation and ideological direction provided to the Sikh movement by the first Guru Arjun. Guru Hargobind and Guru Tegh Bahadur challenged the tyranny of the contemporary rulers.

Guru Hargobind raised the Akal Takhat adjacent to the Harmandir Sahib making it an integrated complex visibly symbolising the integrated Sikh doctrine of Miri-Piri, in which both the spiritual concerns of the human soul and the temporal concerns of day-to-day worldly life came to be taken care of. As the learned authors have also mentioned that the Guru donned two swords,

symbolic of the unity of the spiritual and the temporal. The revolutionary ideal of Sant-Sipahi (Saint-Soldier) laid down by the tenth Guru for his followers was the natural and inevitable outcome of the combination of the spiritual and the empirical enunciated by the first Guru. It is not right to say that the first nine Gurus emphasised only inner virtues. Religion for them was not a matter of philosophical abstraction or metaphysical subtleties. All the Gurus believed that spiritual merit could not be gained without becoming an active agent in promoting social responsibility. Inauguration of the order of the Khalsa on the Baisakhi day of 1699, at Anandpur Sahib, was an epitomic act, in clear fulfilment of the mission initiated by the first Guru.

The authors have done well in elucidating the significance of the Khalsa and the doctrine of Guru Panth and Guru Granth in very clear terms. The two chapters, 'The Khalsa in Sikh Tradition' and 'The Khalsa in Hindu Perception' are very informative. The authors have given English translation of several extracts from the *Bachitar Natak* whose authenticity has so far not been established by the scholars.

A more coherent and detailed account of the Khalsa needs to be undertaken by scholars to enrich our understanding of the lofty ideals of the Guru which can unite and direct the erring humanity confronted with the mighty challenges of growing international tensions, escalation in the arms race and the threat of a nuclear war. Consummation of the Guru's vision would eventually be a world state based on the abiding values of human life-equality, freedom and justice.

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