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Dr. Devinder Singh Sekhon – An Eminent Sikh Scholar devoted to the Sikh Cause

*Interviewed by Dr. Devinder Pal Singh, M.Sc., Ph.D**

Dr. Devinder Singh Sekhon was born in Sathiali village of Gurdaspur district in Punjab province of India in 1944. After receiving his M.Sc. (Chemistry) degree from Kurukshetra University in 1965, he started his professional journey at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College, Mahilpur. The following year, he joined Khalsa College, Amritsar. However, in 1967, he joined Sikh National College, Kadian, as Head of the Department of Chemistry. Due to his keen interest in further studies, he emigrated to California, USA, in 1972. He received Ph. D. degree from Columbia Pacific University, California, USA and later settled in Canada. Until 2009, he served as a Chemistry/ Educational Administration professor at various colleges/Universities in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. Presently, living in Windsor, Canada, he is actively contributing to the fields of Science, Religion, and Literature.

Dr. Devinder Pal Singh and Dr. Devinder Singh Sekhon?

Despite being a noted chemist and educationist, he is interested in sharing his insights about religion and science. Due to this keen dedication to sharing his understanding of Sikhi doctrines with all, he authored seven books on various aspects of the Sikh way of

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life. In addition, his about three dozen stories and two dozen articles have been published in various newspapers and magazines of India, Canada and the USA. His writings, laced with his rationalistic approach and logical outlook, have been well appreciated by his readers. Presently, he is entirely devoted to preparing an English translation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of the Sikhs. In one of my recent meetings with him, I had a chance to learn more about his contributions and insights into Sikhism. A brief write-up of the interview is being shared for the benefit of the readers.

Dr. Singh: You are a scientist by training and a teacher by profession; then how have you become so interested in theology?

Dr. Sekhon: I was very fond of reading from a very early age. When I was in 3rd or 4th grade, I got the opportunity to read S. Sohan Singh Seetal's books. He was a popular religious author in those days. His books on the Martyrdom of Bhai Taru Singh, the younger Sahibzadas, Guru Arjun Sahib, Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, Baba Deep Singh Ji, and stories about Guru Nanak Sahib, etc., deeply touched my heart, and totally unaware of their impact on me, I became a highly devoted Sikh in my early childhood. When I studied science, and as my knowledge about nature and the universe grew, I became more fascinated by the amazing wonders of its Creator. My faith in His existence became firmer with time; it was solidified by Gurbani.

Dr. Singh: Do scientists believe in God? Is faith in God justified?

Dr. Sekhon: I cannot speak on behalf of scientists in general, but as a student of science, my faith in God increased with every passing day. Scientists do not make or change natural laws; they only discover them. But there has to be some power which has created amazingly perfect laws. For example, the earth, which is known to be about 4.54 billion years old, has been rotating about its axis and revolving around the sun without any noticeable change in its path and its periods of rotation and revolution. Which power is keeping it so precisely in its path? There are zillions of amazing facts in nature which cannot be explained without some superpower being behind them. Let us not go too far; even the so complex functioning of the human body is so amazing that one cannot help but acknowledge that there must be some supernatural power which has created such a perfect system. According to Wikipedia, many renowned scientists, including Robert Boyle, Isaac Barrow, Gottfried Leibniz, L. Euler, Mikhail Lomonosov, A. Lavoisier, John Dalton, James Maxwell, John Dawson, J. Gladstone, Lord Kelvin, and J.J Thomson, were believers in God.

To answer the question of whether faith in God is justified, I will say absolutely. Looking at the creation of the universe, and its functioning, who can deny the existence of some supreme power – which you may call God, Allah, Waheguru, or by any other name - and which controls such an endless universe? Rather, I will ask a counter question, is denying the existence of some supreme power justified?

Dr. Singh: What are the unique features of Sri Guru Granth Sahib that make it universal in its approach to human concerns?

Dr. Sekhon: The main human concerns are equality of all human beings and justice for all, fulfilment of the basic needs of life, and peace in the world. Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS) emphasizes all these concerns. The following Shabads will make the claim clear.

ਏਕੁ ਪਿਤਾ ਏਕਸ ਕੇ ਹਮ ਬਾਰਿਕ ਤੂ ਮੇਰਾ ਗੁਰ ਹਾਈ ॥ [M.5, SGGS: 611-12]

Meaning: We all are the children of the same Father, Waheguru, who is also my (our) Guru.

ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੇ ਸਭ ਬੰਦੇ ॥ ਏਕ ਨੂਰ ਤੇ ਸਭੁ ਜਗੁ ਉਪਜਿਆ ਕਉਨ ਭਲੇ ਕੋ ਮੰਦੇ ॥੧॥ [SGGS: 1349-50]

Meaning: First of all, God created nature from His Light, and we are the children (products) of the same Light. Being the products of the same Light, whom can we call good or bad?

ਜਗਤੁ ਜਲੰਦਾ ਰਖਿ ਲੈ ਆਪਣੀ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਧਾਰਿ ॥ ਜਿਤੁ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਉਬਰੈ ਤਿਤੈ ਲੈਹੁ ਉਬਾਰਿ ॥ [M.3, SGGS: 853]

Meaning: Kindly save the world which is burning (suffering) in the fire of desires; oh Waheguru. It does not matter which faith the people belong to.

As you can see, all these holy Shabads are meant for the whole of humanity and not only for a particular set of followers. In addition to the above, SGGS appeals to all humanity because it is all about the praise of God (Waheguru) and about exhorting high moral character for all humanity. Unlike other religious holy books, it does not include any personal stories. It does not claim that only Sikhs can attain emancipation and be "one" with Waheguru. Any human, who worships God with full dedication and leads a life of high moral character, can attain emancipation. It is the only holy book of its kind, which includes the compositions of other holy saints from all religions and from all castes as well. There are 35 holy saints and great souls whose compositions are enshrined in SGGS, but out of

them, there are only 6 Sikh Gurus in this list; and the remaining 29 are other holy saints and great souls.

Dr. Singh: As per the Sikh doctrines, what is the meaning or purpose of our presence in this Universe?

Dr. Sekhon: According to an old belief, there are 8.4 million life forms in the world – a number not necessarily supported by SGGS, according to which the number of species is countless. Scientists believe that there are about 8.7 million species in the world, of which only 1.2 million have been identified (3) so far, and a human being is one of them. Humans have the ability to control the environment and beautify or destroy it. Over time, humans have been able to change the face of the earth with their intelligence and have made life more comfortable in many ways (and difficult in some other ways). According to SGGS, the main purpose of human life on earth, which has been separated from God, is to reunite with Him. This can be done by singing His praise and leading a life of high morality. The following holy Shabads support this idea.

ਰਾਤੀ ਰੁਤੀ ਥਿਤੀ ਵਾਰ ॥ ਪਵਣ ਪਾਣੀ ਅਗਨੀ ਪਾਤਾਲ ॥ ਤਿਸੁ ਵਿਚਿ ਧਰਤੀ ਥਾਪਿ ਰਖੀ ਧਰਮ ਸਾਲ ॥ --- ਕਰਮੀ ਕਰਮੀ ਹੋਇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ ॥ ਸਚਾ ਆਪਿ ਸਚਾ ਦਰਬਾਰੁ ॥ ਤਿਥੈ ਸੋਹਨਿ ਪੰਚ ਪਰਵਾਣੁ ॥ [Japuji, Pauri 34, SGGS: 7]

Meaning: Among the creations of nights, seasons, phases of the moon, days, air, water, fire (energy), and the sky, God has created the earth as the place to sing His praise. God is eternal, and so is His Court. Everybody's deeds are evaluated there, and the holy saints are honoured there.

ਸੰਤ ਹੇਤਿ ਪ੍ਰਭਿ ਤ੍ਰਿਭਵਣ ਧਾਰੇ ॥ ਆਤਮੁ ਚੀਨੈ ਸੁ ਤਤੁ ਬੀਚਾਰੇ ॥੮॥ [M.1, Asthpadi, SGGS: 224]

Meaning: God created the three-layered universe to create holy men. Whoever searches his soul, ponders on the basis (origin) of the universe (sings God's praise).

Dr. Singh: What is the relevance of Gurmukh (as envisioned by Sikh Gurus in Sri Guru Granth Sahib) in the modern context?

Dr. Sekhon: For the Sikhs, Guru Granth Sahib is an eternal truth, so its context never changes. The definition of the Gurmukh is the same as it was at the times of Guru Sahiban and will never change no matter what era it is. A Gurmukh is a devotee which has full faith in the Guru (now Guru Granth Sahib) and leads his life according to His Teachings. All the Teachings of Guru Sahiban have been enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and they are eternal. The following holy Shabads testify to this fact.

ਅਨਦਿਨੁ ਨਾਮੁ ਜਪਹੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੁ ਘਰੀ ਵਸਾਏ ॥ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਸਤਿ ਸਤਿ ਕਰਿ ਜਾਣਹੁ ਗੁਰਸਿਖਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਕਰਤਾ ਆਪਿ ਮੁਹਹੁ ਕਢਾਏ ॥ [M.4, SGGS: 308]

Meaning: Recite Waheguru's (God's) Naam all the time, oh the Sikhs of the Guru; the Creator will implant it in your hearts. Have full faith in the eternalness of the Bani of the Guru as Waheguru Himself makes the Guru utter it.

ਗੁਰੁ ਪੂਰਾ ਪੂਰੀ ਤਾ ਕੀ ਕਲਾ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕਾ ਸਬਦੁ ਸਦਾ ਸਦ ਅਟਲਾ ॥ ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਜਿਸੁ ਮਨਿ ਵਸੈ ॥ ਦੂਖੁ ਦਰਦੁ ਸਭੁ ਤਾ ਕਾ ਨਸੈ ॥੧॥ [M.5, SGGS: 1339-1340]

Meaning: The Guru is perfect, and so are His powers. His Shabad is eternal (valid all the time). The individual, who enshrines His Bani in his heart, gets all his sufferings dispelled.

ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਨਾਮੁ ਦਾਨੁ ਇਸਨਾਨੁ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਲਾਗੈ ਸਹਜਿ ਧਿਆਨੁ ॥ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਪਾਵੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਮਾਨੁ ॥ [Sidh Gosht, Pauri, SGGS: 942]

Meaning: The Sikh of the Guru, recites Waheguru's Naam, shares it with others, helps the needy, and cleanses his mind with the Naam. He focuses his mind on Waheguru in a peaceful state of mind, and he is honoured in Waheguru's Court.

Like any other human being, some Sikhs may have become more money-minded and may have started to question some of the dogmas of Sikhism to justify their way of life, but the basic definition of Gurmukh will never change.

Dr. Singh: What is Sikh Gurus' Educational Philosophy, and what are its sources?

Dr. Sekhon: Guru Sahiban were not against constructive education, which enhanced peoples' ability to think positively so as to become good human being and to be useful to society. Science and technology were not as advanced in those days as they are now, and probably there were no institutions to teach them. So, how could Guru Sahiban promote their learning? But, even Guru Nanak himself went to school to have a working knowledge of languages and arithmetic. As is clear from his writings, he had a vast knowledge of many languages and of music. The same goes for other Guru Sahiban. Society always needs physicians, technicians, teachers, and skilled workers who need knowledge in their respective fields. Obviously, Guru Sahiban promoted education as they wanted people to be knowledgeable. As revealed by their writings, they were highly against ignorance; and even spiritual enlightenment requires education. All the 15 bhagats and the 14 other

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great souls, whose compositions have been enshrined in SGGS, were all highly educated. However, they were against the education which attached the people to Maya (worldly possessions and desires) so that they became money-minded, selfish, egoist, and forgot the Creator.

Sources: The main source of Guru Sahiban's philosophy about education is SGGS and to some degree, the Sikh history – Janam Sakhis, and authors like Bhai Santokh Singh, Giyani Gian Singh, and S. Rattan Singh Bhangu. Bhai Gurdas Ji is known to have received his education in Sanskrit from Benaras, and the same is said about the Nirmalas.

Dr. Singh: You have been an educationist for more than four decades of your life. Please, do share some of your experiences/efforts to implement Sikh Gurus' educational philosophy at the various institutions you served during your long professional career.

Dr. Sekhon: It is a very worthy question, but most of my teaching experience has been at colleges in Alberta and a university in B.C. (Canada) where I taught chemistry and educational administration. Unfortunately, in those environments, there were not enough opportunities for me to intentionally implement Guru Sahiban's philosophy. However, when I taught leadership to the M.A. students, I did emphasize wherever I could that a leader must be fair, non-discriminatory, and unselfish as far as possible, which is the essence of the education policy of our Guru Sahiban.

Dr. Singh: Do Sikh doctrines drive towards the sustainability of living beings on the earth?

Dr. Sekhon: According to SGGS, God created the world with His Huqam (natural laws). In Paurri 31 of Jap(u) Ji, Guru Nanak Sahib reveals that God put in all the needed materials for the survival of life on earth once, and that is not going to change. Guru Nanak Sahib also says that after creating the universe, He watches it working carefreely and enjoys it. The earth is full of water, minerals, gases, oil, and vegetation to meet all the needs of animals, including man. He has also given the man the intelligence and the ability to manage these things to suit his needs. So, it is up to man now whether he wants to use natural resources to improve the environment or to ruin it. Of course, everything is perishable, and the world has to end someday as per natural laws. But man can stretch his life or shorten it by creating conditions corresponding to each situation.

Dr. Singh: Some people proclaim that Sikh Gurus borrowed most of their ideas from Vedas and did not preach anything new.? What is your opinion about it?

Dr. Sekhon: This assertion is absolutely untrue. Of course, everything evolves with time and conditions. Right from the advent of man on this earth, he has acknowledged the existence of some superior power which he was afraid of and worshipped that which may not be God as we worship Him now. With increased knowledge, the man continued to be more and more aware of that power, which gave birth to religions like Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Shintoism, Christianity, and Sikhism as the main religions of the world. According to SGGS, the Vedas do not acknowledge a single Supreme Being but believe in many gods and goddesses. They do not talk about man's union with Waheguru as the main objective of human life; they rather talk about noble and ignoble deeds which result in man's going to heaven or hell respectively. SGGS disapproves of such teachings of the Vedas, which will be clear from the following holy Shabads.

ਮਾਦਲੁ ਬੇਦਿ ਸਿ ਬਾਜਣੋ ਘਣੋ ਧੜੀਐ ਜੋਇ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਨਾਮੁ ਸਮਾਲਿ ਤੂ ਬੀਜਉ ਅਵਰੁ ਨ ਕੋਇ ॥

[M.1, SGGS: 1091]

Meaning: The drum that the Vedas have beaten has been watched by countless people. But I remember Waheguru's Naam only because there is none other like Him, oh Nanak.

ਬੇਦ ਬਾਦ ਸਭਿ ਆਖਿ ਵਖਾਣਹਿ ॥ ਨ ਅੰਤਰੁ ਭੀਜੈ ਨ ਸਬਦੁ ਪਛਾਣਹਿ ॥ ਪੁੰਨੁ ਪਾਪੁ ਸਭੁ ਬੇਦਿ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ ਗੁਰਮੁਖਿ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਪੀਜੈ ਹੇ ॥ [M.3, Sohle,SGGS: 1050]

Meaning: Everybody recites and explains the Vedas, but neither one's mind gets imbued in their love, nor does one recognize (realize) the Shabad (Waheguru) with them. The Vedas emphasize only the noble deeds and the sins, but the Sikh of the Guru drink the immortalizing liquid of Waheguru's Naam.

Dr. Singh: In 2017, you wrote a very analytical article: "Did Guru Gobind Singh Ji worship any goddess?" Can you share your precise findings in this case?

Dr. Sekhon: In addition to being the ninth spiritual successor of Guru Nanak Sahib and the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji fought his entire life against oppression and for justice and equality for everybody. He fought many battles against the evil empire and won most of them, but he never claimed even a single inch of the enemy territory, never

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chased the fleeing enemies, and no plundering was allowed after winning a battle. On the other hand, inspired by his teachings, his Sikhs served water even to the enemy on the battlefield and dressed their wounds. When the enemy fled, leaving their dead behind, Guru Sahib ordered his Sikhs to dispose of their bodies with respect. He sacrificed his entire family – his father, his mother, his four sons, and a large number of his very dear Sikhs. With such noble qualities, some zealot Hindu brethren tried to prove that their gods or goddesses were greater than him and began to promote that Guru Sahib was a worshipper of a goddess. To read the full detail and my response to such false claims, please read the article on my **website http://www.gurbanisandesh.com/**

Dr. Singh: In your opinion, why do Sikh doctrines and Sikh practices appear to be at loggerheads during contemporary times?

Dr. Sekhon: Dr. Sahib, as per SGGS, man is born with haumein (selfishness and ego), which is impossible to get rid of without the shelter of the Guru. As a result, people have been materialistic ever since. In contemporary times, with the advancement of technology, there is a race among the nations and among the general populace to outdo the others, and man's greed has increased to the degree that it has become his main objective in life. To achieve this objective, man is using all moral or immoral ways and sacrificing all his morality and contentment. The Sikh Doctrines are very hard to follow, and the man wants to follow the easiest path to satisfy his haumein. Sadly, even our religious and political leaders (who have always been less than honest) have become victims of immorality. The Gurudwaras have become the source of making money and promoting the political agenda of the leaders. The privately owned Gurdwaras are mushrooming everywhere and are being sold in the market. The holy books are being purposely disrespected and desecrated. Because of a lack of proper preaching, most Sikhs have started to cut their hair and engage in other immoral practices. The whole situation is very sad to watch, and as per SGGS, the world has been thrust into darkness without the Guru.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, Dr. Sekhon, for sparing your valuable time for this interaction. It was wonderful meeting you and listening to your views on various aspects of Sikh doctrines, Sikh history and Sikh philosophy.

Dr. Sekhon: Thank you very much, Dr. Devinder Pal Singh, for your incisive and thought-provoking inquiry. I appreciate your input and efforts very much. ❑

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