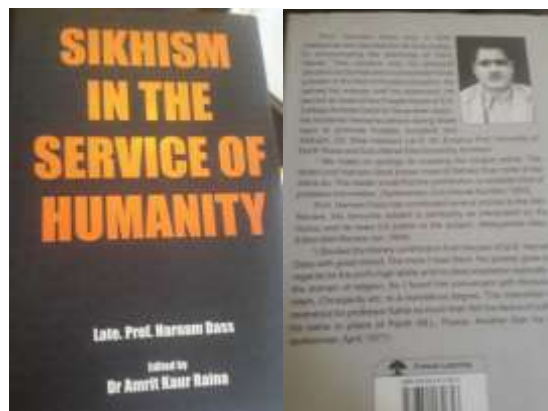


SIKHISM IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

Book Review by Dr. D. P. Singh*



Book Title: **Sikhism In The Service Of Humanity**
Author: **Late. Prof. Harnam Dass**
Edited by: **Dr. Amrit Kaur Raina**
Published by: **Unistar Books, Chandigarh, India**
Publication Year: **2013**; Price: Rs. 695/-; Pages: 502
Reviewer: **Dr. D. P. Singh**, Center for Understanding Sikhism, Mississauga, ON, Canada

Prof. Harnam Dass had been a profound scholar of Sikhism. He was an eminent writer in a comparative study of religions, with several books to his credit. In the Foreword of the book, "Prof. Harnam Dass - A Profile," its editor Dr. Amrit Kaur Raina, provides a detailed description of the author's life, works, and legacy. He was born in 1905 at Daria Khan, Distt. Mianwali (now in Pakistan). Harnam Dass was a Sehajdhari Sikh. Despite facing severe financial adversity in his early years, he was able to obtain M.A.(Persian), M.A. (Punjabi) and B.T. degrees by the sheer dint of his hard work and sustained efforts. Inspired by the writings of Sikh Gurus, he devoted his life to the dissemination of Gurmat and Punjabi language among the masses. Through his literary essays, as published in several reputed research journals, magazines, newspapers, and books, he created an indelible mark of scholarship on the minds of his readers. A votary of honest living, Prof. Dass led a life dedicated to the love of God and selfless service to society. His comparative expositions of Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Vedanta, and Islam were much appreciated by the many eminent scholars of his time. He was a true Karam yogi who had devoted his whole life to spread the message of the love of God, Gurmat, and service to all.

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Prof. Harnam Dass's book "Sikhism in the Service of Humanity" is a compilation of several research articles published in various reputed journals/magazines such as The Sikh Review, Calcutta, and The Spokesman Weekly, Delhi, during 1954-71. It contains a total of 45 articles. It is divided into four sections; titled (i) The Divine Masters and their Message, (ii) Comparative study of Various Religions, (iii) The Dharma and Politics of the Sikh Gurus and (iv) The Gurus as Saviours. It is followed by an Appendix containing a detailed description of the author's literary works.

The first section: "Divine Masters and Their Message," includes 19 articles, wherein various concepts of Sikhism, e.g., the aim of human life, *hukam* (Divine Will), *vigas* (unfoldment of creative spirit), salvation, devotion, *naam* (name) and its realization, divine incarnation, and saint-solider are explained lucidly. The article titled: "The Divine Master and His Message" elaborates on Guru Nanak and his mission. Prof. Dass emphasizes that Guru Nanak was a true Karamyogi, who, with his creative nature and practical approach, was instrumental in establishing various institutions such as *sangat*, *pangat*, *langar*, and *gurudwara*. He always led people with his example. Guru Nanak emphasized that everything happens as per the 'hukam' (Divine Will). According to him, '*vigas*' means the unfolding of the creative spirit in oneself. In the chapter titled: "The Aim of Human Life," Prof. Dass enunciates that Gurbani reports that the aim of human life is God-realization, which is achievable through *Naam-Simran* (meditation) and *Seva* (selfless service). Several Gurmat terms such as Truth, devotion, spiritual trade, divine harmony, the purpose of education, grace-inspired action, God's Vision, and God's Kingdom, *naam* (God's name) and its significance, ego and its ill effects are described herein, in a simple yet authentic manner.

"An Ideal Sikh" describes the story of Bhai Kanhaiya Ji lucidly. Herein the author asserts that the ultimate goal of a Sikh's life is to become a friend of all. He emphasizes that Bhai Kanhaiya Ji had attained that goal by his selfless deeds, so he is an ideal Sikh. Elaborating on the concept of *hukam*, in "Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Divine Hukam" the author articulates that the term '*hukam*' has generally been taken to mean divine will. Still, the word's real sense is understood somewhat better when it is considered as accumulative power of God's will, nature, law, and thought. It is but the real personality of God, and hence, it is beyond human conception and expression.

The article "The Colours of Divine Spring" describes that a flower symbolizes life's true philosophy. The author asserts that Gurbani preaches that people who wish to gain a fully blossomed experience should behave like the lotus. Just as a lotus raises its head and looks straight at the sun, so

should the heart become upright in dedication to God. Thereby it develops divine bloom by coming into conscious relation with the holy name (*naam*). The author reports that just as colours are physically associated with plant life, they are mentally symbolic of a spiritually blossomed life. Spiritually, all seven colours stand for specific values. Violet stands for simplicity and naturalness; indigo for optimism and hope; blue for charm and glory; green for youthfulness and freshness; yellow for self-enlightenment and self-manifestation; orange for sweetness and charity, and red for evolution and joy. Using specific Gurbani quotes, the author authenticates his observations.

Explaining "Guru Nanak's Philosophy of Vigas," Prof. Dass elaborated that Vigas has been used in the Gurbani in the sense of blossoming of the spirit, the bloom of life, the unfoldment of divine beauties in personality and fructification of the divine *naam* in one's life. In the next chapter, "Optimism of Spirit," the author elucidates on "Chardi Kala" as the art of continuous rising in godliness. He emphasizes that Chardi Kala is an essential factor for achieving enduring success in life. The author asserts that the Sikh Gurus made it a point to teach the virtues of Divine optimism (Chardi Kala) to their followers.

Desire as the most important aspect of mind has been elaborated in the chapter "Desirelessness in Desirousness." According to Prof. Dass, man's endless hunger for abundant wealth, immortality, eternal glory and sovereignty, timeless reputation, heavenly bliss, and salvation is, in reality, his longing for God's vision. He asserts that when our aspirations become God's aspirations; when God's purpose actuates our aims; when our will assimilates God's will, and when our individuality is fully merged in God's universal-self, then, and then alone, we can become desireless in our actions. So to practice desirelessness is to become an ideal God-man, who is a perfect Yogi as well and a perfect householder. Articulating on salvation, the author, in "Living Salvation," reports that true salvation is the inward growth of divinity in one's life. It is the natural blossoming and unfolding of the spirit in religious activities. A practical attitude of divine love is undoubtedly the proper means of attaining it. Thus real salvation is the act of transcending ego by the realization of the holy will.

Enunciating on "Guru Nanak's Conception of Divine Devotion," the author reports that the kernel of Guru Nanak's conception of Divine devotion is found in his long poems of Japji, Asa-di-Var, Onkar and Sidh Gosti. According to these hymns, Divine Devotion is a spiritual and Godly way of life and a perfect divine behaviour system. Prof. Dass proclaims that Guru Nanak was an ideal and model devotee of God and was a replica of his sacred devotion concept. Referring to "Guru Arjan Dev's Conception of Devotion," the author elaborates that according to Guru Arjan Dev, Divine devotion is mainly a

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combination of 20 qualities. These qualities include contemplation, faith, wisdom, selfless service, humility, hukam realization, grace, purity, modesty, holy association, love, obedience, and sacrifice. He quotes: "Devotion of God is the essence of human life. Those who lack it are surely subjected to humiliation." (Mehl 5, SGGS, p 865)

Commenting upon "Divine Name and its Realization," Prof. Dass expresses that *naam* (God) is both a *sargun* (manifest) and *nirgun* (unmanifest) reality. The author provides an exhaustive and comprehensive analysis of various aspects of Divine Name and its realization. In the following three chapters on "Practice of God's Nearness", "Kingdom of God," and "Divine Incarnation," a comprehensive description is provided as to how to practice love of God in one's daily life. Sikh Guru's mission to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and the role of divine incarnation are also explained herein.

In the article "Divine Instructions in Sikhism," the author has described various concepts of Sikhism. These concepts include prophets, saints, conscience, revealed books, nature, simran, spiritual values, sabd, society, Grace of God, and Gur Sakhi, in great detail with relevant quotes from Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In the chapter on "Perfection of Life," Prof. Dass asserts that achieving perfection in life is the real aim of human existence. This aim can be rightfully fulfilled by following the instructions provided by the Sikh Gurus. The following two chapters of the section include topics such as: "Gurbani and Divine Revelation" and "Cult of the Saint Soldiers." These two chapters correlate the divine instructions of Gurbani and their practical implementation in the form of Rising of Khalsa (Saint-Soldiers). The author emphasizes that Sikh Gurus aspired that a saint-soldier should have the mission of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth, and he/she can fulfill it by following God's will with dignity.

The second section of the book, containing 11 articles, delineates on "Comparative Study of Various Religions." In the chapter "Guru Nanak's Synthesis of Religion," the author reports Guru Nanak's contributions towards the development of the Sikh religion. Prof. Dass emphasizes that Guru Nanak's sublime ideas and spiritualism resulted from his true spirit of analysis and synthesis of beliefs. The following ten articles report a comparative study of Sikhism, Vedanta, Hinduism, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Raj Yoga, Yoga cult and Arya Samaj.

In the article: "Vedanta and Sikhism," the author concludes that both Vedanta and Sikhism portray that the path of life is to follow God's will, and that alone can provide us with success and bliss of life. After a detailed comparative description of "Sikhism and Hinduism," Prof. Dass reports that Hindu Shastras do not speak of spiritual humanism as depicted in the Gurbani. Hinduism believes more

in creation than the evolution theory of the world. However, Sikhism believes in the evolution theory of life and the universe. The evolution theory, named as *vigas* in the Gurbani, is unique, and it regards both birth and death as an essential part of God's eternal play.

A comprehensive analysis of the ever-present conflict in Sikh values and Brahmanic ethics and rituals is reported in the chapter titled "Sikhism And Brahmanism." The author states that Sikhism and commercialized Brahmanism are opposed to each other. They have been at loggerheads from the very beginning of Sikhism. Moreover, so far as their ideologies are concerned, they will continue to clash with each other in the future as well. The chapter titled: "Sikhism and Buddhism," Prof. Dass has analyzed the various aspects of these two great religions. He reports that the word 'Sikh' was first of all used by Lord Buddha in the case of an educated man. Guru Nanak adopted this word to depict a divinely cultured man who believed God and regarded His discipline as the very core of his life. The author proclaims that the main difference in these religions is that while Sikhism believes strongly in God, soul, *Naam-hukam* philosophy, unity of life, and Divine vision, Buddhism does not believe in these realities.

Delineating on "Sikhism and Jainism," the author declares that Sikhism and Jainism stand poles apart. Sikhism aims at action and *naam* (name) meditation. Jainism has no such aim. Jainism believes in complete non-violence practice for achieving salvation, but Sikhism believes that both non-violence and violence should be used according to the need of time. Sikhism proclaims that when non-violence fails, it is the right of the saint soldier to take up the sword to protect dharma. The philosophy of non-violence preached by Jainism and Buddhism proved a curse for India. Still, the philosophy of *naam*-inspired violence of Sikhism has proved a blessing for India in many ways.

In the chapters "Guru Nanak and Islam" and "The Sikh Gurus and the Real Spirit of Islam," the interaction between Sikhism and Islam is provided in a detailed manner. The author reports that the Sikh Gurus indeed won many sincere, national-minded Sufi Muslims as their friends, who helped them build the Sikh movement. In the article titled: "Raj Yoga and Guru Nanak," the author proclaims that Guru Nanak was a unique Naam Yogi. Herein he has compared Guru Nanak's Raj Yoga with three other Raj Yogas of India. Prof. Dass reports that Guru Nanak has based his Raj Yoga mainly on simran (love of God) and sewa (selfless service). In the article "Guru Nanak and Yoga Cult of Guru Gorakh Nath," the author has analyzed the various aspects of yoga and Guru Nanak's enunciation of this vital Path to God. In the article titled: "Arya Samaj And Sikhism," he has enumerated various points of criticism raised by

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Swami Dayanand, in his book Satyarth Prakash, against the Sikh faith. Herein the author offered a convincing rebuttal to all of these.

The third section of the book contains seven articles. In the article titled: "The Dharma and Politics of the Sikh Gurus," the author enunciates that Guru Nanak had a unique national emancipation program and reconstruction before him, and it was based on the joint organization of the resources of politics and dharma. Guru Nanak's successors, too, followed his work program to create a balanced life, individually and collectively, founded on spiritual dharma, politics, social and economic orders.

In the article "True Spirit of Sikh Dharma," Prof. Dass proclaims that according to Sikhism, dharma is the inner spirit that maintains the equilibrium of the cosmic world physically, mentally, culturally, emotionally, morally and aesthetically. It is the very embodiment of the Divine Grace. According to Guru Nanak, all humans systems should rest on dharma to contribute to humans' welfare and progress; otherwise, these are sure to become a hellish curse for humankind. The article titled: "The Khalsa Panth" elaborates that the Khalsa Panth regards all religions as sacred because, according to it, God is all dharma and is also the father of all the dharmas (religions). A comprehensive description of the ethics, values, social and cultural traditions of Khalsa has been provided in this article.

In his article "Guru Nanak's Songs of Babarwani," Prof. Dass asserts that these hymns of Guru Nanak provide us with a peep into the current political, religious and social conditions of the country. Delineating on "Non-Violence & Violence," the author pronounces that negation of violence is impossible. Otherwise, non-violence too must disappear and thus bringing the whole world to extinction. No nation or country can rule non-violently because they will be letting loose of the brute and demonic powers and upsetting the entire arrangements. Wrong notions of non-violence have been followed in India many times, and these brought many sufferings consequently.

Carrying forward this discussion in the following article, "The Philosophy of the Sword," the author has elaborated on Guru Gobind Singh's ideology of the sword. In the last piece of this section, "Ideal Humanism," the author depicts Guru Nanak's perception of humanism as a creed, a practical way of life, creative life philosophy and effective yoga. Prof. Dass asserts that Guru proclaimed that men and society should aim at the universal emancipation of all and try their utmost to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

The last and fourth section of the book contains eight articles on the life philosophy, works and times of Sikh Gurus. In the article "Guru Nanak Dev-A Strong Opponent of Imperialism," Prof. Dass articulates that Guru Nanak was dead against all kinds of imperialism, be it political, religious, social or

economic. Verily to Guru Nanak, the adoption of colonialism in any form was to lose one's spirit and spiritual values of life; to suffer deception and sorrow, and be reduced to a puppet in the hands of materialism. Guru Nanak looked at imperialism as a severe disease that stood in the way of self-realization. He suggested five great principles: Oneness of God, Spiritual Socialism, Human dignity, Selfless service, Fight against evil, to counter it.

Commenting in "Guru Nanak: The Prophet of Universal Love," the author enunciates that Guru Nanak had boundless love for God. He was a great lover of nature. The Guru loved the virtues of education, literature, democracy, dharma, socialism, and humanism. In his article "Guru Nanak – A Unique Saviour of The Hindu Race," Prof. Dass reports that Guru Nanak wanted to turn India's martial classes into real saint soldiers. Thereby, they may free themselves from the slavery of the foreign rulers and make their motherland a genuinely progressive, creative, liberated and spiritual country. Guru Nanak saved thousands of the Hindus, especially those of Punjab, from being absorbed into a foreign religion and culture, awakened them to a real sense of greatness and glory and filled them with genuine ideals of wisdom, devotion, karma yoga, love, humanism, and divine heroism.

In the article: "Guru Nanak - A Patriot," the author reports that Guru Nanak was a passionate lover of India and Punjab in particular. He was a true nationalist, though his sympathies were international. He laid high stress on the reform and improvement of the leadership of the country. He urged his followers to lead a balanced life, characterized by a harmonious development of religious, political, social, and economic coordination. He wanted that Indian culture must be based on values of spiritual humanism, international understanding, and a universal outlook. The Guru called his patriotic movement of Sikhism the game of universal love and for India's betterment in particular and the world in general. He invited all to join it in a spirit of selfless service and sacrifice.

In the following article, "Guru Arjan Dev–As A Yogi," Prof. Dass declares that Guru Arjan's life was undoubtedly a great example of Karam Yoga. The Guru represented the spirit of self-sacrifice for the cause of Truth and dharma, fearlessness, tolerance, and selfless service. The author proclaims that the unique martyrdom of the Guru was an extraordinary deed of Karam yoga because it infused a new life of self-sacrifice and spiritualism in the Sikhs. In the article: "The Martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur," the author has described the life, time and contributions of the ninth Sikh Guru in social, religious and political fields in India. He asserts that Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom was a noble act and a marvellous deed of a Karam Yogi. The Guru sacrificed his life to uphold the faith of his persecuted fellow men.

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The last two articles: "Unique Personality and work of Guru Gobind Singh" and "Guru Gobind Singh and Equality of Mankind," focus on the works, contributions, and legacy of the tenth Sikh Guru. The author reports that The Guru was a real socialist. He regarded all men as the sons of a common father (God) and admitted openly that they all had equal rights to enjoy bounties of life. His three great principles of spiritual socialism were Deg, Teg, and Fateh. The principle of Deg: Equal distribution of food for all was based on socialist policies. The principle of Teg: Heroism for all was based on the belief in the Commonwealth of the common Father. The principle of Fateh: Victory was based on two crucial concepts of Simran(contemplation) and Sewa (selfless service). The author states that Guru Gobind Singh was a great prophet, poet, patriot, scholar, warrior, socialist, Karam yogi, and a great man of sacrifice, wisdom, love, and creative action.

Prof. Harnam Dass has done essential work in projecting the divine thoughts of Sikh Gurus to the modern world through this book. After making an in-depth study of various religions and the life and teachings of Sikh Gurus, the author has made a successful attempt to project the dynamic vision of the Great Masters on the destiny of the Indian Nation in the context of the contemporary socio-political milieu. The book offers an exciting bridge between the empirical and applied aspects of the great Gurus' teachings in developing Sikhism and socio-cultural revival in India. The Sikh Gurus' vision and mission come out brilliantly through this work. Prof. Dass's thesis is strongly supplemented by appropriate references and quotes from Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Though there has been some repetition of Gurbani quotes and textual material in the book yet, it does not take the reader astray; instead, it clarifies things. Each article is complete in itself and is a treat to read. The younger generation is likely to gain much historical, literary, and spiritual knowledge from this treatise of Sikh philosophy and comparative religious studies. It is pertinent to add that this is one of the best books ever authored on this topic. I strongly recommend that this book be on all libraries' shelves and be distributed by all Gurudwaras. The Sikh youth of today must be encouraged to read works of this nature.

In conclusion, I would like to add that "Sikhism In The Service of Humanity" can inspire countless readers/learners around the world and gives them a unique insight into the comparative aspects of various religions. It is a timeless book to be rightly treasured by all learners and truth seekers. Dr. Amrit Kaur Raina, Editor of the book, deserves credit and appreciation of the Sikh community for diligently, painstakingly, and untiringly working to make this excellent book a reality.

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