

Orientalist Historiography of The Sikhs and beginnings of Sikh Studies in Punjab

Jiwant Kaur

Khalsa College, Patiala

In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, westerners, especially the British, felt the need to take a serious note of the Sikh community and source of inspiration behind their rising political power. Given the growing curiosity to know more about the Sikhs, British officials collated information in the form of notes, letters, essays, monographs and books. This paper provides a chronological overview and historical analysis of some of the writings of these British scholars on Sikh history and religion, applying a new analytical approach. They can be considered the first scientific historians, pioneering Sikh historiography.

With rapid political developments - Anglo-Sikh Wars, death of Ranjit Singh and Revolt of 1857- before and after the annexation of Punjab in 1849, British studies of Sikhism grew in number and began to assume a distinct character. The colonial government made serious attempts to understand the Sikh faith by sponsoring scholarly research and translation of texts. However, with the emergence of nationalist and revolutionary movements by the Sikhs against British rule, their interest in Sikh history was lost. Moreover, as knowledge of western historiography advanced, english-educated Indian scholars also started writing Sikh history. In the latter part of the paper, an attempt is made to demonstrate how modern historical methodology also began to influence and shape writing by indigenous Sikh and non-Sikh scholars.

Introduction

‘Historiography’ means the art of writing history. It is the history of historical writings which tells the story of the successive stages of the evolution of ideas and techniques associated with the writings history and the changing attitudes towards the nature of history itself. In a nutshell, it comprises the study of the development of man’s awareness for the past. Historiography is considered as a rule-bound discipline imposed on the historians who seek to communicate their knowledge of the past. Writing history is a craft - the study of the past as a systematic discipline. It is necessary for acquiring a complete understanding of the creation, creator and the framework and happiness in the time and space chosen. Creation and creator here imply the work and its author. During the process of knowing and communicating history, the task of historians is to undergo the test of validity, that is, the right to furtherance of knowledge and the multiplication of the source material for any country and any period of time. The quality, intensity, depth, coherence and completeness of experimental knowledge acquired through long training, experience and extensive familiarity with the historical record determines the status and also the contribution of any

historian who tries to establish the link between the knowledge and communicating of his ideas. So any historical account demands a close following of the movement, the tempo of events and the motives underlying the action of the people participating in that event.

The present study aims to make a historical analysis of the available writings of western scholars on the history of Sikhs who applied a new analytical approach to the study of Sikh history and attained prominent positions as the first scientific historians in the field of Sikh historiography. Such scholars challenged the fractional and legendary accounts and introduced the scientific method, close examination and verification of different categories of source material.

Punjab received attention of the European scholars because of crucial political development before and after the annexation of the Punjab. Western studies of Sikhism assume their own distinct character. In the earliest European references, there are two letters bearing historical value. The earliest writing is a contemporary reference to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev written by father Jerome Xavier, on September 25, 1606 to the provincial at Goa, of which Father Gasper Fernandes was the charger. Father Jerome Xavier's account appears to be based on second-hand information regarding the details of tortures to which Guru Arjan Dev was subjected. There is no indication in the letter that Father Jerome Xavier knew the Guru personally or that he had seen him during his imprisonment at Lahore or that he was an eye-witness of what he has recorded in his letter.¹ Another important letter was written on March 10, 1716 from Delhi by Messrs John Surman and Edward Stephenson to the Hon'ble Robert Hedges, President and Governor of Fort William, council in Bengal. These gentlemen and their Secretary, Hugh Barker, were present in the Mughal capital as ambassadors of the East India Company's council in Bengal to the Court of Emperor Farrukh-Siyar.² The letter is an eye-witness account of the execution of Banda Bahadur along with hundreds of the Sikhs without showing any awareness of the history of the Sikhs.

In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, Westerners felt the need to take a serious note of the Sikh community and source of inspiration behind their rising power. So, compelled by a great curiosity to know more about them the British officials collected information of a preliminary nature and put it into brief notes, in the form of essays or monographs. Antonie Louis Henri Polier, a Swiss engineer, was one of the earliest members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, elected on January 29, 1784. His paper *The Siques*, presented on December 20, 1787 before members of the Asiatic Society, touches upon almost all important aspects of the contemporary Sikh society, their origin, progress of their faith, their struggles for independence, their religion, society, occupations. This paper contains a number of factual errors which are quite natural in the face of paucity of authentic information, absence of personal contacts with the Sikhs and ignorance of their language but being the first ever paper connecting Europeans to the Sikh people, it acquires a safe place among other contemporary writings and also serves as an important source of information on late eighteenth century Sikhs.³

Historiographically, Major James Browne's *History of the Origin and Progress of the Sikhs* marked the beginning of modern historical writing on the Sikhs.⁴ He was an agent of Warren Hastings at the Court of Shah Alam II. Major James Browne's account has two aspects pertaining to the rise of the Sikhs and present State of the Sikhs. The first aspect is an English rendering of a Persian manuscript *Risala-i-Nanak Shah* by Budh Singh Arora of Lahore written in collaboration with Lala Ajaib Singh Suraj of Malerkotla. This manuscript contains an account of the Sikhs from the time of Guru Nanak to the late eighteenth century. The second aspect of Major James Browne's writing is his original contribution. It consists of an *Introduction* and the additional account at the end covering the period from 1764 to 1785.⁵ This is far more valuable than the translation portion of the tract and contains complete body of information he collected at great pain and using diverse channels during his stay at Delhi.⁶

George Forster, appointed as a civil servant in the Madras Presidency of the East India Company in 1782, published his account in two volumes in 1798 under the title *A Journey from Bengal to England*. His account is based partially on the information supplied to him by Colonel Polier and partially on his own observations. George Forster presents the life of Guru Nanak and the work of his successors and armed conflicts of Sikhs with the hill chiefs and the Mughal faujdars before Banda Singh Bahadur was able to establish an independent dominion. He has mainly written about the Sikhs in general and several important aspects of their society and polity, viz., their 'aristocratical' government, their armed forces, their guerilla mode of fighting, their concern for the welfare of the people under their rule, religion and their struggle against the Mughal and Afghan armies.⁷

In the opening decades of nineteenth century, the political situation had undergone a sea change in North-West India. The Maratha power was defeated, Delhi was occupied by the Britishers and the Sikh consolidated their hold over the territories extending from river Indus to the Jamuna. The personal contact of the Britishers with the Sikhs became inevitable. During this time, Lt. Col. John Malcolm visited Punjab. He accompanied Lord Lake following Jaswant Rao Holkar who advanced to Punjab to gain help of the Sikh chiefs. Lt. Col. John Malcolm availed opportunity to collect materials on the Sikhs and produced *Sketch of the Sikhs*. He utilized writings of Major James Browne, George Forster, *Varan of Bhai Gurdas*, *The Janamsakhi Bhai Bala*, *Bakhat Mal's Khalsa-Nama*, *The Adi Granth*, *Dasam Granth Sahib*, *Bachitar Natak* and *Syiaru-l-Muta-Akhkhirin*. He has divided the whole account into three sections dealing respectively with the history and origin of the Sikhs, their customs and manners and their religion.⁸ Lt. Col. John Malcolm's study of the Sikhs is an advancement over the earlier studies due to the author's attitude and depth of his analysis over authentic sources which made his writing more balanced. In the opening decades of nineteenth century, with the establishment of the Sikh Empire under Ranjit Singh in the North-West of India, the British felt the need for more than preliminary information and endeavoured to understand the Sikh community closely by familiarising themselves with their customs, usages and institutions. This purpose was well served in the writings of Prinsep, Murray,

Smyth, Steinback, Gardener and Honigberger.⁹ The motives behind historical writings differed from person to person and they were often mixed, ranging from intellectual curiosity to idle fancy or self interest in practical, political or even personal terms.

Captain William Murray spent sixteen years (1815-1831) among the Sikhs as Assistant Political Agent at Ludhiana, Deputy Superintendent of Sikh and Hill Affairs and later Political Agent at Ambala. He had taken to the writing of '*Political and Historical Review of the Sikh States*'. In preparing his work, he collected a number of written materials and collected oral information from knowledgeable persons through his personal contacts.¹⁰

Henry Prinsep, Persian Secretary to the Indian Government, produced *Origin of the Sikh power in the Punjab and Political Life of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, and *Account of the Religion, Laws and Customs of the Sikhs* (1834). It was primarily based on the material collected by Captain Murray. He further enriched Captain Murray's information by adding from Captain Wade's (agent at Ludhiana) report. Prinsep's account deals with the political history of the Sikhs from 1742 A.D. to 1831 A.D. His objective of writing this book was to provide a narrative of important occurrences leading to the rise of Ranjit Singh. He also gave limited but useful information about the activities and some aspects of administrative structure of the Sikhs and of different Sikh Sardars during the eighteenth century from the invasion of Nadir Shah onwards.¹¹

Major G. Carmichael Smyth wrote *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore*, along with *Some Account of the Jummo Rajahs, the Seik Soldiers and their Sardars*, 1847. An important point about his writing is that he was heavily dependent on the writings of other scholars both Europeans and Indian, of Punjab history largely to discredit the Lahore Darbar, but without critically verifying them. The purpose of writing this book, in the words of the author himself, was to bring forward all those facts which pertained to the political condition of the Lahore Darbar.¹² N.K. Sinha, however says that Smyth 'records bazar rumours'. His reliance on uncorroborated hearsay evidence makes him undependable.¹³ But Smyth was an active interventionist and suggested a company policy very much close to the annexation of Punjab.

Henry Steinback, Commander of an infantry regiment in the Sikh army, got published *The Punjab: Being brief account of the History of the Country of the Sikhs, its extent, History, Commerce, Productions, Government, Manufacturers, Laws, Religion etc.* in June 1845. His motive seems to be to make a forceful plea for the annexation of the Punjab by the British. He makes use of writings of John Malcolm, Prinsep, Thornton's Gazetteer and travel accounts of Moorcroft and Trebeck. He narrates the pre-Ranjit Singh period very briefly but gives a detailed account of post-Ranjit Singh period. Steinback's account is not based on his personal observations. However, although the account by Steinback is highly prejudicial, it may still be regarded as a useful and contemporary source on the period following the death of Ranjit Singh, a period which witnessed a kaleidoscopic transformation in the political landscape of the Punjab.¹⁴

Alexander Gardner, an employee in the Lahore Darbar, has left a valuable source of information in the form of memoirs, later on edited by Major Pearse,

entitled *Soldier and Traveller: The Memoir of Alexander Gardner, Colonel of Artillery in the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh*. The book is divided into sixteen chapters including editor's own chapters. These give ample information about the early life of Alexander Gardner, his exploits and escapades in Central Asia, climax of Ranjit Singh's power, its denouncement, court intrigues, role of the Khalsa army and his sojourn at Srinagar. All of the work is not an original account of Alexander Gardner and lacks the inner vitality but is a valuable source of information about one of the most crucial periods in the history of Punjab.

The first connected and up to date history of the Sikhs comes from Allen & Co. London, completed in 1846 and published in two volumes as *History of the Punjab and of the rise, progress and present condition of the sect and nation of the Sikhs*. The book is anonymous and this has caused confusion about its authorship. However, we know the publishers had employed T.H. Thornton for bringing out the book. Moreover, the bulk of T.H. Thornton's book is a reproduction of Prinsep's *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab*. The book deals with the hydrography and topography of the Punjab and its socio-economic milieu (largely of the Sikhs) besides the early and contemporary history of the Sikhs.

John Martin Honigberger, a doctor, produced *Thirty Five Years in the East*. As a doctor, he loved his profession and practiced it worthily. The book is profusely illustrated and contains his personal history, interesting and valuable information on such subjects as medicine, botany and archaeology.¹⁵ Besides this, Honigberger writes about the social customs and practices of the people of those days.

W. L. M'Gregor had been a surgeon in the British army and attended to Ranjit Singh in 1835-37. He wrote *History of the Sikhs* in two volumes in 1846. The first volume deals with the history of the Sikhs from the time of Guru Nanak to the reign of Ranjit Singh. The second volume contains the events from the death of Ranjit Singh to the conclusion of the First Anglo Sikh war, the bulk of it being devoted to the events of the war.¹⁶ M'Gregor's sources were the works of John Malcolm, H.T. Prinsep and E. Thornton and a book on Persian history of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the possession of a Muslim family in Wattala. The Persian history refers to the *Kitab-i-Hind* of Ahmad Shah Batalvi. Since M'Gregor did not know Persian, he had it translated into Urdu by his friend Abdoolashah.¹⁷ W. L. M'Gregor obtained the Persian work from Hussein, the son of Ahmad Shah Batalvi. His scrutiny of source material is not sufficiently rigorous and ignorance of source material is no bliss, nor does it absolve a historian of his shortcomings. He simply writes what he believes to be scrupulously correct.

Joseph Davey Cunningham is the author of *A History of the Sikhs: from the origin of the Nation to the battles of the Sutlej*. He is fully alive to the contradiction in the democratic tradition of Sikhism and the apparently despotic government of Ranjit Singh.¹⁸ He went through books on various subjects like history, literature, philosophy, science, geography and geology before developing taste for a critical study of Indian history, especially history of the

Punjab. He makes a careful and critical study of the works written by English authors on Indian history,¹⁹ Punjab history, Persian works and books on Sikh religion. He also consulted published and unpublished public records and articles in different journals like Asiatic Researcher, the Calcutta Monthly Journal and the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal. He charters a new philosophy and approach to the study of history of the Sikhs. Cunningham made the use of translated works which make his treatment of the Guru period weaker than that of the later period. The works of W. L. M'Gregor and Cunningham reflected the controversies thrown up by the outbreak of hostilities between the Sikhs and the British.

Horace Hayman Wilson's account of the Sikh sects is contained in his *Religious Sects of Hindus (Asiatic Researches)*, *Civil and Religious Institutions of the Sikhs* published in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. IX and this was subsequently included in *Sikh Religion: A Symposium*. His information is based on the accounts of Wilkins, John Malcolm, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, translation of *Vichitra Natak* by Captain G. Siddons and his personal relations with Atma Ram, a Sikh priest of Calcutta. Undoubtedly, it is a serious attempt to provide a systematic account of the beliefs and practices of the Sikhs and their civil and religious institutions but the analysis suffers greatly because of the author's ignorance of the true facts and lack of familiarity with the community and their beliefs. However, some points raised in the course of analysis are important for the proper understanding of the Sikh institutions.²⁰ Such points include the Sikhs being among many minor Hindu Sects and to describe the origin, history and main teachings of Sikhism in terms of the beliefs and practices of the various Sikh sects such as Nanak Shahis, Udasis, Gobind Sinhis, Nirmalas etc.

The British military encounter with the Sikhs during the great revolt of 1857 and consequent disbandment of the Khalsa army and destruction of the Sikh political power compelled the British to obtain first-hand information about the social and religious background of the community. The British Punjab Government made a serious attempt to understand the Sikh faith by sponsoring scholarly research and translation of important texts. So the Government mooted the proposal of getting prepared an authentic translation of *Adi Granth*, the most sacred book of the Sikhs and this work was entrusted to a German Christian missionary named Ernest Trumpp, a learned scholar of oriental languages of the University, Tübingen and member of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences. Ernest Trumpp had been launched into study of the Sikh religion neither by his own choice nor had instinctive sympathy or liking for the subject he has been asked to work upon, except perhaps some interest of a linguistic nature. He was employed by the Indian office authorities of London to take up the work. He sought the help of some Granthis at Lahore, Gurukashi (Damdama Sahib) and Amritsar but was sorely disappointed. As a learned scholar of Oriental Languages and having good knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit and North Indian vernaculars, he gleaned relevant information from English, Persian and Punjabi books, manuscripts, which are far from authentic and trustworthy²¹ and got the translation of *Adi Granth Sahib*. But, unfortunately, the missionary German

scholar, who was selected for this stupendous task was neither linguistically equipped nor did he have even a rudimentary respect for oriental doctrines, religious philosophy and mystical thoughts which were different from or contrary to dogmatic Christian ideas.²² So not surprisingly Trumpp criticized the *Adi Granth* from *all* aspects, although he still called it a treasure of linguistic information.²³

Under the British dominion, the Sikhs began to be viewed by the British from a new angle. Because of their great 'martial' qualities, they were now much sought after for recruitment in the British armed forces. However, Trumpp's interpretation and negative comments on the *Adi Granth* injured Sikh sentiments and this aroused and inspired the educated Sikhs to rebut and disprove the contentions of Trumpp by undertaking themselves scholarly study of their sacred book and religious history. Hurried steps were taken to assuage the injured sentiments of the Sikhs. Writers such as Lepel Griffin, M.A. Macauliffe, John Gordon, A.H. Bingley and C.H. Payne produced works designed to placate the Sikhs through their writings.

Sir Lepel Henry Griffin, Assistance Commissioner in Punjab in 1860, Chief Secretary in Punjab in 1878, got ample time to write about the Punjab and the Sikhs during his official assignments. His notable works on Punjab include *i. The Punjab Chiefs*, *ii. The Law of Inheritance to Chiefships*, *iii. The Rajas of the Punjab* and *iv. Ranjit Singh* written under the project rulers of India series on the request of W.W. Hunter, office incharge of the project. Sir Lepel Henry Griffin had a two-fold objective in writing the history of the Punjab, viz., to provide justification of British expansion in India and to establish the superiority over the Indians of character of the English people, which of course, was not a new thesis.²⁴ For this work, he accessed the British official records, depended on his interviews with chieftains, members of aristocracy, their private records, Ernest Trumpp's *Adi Granth* and Denzil Ibbetson's *Census Report of 1881*. The nature of Sir Lepel Henry Griffin's writings on the Sikh history illustrates a mixture of his possession of historical vision coupled with biographical style and his own thinking and views regarding the then prevailing customs, attitudes and social institutions.

The Sikh reaction to Ernest Trumpp's translation of the *Adi Granth* was outright rejection because for his derogatory comments regarding their Gurus, the scriptures and gross misrepresentation of their religion.²⁵ Max Arthur Macauliffe, British administrator at Amritsar made amends for Ernest Trumpp's failings, for he understood the distinctive principles of Sikh religion and got published his monumental work entitled *The Sikh Religion, Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors* in 1909. Max Arthur Macauliffe relied heavily on prominent men such as Bhai Sardul Singh, Bhai Sant Singh, Bhai Kahn Singh of Nabha who provided guidance as to interpretation and contextual statements. The motive of Max Arthur Macauliffe was to present before the world what he thought was an accurate account of the scriptures of the Sikhs and their traditions. Max Arthur Macauliffe's unbiased attitude gave Sikhs and the world a readable, popular but very uncritical account of the early evolution of Sikhism,

a systematic version contrasting sharply with the bland, unidiomatic and often caustic version of Ernest Trumpp.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Charles Gough produced *The Sikh and the Sikh Wars* (1897), which was meant to explain the role British army had played in extending and maintaining British rule. The book, however, suggested an idea which greatly struck subsequent writers such as Gordon, Bingley and Payne.²⁶ Besides eulogizing the exploits of the British army, their studies brought into sharp focus the military potential and liberal administration of the British to infuse confidence in the administrators and overawe their subjects but paid rich tributes to the Sikhs especially the Jat Sikhs. This is the main idea or thread which runs through the writings of Gordon, Bingley and Payne with varying degrees of emphasis. Sir John James Hood Gordon wrote *The Sikhs* in 1904. Resting his hypothesis on the contemporary researches regarding foreign origin of Rajput's and the Jat's, Gordon sets out to prove that the Sikhs have preserved inherited racial characteristics foreign to Orientals. He tried to impart separate identity to the Sikhs through his writing. To provide an adequately convincing basis for his assertions, he cited various illustrations from history wherein mutual assistance had proved mutually beneficial.

Around 1900 A.D., Bingley published his book *The Sikhs* (a manual for recruitment) emphasising the need to recruit more Jat Sikhs in the army. According to Fauja Singh, 'the purpose before Bingley seems very limited i.e., to explain the circumstances which caused the race of peaceful cultivators to be transformed into a fraternity of warriors.'²⁷ Bingley dilated upon the martial and military qualities of the Jat Sikhs. Despite the existence of a great variety of sources, he claims to have depended heavily on Denzil Ibbetson's *Outlines of Punjab Ethnography* and Sir Lepel Henry Griffin's *Ranjit Singh* and blended them in such a way so that he could make a strong case in favour of recruitment of Jat Sikhs. After the First World War, C.H. Payne from the Bhopal State service wrote *A Short History of the Sikhs*. In fact, the whole book is an attempt to establish that though the interests of the British and Sikhs were different in nature and character yet their welfare was interdependent.²⁸ C.H. Payne, having seen the war and rise of the *Khilafat* movement, attempted to project the Hindus and Muslims as inveterate enemies of the Sikhs. Gordon, Bingley and Payne were persons of average intellect and reflected how the average Englishman understood history or how they wanted the Sikhs to understand their own history.

With the emergence of nationalist and revolutionary movements among the Sikhs against British rule, the interest of the British in their history was lost and there was no serious study of the history of Punjab being made by them in the last three decades of the British rule in India.

As knowledge of Western historiography advanced in India, English educated Indian scholars too tried their hands at it. Syed Muhammad Latif, a revenue official of the British Indian administration, was the first among Indians to write a comprehensive history of the Punjab in English. His writings include *History of the Punjab*, *History of Multan* and *History of Lahore*. He depended entirely on English sources like James Mill, W.W. Hunter, J.D. Cunningham.

He was an Indian, a Muslim by religion and a British administrator. The combination of these characteristics influenced his writings. Though his general approach was pro-British and pro-Muslim yet in dealing with the Sikh portion of Punjab history, he was able to display a measure of fair assessment of men and events earlier unknown in any writer on the Sikhs from that community.

Sita Ram Kohli, a scientific researcher, wrote *Catalogue of Khalsa Darbar Records, Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Urdu), The Indus Valley Civilization*, articles in the *Journal of Indian History* and edited Dewan Amarnath's *Zafarnama-i-Ranjit Singh*. He was indebted for his interest in historical research to his western education and European teachers and friends, such as H.L.C. Garret and John Thompson. He was associated with the Indian National Congress. His main field of interest and specialization in the field of research was on the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors. The pre-Ranjit Singh period was untouched except a few references in some of his accounts. He utilized some primary sources such as Munshi Sohan Lal's *Umdat-ut-Twarikh*, Diwan Amarnath's *Zafarnama* Ranjit Singh, Ganesh Dass's *Fatehnama Guru Khalsa Ji Ka*, *A book of Military Parwanas*, Shah Muhammad's *Var on the First Anglo-Sikh War* (1845-46), foreign travellers, and visitors' accounts and British intelligence reports.²⁹ He followed a scientific approach but unnecessary length, repetition and untouched fields in his writings brings shortcomings. The strong wave of Indian Nationalism was sweeping the country at the time of his writings and this left a deep mark on his way of thinking.

Transformation of Sikhism (1st edition in 1912) is the only historical book by Gokal Chand Narang. Narang was an Arya Samajist. He claims in the preface to the first edition of *Transformation of Sikhism* that he studied every important book or manuscript dealing with the Sikh history that he could find in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the libraries of Indian Office, British Museum, Royal Asiatic Society based in London.³⁰ He also referred to *Panth Prakash* (without saying which *Panth Prakash* he consulted), *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, J. D. Cunningham's *A History of the Sikhs*, Ali-ud-Din's *Ibratnama* and *Risala-i-Nanakshah*.³¹ As an Arya Samajist, Gokal Chand Narang was powerfully influenced by the national thought of the period and his book on Sikhism bears an indelible imprint of that. As communal passions raged high, his outlook came to have an element of narrowness.

The works of such Indian writers show a clear impact of the modern historical methodology which is obviously the gift of the West to India. But if their methodology is from outside, their point of view is Indian and not foreign. They too were not entirely free from the nationalist bias which put some obstacles on their broad outlook.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, educated Sikhs had begun to respond to the 'Orientalist' interpretations of the Sikh tradition. They had good knowledge of the Sikh sources and they followed a critical attitude towards them. Their sympathetic approach to the Sikh tradition served as a source of inspiration for their scholarship. The first decade of nineteenth century marks the early stage of Sikh studies. During this period, the approach of the writers was historical and biographical. Their main aim was to educate the English-

knowing public on the lives of the Gurus and their teachings. The Sikh religion was under dual attack from the Hindus and Christians, and given the situation the nature of Sikh publications was polemical. Bawa Chhaju Singh published *The Ten Gurus and their teachings* in 1903. A year later appeared Sewa Ram Singh's book *A Critical Study of the life and Teachings of Sri Guru Nanak Dev*. He was a lawyer who later became a Judge. He relied upon the *Janamsakhi* traditions which included works of Bhai Bala, Bhai Mani Singh and Colebrooke (*Hafizabad* or *Valayatwali*), works of Bhai Santokh Singh, Giani Gian Singh, Guru Nanak Dev's compositions, Bhai Gurdas, Baghdad inscription, personal observations and European predecessors. Sewa Ram Singh had concentrated on the early Sikh tradition starting with Guru Nanak Dev Ji. The first comprehensive work on the history and religion of the Sikhs was produced by Khazan Singh, an Extra Assistant Commissioner, entitled *History and Philosophy of Sikhism* (1914) in two volumes. He offered a philosophical exposition of Sikh concept on God, Guru, Soul, Karma, Khalsa. He was interested more in the early Sikh tradition than in the political history of the Sikhs for which he made a critical study of the sources available to him. He believed in the divinity of Guru Nanak and the originality of his creed. These English educated Indian writers appeared to have cherished the Sikh tradition. For them, the Sikhs had a distinct identity of their own, which marked them off from Hindus as well as Muslims.

Prof. Teja Singh, a product of the Gurdwara Reform movement, wrote *Guru Nanak and His Mission* (1918), *The Sword and Religion* (1918). His *Gurdwara Reform Movement*, published in 1922, reflected some of the ideas he had expressed in *Guru Nanak and His Mission*. He brought out *Asa Di Var* in English translation in 1924, followed by an English translation of *Japji*. His motive behind his publications was to interpret Sikhism as an original system and to propagate this interpretation among Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.

Some of the Indian scholars who had some understanding of religious texts were unable to convey the spirit of original while writing in a foreign language like English. At times they followed the band-wagon of Western scholars and expressed agreement with their view, little realising the harm they caused to the spirit and purity of the Sikh doctrine.

S. Karam Singh Historian was a pioneer of modern research in Sikh history. He wrote Sikh history in Gurmukhi using a scientific approach. He is the first person who challenged the traditions and legendary accounts and introduced a scientific method of investigation to solve the mysteries of Sikh history through critical analysis, close examination and verification of different source materials. He devoted more time to discovering the authentic contemporary source material to put the main events of Sikh history in an objective and systematic way. His proficiency in Punjabi, Persian, Arabic and English proved useful in his historical research. He also gave adequate attention to collect oral traditions relating to Sikh rule in Punjab. So research work, aimed at presenting an objective history of the Punjab, especially Sikh history using analytical approach, was started by S. Karam Singh Historian at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was able to produce works of far-reaching historical importance than done previously. He was not satisfied with using traditional

accounts and claimed to have based his works on original, contemporary, oral information and other authentic sources available to him.

The main difficulty with Western scholars of Sikhism is their ignorance of sources and critique on Sikhism published in Punjabi and lack of understanding of the depth of Sikh scriptural texts. The English translations available do not carry the spirit of the original. The background context of their own religion directly or indirectly moulds their perception and prevents their proper appreciation of Sikh values and ethos. Sometimes, they fall back on biased sources and as such there is an inherent flaw in their interpretation of a certain event or approach to a Sikh practice. So their works suffer from superficiality and sometimes distortion of Sikh traditions and ethics.

Their writings were largely occasioned by a genuine desire to share their knowledge, experiences and observations of an enigmatic and formidable people with their countrymen and at the same time serve and further the imperial aims of British rule. Sikhism was studied and presented by Western writers against its Indian religious background. They attempted to interpret its nature in terms of its relation with earlier religious traditions of India along with the method of historical analysis. But most of the European writings were based on secondary sources having nothing new to offer either in the form of information or by way of interpretation.

Western education made inroads in Punjab in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, introducing new analytical methods in the study of history, literature and religion. The spread of western education and the import of liberal ideas of the West brought about a spiritual awakening among the intelligentsia. Their desire for reform received a further impetus owing to the onslaughts of the Christian missionaries who were active in the province. The challenge of Christianity aroused the larger communities of the Punjab viz. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to set their houses in order. The dogmas of the British and Christians produced a reaction when they were confronted with native religions and cultures in the form of revivalist movements such as Brahmo Samaj, Prathana Samaj, Arya Samaj, Dev Samaj and Singh Sabha among the different communities.³² The motive of these movements was in terms of rekindling or re-awakening among the people a spirit of quest in religious thought and an enthusiasm for social reform. These movements were started with the conviction that there was a need to revitalize their communities. In order to do this, literature in their respective mother-tongue was produced to re-acquaint the masses with their religion, culture and history. So these movements led to the growth of the vernacular literature³³ and did a commendable work in the field of education for boys and girls and in raising social and political consciousness in the country.

From the beginning of nineteenth century onwards, the original sources of Sikhism became accessible for Western writers but their ignorance of the language kept crippling their proper understanding. Owing to obvious such shortcomings, Sikhs faced a serious threat to their religion and cultural identity. In spite of these problems, the English-educated Indian writers endeavoured to delineate some of the characteristics and practices of an analytical approach in

their writings. So it was because of the influence of Western studies that the method of historical and theological analysis came to be adopted in the area of Sikh Studies by indigenous writers.

Notes

- ¹ 'Guru Arjun's Martyrdom - From Father Jerome Xavier's letter, September 25, 1606' in Dr. Ganda Singh (ed.), *Early European Accounts of the Sikhs*, Today And Tomorrow, New Delhi, 1974, p. 181.
- ² 'John Surman and Edward Stephenson – Massacre of the Sikhs at Delhi in 1716', *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- ³ J.S. Grewal, *Contesting Interpretations of the Sikh Tradition*, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 1998, p. 24.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Dr. Fauja Singh, 'Early European Writers: Browne, Polier, Forster and Malcolm' in Dr. Fauja Singh (ed.), *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, Oriental Publishers & Distribution, New Delhi, 1978, p. 5.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ J.C. Dua, *British Historiography on the Eighteenth Century Punjab*, Radha Publishers, New Delhi, 1992, p. 28.
- ⁸ Darshan Singh, *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*, Sehgal Publishers Service, New Delhi, 1991, p. 15.
- ⁹ Dr. Fauja Singh (ed.), 'Introduction', *Historians and Historiography Of the Sikhs*, p. viii.
- ¹⁰ Darshan Singh, *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*, pp. 16-17.
- ¹¹ J.C. Dua, *British Historiography on the Eighteenth Century Punjab*, p. 44.
- ¹² Dr. S.K. Bajaj, 'Prinsep, Murray and Smyth' in Dr. Fauja Singh (ed.), *Historians and Historiography Of The Sikhs*, p. 30.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ¹⁴ Dr. S.K. Bajaj, 'Steinback, Gardner and Honigberger' in Dr. Fauja Singh (ed.), *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, p. 41.
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- ¹⁶ G. Khurana, *British Historiography On The Sikh Power in Punjab*, Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1985, p. 93.
- ¹⁷ W.L. M'Gregor, *The History of The Sikhs*, Vol. I, James Madden, 8, Leaden Hall Street, London, 1846, p. 291.
- ¹⁸ S.P. Singh & Harish Sharma, *Europeans and Maharaja Ranjit Singh*, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, 2001, p. 82.
- ¹⁹ Elphinstone's *History of India*, J. Mill's *History of British India*, Auber's *Rise and Progress of British Power in India*, E. Thornton's *History of the Marathas* and Harlan's *India and Afghanistan*. Dr. S.S.

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- ²⁰ Darshan Singh, *Western Perspective on the Sikh Religion*, p. 27.
- ²¹ *Dabistan-i-Mazahib* (English translation by Shea & Tryer), *Siyaru-l-Muta-Akhkhirin* (English transition by Briggs), *Sakhis: Travels of Guru Teg Bahadur and Guru Gobind Singh* (English translation by Attar Singh of Bhadaur), *Sikhan De Raj Di Vitihia* of Shardha Ram Philauri. Dr. A.C. Arora, 'Ernest Trumpp' in Dr. Fauja Singh (ed.), *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs*, p. 162.
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