

**RELIGION
AND
POLITICS:**

The Sikh Perspective

G.S. Dhillon

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G. S. DHILLON

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**To the sweet memory of my brother-
in-law, Er. Harinder Singh Sidhu,
who left us in the prime
of his life.**

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DIVISION OF THE PHYSICAL SCIENCES
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Preface

This study is an attempt to bring into focus the true nature of Sikh ideology, not in its isolation, but in the light of the teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the broad historical perspective. Attempts have been made to trace the origin of the Sikh doctrine to the earlier religious traditions and to split it into various strands, linking them to earlier sources. This has led to many distorted versions and erroneous interpretations of Sikhism. An impartial historian must view the revealed Sikh doctrine in its totality, and not in fragments.

The basic tenets of the Sikh faith have been clearly laid down in its scripture, the *Guru Granth*. In the Sikh world-view, there is no place for the doctrine of illusion (*Maya*) and the resultant renunciation, escapism or pessimism. One of the positive features of Sikhism is the welding of the spiritual and the temporal aspects of human existence. The Sikh Gurus viewed the world of sense and form as true and valuable. They stressed spiritual devotion combined with social responsibility. According to their integrated vision, the social is a religious responsibility and the religious has to be expressed in the social. Religion, thus viewed, could be an effective vehicle of promoting the values of social harmony, love, equality, freedom and brotherhood of man.

Absence of moral element has been the bane of Indian politics, more especially, in the recent years. The so-called division between religion and politics, under the camouflage of secularism, is nothing but a ploy to put an end to all diversity and dissent. In the process all principles of justice and fair play are being sacrificed.

Recently the Akali Dal has come under sharp attack for combining religion with politics. The ideals of a community spring from its past tradition and have deep social and historical roots. In the long and highly cherished Sikh tradition of *Miri* and *Piri*,

initiated by the Gurus, and the consequent heroic ideal of *Sant-Sipahi*, one supplements the other and makes for a stable and just polity. A religion which preaches the message of universal brotherhood has no scope for narrowness and fanaticism.

Sikhism, to-day, is passing through a crucial phase. The Sikhs are struggling hard to maintain the identity, unity and integrity of the great Gospel handed down to them by the Gurus. The Khalsa was created for the very purpose of upholding *Dharma* (righteousness). Imbued with this ideal, the Sikhs have been in the forefront to make sacrifices for the defence of the universal and national causes. Unfortunately, when they try to defend the interests of their community, they are dubbed as fundamentalists, secessionists and communal. In this study an effort has been made to examine the socio-political relevance of the Sikh faith.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Rajesh Bindra, proprietor, Roxana Printers, who extended all help in the preparation of this book. My thanks are also due to Professor Jodh Singh, Head, Fine Arts Department, Government College for Girls, Sector 11, Chandigarh, who took pains for the cover design. I must say a word of thanks to my little daughter, Puneet, who bore with me, during this laborious work.

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Sector 14, Chandigarh
28th August, 1989

RELIGION AND POLITICS

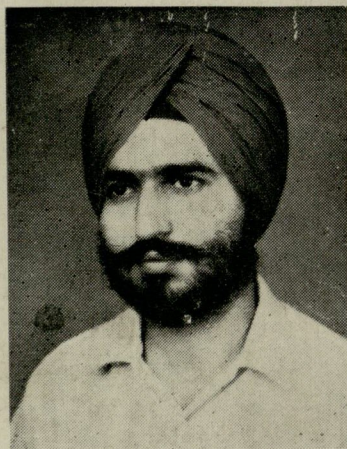
—THE SIKH PERSPECTIVE

What is the role of religion in relation to human society? Can a religion be altogether abstract and other-worldly? Can there be a clear demarcation between the boundaries of the spiritual and the empirical? Are the two realms entirely separate and incompatible? Or can there be harmony between the two? Is it right to ask the Sikhs to separate religion and politics? In the present study an attempt is made to seek answers to these questions.

The most important task before us is to find the answer the Sikh Gurus give on the issue of combining religion and politics. For this purpose, we shall deal with three aspects of the issue. The first is the ideological answer given by the Gurus in their *Bani* in the *Granth Sahib*. The second aspect is the history of their lives and how they have conducted themselves in relation to the ideology they prescribe. This aspect will also indicate the kind of society the Gurus organised, the nature of institutions they built and the targets they laid for that society. The third aspect is how the Sikh society has lived and stuck to these ideals in its history during the post-Guru period.

Inseparability of religion and politics has been one of the chief characteristics of Sikhism. Want of a clear perception of Sikhism has led to many controversies and misconceptions regarding this doctrine. Sikhs, as a religious and cultural, group have been in a minority, yet they have played a significant role in the Indian affairs, out of proportion to their small numbers. It is so because of their unique historico-political position and their spiritual and social vitality bestowed upon them by their faith. The Sikhs have had to pass through great ordeals to preserve their strength and distinctiveness.

Before the advent of Sikhism, Islam was the only religion which welded the spiritual and the temporal into a harmonious



Publisher's note

The much-debated subject of Religion and Politics has attracted national and international attention. The author has tried to place before the readers the Sikh perspective purely from an academician's point of view. It is a pioneering work as the subject has not been touched by any scholar of Sikhism so far. The author has, in a very lucid style, covered the salient features of Sikh religion and history to authenticate his statements and conclusions. Well-documented and thought-provoking, the book is of immense interest not only to scholars but to all those who share the agony of Punjab and wish all controversies to be solved through a spirit of goodwill and mutual understanding.

About the author

Gurdarshan Singh Dhillon is M.A., first class first, in History. His doctoral thesis, 'Character and Impact of the Singh Sabha Movement', is a work of great historical importance. A specialist in modern Sikh history, Dhillon has published a number of research papers in journals of repute.