

Bona Fides of Dr Nicola Mooney Dhillon and Doris Jacobsh

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Mr Jagpal Singh Tiwana writes in the July 2006 issue of The Sikh Review that **Dr Nicola Mooney Dhillon** is a budding scholar of Sikh Studies. Does this mean that any Professor/school teacher who brings his or her students to the Gurdwara to learn about the Sikh religion can become a potential Sikh scholar?

It is the idea of what constitutes a “budding scholar of Sikh studies” that has prompted me to write this response. I have noticed that in North America, whenever any white American or Canadian shows a slight interest in knowing about Sikhism, we Sikhs start labelling him or her a “budding scholar of Sikh studies” but is this necessarily correct?

In the UK, I have seen teachers and lecturers in the UK bringing students to the Gurdwaras to find out about the Gurdwara and its significance in the Sikh community. Such visits are made to develop their own, as well as the students’ understanding of how Sikh religious beliefs are expressed in practice through studying the features of the Gurdwara (prayer hall, langar, library, Guru Granth Sahib, sleeping area, entrance hall, flag, coin box, canopy, tablah, pictures), and the activities, including worship. Yet I have not once heard teachers and lecturers or Sikh leaders saying that these visitors become potential scholars of the Sikh religion, except Dr Cole and one or two more who later worked on the topics related to Sikhism for higher degrees.

I would argue that rather than being a study of Sikhism, Dr Dhillon’s work for the degree of PhD “**Good Fortunes: Ethnicity and Modernity among an urban Jat Sikh Middle Class**” is nearer to Sociology, Social History or Social Anthropology. Simply visiting or sending students to Gurdwara doesn’t make a “budding scholar of Sikh studies”, at least not here in UK. Additionally, Mr Tiwana has not asked any question on Dr Dhillon’s research work such as, why she has decided to study the Urban Jat middle class? What was her control group to compare the middle class Jat Sikhs? What research methodology did she decide to use? What was the size of her sample? Did she compare Jat Sikhs with Hindu Jats or with non Jat Sikhs? What were her conclusions and implications? Who was her supervisor? What work had the supervisor done himself/herself in the area? Who were the external examiners? These answers would have shown what the author’s motive (i.e. primarily social or religious study) was for the degree of PhD. Others may have benefited from such responses for future work on this issue.

Turning to Mr Tiwana’s interview with Dr Doris Jakobsh published in the 2006 October issue of The Sikh Review, no question has been asked about Dr Jakobsh’s claim that anti-female statements can be found in the Guru Granth Sahib. Dr Jakobsh has not so far responded to Kashmir Singh’s comments on her work, published in The Sikh Review. Dr Gurnam Kaur of Punjabi University, and Dr J S Mann and Dr S S Sohdi have also commented on her book – **Relocating Gender in Sikh History** based on her research work for PhD thesis. If someone had written this kind of critical review of my research, I would have responded to their criticism in order to uphold my academic reputation.

It is remarkable that Dr Jakobsh learnt written and spoken Punjabi in ten months, understood our Gurus' Bani in such a short time, and was able to point out that women are not equal to men even in Bani. Had she read GGS in Punjabi or its translation in English? It is also interesting to note that Dr Jacobs admires Dr McLeod, Dr Pashaura Singh, Dr Gurrinder Singh Mann, Dr N Barrier and her supervisor, Dr Oberoi - no Indian Sikh historians with the exception of Mr Kushwant Singh are mentioned.

The interview seemed to have missed such vital statements and merely focussed on Dr Jakobsh's going to British Columbia university, and her supervisor, and on her love to listen to Kirtan, and both her children and her fondness of Kara Parshad and Langer. Whilst complimentary, what was the relevance of this? When school pupils, teachers, and university students and lecturers visit a Gurdwara in the UK, they all say Karah is very tasty and sweet. Can they have more? They also enjoy our Langer. Further, whenever my students were going on holiday in India, they used to ask me which part of India I would suggest they should visit. I used to say, "Do go to Amritsar and visit Golden Temple, if you are visiting Chandigarh". Upon their return, they thanked me for my suggestion. The comments were: it was such a peaceful place and we sat there for sometimes and listened to the music- "We didn't understand the words, but the music was very soothing".

I cannot comprehend that we are happy to see American, Canadian and European writers carry out superficial research on Sikhism and Sikh history and, without extensively reading or interviewing renowned Sikh historians then go on to publish books which naturally convey the wrong message.

What is more disturbing is that such books may fall into the hands of young Sikh youths, born, educated, working and living abroad, who want to find out more about their religion and history, but in the absence of a knowledge of Punjabi will fall back on books written in English. If the wrong message is being conveyed then my fear is that we will soon find our Gurdwaras overseas becoming emptier and emptier, and youngsters losing interest in Sikhism.

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