

Betrayal of the Sikhs by Landen Sarsfield (1946) [133P] ASIN: B0006BYBPS Lahore Book Shop

Book Review: Kavneet Singh



This rare hard to find book written in June 1946, a little more than a year before the formation of two countries out of the mish mash of over 650 independent states, monarchies and countries glued together by the canny British East India Company is focused on the predicament of the Sikh situation through a clarion call made by a moral, ethical Britisher with a conscience. Landen Sarsfield has to a large extent understood the psyche, the moral fiber, other virtues and weaknesses of the Sikh people very astutely.

Chapter 1...

On the other hand it seems Mr.Jinnah envisaged some minor adjustments to the present boundaries of the Punjab. If so, does he propose to exclude the districts and States mentioned above, and should he do so then what is to be done with them? If you admit their right to be separated from Pakistan you automatically admit that grounds exist to create a "Khalistan" or independent Sikh State. If, on the other hand, Mr.Jinnah denies the right of self-determination to those areas which are predominantly non-Muslim, how can he claim the application of the same principle to the Mussulmans? Clearly the whole question boils down to this: if Muslims are entitled to Pakistan on those areas where they predominate, then equally the Sikhs are entitled to their.....[page 5]

In the environment and time frame of writing this book, the Sikh political players never truly understood the devious Brahmin-Khatri-Bania combine who very cleverly co-opted the entire Sikh leadership and sold them a golden bag of hot air. With Master Tara Singh leading the Sikhs, being less educated than his Muslim and Hindu counterparts; with a limited vision; and a first generation Sikh convert, was too trusting of the Hindu leadership till it was too late. LS, keenly aware of the "all-embracing and all-resolving sea of Hinduism", has mentioned at the outset of this fear by the Muslims. LS, further clarifies the blunder of the Cabinet Mission Plan and the fallacy of "counting heads" instead of understanding the true nature of the three major parties involved of which the third being the Sikhs; whose contribution being way out of proportion to their small numbers.

Chapter 2....

All living creatures in the village were killed and eaten, and then the Sikhs were driven to the extremity of eating the bark of trees and such grass they could find. Still, however, there was no question of surrender.....[Page 15]

LS, has succinctly grasped the religious/military history of the Sikhs and very concisely put the ethical conduct of the Sikhs in its historical milieu and notwithstanding the fact that, the Sikhs had been fighting in defense of their existence perpetually. From the time of Guru Gobind Singh to the time of the annexation of Panjab, the bravery of the Sikhs was even more than the fiery Gurkhas in the face of adversity is remarkable with no parallels. LS reminds his fellow countrymen of the amazing courage and service provided and a moral debt is owed to the Sikhs in so much as at a minimum the British have to be just and impartial in doling out what rightfully belongs to the Sikh People.

Chapter 3....

They did not submit then and they will not submit now; whether you are their enemy or their friend; whether you like it or not, you have to face the fact that Sikhs will fight. They are brave and strong and will resist domination to the death.....[Page 23]

If past history; albeit sad yet amazing is any indicator of the future LS's insight is incisive.

Chapter 4....

To Sikhs honour is more than life, and believes that it is better to die than surrender to oblivion and disgrace.....he would have known that were the Khalsa the smallest community in the world, they would still steep India in misery and bloodshed unless the rights of the community are maintained.....[Pages 31-32]

LS, taking into account the unique; magnanimous reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, saw a truly democratic nature of a minority Faith people ruling 'others' with fairness and equity and understood the character of Sikhs and realized what made them tick.

Chapter 5....

Many times in different countries one has heard the taunt that we British have little use for a friend once he has served his purpose; and reluctantly one must admit that, with or without reason, many people think that of us. Now it seems to me that such reputation is best lived down.....[Page 37]

The loyalty shown towards the British by the Sikhs in 1857 and saving their hides at a critical juncture, is a priceless debt owed to the Sikhs otherwise the tide of history would have been drastically different. For the critics of the Sikhs a gentle reminder as to the context; that just a few years earlier the Sikh Empire was annexed by the British all with the help of Hindus and non-Sikh soldiers basically from another country. How could then they trust the same people and collude with them at the time of the Mutiny of 1857!

Chapter 6.....

Unparalleled Military Record; A complete survey of their record would take not one volume but twenty.....[Page 38]

A short list of 306 soldiers are listed; yet the fact is over 83,000 Turbaned Sikh soldiers died and over 109,000 soldiers were wounded in just World War I & II alone in aid of the British. Again for the critics, all other Faith groups who enlisted as soldiers in the British

Armed Forces were in a way all mercenaries, therefore no fingers can be pointed at each other.

Chapter 7....

Details taken from the 1st Sikh Infantry.....That the record of men who gave their lives in one battalion, and the same story is repeated in numerous other instances.....[Page 50]

LS, has highlighted examples of the bravery awards won by Sikh soldiers in various theaters of battle and wars all over the globe proving their mettle with par excellence.

Chapter 8...

In such a case the Sikh Holy Places will have to be protected, whether by inclusion in Khalistan or otherwise; the details are for politicians to work out, but the principle is simple. No domination and above all no interference with Sikh institutions or culture. For the maintenance of these - in fact and inviolate - they will fight to the last man.....[Page 58]

LS, again seems to be uncannily visionary as all his warnings came to pass eventually.

Chapter 9....

He appears to have tried to get the Khalsa College raised to a Sikh University...[Page 60]

The Khalsa College established in 1892 was a premier Sikh institution which as LS hopes through many trials and tribulations eventually does become a University but not exactly the way he envisioned it.

Chapter 10....

So runs the promise of the King's representative, and so indeed the ordinary Britisher does not forget even today. It is not an irony of fate that the elected representative of the British People seem in danger of doing so? That not merely in danger of forgetting centuries of devotion and unswerving loyalty, they are helping to undermine the very foundations on which these gallant princes and people have based their existence.... [Page 69]

LS, reminds his British audience of the loyal and friendly alliances built by the British with the government of Patiala which should not go unrewarded and further besieges his countrymen to act like honorable statesman.

Chapter 11...

Coming from a race of fighting men, and ruling over a country noted for the fighting capabilities of its people.....Normally they are quiet, lovable people, but when aroused, are likely to be fanatical. This is of course to be expected, as much among the Muslims as the Sikhs.....[Pages 80-81]

The erstwhile State of Kapurthala had also sent many of its men to battle by enlisting into the British Army. Many a sacrifice has been made by Sikhs from this area in past two centuries to fight all sorts of enemies. LS points out to all the small independent Sikh states have also contributed their undue share of man power for King and Country.

Chapter 12....

In the first and second World Wars the services of this State have been as outstanding as those of Patiala and Faridkot.....[Page 87]

Again LS relays to the reader the loyalty to the British through outstanding military service of the State of Jind.

Chapter 13...

Up to now the present Faridkot has stood entirely aloof from any combination which might have as their object embarrassment of the British Government, and in fact has been a staunch supporter of our administration always.....[Page 93]

LS has mentioned all the infighting and the battles among the various Sikh states but continues to clarify & voice the loyalty and service as a collective towards the British.

Chapter 14....

The services of this State in World War I & II have not been insignificant, and a considerable standing army is maintained.....[Page 98]

LS continues to mention the stalwart services of the State of Nabha towards sending soldiers into both the World Wars on behalf of the British.

Chapter 15....

He maybe filled with the greatest enthusiasm for his own religious beliefs, but he has no desire whatever to interfere with those of anyone else..... Taken all in all, there should be little ground for imagining that any minorities in a future Sikh state would be denied absolute freedom of worship and developing their own culture. If any person thinks so he should disabuse himself because he is suffering from misapprehension unfair to the Sikhs and moreover one which indicates that he, himself, is not free from baseless prejudice.....[Page 101]

LS's ability to understand the Sikh psyche perfectly is amazing and I am sure some men of other Faiths understood this but refused to acknowledge in case it caught the imagination of the right thinking politicians.

Chapter 16....

Moreover, any division of the Punjab would of necessity divide the Sikhs leaving substantial bodies of Sikhs on both sides of the boundary. We have therefore been forced to the conclusion that neither a larger nor smaller Sovereign State of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution for the communal problem.....[Page 106]

The Cabinet Mission Plan a 17 page document is printed in its entirety in this book and it glaringly obvious that there is literally no mention of the Sikh situation and they have been ignored completely. The British willingly played into the hands of the Hindu Congress party to submerge the Sikhs permanently.

Chapter 17....

...have deliberately blinded themselves to the same danger to a greater degree to Sikhs under Muslim domination which is thought to be aggravated by the proposed constitution. Needless to add that even under the existing constitution Sikhs have been reduced to a position of complete helplessness which already exasperated them to the verge of revolt. (c) That while admitting that the Punjab is the "homeland" of Sikhs, the Cabinet Mission

has by its recommendations liquidated the position of Sikhs in their homeland. (d) That the Advisory Committee set up in Paragraph 20 of the Cabinet Mission's statement is wholly ineffective to safeguard the just rights of Sikhs.....[Page 125]

The Amritsar Meeting of the Sikh leadership countered with passing a resolution (part of which is above) immediately upon reading the Cabinet Mission Plan realized that the Sikh grave had already been dug by the (Hindu) double dealers.

Chapter 18....

There may be slight differences of opinions as to the extent of Khalistan, or its boundaries, but that there will be a Sikh State, at whatever cost, is the firm belief of all. Sometimes in the past the Congress Party has interfered in matters not altogether its concerns, but in relation to this important matter members appear to be busy with their own point of view concerning the future of India, that they have little time to take note of anyone else's.....No system of representation at the Centre is likely to satisfy the Sikhs if they are to live in an autonomous area which, call it what you like, will be Pakistan de facto.....yet possible to avoid the endless bloodshed and misery which otherwise will be rampant on the face of this unhappy land.....[Page 131-133]

LS close's the 'Curtain' on the book with some truly prophetic ending. If only some sanity prevailed among the leadership especially the British and took some the wisdom of Landen, there would have been much more peace than unrest for all those years till today.

In conclusion this concise book very bluntly puts across the argument that all the alienable rights of the Sikhs must be protected for a laundry list of reasons, but even more so that they are very small in number and have contributed multifold more than any of the other two parties at the bargaining table. A fair, impartial and just group of men need to partition off what is right and the correct thing to do on behalf of the Sikhs; or face the consequences of a never ending self created monster based on greed and base (racist) instincts. LS, seems to be aware of the Gandhi-Nehru-Patel problem but has not highlighted the issue, though right in the first chapter pointed out the "all embracing sea of Hinduism" factor which has been the bane of the Sikhs since then! A remarkable book written by a visionary man with real integrity and must read for any unbiased history buff!