

REVIEW OF DORIS R. JAKOBSH “RELOCATING GENDER IN SIKH HISTORY”

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By

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In this article we will attempt to expose pathological motivation, and dehumanizing anti-Sikh research done by Doris Jakobsh (Instructor in Religion, Renison College, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada, phone: 1-519-885-1211 ext. 3497). Jakobsh under Dr. Harjot Oberoi, Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

We are concentrating of two major documents:

- a. “Gender Issues in Sikh Studies, Hermenentics of Affirmation or Hermenentics of Suspicion” written by Doris Jakobsh when she was a doctoral student in the Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia, Vancouver in 1993-2000. This invited article was part of an international conference hosted by Dr. Pashaura Singh at the University of Michigan, U. S. A. in 1994. Later on, Pashaura Singh and N. Gerald Barrier edited a book based on the said conference entitled The Transmission of Sikh Heritage in the Diaspora published by Manohar Publishers and Distributors 2/6 Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi 110002. Pashaura Singh claims that this book was “Prepared under the auspices of the Sikh Studies Program, University of Michigan, U. S. A.”
- b. Relocating Gender in Sikh History, Transformation, Meaning and Identity by Doris R. Jakobsh, Oxford University Press, Y.M.C.A. Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110001. This book is a revised version of Dr. Jokobsh ‘s Ph.D. thesis which she finished in 1999 as a graduate student in the Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia. Dr. Harjot Oberoi, who was removed from the University of British Columbia Sikh chair for his anti-Sikh research and sent to teach Anthropology was her supervisor. We do not know at this point in time who were on her thesis committee and her external examiner or whether an ethics committee was set up to review her thesis proposal (S.S.H.R.C. guidelines, 1991).

After carefully reading the above-mentioned sources we can safely conclude that:

1. Doris Jakobsh is an Eurocentric anti-Sikh, self-appointed researcher who wants to bring “correctness” to the Gender Issues in Sikh History using:
 - a) Western Feministic Paradigm
 - b) She wants to look at Sikh Gurus and their religion as reflected in Guru Granth Sahib as Marx looked at various European religions.
 - c) She wants to use empiricist, logical-positive-objective European methods to evaluate mystic writings of the Sikh Gurus.
 - d) Her motivation appear to be repression-projection mechanism. It means whatever she has been made to repress as a female growing up in North America, she wants to displace and project to Sikh ethos. She claims that it will help her in reducing contradictions in her otherwise ‘meaningless’ life!!
 - e) She is a North American female scholar “in a hurry” and has done excellent “role dance” from 1993-2000 around anti-Sikh paradigms developed by Dr. McLeod, Grewal, Hans, Gurrinder Mann, Pashaura Singh, Fenech and her supervisor H. Oberoi.
 - f) In her pathological desire to fit with the “Culture of the Fitters” of Sikh religion and to form an “ugly gestalt”, she even has shamelessly attempted to demolish the best Khalsacentric work done on Sikh females by Dr. Nikky-Gurinder Kaur Singh documentation in her book entitled “The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
 - g) Jakobsh feels she has the right to make Sikh female “sociological respectable” by imposing rational efficiency of logical positivism. In the process, if she has to trample over to the sacred writing of the Sikhs in Guru Granth Sahib, so it be!
 - h) She is willing to “denature the Eastern Supernature” even though her “Doors of Perception” may be still tinted with coloured glass of western up bringing!!
 - i) She is willing to violate all norms of S.S.H.R.C., 1991 set by Canadian Council as long as she can land a lectureship at Renison College, University of Waterloo.

A summary of Jakobsh’s writing is provided for the benefit of the readers. They can make up their own mind about her research. Doris claims:

1 That Guru Nanak’s use of MATA as wisdom, beauty, clarity, Guru Gobind Singh’s use of “Durga” not as a Goddess but a figure of myth and literature and Bhai Vir Singh’s use of Sundari and Rani Raj Kaur as wise and saintly Sikh female role models was a “lip service.”

2. In spite of the use of female imagery in Sikh Scripture by many Gurus, one can find misogynistic (anti-female) statements in Guru Granth Sahib.

3. Sikh Gurus, even though they identified with the female worldview by producing (feminine bani—MEHALA I, II, III, IV, V, IX) yet did not understand whether in fact “their poetic utterances were feminine.”

4. She agrees with Harjot Oberoi that Sikh Scripture is male dominated because it uses such terminology as Akal Purakh, Karta Purakh. The devotee is allegorically depicted as bride yearning for Male God in the form of a bridegroom. She considers this aspect of Guru Granth Sahib as misogynistic (anti-female), androcentric and patriarchal.

5. Even though Guru Granth Sahib is replete with images of mother, bride and many metaphors of feminine roles, yet it still reflects men's perception of and stereotypes about women's ideal behaviour. In Sikh Scriptures women are told how to regulate their private life by Sikh Gurus who were all males. The Scriptures provided tools of control for what the "ideal is to be and to do!"

6. The celebration of motherhood in Sikh Scriptures where she lives with dignity and upon whom depends creation and nurturing is false. Jakobsh thinks that Guru Nanak often quoted Shabad (AG 473)

OF WOMAN ARE WE BORN, OF WOMAN CONCEIVED,
 TO WOMAN ENGAGED, TO WOMAN MARRIED,
 IT IS THROUGH WOMAN THAT ORDER IS MAINTAINED
 THEN WHY CALL HER INFERIOR FROM WHOM
 ALL GREAT ONES ARE BORN?
 WOMAN IS BORN OF WOMAN:
 NAM IS BORN BUT OF WOMAN.

According to Doris, Nanak is ambivalent and uses women only as procreators especially valued if they produce (RAJANS). Doris further feels that Guru Granth Sahib's view of female is one sided and promotes subjugation and self-abnegation to the male master hidden in the form of a male Guru.

7. Jakobsh thinks that we should stop calling the language of Adi Granth Allegorical (See AG 371, AG 483, AG 31, AG 41, AG 182, AG 796, AG 639) but reflection of Social reality of women depicted by Male Gurus. She does not agree with Dr. Nikky Singh "that Shabads of Guru Granth Sahib symbolically depict duality of body and mind, which not only splits one part of the self from the other but also has an in-built mechanism that degrades the one and exalts the other is negated."

8. Doris thinks that the language of Guru Granth Sahib has a "hidden agenda for women." To become better human beings you have to become obedient, subservient, sensual, compliant, faithful and devoted wives and mothers.

9. According to Dr. Jakobsh we should apply "Research of Suspicion" to Guru Granth Sahib. We should negate whatever is written, break the mask and reach a new Western feminine worldview of affirmation of Sikh Female through McLeodian paradigms. This research of suspicion will bring out sexist, patriarchal attitudes and practices as depicted and promoted in Guru Granth Sahib.

10. Doris is upset that Sikh Gurus ended up fighting with the Mughals rather than removing social evils of the society and emancipating women. She feels that it produced incongruity between Sikh precepts and practice in Guru period of Sikh history.

11. Doris think that Dr. Nicky Gurinder is wrong when she claims that Guru Nanak received his divine revelation independently and Guru Nanak was a MASTER himself and did not follow Kabir or his Bhagti Paradigm.

12. Doris thinks that McLeod's SANT synthesis with regards to the origins of Sikhism is valid. Guru Nanak, the Founder of Sikhism absorbed many SANT ideals from a variety of resources including Kabir. In other words, Guru Nanak was a SANT NANAK of Bhagti movement. Dadu Dayal and Guru Nanak were definitely influenced by KABIR.

13. Because Guru Gobind Singh spent a good deal of his formative years in the Sivalik Hills, the area where the Durga Cult prevailed, he incorporated the Durga Myth in his poetry to please the Jat Sikhs who were Durga worshippers. (Please note that McLeod thinks that Guru Gobind borrowed the Five K's from Jat Sikhs.) In doing so, Guru Gobind Singh overruled the writings of Guru Granth Sahib (AG 874) where females are negatively perceived but worship of Great Mother is forbidden and Sat Guru is inadvertently assumed as Male.

14. Jakobsh claims that Guru Gobind Singh became a Durga worshipper as he was afraid of the Female Goddess. Durga myth helped Guru Gobind Singh mediate contradictions in Sikh worldview. Adi Granth has shaped "One God" (Ek Onkar) psyche of the Sanatanic Sikh; therefore, Guru Gobind Singh brought in Durga to satisfy the yearning for the feminine images of the Khalsa Sikhs. No wonder Dasam Granth of Durga Myth was very popular with Sikhs in the early nineteenth century. (I do not think Doris has read Critro Pakhyaan—Tales of Male-Female Tricky Deceptions from Dasam Granth translated by Pritpal Singh Bindra!)

15. She agrees with the interpretation of Dr. Oberoi regarding 19th century Sikhism of Sanatan Sikhs which had nature worship, witchcraft, spirit and spirit possession, miracle saints, and goddess worship along with devotion to Sikh Gurus. She is sad that this "enchanted universe" of Panjab was destroyed by Singh Sabha leaders trained in Western ideology with linear worldview (At least she admits that that Western ideology produces linear world view!).

16. Doris is very upset that in the poems of Bhai Vir Singh Mere Saian Jio (O, My Beloved) and Rani Raj Kaur, it is always a female in search of the divine and the Beloved is also a Male. (Perhaps she would like to see a male searching for a female or a female searching for a female or a male searching for a male!!)

17. In relocating gender in Sikh History, Doris is applying Dr. Oberoi's "Paradigm of Construction of Religious Boundaries" (1994) to explain the worldview of Sikh women during the Guru period and Singh Sabha movement period. For Guru period, she uses

Adi Granth and comes up with the following degrading observation about Adi Granth which the Sikhs consider Sacred and their Living Guru.

About Guru Nanak

1. Nanak states in Guru Bani that the ideal woman produces sons, especially Rajas
2. By supporting Rajas, Guru Nanak gave his support to the dominant social and political order of his time.
3. Guru Nanak associated women with Maya and barrier to the attainment of emancipation.
4. Guru Nanak used women to explain bad behaviours of men.
5. Guru Nanak grieved over the rape of women during the Babur invasion but is silent about sati and female infanticide.
6. Guru Nanak belonged to the upper echelons of society, so it could be construed that his silence about sati and female infanticide was an approval.
7. Guru Nanak seemed content to leave the prevailing system in place in his Shabads.
8. When Guru Nanak addressed the Divine through the feminine voice (Bani) it accepted that God was a male, use of bride and bridegrooms analogy also signifies that Guru Nanak's Sat Guru was a male.
9. Guru Nanak perceived his married life as a burden, an obstacle that needed to be overcome. In other words Guru Nanak was not a happy householder.
10. Guru Nanak lived squarely within the patriarchal framework surrounding him. He did not criticize the society he lived in regarding the status of women.
11. Guru Ram Das Sabads contained feminine imagery of palpable reality. He expressed love for the divine in utterly PROFANE language (P. 32 RG 1 SH).
12. While appointing Masand, the Fourth Guru excluded women.
13. In her conclusion Doris uses unauthentic/questionable source which has no place for PhD research which suggests that Mata Ganga Ji who is highly revered and respectable Women in Sikh History entered into Niyoga. It is an attempt to defame Important Role played by women in Sikh history. For details read Dr. Kashmir Singh's review on use of this questionable source by Doris. Niyoga theory has no place in Sikhism.
14. The role played by Mata Jito, Mata Sahib Devi and Mata Sundri at the time of creation of the Khalsa is not clear. All they did was to bring Patashas to sweeten the Amrit. Whether Khalsa was given Five K's in April 1699 is debatable.
15. While writing Chritro Pakhyan for Dasam Granth, Guru Gobind Singh depicted women as seducers. According to Doris, "Chritro Pakhyan should be used for the construction of gender during the time of the tenth Guru." These stories were written by Guru Gobind Singh as a warning to the Khalsa order. The Rahit-Namas also degraded women. The Warrior-Saint ideal for the Sikh male was detrimental to the status of the Sikh female.

16. Mai Bhago being dressed in male attire and becoming a bodyguard of Guru Gobind Singh was a suppression of her femaleness. Creation of Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh devalued the Sikh females who were not included in the order.
17. In Jat Sikhs, Britishers saw a reflection of themselves; hence started promoting Martial Race Concept. Khalsa Sikhs represented British ideals of masculinity and hence was not good for Sikh female image. British aroused in the Sikhs, their religious impulse to produce in them the martial spirits which they used to control India. So it was politics of similarity between the Sikhs and the Britishers. (She does not know that two thousand Sikh Freedom Fighters were hanged during British Raj 1849-1947.)
18. The British support the practice of KAREWA for Jat widows curtailed the desire for power and liberty in Sikh widows.
19. The hyper masculinity of Sikh males was appreciated by the British masters who cut Maharani Jindan to size because she was a muscular woman.
20. Sikhs in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's court did not honour their women and indulged in homosexual practices. Sikh women did not fit the "Victorian notion of frailty of women" because they were sturdy and looked tough.
21. Britishers colonized India because Indians have depraved attitudes towards women. Christian missionaries (men and women) were invited to teach Sikh males the manners. That is why British administration supported conversion of Panjabis to Christianity. Christian missionaries and Singh Sabha movement liberated Sikhs from magic practices of DAINS and OJHAS.
22. Guru Ram Singh was exiled to Burma because he preached open sexual morality among his Kuka adherents. "Kuka women were loose" and they did that to find a place in the male oriented society of Kukas, followers of Guru Ram Singh.
23. Highly developed gender ideology of Arya Samaj affected Singh Sabha movement which in turn started defining the role of Sikh women. Singh Sabha was not an original movement. Singh Sabha leaders turned to fastidious interpretations of Sikh scriptures as a basis of their reforms and shaped a new Sikh female on the basis of models provided by Bh. Vir Singh.
24. As compared to Panjabi Sikh males, Bengali men were effeminate and only suitable for civil service and not for military service, which is a "man's" job.
25. She misrepresent and misinterpret Sikhism by use defaming literature that parents married through Anand Karj ceremony, their children were called HARAMZADAS. For Sikh Perspective on "Anand Marriage Act" one should read Article By K.S, Talwar.
26. The Sikh female middle name KAUR came from Rajput term KANWAR (Prince). This middle name for the females was taken to Rajputize their identity.

After reading Relocating Gender in Sikh History by Doris Jakobsh one is amazed to see how mystified a Theology graduate (1992) from Harvard University can become while working under Eurocentric Supervisor with linear and myopic vision. She talks about the role dances Sikh females had to do to define their identity, yet forgets about

how many times she talks about the insightful paradigms of McLeod, “Enchanted Universe” of Oberoi to seek male supervisor’s convergence for a piece of paper (Ph.D.) which took her seven years to get.

Conclusion

The statements collected in this paper show that Doris Jakobsh is an Eurocentric Feminist Sikh research who wants to bring “correctness” to the Sikh History. She wants to use logical-positivistic methods by using object-subject duality. The “role dancing,” repression and projection of nine years of graduate work closed her mind to universal consciousness and deep mystical saintliness preached and practiced by Sikh Gurus who were operating under very difficult and oppressive times.

The concept of ethnic research, social sensitivity and responsibility, introspection and retrospection, positive disintegration and dissonance, essence and wholism, not approaching the subject of ethnic study with a prestored paradigm, doing retrospection to ascertain if the interpretations of her findings are causing psychic or spiritual discomfort to the people who belong to the culture under study, looking for the wholistic reality rather than detached reality, looking for the essence of the culture and not imposing false proposition of one culture to understand the other, seeking total immersion in the culture before rushing to study it, cleansing the doors of perception through introspection, examining the psychodynamics of motivation to do study in a particular culture, not using freedom of expression as crutch to generate hurtful knowledge, not using oppressive assumptions, obliterating subjective objective duality, declaring who she is and her motivations through insightful discovery were sadly missing in Dr. Jakobsh writings. She was a prisoner of paradigms.

WHAT BOTHERED THE PRESENT AUTHORS THE MOST IS THAT SUCH A HALF BAKED, INSENSITIVE, PRISONER OF EUROCENTRIC FEMINISTIC PARADIGMS AND RACIST INSTRUCTOR WHO HAS NOT SHOWN INTELLECTUAL HONESTY, ACADEMIC HUMILITY AND SENSITIVITY IS TEACHING RELIGION IN RENISION COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO, WATERLOO, CANADA. IT MUST BE VERY FRIGHTENING FOR ETHNIC MALES (JEWS, CHINESE, EAST INDIAN SIKHS, BENGALIS, CATHOLICS) TO TAKE COURSES IN RELIGION (SPIRITUAL) FROM DORIS OF RENISION COLLEGE.