

The Materiality of the Past-History and Representation in Sikh Tradition

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Recently, the field of Sikh Studies has generated a lot of interest in the West. But most of these studies tend to be influenced by the late W H McLeod who was the most ardent proponent and forerunner of the materialistic school of thought. He introduced and propagated new methodologies, new themes and new models of history writing based on materialistic interpretations of history. He introduced some fundamental changes in history writing and shaped the direction of Sikh Studies in the West from what came to be called, 'a post colonial perspective' on the modern secular lines. Chairs of Sikh Studies in America and Canada also tend to be dominated by McLeodian model of history writing. Anne Murphy, Assistant Professor of Sikh Studies at British Columbia University is on the same bandwagon as McLeod and is adopting the same model for history writing.

Literature produced by scholars, operating from the 'ivory towers' of Western academia have generated a storm of controversy in the academic circles. Unsavoury debates and cultural and intellectual tensions on account of contrasting approaches to historiography have led to a virtual impasse between the Eastern and Western scholars and chaos in the field of history. Western scholars, with their 'one-size-fits-all' explanations and brazen self-congratulatory sophistry attempt to prove the validity of materialistic versions of history and go on to make eloquent claims of self-righteousness, liberalism and objectivity. Scholars, attuned to traditional historiography

in the non-Western cultures, are strong dissenters of the new approach. They find this highly irksome in as far as the Western writings encroach on their religion, culture and identity under the cloak of presenting 'new versions' of history, which are based on their lop-sided Western world-view and materialist methodology.

Godless materialism and staunch secularism of the West seem to have invaded the field of Sikh history which is closely intertwined with the Miri-Piri tradition and the firm belief of the Sikhs that 'Akal Purkh operates in history'. Materialistic interpretation of Sikh history is a direct negation of the unique Sikh world-view which is very closely aligned to the wholeness of life and combines the spiritual and the empirical realms of human existence. This world-view operates in the dynamic Sikh history as a motivating force. In the integrated vision of the Sikh Gurus, there is only one indivisible unified Reality that creates, underlines and weaves together the multiplicity of matter. Thoughts, attitudes, emotions and actions that go into the making of the Sikh community and their ethos, traditions and history are all governed by this world-view.

History is not a calculating machine, meant to count only materialities of the past. It unfolds in the mind and the imagination. It must take into account the multifarious responses of a people's culture. A historian must be fully sensitive to the reality of the historical experience of a community's culture in all its diversity and complexity. Culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element. As Mathew Arnold put it, culture is, 'each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought'. He believed that 'culture palliates, if does not altogether neutralise, the ravages of a modern aggressive, mercantile and brutalizing urban existence.' Culture is a source of identity. Edward W Said, in his famous book, 'Culture and Imperialism' defines culture as a sort of theatre, where various political and ideological causes engage one another.' Religion is woven into the very fabric of Sikh culture, which cannot be explained by applying rigorous codes of materialistic interpretations. Sikh history is much more

dynamic than what the materialist thinkers can comprehend with their fragmented vision.

Actors are certainly more important than objects in history. And in Sikh history, actors are very dynamic actors. Sikhs are movers and shapers of history. Material things can be destroyed or disintegrated in a matter of moments. It is the actors who hold the torch of ideas and ideals and leave their 'footprints on the sands of time' and produce history. Carlyle believed that moving force behind history are great men. Ideas and ideals acquire institutional forms. These ideas and ideals can't be grasped by the external observers in a manner and standard set by those who adhere to the so-called scientific materialism and give more priority to visible forms and objects. These observers limit themselves and their writings to the limited domain of the manifested world. Materialist philosophy, with its focus only on visible phenomenon, is mono-dimensional, partial and lop-sided in its approach. This dichotomy in outlooks and world-views has also resulted in stark contrast between the self-representation of their past by the Sikhs, on the one hand, and studies on Sikhism and Sikh history, undertaken by Western scholars, on the other hand. For obvious reasons, the Sikhs resist the redefinition of their identity by Western scholars. The task of reviewing the above mentioned book would have been incomplete without this rather lengthy explanation, as the lay readers don't seem to be aware of the new wave of empiricist historiography, which has swept across the West, leading to a lot of controversy in the academic field.

The book, under review in its original form, was produced as a doctoral dissertation under the guidance of J S Hawley at British Columbia University, where the author Anne Murphy is employed as an Assistant Professor at the Chair of Punjabi Language, Literature and Sikh Studies. Her doctoral research was funded by a Fullbright Hayes dissertation research grant which enabled her to undertake research in India, England

and Scotland. The author gave a final shape to the book on the basis of post-doctoral research supported by generous grants provided by several institutions like New Scholar University, University of British Columbia, British Academy, American Philosophical Society and American Institute of Indian Studies.

The focus of the book, on an unusual theme, is on the forms of 'representation of the Sikh past at different moments in the present and in the past'. The book raises issues of historiography and its diverse and sometimes contrasting forms. The starting point of the book is from 1708, the year of demise of Guru Gobind Singh, which is also a date suggested for the first historiographical text written about the Tenth Guru and the Sikh community by the author Sainapati. The book ends with the official recognition, in 1925, of a managing body for the Sikh Gurdwaras, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (S.G.P.C.).

The author believes that there was no careful recording of the Sikh history during the first 150 years after the Tenth Guru's demise. She maintains that there was no clear Sikh identity prior to the Colonial era. According to her, it was the British who sensitized the Sikhs about their history and identity and played a crucial role in the modern formation of a Sikh historical sensibility, which gave a clear form to Sikh distinctiveness as compared to pre-Colonial indigenous formations. She refers to 'multiple notions of the community with regard to its past and its sovereignty', articulated at different times, in the pre-Colonial, Colonial and post-Colonial contexts. She argues that in the pre-Colonial period, representation of the past was tied to territory or region, within the Punjab landscape and the articulation of a sovereign space for the community. In the transition from a pre-Colonial to Colonial period, 'a particular territorialized imagination of the Sikh past' was produced that contributed to the living memory of the Gurus and their teachings for the Sikh community. The Sikhs sought authority and control over the interpretation of their past. She believes that all this took place within

the Colonial framework of knowledge. The author states that Punjabi and Sikh historiography, at this time, came under the direct influence of British form of historical writing. The central theme in her thesis is that Sikh identity, in its current form, never existed in the pre-Colonial period and that it emerged primarily as a result of encounter with Colonialism. As an outcome of this encounter, Sikhs started making use of theological idiom and territory to express their identity.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter titled 'The forms of Memory and History' is introductory. With her hair-splitting arguments, the author sets out to point out the theoretical framework of the book. She tries to prove that materiality of the past in the form of objects and sites, mostly associated with Gurus, has operated in the formation of the Sikh community through various means. Objects mentioned in the book include weapons, historical paintings, photographs, text and Gurdwara model. In her obsession for materiality, she also includes, in her list, Five K's i.e. *Kes* (hair), *Kangha* (comb), *Kirpan* (sword), *Kara* (steel bracelet) and *Kachha* (undergarment). She makes it clear that approach of the book is entirely different from 'the textually defined narratives that have dominated understanding of the formation of the Sikh community'. Working within the narrow conceptual framework of materialistic parameters, the author takes no cognizance of the subtle inner reality of creative spirituality, so highly valued by the adherents of the Sikh religious tradition. Is the author trying to establish the supremacy of matter over spirit? Is the outer garb more important than inner essence, in her estimation? Or is she denying the existence of spirit? With her lop-sided approach, she fails to understand the dynamics of Sikh history. Inert matter, materiality or material objects and sites acquire their sanctity due to their association with the Gurus. They don't exist in isolation. Five K's acquire their importance as symbols of the Khalsa, prescribed by the Tenth Guru. Take an example. For the Christians, Cross is a sacred symbol, not a material object, due to its association with Jesus Christ. Nothing

can be more absurd for the author than to include Five K's in the list of material objects and deny their true significance. She can be compared to a blind person who denies the existence of sun.

In the second chapter titled, 'Sikh materialities', the author seeks to emphasize that objects and buildings manifest the past and act as a bridge between the past and present. They represent the past presence of people as well as events they are associated with. Her list of materialities also includes texts, as physical manifestations of the word of the Guru. She discusses at length the materiality of the Five K's and contends that they are 'symbolically charged and subject to wide interpretation'. She quotes McLeod to say that prior to the advent of Singh Sabha there was no reference to the Five K's nor of their inclusion in the *Rahit* (Code of discipline for the Khalsa). She concludes the chapter by stating that 'In exploring the nature of representation within object and site, the form of material representation in the Sikh case must be considered in relation to non-religious forms of materialization as well and cannot be relegated to the religious (category) in simplistic terms.' The statement is factually incorrect as the objects and sites mentioned in the book become sacred only in relation to their deep ties with the Guru. She does not elaborate on the nature of non-religious form of materialization in the Sikh case. In a bid to prove her point, she chooses to make a clean sweep of the religiosity associated with so many material objects and sites. So much so that she tries to erode the sanctity of the Sikh scripture. Scripture is not simply a text book or a material object. It is sacred because it contains Guru's inspired and revealed word. It was equated with the Guru himself. 'The holy Word is the Guru and the Guru is the holy Word,¹ said the third Guru Ram Das. 'The Granth is the Lord's dwelling

¹ ਬਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਗੁਰੂ ਹੈ ਬਾਣੀ ਵਿਚਿ ਬਾਣੀ ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤੁ ਸਾਰੇ ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, p. 982.

place,'² wrote Guru Arjan, who compiled the Bani. The Tenth Guru granted to it the status of Guru. It is a perennial fountain of inspiration and means of self perpetuation for the Sikh community. Arnold Toynbee hailed Granth Sahib as the common spiritual heritage of mankind, as he was impressed with the universal message of unity of God and brotherhood of mankind, given by the Gurus. The Supreme Court of India, after referring to authorities of Sikh religion, in a major landmark judgement, acknowledged the independent sovereign status of the Granth Sahib. Elaborating further, the Court observed that it is not only a sacred book but it is also reckoned as a living Guru and that it cannot be equated with scriptures of Hindus, Christians and Muslims. The Apex Court granted the status of a juristic person to the Guru Granth.

The author is under the mistaken impression that the articulation of Sikh identity began in the Colonial period with the advent of Singh Sabha. It is quite naive for Anne Murphy not to understand the British motive and policies in relation to the Singh Sabha. It is preposterous for her to assume that the Singh Sabha made use of the theological idiom to express the Sikh identity within the Colonial framework of knowledge. She seems to be unaware of the currents and cross-currents underlying the developments that led to birth and growth of Singh Sabha Movement. This was a time when the Sikh-British relations were far from being cordial. On the contrary, the arrival of the British had ruined the political sovereignty of the Sikhs. The British had treacherously annexed their kingdom and were distributing political rights to their rivals who were numerically stronger. The minor Maharaja Dalip Singh was converted to Christianity. The Christian Missions, who worked under the political wings of the British had started their missionary activities in Punjab. Religions imperialism was the first phase of the British Colonial imperialism. In 1873, four Sikh students of Amritsar

² ਪੋਥੀ ਪਰਮੇਸਰ ਕਾ ਬਾਨੁ ॥ Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1226.

Mission School were converted to Christianity. To add insult to the injury, there was a series of lectures at Amritsar delivered by Sharda Ram Philauri in which he made derogatory references to the Sikh Gurus. Philauri was also sponsored by the British to write a history of the Sikhs titled *Sikhan De Raj Di Vithya* – in which he presented a distorted account of the message of the Sikh Gurus. It was under these circumstances that the Singh Sabha assumed the leadership of the Sikh community. Faced by the multi-pronged attack of Christian Missionaries and Arya Samajists, the Singh Sabha undertook to restore Sikhism to its pristine purity. It also aimed at the protection of Sikh religion and Sikh rights. However, it was a tough task for the Singh Sabha to promote the Sikh ideological identity in view of hostile attitude adopted by the British at every step. The Arms Act of 1878 barred the Sikhs from wearing *Kirpan* which is one of the five K's of the Sikh faith. It was after a protracted struggle launched by the Singh Sabha that the Government exempted the Sikhs from the Arms Act and allowed them to possess and wear *Kirpan*, on June 25, 1914. Anne Murphy has overlooked the overwhelming evidence with regard to the Singh Sabha struggle for the religious rights of the Sikhs, whether it be the right to wear *Kirpan* or right to control their shrines or other institutions. Sikhism had qualified as a distinct religion ever since the time of first Guru Nanak. Pre-Colonial period i.e., the eighteenth century was a period of intense persecution for the Sikhs when prices were fixed on their heads and they were forced to retreat to jungles. But even in this tumultuous period, they were identifiable as 'Nanakpanthis'. Indubhusan Banerjee testifies that the Sikhs in the eighteenth century were far more united in a spirit of brotherhood than at any other time. They passed through the fire of suffering but kept the torch of Sikhism ablaze. Singh Sabha was instrumental in re-asserting the already formed Sikh identity. Their authoritative pronouncement, '*Ham Hindu Nahi*' (We are not Hindus) was in direct response to propaganda in some quarters that Sikhs were Hindus. Five K's prescribed for the Khalsa, have come down to the Sikhs from the time of Guru Gobind Singh. These have

not been invented by the Singh Sabha. The author's contention that Singh Sabha sought control over the interpretation of Sikh history is baseless. She reflects her own bias when she assumes that Rattan Singh Bhangu's views on Sikh identity and his positive and benign orientation towards the Sikhs, in his 'Panth Parkash', is due to the editing of this work by Bhai Vir Singh. The same is true of her analysis of Bhai Vir Singh's novel 'Sundri' which belongs to the genre of historical fiction. She draws inferences from certain dialogues in this novel, not backed by precise facts. She tears these dialogues out of their context and twists them to suit and fit into her own perspective. Construction of history, based on historical fiction, can never be adequate.

In the third and fourth chapters, the author examines the pre-Colonial and early Colonial period literary representations of the past 'to reconstruct how history has been imagined and represented in Sikh terms.' She explores some works which narrate the Sikh past in various modes in relation to the articulation of the Sikhs as a community and in some cases in relation to sovereignty. She is of the opinion that Sikh historical project overall does not position the Sikh community in singular sovereign statist terms but rather makes the community sovereign in multiple and contingent ways, mapped to the land and to objects and sites of history, in an array of ways. This, she believes, is the new way of understanding the Sikh past. The motivated slant of the author is obvious from the way she chooses to select or reject certain evidences and literary representations to serve her arguments. She does not have adequate understanding of Sikh ideology. Her methodological compulsions and predispositions are so fixed that she just turns a blind eye to the obvious statistical evidence of five centuries of glorious Sikh history, which is so deeply intertwined with Sikh religious ethos. She ignores the fact that by compiling the Granth Sahib, Guru Arjan proclaimed the ideological independence of the Sikh society. She makes no reference to the ideology of the Granth Sahib. On the other hand, she chooses to quote from the controversial 'Dasam Granth'

whose authenticity has not been established. She also makes eloquent reference to Dr Ernest Trumpp's description of Sikhism, dismissed by Sikhs as biased. She believes that Trumpp 'managed to shift the ground of future discourse of Sikhism under the purview of Western intellectual and religious tradition'. Here it is pertinent to mention that Anne Murphy has deliberately excluded Macauliffe's monumental work on Sikh religion, in 6 volumes, from her analysis. Scholars of varying backgrounds and persuasions, all have attested to the fact that Sikh society, without any ambiguity, was a homogenous society in the pre-Colonial period. There was no question of 'multiple identities' as pointed out by Anne Murphy.

The author deliberately avoids reference to the contemporary authentic evidence of Bhai Gurdas's '*Vars*' and Mohsan Fani's '*Dabistan*' which clearly establish the independent sovereign status of the Sikh identity. She also avoids the clear evidence of "Prem Sumarg" a production of the first quarter of the 18th century (near 1716-1718), which contains mention of distinct Sikh practices of birth, marriage and death. Another significant pre-colonial work 'Sketch of the Sikhs' (1810) by John Malcolm has also been excluded by the author, in her discussion on the pre-Colonial period. Malcolm writes, "The character of the Sikhs, or rather Singhs, which is the name by which the followers of Guru Gobind Singh, who are all devoted to arms, are distinguished, is very marked. The Sikh identity is shared by the Sikh merchant, or cultivator of the soil, if he is a Singh, not merely by the soldiers who so conspicuously paraded it. The followers of Guru Gobind Singh or Khalsa Sikhs are clearly distinguished." The author also chooses to overlook the path breaking pre-Colonial work (1849) of J.D. Cunningham, who has not only recorded the triumphs and travails of the Sikh community in a brilliant fashion but has also captured the dynamics of Sikh identity, as few authors can. Cunningham wrote Sikh history, without fear or favour in the pre-Colonial period, without any Colonial pressure. In her lame conclusion, Anne Murphy falsely contends that

intervention of the British rule left a profound impact on the writing of Sikh history. Sikh religious tradition was not an edifice built on hot air of make-believe but had sound historical basis for it, going back to the time of Gurus. British rule did not leave much impact either on the Sikh religious tradition or the writing of Sikh history. In fact, the Sikh identity was too powerful to be disturbed or dictated by the Colonial masters.

The theme of fifth chapter relates to the relation of the Sikh community to land and history, with reference to pre-Colonial practices. The author points out that in the pre-Colonial times, Sikh religious sites were managed in the court of the last independent rulers of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh and his successors. These practices are then compared with Colonial period discourse and practice. Here it is pertinent to mention that what applied to the control of religious places of the Sikhs, also applied to the control of religious places of other communities. It was the Waqf Act of 1861 which gave the control and management of holy places of the Hindus and Muslims to the communities concerned but in case of the Sikh Gurdwaras, the Act was not applied on political grounds. Proprietary rights of the holy places of the Sikhs were conferred on the corrupt Mahants and Pujaris. The Sikhs had to wage a protracted battle to liberate their Gurdwaras from the clutches of these Mahants and Pujaris.

Chapter six relates to Gurdwaras and their role in creating a 'territorialized vision' of the Sikh past. In other words, the author wants to assert that Gurdwaras shaped the historical consciousness of the community, in terms of territory. She again applies the logic of material arguments to explain the Sikh struggle for reform and governance of Gurdwaras. She argues that Sikh Gurdwara Act (1925) subverted earlier forms of ownership associated with the Gurdwaras and was passed in the light of Colonial notions of past and that it created a territorialized vision of the Sikh past.

This materialistic explanation erodes the spiritual significance of Gurdwaras. A Gurdwara is, first and foremost, an epicentre of Sikh faith. The very name Gurdwara denotes a place of worship. Its significance cannot be reduced to mere territory. It cannot be delinked from faith. An eloquent reference is made to Gurdwaras in the daily Sikh prayer. Gurdwaras are instrumental in shaping the historical consciousness of the Sikh community only because of their link with the Gurus and the Guru Granth. A quote from the Gurbani establishes that 'Guru sanctifies the spot where ever he is associated with.* A holy place assumes a holy character because here the spiritual transcends the mundane and acquires a new mystic dimension. Territories and sites come into prominence and assume significance when they get associated with a particular religion. Look at the historical profile of Jerusalem and the Vatican, known for their spiritual significance. It would be absurd to say that these holy places, first and foremost inspire territorial visions in stead of spiritual visions for the followers. For most people, names of territories or sites on which holy places or shrines are built are hardly worthy of serious notice. Only historians probe into official records to trace their origin. Take a few examples. Gurdwara Nankana Sahib has been built on a site called Rai Bhoi ki Talwandi in official records but the site has been sanctified on account of its link with the birth of Guru Nanak. Gurdwara Sach Khand Hazur Sahib is located on a territory known as Nanded on the banks of river Godavari. The territory has assumed significance by virtue of its association with the Tenth Sikh Guru. Very few people know that Gurdwara Anandpur Sahib is located in village Makhwal which has gained importance on account of the historic Gurdwara where Tenth Guru created the Khalsa. Primary historical value of the Gurdwaras is certainly not understood by the Sikhs in territorialized mode. A scholar, nurtured in the West, misleads the readers by

* ਜਿਥੈ ਜਾਇ ਬਹੈ ਮੇਰਾ ਸਤਿਗੁਰੂ ਸੇ ਥਾਨੁ ਸੁਹਾਵਾ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਜੇ ॥ (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 450)

reiterating, again and again, that Sikhs envision their Gurdwaras, in terms of territory or property.

Gurdwaras conjure up for the Sikhs the hallowed memories of their Gurus, saints and martyrs, their hopes and fears, their songs and tales of heroism, their struggles and triumphs. They remind them of their great heritage, eventful history and tradition and of so many legends that have become attached to them through the centuries. They mirror the entire panorama of Sikh history. They are the living monuments of the spiritual yearnings and the socio-political objectives that have shaped the dynamic and vibrant Sikh people and animated them over the years. They are not merely structures of brick and mortar. They are the heart and soul of Sikh faith. They embody the fount of Sikh spirit and power. Their history is the capsuled history of the Sikhs. Darbar Sahib, Amritsar has been the centre of resistance against the tyranny of the rulers. The socio-political struggle of the Sikhs started first with the liberation of Darbar Sahib from the control of the Government – mahant combine and continued there after from its precincts, for the liberation of their motherland. Forces emanating from here have caused not just ripples but great tides in the political ocean of the region. Sikh history, since the time of the Gurus, provides no corroboration for the author's materialistic contention. Powerful Sikh movement for the reform and control of the Gurdwaras cannot be reduced to a territorial dispute. Vital issues of religion, history, tradition, politics and identity were intertwined in this movement. In this chapter, the entire analysis of the Movement presented by the author is not only blasphemous and derogatory to the Sikh religion but also misleading, ambiguous and self-contradictory. In fact, the author fails to judge the dynamics of this movement within the narrow conceptual framework of materialistic parameters. Although she is so ardent to plead her materialist perspective, yet she has to reluctantly concede that 'as a result of the

movement, however, these sites (Gurdwaras) changed in their meaning, functioning and relationship with other elements of Sikh life and particularly with the state.'

Chapter seven titled 'Territory and the Definition of Being Sikh' discusses the long-term impact of the Gurdwara Reform Movement of 1920-25. The author believes that as a result of this Movement, sacred sites came to occupy a primary position as historical and as property in the British Raj and came to be tied to a clearly defined notion of being Sikh, that was a direct result of the legislative order, put in place by the British. Gurdwaras, as property, came to belong to the community, the contours of which were defined. The author goes on to explain that in order to fulfil the requirements of Gurdwara Reform Act, it was necessary for the Colonial government to provide strict regulation of history and identity in relation to the definition of property rights. She contends that Sikh interest in history in the Colonial period continued in a territorialized mode, in a new way. She believes that while the Sikhs fought and won the battle over the sites which they deemed as embodiment of the historical, they were relatively silent over the matter of historical objects, which are in the private possession of a few families. The entire structure raised by Anne Murphy has no basis in facts. She turns a blind eye to the prophetic and monumental work of the ten Gurus in creating a new religion and organizing the Sikh society. In fact, she makes a complete black out of the entire Sikh ideology. She also overlooks the long span of persecution, undergone by the Sikhs to maintain their identity. Identities are built by the ideology, motivation, the blood of the martyrs, tradition, suffering and sacrifice and not by the juxtaposition of material facts.

In the last Chapter (eight), Anne Murphy, reiterates the central issue of her thesis that, in the post-Colonial period, focus was on the material representation of the Sikh past. She uses the backdrop of material objects and sites to construct Sikh history. This is in contradistinction to the 'territorialized imagination' of the Sikh community and its past,

mentioned earlier in the book. She argues that the entity known as Sikhism is still identifiable with the help of material objects. She believes that the term 'Sikh', no longer, signifies regional, cultural and religious identifications. The author states, "Attention to generally neglected representational practices such as these expressed in material culture provides a unique view of the community's self-imagination in a de-territorialised diasporic and fluid environment." She believes that territorialized understanding of the Sikh past is being replaced by new notions of identity and that notions of cultural and religious sovereignty are losing their ground in a transnationally linked globalised world. Here she entangles herself in a web of self-contradiction when she states that 'Khalistani vision of the territorialized nation-state still holds a potent force in some diasporic locations.' She concedes that territorially driven colonial frames of knowledge still abide. She raises issues of politics and yet she cautions the readers against the political application of her arguments to the current issues of the Sikhs. In her own ingenious way, she seeks a cover for her utterances and supports David Scott's contention to deny 'a natural or necessary link between past identities and the legitimacy of present political claims.' It is preposterous for the author to assume that in the new globalised world, one single identity will replace all other identities, that nation-states will disappear, that the world will become a single coherent political entity. Samuel P Huntington has rightly observed that in future, 'there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations which will have to co-exist with the others.'

All said and done, some portions of the book seem to have taken the form of a political critique in the contemporary political environment. The author's anti-Sikh bias is very clearly reflected in the following statement, 'This study focuses not on Sikh representations of violence but on representations of the past in broader terms that have accompanied the commemoration of violence in the Sikh past.' 'Commemoration of

violence' is an expression which undermines Sikhism and holds negative connotations. Sikhs hold their martyrs in very high esteem. They commemorate the martyrdom of their Gurus, heroes and warriors. They don't commemorate violence. The author seems to have no knowledge of the current socio-political problems faced by the Sikhs. She also fails to understand the Sikh religious ethos, the struggle of the Sikhs against state tyranny, self-sought martyrdoms of their Gurus and eloquent examples of willing sacrifices of their heroes and warriors for the sake of human rights, justice and freedom. Sikh readers of the book would easily decipher the academic arrogance and prejudice of the author in labelling the Sikh community as violent. If there could be a lexicon of academic violence, they would place Anne Murphy's name on the top, as she uses it without restraint.

At a grave juncture in the history of mankind, when spiritual impoverishment and breakdown of positive values have taken their toll on mankind religion and religious identities cannot be wished away. In fact, the new century is marked by the return of God and religion, though it cannot be equated with the return of religious fundamentalism. The so-called modern identity, based on empirical evidence, is paradoxically religious in its true essence. The term 'secular' in its wider context and connotations, also accepts the co-existence of plural religious societies. Conception of sovereignty, vested in territorialized nation states, is as valid to-day as it was in the past. This time tested conception, along with global inter-connectedness of different cultures, can open up a new dynamics of peaceful pluralisation in the contemporary globalization. In the new pluralistic world order, where religious traditions and identities of all races and minorities would be duly acknowledged, Sikhs can assert their freedom and play a dynamic and creative role in the shaping of new politico-economic realities. New trends are very much in evidence in the new knowledge formations. Anne Murphy needs to revise her notions of modern identity, secularism and

detrterritorialised nation state in the light of latest trends, testified by contemporary political discourse.

There is a need to comprehend and understand Sikhism and Sikh ethos at a systematic, profound and dispassionate level. Sikhism is unique among the world religions. A dominant note of Sikhism is respect for all creeds. As a religious scripture, Guru Granth Sahib is of immense value, as it places before mankind a very dynamic philosophy of life. It provides great visions of truth and insight into the fundamental meaning and purpose of human life. It stands for a faith which is meant for all humanity, without any distinction of race or creed, and without any limits of time and space. Such is the spirit of universality stressed by the Sikh Gurus.

Guru Nanak, with his emphasis on the unity of God and universal brotherhood, was the herald of a world society. He propagated universal ethical norms for the redemption of mankind and pointed the way to the solution of the larger problem of international culture. By doing so, he became the precursor and prophet of the coming humanity. Anne Murphy needs to change her entire perspective on Sikhism.

Conclusion

The book is only one of its kind, with its entire focus on materialistic aspects of the Sikh past. The author does not possess the necessary tools to make a comprehensive study of Sikh religion, history and identity. With her lop-sided approach and misplaced emphasis on the domain of the mundane, she fails to sift the trivial and the ephemeral from the important and the long-lasting that go into the formation of a community's status and identity. In fact, this is a malaise that has afflicted all those who label themselves secular, liberal, post-Colonial theorists and subscribe to materialistic school of thought. As a result of this historical method, wide areas of human understanding,

especially the religious, the spiritual and the mystical elude their grasp and they get only a partial and distorted view of the truth of any situation.

With her exclusive emphasis on materialities and trivialities, Anne Murphy has tried to reconstruct the Sikh past and provide a new perspective on Sikh identity, on the secular, post-Colonial lines. She tries to erode the sound historical basis of Sikh identity and builds her own structure of concepts and ideas that bear no resemblance to the self-image of the Sikhs and traditional view of their identity. In his famous book '*Clash of Civilizations*' Samuel P. Huntington emphasizes that 'the subjective self identification of people' must be taken into account while defining a community. Anne Murphy takes absolutely no cognizance of the self-definition of the Sikhs. Her new perspective implicitly labels the Sikh culture as purely material culture. In her view, all the main components of traditional Sikh identity, the Sikh scripture, Gurdwaras and the Khalsa symbols (Five K's) are all material in their essence and hold no spiritual significance. In other words, the sum and substance of Sikh faith is material. With her materialist representation of the Sikh past, the author ruthlessly dilutes, distorts and confuses the unanimous and long-established Sikh identity. She has provided a very unfair representation of the vibrant Sikhs who released a big dynamic force into the arena of Indian history and stood in the forefront of the country's struggle for freedom. Her whole account is highly detrimental to the Sikhs and Sikhism.

The book written, on an ill-chosen theme, abounds in partial truths, false constructions, unnecessary profusion of material details, gross misrepresentation of facts, very serious omissions, wrong assumptions and lame conclusions. A dispassionate historian must take full cognizance of the sensitivities and the self-definition of a community and tread his or her path with utmost caution, while taking up sensitive issues of religious tradition and identity or burning current issues which involve socio-political life of the community. The book has a strong political flavor and anti-Sikh bias. It is rather

astonishing that, so far, the entire Sikh Studies output at the University of British Columbia has been hostile to the Sikhs. A well-balanced perspective on the Sikhs is the need of the hour.

Here it is pertinent to add that academic onslaughts on the Sikh identity and their religious symbols can have very serious ramifications for the Sikh Community, especially for the diasporic Sikhs who sometimes have to face all odds and fight legal battles to defend their identity and for their right to wear turban or Kirpan as integral part of their religion. Misrepresentation of Sikh identity can also have a direct negative bearing on the credibility and credentials of the Sikhs as a community.

Recently, alarming reports have appeared of some diasporic Sikh having been discriminated against, insulted, attacked and killed on the identity issue. Some Western scholars lack the desired sensibility and academic integrity in so far as they stretch their academic freedom beyond desirable limits and make unscrupulous attacks on other religions. One is forced to think whether it could be a part of some bigger design to deploy strategies in order to denigrate non-Western phenomenon. As Samuel P Huntington says that 'cultural differences between the East and the West are less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones.' From all angles, it is a very dangerous trend which needs to be nipped in the bud, before it gets out of control and cause more damage in the academic and socio-cultural fields. Academicians both in the West and East are expected to play a more worthy, constructive and positive role in promoting the peaceful co-existence of all races and communities, through mutual understanding of each other's point of view.

The very theme of the book chosen by Anne Murphy reflects her implicit bias against the Sikhs and Sikhism. Bias is always irrational and it, invariably, leads to irrational

conclusions. Western historiography, which has created new models of history writing based on materialistic interpretation of history, is under a cloud.