

Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation

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The field of Sikh Studies in the West is in a state of turmoil. The problem, complicated as it seems, is essentially due to an attempt by the Western scholars to interpret Sikh religion and history in the light of materialist methodology. Most of this literature in the West is modelled on the basis of a framework, laid down by W.H. McLeod, torch-bearer of empirical research on Sikh Studies. Empirical approach is too single-track and in a way too rigid to take a comprehensive view of Reality. It is not applicable to all varieties of human experience and cannot cross the uncharted ocean that surrounds us. With their exclusive reliance on visible phenomenon and observed fact, materialist scholars eschew metaphysics and often neglect non-material aspects of life, such as traditions, ideals, values, beliefs and standards. They take no note of the spiritual dimension of man and things of the spirit, which are beyond the scope of our physical world. They overlook so much that is vital in life. Mankind needs some reliance on moral, spiritual and idealistic conceptions or else man has no anchorage, no objectives or purpose in life. Material science moves in narrow grooves of thought and action and is not equipped to deal with matters of religion. Empirical research requires breadth of vision and scholarship to redeem itself from futility.

Material culture of the West has led to an upsurge in empirical research in the Western universities. For the last four decades, almost entire output of Sikh Studies in the West has been on empirical lines. There is something counterfeit about these writings, some lack of sensitivity or academic integrity, in so far as they produce something radically new in the form of

frontal onslaughts on the long-established and time-honoured traditions of the Sikhs and endanger the socio-political interests of the community. These writings disparage the Sikh past, belittle the Sikh prophets, undermine the status of Guru Granth, repudiate the ideals and institutions of the Sikhs, denigrate their martyrdoms and question their independent identity. Scholars who occupy the Chairs of Sikh Studies in the American universities seem to be protégés of the West who promote Western culture. They are careerists and opportunists, who seem to assume the role of experts and advisers on Sikh issues. Prizes held out to them are handsome salaries, high positions, generous research grants and scholarships. East-West rivalry stands out clear. As the ever-present feeling of self-righteousness in relation to the East continues to grow among these scholars, their hostile proclamations about Sikhs and Sikhism become louder and more blatant. They often sacrifice truth to expediency. E.W. Said, as a cultural critic, academic and writer vigorously discussed and debated the cultural subjects as applied to the field of history. He contends that the Western study of Eastern culture 'remains inextricably tied to the imperialist societies, which makes much of the work inherently political, servile to power and therefore intellectually suspect'. Those who knowingly suppress or sacrifice the truth in the interest of expediency fail in their function as true academicians.

The result is disastrous, when the elitist snobs, flashing academic credentials as proof of superiority, abandon moral and ethical guidelines under social and cultural pressures of conformity and specialization, with no desire to steer an independent course. A grave crisis occurs in the intellectual field, when university-based intellectuals withdraw from the general issues of public responsibility, owing to an increasing collusion with institutionalized structures of specializations that leave no scope for independent research. Elitism survives and perpetuates itself on its own institutions and transnational networks of communication and self-promoting connections. As for those, who stand outside this circle or swim against the tide, there is nothing but contempt, ridicule and antipathy. Knowledge seems to have become a plaything in the hands of autocratic forces.

After the collapse of Soviet Union, America has emerged as a dominant political power in the world and looks upon itself in the vanguard of an advancing civilization. Americans delude themselves that their way of looking at things is the only right way. They want to impose their cultural and intellectual agenda on the entire world. A.N. Whitehead, Professor of Philosophy at Harvard, believed that the fate of the intellectual civilization of the world is in the hands of America. He was hopeful that Harvard would fashion the intellect of the new century. In view of this, one can well imagine the fate of Sikh Studies in American universities. Mandair's book clearly shows that the literature, being produced in the field of Humanities in the American universities, is aimed at guiding the policy programmes of the state. Mandair, who occupies the Chair of Sikh Studies at the Michigan University, has revealed the motive, in explicit terms, which McLeod and others had, so far, concealed. Through materialist interpretation of Sikh history and religion, Sikh Studies programmes are being manipulated in order to secularize *Gurmat* and produce a hybrid Sikh identity. Hired Sikh scholars seem to be the most suitable for these positions.

The book, under review, is based on author's doctoral thesis, entitled, 'Thinking between cultures: Metaphysics and Cultural translation.' The author sets out to take up a wide range of issues of religion, politics, secularism, identity, culture, translation and philosophy. He explores the possibility of 'a truly comparative cultural theory,' a form of multi-culturalism in the post-Colonial global context. He claims that the book is a critique of the concept of religion as 'a cultural universal' in the context of the emerging cultural landscape in the new world order.

Through a case study of Sikhism, the author has tried to demonstrate how certain aspects of Sikh tradition were reinvented, in terms of the category of religion, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He believes that native Singh Sabha elites constructed religious boundaries during the Colonial period and operations of translations were pivotal to the reformulation of Sikh and Hindu traditions, in terms of religious identity. Prior to this, the concept of religion may not have existed in the native languages.

Author's contention that the religious identity of the Sikhs came into being on account of 'benign intervention' of the British needs to be investigated more thoroughly. There is no denying the fact that the British had treated the Sikhs very harshly and treacherously. But behind all the distressing features of their defeat, hurt and humiliation of their enslaved condition after the Annexation of Punjab, there was an inner vitality, some passion and pent up energies that sought an outlet. Otherwise they would have been pushed aside by new forces. Sikhs could not be passive spectators of their tragic fate. Their role in history had not finished. Singh Sabha Movement arose as a psychological fallout, to tone down their feelings of hurt, to remind them of their glorious past and the time-honoured values and practices. The Movement exerted a powerful influence on the Sikhs but it emphasised and brought out something that already existed in the minds of people. It did not invent anything new, nor did it deviate from the ideology of the Gurus. Religious identity of the Sikhs was not encouraged or imposed from outside. Behind it lay the powerful ideology of the Gurus, mass of tradition and history, not of the remote past but of a recent period.

British-Sikh relations were that of the ruler and the ruled. Historical baggage of hostility also stood between them. The contradiction between the deliberate policy of the British authorities and some of its unintended consequences often masks that policy itself. The introduction of the steam engine, the railways and the advent of the printing press were, no doubt, big steps towards progress but all this was done to facilitate the British administration. But undoubtedly, British Colonial policy was far from being 'benign' towards the Sikhs. Beside the Arya Samaj, the Singh Sabha had also to face the challenge of Christian missionaries, who enjoyed the support of the British Government. Minor Sikh Maharaja Dalip Singh was sent to England, with Bible as a parting gift from Lord Dalhousie. He was later converted to Christianity.

Western scholars often ask: 'Who were those who were first to be called Sikhs and when did the term 'Sikh' come into literature'? Term 'Sikh' has been used since the time of the Gurus. One comes across terms 'Sikh' and

'*Guru ka Sikh*' at a number of places in Guru Granth Sahib. There are numerous verses in the Gurbani relating to Guru-Sikh relationship. Bhai Gurdas, who was Guru Arjan's scribe, wrote extensively on 'who is a Sikh' in his sixteenth century compositions. He reported that Sikhs of the Guru woke up early in the morning, took bath and read verses of the Guru before proceeding towards the house of congregation, i.e. *Dharamsal*, early nomenclature of Gurdwara (*Vaar* 40, *Pauri* 11). This was based on the code of daily worship, outlined by Guru Ram Das. Bhai Gurdas wrote extensively on *Gurmat* philosophy and Sikh way of life. As the Sikh religious tradition was clearly demarcated, Bhai Gurdas used various names to describe this tradition such as *Nirmal Panth*, *Gurmukh Marg*, *Gurmukh Panth* etc. The tenth Guru Gobind Singh created the Khalsa and gave a distinguished outward appearance (the five K's) to his disciples, consolidating them into a distinct, coherent and self-contained group, endowed with beliefs, ideas and ideals, vastly different from those of the Hindus. Sikhs also came to have their own distinct initiation and salutation practices. An early 17th century chronicler, Mohsin Fani, in his *Dabistan-i-Mazahib*, bears ample testimony to the independent religious identity of the Sikhs, calling them *Nanak Panthis* and *Gur-Sikhs*. Task of history writing was made difficult due to the fire of persecution, undergone by the Sikhs in the 18th century.

Ideology exercised a powerful influence on Sikh history. Banda Bahadur and 740 of his followers chose to die a torturous death but did not renounce their faith. During the tumultuous eighteenth century, the Mughal rulers issued edicts 'to kill the disciples of Nanak (the Sikhs) wherever they were found'. Even when prices were fixed on their heads, the Sikhs were strengthened by their faith in the Gurus and emboldened by constant prayers, they sang the couplet: '*Raj Karega Khalsa, Yaki rahe na koe*' (The Khalsa shall rule, no hostile refractory shall exist'). This has been recorded in *Tankhah-Nama* of Bhai Nand Lal, a contemporary chronicler. When Ranjit Singh became a sovereign ruler of Punjab, he named his kingdom *Sarkar-i-Khalsa* and issued coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh.

It is a gross misrepresentation of historical facts to say that the religious identity of the Sikhs was the creation of the British. Sikhs had their ideology, their scripture, their institutions and traditions before the advent of the British. Mandair's strong affiliation to McLeodian line of thought has prevented him from arriving at the right conclusions. On a pre-conceived basis, he has built a structure of opinions which are not substantiated by facts of history. He has devoted an entire chapter to 'Sikhism and the politics of religion-making.' He fails to note that Sikhs had not developed that sense of doubtful value that divides life into watertight compartments and makes religion in the West as something different from one's social and political life. For the Sikhs, religion and politics are interlinked. Author's failure to take note of the integrated world-view of the Sikh Gurus makes him step on debatable ground.

For Mandair, the term religion has negative connotations, as he associates it with fundamentalism and violence. He fails to note that present day religionism in India, as elsewhere, has very little tribal logic. Violence is largely a political construct, along political faultlines. It is politics that animates and dominates today's world. Root cause of violence and war is the criminalisation of politics-politics bereft of morality. In the world-view of Sikh Gurus, religion has a very positive role. Religion and politics are not only inseparable but their combination, when properly harnessed, can be a tremendous force for justice, peace and righteousness. It is a tribute to the vision and wisdom of the Sikh Gurus that they laid down basic principles of ethics and morality to be followed by the society and the state for the uplift of humanity. The Sikh idea of polity is a religion-oriented state in the sense of exalting the spiritual principles as the basis of political governance. Let us compare it with the exposition of state craft by Machiavelli, who exempted the rulers from moral obligations. Kautilya's *Arthshastra* also subordinates moral principles to political expediency. For both Machiavelli and Kautilya, ends justify the means. Such models of polity give rise to gross materialism, elitism, centralization, militarism, glaring inequalities and alienation of the common man from the system. A dispassionate historian must take note of this but Mandair thinks in a different mode and his assumptions are other than purely academic. A positive view of Sikh polity does not fit into his contrived thesis. He states,

"Sikhism must revert to its original peaceful state. True Sikhism is without a desire for sovereignty, a Sikhism that has already renounced politics through interiorization". (page 388)

The materialistic ideologies of the West have succeeded in conditioning this world to seeking only materialist solutions to all problems. Written from a materialistic perspective, Mandair's book glorifies the Western culture and Western virtues. He believes that Indians, and especially the Sikhs, had no sense of history and religion before the advent of the British rule. He takes no notice of what happened in the three centuries preceding it. Events in history cannot be understood in isolation. They are links in an unending chain, caused by all that has preceded before, resulting from the wills, urges, desires and aspirations of a community. Culture is a continuation and development of past trends and traditions and, at the same time, it represents new urges and creative tendencies. The author deliberately makes a complete black out of the glorious pre-Colonial-period, the values and ideals laid down and practised by the Gurus, their martyrdoms, the Sikh struggle for liberation against daunting odds and the Khalsa rule called *Sarkar-i-Khalsa* under Ranjit Singh.

Religion is a living element in the life of the Sikhs as it is woven in the very fabric of their society. Faith in the Gurus is all pervasive. It has percolated deep into the masses and has given them a strong and abiding cultural background. It is only the armchair scholars who place religion in the conceptual framework in their academic discourses. Common masses are not concerned with array of facts, categories and systematised theories even as the core values of religion animate their faith and feeling, get embedded in their collective psyche and provide them solidarity. Nietzsche claimed that all those who stress concepts over reality and talk about categorial imperatives are perverting the truth of life. Sikh Gurus brought the truths of religion to the level of the common people. Sikhism became a religion of the masses. Religious identities were not forged by the British. Identity politics in the political context, came to the fore in the British period, because of the imperatives of communal electorates or census operations. Principle of communal representation generated

political competitiveness and placed the Sikhs at a disadvantage on account of their demographic position.

Mandair fails to note that racial divide in the West has caused greater long-term problems than religious divides have done in India . Religious riots are episodic and mostly engineered, whereas racism is an existential reality, plaguing the West. The worst manifestation of racism was slavery which resulted in Civil War in America. Idea of a superior race is inherent in imperialism and has discredited the West. Western culture has emphasised rights. It has paid little attention to duties and obligations. It is an active, aggressive, competitive and acquisitive culture, seeking power and domination, living in the present and ignoring the future consequences. It has a world-view where empire and expansion are looked upon as prerogatives of a dynamic and progressive people. War is seen as a biological necessity. Profit motive is viewed as the central fact, dominating human relations. These ideas form the basis of modern Western civilization. An analysis of the Second World War reveals that Western democracies were fighting not for a change but for a perpetuation of the old order. Nazism and fascism were no sudden growths or accidents of history but a culmination of all that had gone before. Western democracies had some kind of ideological bond with fascism, even when they disliked many of its brutal manifestations.

Godless materialism of the West has led to the erosion of moral values. It is a society where form prevails over substance and intellect and reason are mistaken to be the supreme glory of man. It has not contributed to human happiness. Rather, with its mad race for armaments, it has resulted in the possibility of universal destruction. Materialist philosophy, of even the most catholic kind, if confined to mere intellectual discussion, will remain a helpless spectator of war, intrigue and devastation, repeatedly carried on by head-strong persons with narrow outlooks and uncontrolled passions.

Mandair tries to interpret Sikh tradition in the light of various pre-suppositions. He looks upon Hegel as his beau-ideal and interprets Sikhism, in terms of Hegelian philosophy. In pursuit of his idealism,

Hegel tried to unite the opposites in a synthesis but could not hold the balance even. He undermined not only Oriental religion and metaphysical concepts but also Oriental political institutions. He glorified Christianity and Jesus as symbol of universal truth. He was a chauvinist who believed that civilization has moved towards the West and institutions in the West have matured as compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world. He was opposed to democracy, as it placed too much stress on the rights of the individual. Hitler admired Hegel's political philosophy which granted more power to the state as compared to the rights of citizens. Mandair follows Hegel blindly, without using his sense of discrimination in evaluating his theories. He holds on to the Hegelian notion of the superiority and spectre of the West and subservience of the Rest, with special focus on Sikhs and Sikhism. As champion of the West, he is engaged in the task of producing 'new knowledge formations' in Sikh Studies. He writes in the Hegelian style, which is overly technical, too profuse, laborious, abstruse and marked by scholastic complexities. Full of self-contradictions, he tries to claim that his way is the Hegelian way of synthesis between the East and the West. But this so-called synthesis is dominated by his underlying insistence that the ideals of the West must become hegemonic through 'the universal element inherent in modernity' or rather Christianity - the two terms seem to be synonymous in Mandair's book.

Mandair believes that India's passage to modernity has been made difficult due to its entanglements of identity politics. For Europeans and Americans, modernity was born with the Enlightenment project that broke with a world centred around Christianity, leading to the separation of the Church and the state. He credits the West for providing a new meaning to religion as 'cultural universal' as opposed to the traditional view of religion as a set of propositions or concepts. He envisions India's encounter with the West through a movement that is represented as India's transition (or conversion) to modernity but which, in fact, involves a displacement of Indian forms of thinking. Job could also be accomplished through a project of 'religion' or eventually its installation 'within the secular humanist framework of the modern university'. He notes that 'the world of knowledge (university) in its fully objectified form is the world of action

(state)'. This idea is based on a close reading of some of the key moves of Hegel, presented in his book, 'Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion.' Hegel's main concern was 'to bring the chaotic diversity of Oriental religions into some kind of manageable order'. Hegel's key move was to establish a firm theoretical standpoint for religion-in-general and as a result of this, a way of classifying Oriental cultures, according to a new framework based on onto-theology. The author explains that onto-theological scheme is a means of rendering the encounter with non-Western cultures, politically harmless by installing them on a standardized graph of history/religion/reason. The author states that Hegel's work both fleshes out the contours of the West and the 'Rest' and provides the conceptual tools for future disciplines within emerging Humanities to theoretically exclude non-Western cultures from entering signification (the realm of human contact and interaction) and yet at the same time to 'retain, rename and elevate them in a benevolent second order gesture'.

Hegel's view reflects how the West perceives and represents the East. Mandair continues to name Hegel in his analysis as 'he is directly responsible for reformulating the matrix of knowledge-power in relation to Asian cultures'. He makes his theoretico-political position clear by stating that he is engaged in the task of de-colonization of Asian cultures, caught up in superstition, pseudo-sciences and mysticism. He wants them to overcome Colonial mindset and debilitating legacies of Colonialism by striving after a different way of life, free from identity-politics. He asserts that the way to political and intellectual peace lies through subscribing to the universal value of the concept of religion which drives its meaning from Christianity. He believes that the process of modernization of pre-modern societies necessitates 'enlightening and demystifying' these communities and redefinition of their religion on modern scientific lines. He emphasises the need for political and theoretical interventions that can change the system to a new mode that does not respond to the politics of identity. He discusses the mechanisms whereby 'academic theory fluidly translates into state politics'. He finds parallels in the situation between the US and India and their attempts to formulate policies through the

academic forums to deal with problems relating to identities. Unholy alliance between the state and academic forums comes to the fore.

After formulating a theoretical framework for redefining Sikhism, Mandair views the postulation of a passage from the Divine to the human, from eternity to time, formlessness to form, immediate to the mediated. His post-Colonial theory includes the analysis of Guru Nanak the man, Sikhism as deism (without revelatory experience) and the re-reading of the Granth Sahib to make the shift from a meta-physical framework of eternity to a non-metaphysical framework, based on finitude, in consonance with the new notion of religion. He believes that this new reading of the Granth Sahib can foster a mode of secularization that, is inherent in the teachings of the Sikh Gurus. Such a radical view strips Guru Nanak of his divinity, undermines the status of Guru Granth Sahib and thus negates the sovereignty of the Sikh identity.

Mandair interprets the revelatory experience of Guru Nanak at Sultanpur in empirical terms. He says that 'the event must be thought of as a universal, something that is shareable with the rest of humanity' and not as something that could only have happened to Guru Nanak, who need not be looked upon as 'a transcendent being in the world of men'. The episode, he believes, can be brought into the realm of ordinary human experience. He asserts that it was the Singh Sabha that attached transcendence to this episode. As a Hegelian, the author eschews metaphysics and transcendence but he fails to put forward his perspective clearly and effectively. His mental reach is limited to the empirical domain and he fails to view Guru Nanak in a prophetic mould. Like his ideologue Hegel, he neglects intuition, which is beyond man's rational capacities. One needs to understand the role of intuition in order to comprehend the inner essence of a revelatory experience. Schelling, who was more conversant with the wisdom of the East, believed that mere rational knowledge is not an adequate tool for the understanding of Reality. He relied on intuition to liberate us from the bondage of senses and finitude and introduce us into the realm of Eternal Reality-beyond the bondage of space and time Revelation, being-divinely inspired wisdom, has a timeless quality. It is a bridge between God and man. There can be no empirical

verification for a revelatory experience, which is the mystical all-encompassing Truth as also the 'peace that passeth understanding'. With regard to his revelatory experience, Guru Nanak clearly states, "O, Lalo! I speak as God ordains me to speak.' As a prophet, Guru was the spiritual ambassador of God and had a divine mission for mankind, with unity of God and brotherhood of mankind as his ideals.

Mandair seems hell bent on devising strategies through which 'it may be possible to break the cycles of repetition that produce identity-politics centred around structure of transcendence.' Then he goes on to choose central terms in the teachings of Sikh Gurus such as 'Nam' and 'Nam Simran' and connect them to frameworks grounded in finitude and contingency. This regrounding of *Gurmat* in structures, bereft of transcendence, would result in a secularization of *Gurmat* and emancipate it from metaphysics. He states that '*Nam Simran* is not a metaphysical concept. It is as inherently political as spiritual.' Once again, he brings mystical experience to the domain of the mundane, when he states that for the Sikh Gurus 'there was no contradiction between mystical experience and the life of a soldier, householder or political leader.' He thinks of yet another strategy to re-envisage *Gurmat* as 'a political theology which, properly speaking, corresponds more closely to the idea of *Gurmat* as a self-emptying concept, a concept that places as much emphasis on the absence of the divine as it does on divine presence.' We find a strange paradox in his analysis, an ambivalence which is difficult to explain. He fails to note that in the world-view of the Sikh Gurus, the spiritual and the empirical realms blend into a harmonious whole. The two realms require each other and supplement each other. Awareness of divinity makes a householder, a better householder. A spiritually elevated soldier would act like Bhai Kanhiya, who made no distinction between friends and foes while serving water in the battlefield. A politician, with spiritual awareness, would be conscious of his moral obligation towards society. Gurus asserted that genuine religious faith creates in the individual the enthusiasm for reforming life and bringing it in tune with God. Scepticism of the intellectual does not destroy the essential faith of the masses. To say that *Gurmat* is an empty concept is an utter perversity of judgment. In fact, Mandair's paradoxical argument is an empty argument.

Mandair is very keen to bring all discourse about Sikhism 'under the purview of liberal humanism' on the lines suggested by Mcleod, whom he calls 'the most distinguished exponent of Sikhism.' According to this, liberation entails a position which reduces spiritual experience to a form of individualised interiority, which is universal and translatable across cultures. Mandair argues that from a historian's point of view, Guru Nanak's mystical experience was a case of individualised interiority, 'inherently doubtful, a false or pseudo-reality about which, nothing can be affirmed unless evidence to the contrary is presented.' Elaborating his point still further, he states, "Although the phenomenon called Sikhism corresponds to a degenerative evolution, it is nevertheless possible to get an indication of its level of spiritual creativity by determining to what degree it corresponds to or imitates this origin through certain prescribed practices such as *Nam Simran*"(p. 295). Pulling together the various threads of the same argument, Mandair states that Guru Nanak brought his mystical experience into the temporal domain i.e. into the world of time and writing. Words, no doubt, cannot adequately convey a mystical experience. But understanding of the Ultimate Reality cannot be conveyed through silence and non-assertion. Words are used more to suggest than to express the inexpressible. The hand pointing to the moon should not be mistaken for the moon.

Guru Nanak communicated with the world through the medium of his 'bani'. He inaugurated a societal religion and not a religion of interiority. This was in contradistinction to Hinduism, with its one-sided stress on other worldliness, which caused inactivism, defeatism, fatalism and socio-political ruin. Sikh Gurus were organisers and uplifters of society and moulders of social institutions for the welfare of humanity. They stood for universal ideals which individuals, societies and nations can profess and practise to establish the kingdom of God on earth and help the advent of a more harmonious and peaceful state of human existence. Christianity accepts pacifism, monasticism, celibacy and nunneries as a valid path of spiritual life. Mandair misrepresents Sikhism and promotes Christianity under a motivated design. He applauds Dr. Trumpp's controversial book as 'the most influential document concerning the question, what is

Sikhism?' (p. 185). Trumpp had stated that 'the Adi Granth is an incoherent document full of contradictory statements.' Trumpp bracketed the Sikhs with the Hindus. He described Sikhism as a mere pantheism.

One cannot fail to notice a clear ambivalence and self-contradiction in Mandair's analysis of the Sikh concept of God, which is linked to Guru Nanak's world-view. On the one hand, he quotes McLeod to say that Guru Nanak was more attuned to *Nirgun* than *Sargun* aspect of God, in order to prove the interiority of Guru Nanak's religion and, at the same time, he goes on to reject the mystical element in the Guru's concept. Mandair seems to have vowed to use every tool at his command to pervert the essence of Guru Nanak's *Bani*.

Guru Nanak viewed God as both *Nirgun* and *Sargun* and saw all things under the aspect of the Absolute. Materialists, who think in terms of space, time, matter, causality and reason, cannot comprehend the true essence of the Absolute. Those who reject metaphysics cannot understand the true nature of the Absolute. Waismann lashed at those who sought to ascertain the Absolute through outer observation or introspection. He came to hold: 'To say metaphysics is non-sense is non-sense'. A religion, without metaphysics, is no religion. Mandair wants to erode the very basis of Sikh religion by rejecting its metaphysics.

Mandair seems to have some ulterior political motive in his mind, when he envisages *Gurmat* as a political theology. Obsessed with cultural-politics and identity-politics, he attempts the secularization of *Gurmat* - an attempt that is blatantly propagandist and not at all academic. This is a part of an ongoing process of McLeodian offensive against Sikhism. McLeod is no more but his legacy has been carried on by all those who call themselves critical historians and true scholars and dub all others as pseudo-scholars. Mandair is a past master in adopting the McLeodian paradigms and strategies of casting doubts on all the undisputably true and authentic Sikh doctrines. Mandair's dogged persistence in putting anything and everything relating to Sikhism in 'structures of finitude' is a glaring example of his application of McLeodian approach. Given below is an example of how he twists and distorts the meaning of *Nam Simran* to

describe it as 'an experience of finitude' and not a metaphysical experience.'

He states, "Derived from the Indo-European root *Smr* (to remember, to hold in mind) the term has traditionally been understood to resonate with the Sanskrit terms *mr* and *marna*, to die or pass away, suggesting that Simran is a form of remembrance that automatically lets go or renounces. Stated differently, *simran* is first of all remembrance of one's own mortality, of the ego's death, remembering which one awakens to Name. *Nam Simran* is therefore the condition of experience of finitude." Gurus simply used this term as an act of remembrance of God, which could connect the finite human mind with the Divine Infinite. Mandair knowingly circumscribes Sikh religion and places it in limited structures of finitude-that are temporary, time-bound, fleeting and not long-lasting. He ingeniously undermines revelation, intuition, transcendence and spiritual experiences of Infinity, undergone by the Gurus. Elements and values that have sustained *Gurmat* are timeless, eternal and universal and not finite that are limited, changeable and perishable. Mandair believes that ideological formations based on transcendence were perpetuated by the Singh Sabha reformers as hallmarks of a distinctive Sikh identity. He points out that Singh Sabha scholars studiously avoided translating the word Guru as Avtar, preferring to translate it as prophet to whom God spoke and revealed His word. He states that 'the reformists had to reinterpret the Janamsakhi legend of Guru Nanak's consecration as God's representative in terms of a pseudo-theory based on revelation and embellished with suitable quotations from the Adi Granth' (p. 211). In the perversity of his judgements, Mandair seems to have gone far ahead of his ideologues, McLeod and Trumpp.

Mandair analyses all concepts of *Gurmat* except, 'Sabad Guru', in the context of finitude. He believes that concept of 'Sabad Guru' can be universalized, as it pertains to the domain of interiorities. He states, 'Non-monotheistic and non-monastic conception of *Sabad Guru*, far from being yet another idiosyncratic product of modern Sikh ideology, resists ideology as such.' (p. 333)

Mandair presents a distorted view of Sikh monotheism which is a unique feature of Sikhism and at the core of Sikh belief system. He scratches his head to look for some rationale to make Guru Nanak's monotheism redundant. He tries to confuse the term *IKomkar* in the *Mool Mantra* (Preamble) of Japuji. Guru Nanak refers to God as *Ikomkar* to emphasize the Absolute, Uncompromising Oneness of God. This is a universally accepted interpretation. As against this, Mandair calls *IKomkar* 'a unique and deceitful concept'. (p. 369) In a devious and divisive argument he tries to confuse the numerical 1 with the word *Ik* (one). Fundamental problem with him is the split-brain symptoms of modern man, who sees the universal 1 in terms of duality 'between the numeral 1 as the signifier of unity and identity and the word 1 as the signifier of the self's identity.' (p. 369) This duality is also seen as ego-crisis, subject-object duality and also in terms of inner and outer existence, *Sargun* and *Nirgun*. Is Reality a paradox? From our limited angle and viewpoint it is and yet not by itself, as Guru Nanak viewed it. All that needs to be done is to drop off the material glasses or split-mind by simply being aware of the split and not doing anything about it. The need is to transcend duality and reach a higher dimension, a kind of meta-awareness, that is unthinkable - a dimension that cannot be explained through intellectual statements. It is to make life a mystery, once more. There is absolutely no ambiguity or, paradox in Guru Nanak's monotheism. There is nothing deceitful about it. Mandair uses the term 'deceitful' for Guru's sacred *Bani*, without restraint.

Mandair finds traces of idolatry in Guru Nanak's ideology, as he translates *Akal Murat* as 'image of the Eternal' and says that it conveys the meaning of an idol, which cannot escape a connection to time and world (p. 229). He thinks that Singh Sabha reformers gave a new version of *Akal Murat* as 'Formless Divine' to avoid any association with Hindu idolatry. It must be made clear that *Akal Murat* takes its meaning not in isolation but from the total understanding of *Mul Mantra*, which refers to One Lord, the Eternal Reality, Creator, Immanent without Fear, without Rancour, Beyond time and death, Beyond the trammels of birth or incarnation, Self-Existent, realised through the Grace of the Guru. How can these attributes be applied to an idol? How can an idol be timeless (*Akal*)? How can an idol be Eternal Reality? Mandair's sole purpose is to connect Guru Nanak's God to

time and world and then to idolatry. He tears words and terms out of context and twists their meaning to suit his contrived thesis. Guru Nanak's views on idolatry are absolutely clear, "Should one propitiate gods and goddesses, what boon can you beg of them? What can they grant? Should a stone be washed in water, in water must it still sink." (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 637). Despite such clear evidence, Mandair seems to be bent upon distorting the true message of Guru Nanak.

Mandair continues to maintain the same stance with regard to his interpretation of *Sabad-Guru*. He emphasizes 'the political nature' of the concept of *Sabad-Guru* and believes that this ideological shift would facilitate the entry of Sikhs in the post-Colonial period. He states that 'the task can be consummated through an alternative interpretation of *Gurmat* (teachings of the Sikh Gurus) as centred not on eternity and transcendence, as it is in neo-Colonial interpretations but around contingency or human finitude. The aim of this post-Colonial interpretation is firstly to release the affect of shame that has been associated with the idea and experience of finitude as the universal ground of *Gurmat*'. In view of the motivated approach and perception of Mandair, it is futile to expect him to display a true understanding of the concept of *Sabad-Guru*. Metaphysical interpretation of *Sabad-Guru*, based on eternity and transcendence does not fit into his thesis. Metaphysics finds its way out of human theories as material things do not enter metaphysical premises and conclusions. Still to prove his point, Mandair asserts that 'non-metaphysical interpretation is not only closer to the teachings of the Sikh Gurus within the Adi Granth but also a powerful, though repressed undercurrent of contemporary Sikh thought and practice.' He believes that the political crisis of Sikh identity can be resolved through a 'ruthless examination' of the term *Gurmat*, through the more universal discourse of modern Western university. 'Ruthless examination' of a sacred scripture is not the true academic approach.

Mandair's purpose is simply to challenge and replace such ideological formations as 'Sikh theology' and 'Sikh history' which form the bedrock of representations of 'Sikhs-as-nation' and articulation of 'Sikhism as world religion'. He has discovered a devious stratagem of ushering in an era of

communal harmony in India through the levelling and homogenizing of identities. Accordingly, the Sikhs must lead their lives in terms of quietest detachment from worldly affairs and politics and the constant repetition of the name (*Nam-Simran*). There is a Hegelian tone in his analysis of the Sikhs versus the Indian state when he says that 'if the Sikhs were to exist in modern secular society, they must return to their pacifist origin, a move which, in the context of the modern nation-state, imposes a legal injunction that effectively forecloses Sikhs and Sikhism from any connection to the political.' Notion of political Sikhism as a deviation from original Sikhism is a myth perpetuated by McLeod and his coterie and refuted by knowledgeable scholars from time to time. Yet Mandair repeats this notion, time and again, and makes it the basis of his false formulations. Burden of his thesis is to prove that there is no originality in the religious thesis of Guru Nanak. He endorses McLeod's view that the Guru belonged to the Sant tradition, associated with the quietist practice of *Nam Simran*. The later Gurus deviated from this practice, entered the worldly realm of politics and even resorted to violence against the Mughal state. He tries to cloud the issue of Sikh resistance to the Mughal bigotry by describing it as violence against the State. He believes that the quality of original experience of Guru Nanak got diluted and 'truly corrupted' under the successor Gurus. Use of such derogatory language for the Gurus is offensive to Sikh sentiments. He states that 'only Nanak and members of the early Nanak Panth remained true to the Sant ideal and can therefore be described as truly religious. Accordingly, the Gurus who came after Nanak can only have been imitations or weaker copies of the original' (p. 255). It is not appropriate to associate Guru Nanak or early Nanak Panth with the Sant tradition. Guru had separated himself from the Udasis and had rejected asceticism. His religion is a religion of householders, which aims at harmonising valid worldly pursuits with a true religious life. It must be mentioned that all the ten Gurus, Nanak and his nine successors are equally revered, because they all manifest the same Divine Light, just as one lamp is lit from another. Guru's injunction is very clear in this respect, "There is one sole holy text (Bani), one Guru, one unified Word (Sabad) to contemplate".¹ Mandair points out that Sikhism has not succeeded in gaining entry into the 'Elite Club of World religions'.

¹ 'ਇਕਾ ਬਾਣੀ, ਇਕੁ ਗੁਰੂ, ਇਕੋ ਸਬਦੁ ਵੀਚਾਰਿ ।' Guru Granth Sahib, p. 646.

Mandair envisages a bigger role and more rights for the universities - the right to say everything, without condition and beyond question. He proposes university's relation to the power of the nation-state and its scepter of the indivisible sovereignty with a view to produce new knowledge formations for the purpose of theoretical and political interventions. He talks, in eloquent terms, of the ideal of secular disinterested enquiry and liberal humanism, within the privileged space of secular academic discourse. But unfortunately this ideal is far from being practised. How can a 'disinterested' historian overlook the vital factor of ideology in the study of religion and overemphasise social and political factors? It is unfortunate that it is from the privileged platform of Sikh studies in America that campaigns of misrepresentations of Sikhism and distortion of Sikh history are being organised under the cover of 'liberal humanism'. Mandair has misused this privilege to the utmost and yet he is contemplating moves for more powers to the universities, under the protection of the nation-state, to pursue his relentless agenda of theoretical and political interventions. Such plans are always contentious. History bears ample testimony to this. Take the example of Mughal King, Akbar, who proposed a synthesis of different elements and their fusion into a common religion but could not succeed. His *Din-i-Ilahi* is mentioned only as a footnote in history. He tried to interpret religion in a rational spirit and, for the moment, he appeared to have brought about a remarkable transformation of the Indian scene with his synthetic faith. But this direct intervention did not succeed, as it has seldom succeeded elsewhere. Nor it is going to succeed in the West, loud claims of 'liberal humanism' notwithstanding.

Mandair is neither liberal nor humane. He lacks all candour and courtesy, as is obvious from the manner in which he has intensified the 'war of scholarship' between the Sikhs and the West. What can one expect from a pseudo-scholar, who suspends or subordinates his judgment to Hegelian commandments or McLeodian framework? Hegel's philosophy was abstruse. He was not a practical philosopher. He had too much faith in the nation-state. He did not realise that gigantic unbridled power, vested in the centralised state, based on might is right, could spell disaster and lead to

dictatorship. It was partly under Hegelian influence that Hitler had turned a dictator, who massacred six million Jews. Hegel's opposition to democracy and rights of the individual and his rigid adherence to rationalism had made him unpopular. He wanted to legitimise 'European man's claim to be historically different from the Rest.' The idea of a master race was proclaimed by Hegel, in unambiguous terms, and became inherent in imperialism. Mandair feels compelled to overlook these pitfalls in Hegel's philosophy. In place of past imperialism, he wants to clear the ground for a new imperialism, centred around America. He envisions America as a torch-bearer in the post-Colonial period and becoming the centre of a new civilization. He believes that it is reserved for America to play the role of a guardian in the new world order at all levels - political, diplomatic, technical, military and even on the level of academics, language and international law. It is argued that the only universals that can work in an age of globalisation are Western universals and that the notion of religion as 'a cultural universal' is a Western notion. Global legitimacy of Christianity is sought to be established as 'only Christianity has a concept of universality' Christianity's claim as a world-religion is further legitimised on account of the intimate 'nexus of language and religion'. Thus Christianity as a global religion and English, as a language of international communication, emerges as the best combination. Claim of Hinduism as world religion becomes illegitimate, on account of the handicap of language, although it is Christianity-like in its universality otherwise. Mandair suggests that Sikhs as a 'stateless minority' should accept their limitations and be happy to promote a universal global culture.

Some of the post-Colonial theorists in the West conceive the new world-order in terms of an empire. Mandair quotes Hardt and Negri who give details of this concept in their book 'Empire.' The term 'empire' is a deterritorialised notion of the new global order which seeks to liberate the 'multitude' from the constraints of modernity and the nation-state. It seeks to displace the idea of territorial acquisition, which is linked to European colonization. New approach signifies a 'space of imperial sovereignty' that is in effect a 'non-place' To think of the civilizational unity of the entire world and deterritorialised notion of the new global order, without nation-

states, is to live in a fool's paradise. There have been empires in history but they never encompassed the whole world. The American idea of a world empire is nothing but an empty dream. The Christian Right in America are vigorously engaged in 'blue sky thinking' through a plethora of think tanks, journals and academic specialisms. In India, the Right wing Hindu think-tanks have high-brow journals and newspapers at their command for peddling their socio-political propaganda. Think-tank among the Sikhs is intellectually feeble and cannot match upto others. A handful of Sikh intellectuals end up simply being defensive and reactive rather than pro-active. Lack of political space is a big handicap for the Sikhs.

Conclusion

The book gives a clear idea of how America defines its international role in the post-Colonial period. It is the role of a dominant super-power which sees itself as entitled to act in any way it deems fit. It is an imperial mind set, which claims a monopoly on all virtues. It envisions an empire in the shape of an over arching civilizational framework, largely underpinned by Christian ethos. It is the vision of a very cohesive and homogenous form of internationalism, with mono-culturalism of Christianity defining it. Its hegemonic agenda holds negative portents for other cultures, especially for the minorities, as it puts them in the amalgamating melting pot of identities. It distorts the logic of American democracy and claim of human rights. New knowledge formations in the American universities aim at theoretical and political interventions and deeply biased policy frameworks with a view to providing sweeping solutions to the problem of multi-culturalism. This is a short-sighted approach. From a liberal democracy, America is turning into a guided democracy-guided by university elites, who super-scribe Western cultural norms and the primacy of Christianity through their academic discourses. In the field of Humanities, all academic pursuits are, overtly or covertly, aimed at the fulfillment of the inordinate imperialist ambition and vision of a new America in the position of a geo-political command.

Although Mandair follows the guidelines laid down by Mcleod, yet the two differ in their approach. While McLeod conceals his hidden agenda,

Mandair, at once, lifts the curtain without hesitation and reveals his real intent and agenda, in no uncertain terms. As a protege of the Christian West, he blows the Western trumpet, without mincing words. In a bid to assert the superiority of Christian values, he dilutes and damages the true spirit of Sikhism, which stands for universal values of brotherhood of mankind (Sarbat da Bhala), irrespective of caste, creed or race. Mandair's reading of Sikh history is not only biased but also selective. He deliberately ignores the glorious periods of Sikh history, full of examples of altruism and martyrdoms for justice and human rights. He sees only which he wants to see and is blind to all else. But facts do not vanish simply because they are overlooked and when they compel attention, there is bound to be a feeling of displeasure and resentment at the unexpected happening as of some trick having been played. Mandair portrays a high profile image of priest-ridden, caste-ridden and ritualistic Hindu religion. While downgrading Sikhism, he places Hinduism and Christianity on the same pedestal for their 'universal values', but prefers Christianity for the new global order, on account of its association with the English language.

The emerging global reality may be quite different from the American dream described by Mandair. There is certainly no prospect of the emergence of a uniform and homogenised cultural universe, for cultures are far too embedded for that to happen. The idea of theoretical and political intervention, meant to dilute identities of minorities, repeatedly emphasised by Mandair, is outrageous. There is likely to be sustained and often sharp resistance to the threat of cultural erosion. Samuel Huntington rightly observed that the 'fear of cultural dilution could make people more defensive and that it could lead to collectivities of cultures organising themselves politically and clashing with one another'. Mankind cannot afford to see this world splitting apart along historic faultlines of cultures and creeds. Mandair has to change the lens through which he views the world and the place of Sikhs and Sikhism in the new global order.

20th century has witnessed the dismal performance of bankrupt secular ideologies and secularisation. Downfall of the USSR and failure of Hitler, on account of moral callousness, are eye-openers for mankind. 'Back to religion' is the new motto in the 21st century. More and more people in

America are beginning to see the futility of a culture, devoid of moral-ethical values. The views expressed by Jerry Falwell, in a television broadcast, two days after the tragedy of 9/11, 2001 are noteworthy in this context, "I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, the people of the American Way - all of them who have tried to secularize America - I point the finger in their face and say "you have helped this happen." These remarks are quoted from a book entitled 'The Mighty and the Almighty', authored by Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, who believes that only the faith in the Almighty can save the mighty in this world.

Apart from being a protagonist of the Christian West, Mandair also has affiliations with Hindu outfits DANAM (Dharma Academy of North America) & Uberoi foundation. The book presents a Hindu-centric vision of India and pro-Christian vision of the new global order. Mandair wants the Sikhs to play a subservient role to both of them. Such deeply biased policy frameworks, proposed by him, cannot succeed. It is empty Hegelian idealism.