

## “Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities”

Dr. Baldev Singh

In his response (The Sikh Review (T.S.R.), May 2006, p. 78) to my rejoinder (T.S.R., April 2006, pp. 71-74) to “Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities” (T.S.R., February 2006, pp. 56-59), Prof. I.J. Singh has ignored the questions I raised regarding the false and misleading statements in the article in question. Instead, he says that I grossly misread their position and suggested me to reread his review articles on the works of Prof. McLeod and his associates.

I would suggest Prof. Singh to reread his article and my rejoinder carefully and point out what wrong have I done?

He says, “Our essay was NOT intended to analyze the idea of Sikh Chairs, much less to evaluate their academic achievements, or to promote the model. Its primary purpose was quite narrow — to look at what the expectations of American/UK universities - and community - are, when chairs are established. If the chairs are to be established, we need to understand how the system works.”

1.If this was their primary objective in publishing their article “Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities” then it failed to communicate that objective clearly. Besides, I would like Prof. Singh to explain how does the following paragraph in their article, tally with the above objective?

*While Muslims swordsmen conquered for the faith, Christian missionaries were willing to explore tentatively on the frontiers of empire to bring the good news to even a few more souls. ... In our own Sikh tradition, beginning right from the time of our Gurus, Sikh*

*theologians were sent to the centers of higher learning such as the famous Benaras Hindu University for research and dialogue.*

Doesn't this paragraph represent a gross distortion of the history of Islam, Christianity and Sikhism? If Prof. Singh thinks that I am wrong then could he provide answer to the following two questions?

a. When did the Islamic armies invade Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Tanzania? What happened to the aborigines of Australia, Americas and Africa when the Christians conquered and colonized the native populations? Why was Maharaja Dalip Singh, a ten years old boy kidnapped by the British colonists and converted to Christianity?

b. What are the names of Sikh Gurus who sent Sikh theologians for research and dialogue to the famous "Benaras Hindu University"? What are the names of those Sikh theologians? Did the famous Benaras University or anything like it exist at the time of the Sikh Gurus? According to Aad Guru Granth Sahib (p. 476) Benaras was known as the center of thugs. Moreover, didn't Guru Nanak reject all the essentials of Hinduism: incarnation of God, caste system, transmigration, karma, hell, heaven, gods, goddesses, idol worship, and the method or approach to attain salvation as preached by Indian and Semitic religions? Besides, didn't he reject Sanskrit as well as its script as a medium for the propagation of his philosophy? Given these truths why would any Guru send Sikhs to Benaras and for what purpose?

2. Furthermore, isn't the statement *"An endowed Chair is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon a professor, who has already accumulated an*

*excellent track record in the specialty area"*  
misleading?

If that is so then what was Harjot Oberoi or Pashaura Singh or Gurinder Singh Mann's "already accumulated excellent track record" before they became the occupants of Sikh Chairs? To my knowledge the one "common outstanding qualification" of the three is their relationship to McLeod, who supervised Pashaura Singh's thesis and was consultant to Oberoi and Mann for their Ph.D. theses.

3. Regarding Prof. I.J. Singh's writings on Sikhism, I have read his books, reviews and other general articles. I regard all of his writings including book reviews as "popular writings" because he never quotes Aad Guru Granth Sahib or gives documentary evidence in support of his arguments. Scholarly reviews of academic work require strong documentary evidence and logical arguments; mere statements are meaningless.

4. In their article I.J. Singh and his co-authors have given the impression that Western universities are autonomous and work on the principle of "academic freedom," but this is not necessarily true. For example, what often goes on in the "departments of humanities" is not research for "truth" but propaganda to advance particular viewpoint/agenda. Quite often the faculty members work as consultants to various governmental agencies including intelligence gathering and spying. So what is often cloaked, as academic freedom may be academic terror or academic oppression or academic colonization.

5. Since Prof. Singh and his co-authors have vast academic experiences and first hands knowledge of "how the system works" at Western universities,

would they kindly explain to the Sikhs how a discredited candidate, who was demoted from assistant professor to a lecturer at the University of Michigan, got an appointment as full professor in the same field/specialty at University of California at Riverside?

Finally, I want to remind the Sikh community, particularly the advocates and sponsors of Sikh Chairs that "Sikh resources" are being used to undermine "Nanakian philosophy (Gurmat/Sikhi) and Sikh Identity." We ignore the Punjabi proverb, *apnia jutian apne sir* (one is beaten on the head by the enemy by one's own shoes) at our own peril.

Note: The article "Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities" that started this debate was published by Raghbir Singh Basi, I.J. Singh, Harbans Lal and Indarjit Singh in the Sikh Review, February 2006, pp. 56-59.

Baldev Singh  
316, R Glad Way  
Collegeville, PA 19426  
USA  
e-mail:baldev6@aol.com  
Phone: 610-4540-1079

### Endowed Chairs in Sikhism at Western Universities

Dr. I.J.Singh

**Sr. Baldev Singh's rejoinder (SR, April 2006. Pages 71-74) to our essay on Sikh studies is provocative, but it is a gross misreading of our position.**

Our essay was Not intended to analyze the idea of Sikh Chairs, much less to evaluate their achievements, or to promote the model. Its primary

purpose was quite narrow to look at what the expectations of American/UK universities - and community - are, when chairs are established. If chairs are to be established, we need to understand how the system works.

My views on the whole issue of Sikh studies and how they should be structured not how they are modeled at present was published in the Sikh Review as an article (*I.J. Singh & Hakam Singh, Chairs in Sikh Studies in America: Problems and solutions, Sikh Review, pages 43-51, May 1996.*) One of the current holders of a Chair became displeased because he thought I was trying to do him out of a job; however, my views remain unchanged.

Sr. Baldev Singh asks if I have taken any critical note of the writings of Hew McLeod, or any of the Chairs. Let me point out to him that I published lengthy reviews of Harjot Oberoi's and Pashaura Singh's theses. Neither their supporters nor their detractors were pleased. As the Editor pointed out in a footnote to Baldev Singh's article, the same issue (*Sikh Review, April 2006*) that published his challenge also contains my review (co-authored with Laurie Bolger) of Hew McLeod's recent book, *Historical Dictionary of Sikhism*, on pages 89-93. Our review takes critical note of McLeod's work where it is appropriate, and lauds it where we think that is called for. I suggest that Sr. Baldev Singh rereads what I have written; it is available on public record.

I.J. Singh  
2414 Capri Place  
North Bellmore, New York  
NY 11710-1624, U.S.A.