

Foreword

Most of us – Sikhs with Punjabi roots – who learned our *Sikhi* at our parent or grandparent's knee would recognize these stories from the life of Guru Nanak. These were possibly our first connections to the richness of Sikh teachings. Twice-told tales is what I would call them. Why do they need retelling now?

True that Inni Kaur uses the English language most creatively and seductively; her words rope you in. A sublime storyteller, she understands intuitively how young minds think and respond. Her framing of young Nanak's life captivates not only the young, but also the not-so-young – the parental generation, along with the youthful technocrats and college students. The primary audience remains children seven to twelve years of age.



So what? you could ask. There are a zillion stories in this world and just as many good fabulists. In this global village, there are many new stories to tell – stories of today and tomorrow, not of times long ago. Why do these old stories need or deserve revisiting?

The classics are so labeled because there is immortality to them. *Sikhi* is not a shop that can be passed from parent to child. It is a skill set and knowledge base that have to be earned anew and reinterpreted by each successive generation. From this will arise a sense of ownership. Thus will *Sikhi* shape lives and their collective ethos across generations.

The transmission of a religious heritage begins with parables – fables with morals. Even when they become embedded into the mythology of a people, they remain a singularly effective way to carry home in a simple – but never simplistic – fashion layers upon layers of some very compelling ideas and meanings. The parables of Guru Nanak's life address such weighty matters as the nature of God and the human mind and heart, the world around us, as well as our very complex human psychosocial realities.

Discussion points at the end of each chapter excite the young mind that has never encountered such material, as well as the mature reader who might otherwise dismiss it as merely kid stuff.

Guru Nanak, the founder of *Sikhi*, is an ideal subject for fables with morals. He traveled widely. He challenged the entrenched religious practices of both Hinduism and Islam with unmatched courage, with panache and a light touch to puncture the balloon of unctuous pride, ego and unthinking loyalty to illogical belief. His weapons: soul-stirring music, a hefty dose of common sense and more than a dollop of delightful humor.



Inni Kaur refrains from using the honorific “Guru” with Nanak well past his growing-up years, until Nanak reappears after a three-day absence in the river *Bayeen* and declares his spiritual mission. (In historical documents, the alternative spelling *Vayeen* is also found.) Some readers may find this departure from tradition somewhat unsettling. One way to look at it is that it was then that the world started to see the Guru in Nanak the man, although, as the parables tell us, it was clear that, even as a child, Nanak was special.

There is an art to teaching, and Inni has it. The message must not be preachy. It must be user-friendly. It must embrace the learner – not repel. Yet it must challenge and engage the reader fully, so that one is not tempted to dismiss it as a simple catechism of easy-to-master factoids.

Education means not saddling with mind-numbing detail, but instead giving one the basics, along with the tools and techniques to think with. This Inni Kaur does well and effectively.

This is a handsomely produced book – an engrossing and enjoyable read – meticulously edited by Manjyot Kaur. There is a useful glossary at the end of the book that would greatly serve all those who find themselves on unfamiliar territory. Pictures, they say, are worth a thousand words. Well! Here the illustrations, by Pardeep Singh, the India-based artist, are simply exquisite. They are not eye-candy; they make the stories come alive. All in all, no student and no teacher could have wished for anything better.

The stories from the life of Guru Nanak that this book brings to you have formed us, as they formed our parents. Now they will form our children and their children. They will also continue to shape the parents and their peers by transcending barriers between generations.

In recent years, Sikh communities have grown exponentially outside Punjab and India, and there is a new Sikh generation that connects to a home in the Diaspora. A plethora of attractively produced, well written and first-rate books and booklets on Sikhs and Sikhism for all ages are being published – more in the Diaspora than in India.

Inni Kaur’s work fits nicely into this genre of writing. I welcome it with great pleasure and look forward to many more stories of Sikhi from her pen.

Enjoy!

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June 1, 2010

