

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Bhāi Gurdās Dīāñ Vārāñ Dā Ālochanātamak Adhayan* (Puñjābī) by Gurbakhsh Singh Shānt (Languages Department, Punjab, Patiala, 1984), pp. 358; Rs. 13/-.

Bhāi Gurdās is the first exegete of the Sikh Scripture and his Vārs are said to have been *termed* by Gurū Arjan himself as the key to understanding the Scripture. Before Gurū Nānak, Vār as a poetic *genre* was used to narrate the heroic deeds of a warrior. However, the Sikh Gurus brought about a thematic and structural transformation of the Vār. In their Vārs the human psyche is made the battlefield where the forces of good take on the forces of evil. Gurmukh is an embodiment of the good and he is the hero of these Vārs, which now dealt with spiritual instead of the heroic theme. After the Gurū Granthian Vārs, Bhāi Gurdās is the first Puñjābī poet to write Vārs on spiritual themes. His contribution to this *genre* of poetry has since remained unequalled both in terms of quality and quantity.

The volume under review is a pioneer attempt, by Gurbakhsh Singh Shānt who originally prepared this work for a doctoral degree, which makes an intensive critical analysis of all the Vārs of Bhāi Gurdās in order to form and present an overall view of the poet. Prior to this, efforts had been made in this direction but only on a limited scale and only to highlight one or the other aspect of his poetic genius. The author has made such an in depth and exhaustive study of the theme that any future work on the same theme is bound to be greatly indebted to this work.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The opening two chapters address themselves to the life and career of Bhāi Gurdās and the *milieu* in which he lived and worked. In the first chapter, the author has tried to put together a life-sketch of Bhāi Gurdās from whatever skeleton information is available. He has taken pains to reconcile many discrepancies after reproducing the divided and conflicting opinions about several incidents relating to his life. It also includes information about his contribution to Sikh literature as well as to Sikh religion. The next chapter gives a description and analysis of his inheritance and the contemporary *milieu*. An effort has also been made to identify Bhāi Gurdās and his poetry with the contemporary literary tradition. The political, social and religious conditions as they emerge from the study of his Vārs have been fully analysed.

The two chapters, that follow, are a thematic study of all the 39 Vārs of Bhāi Gurdās. Chapter III (pp. 61–161) deals with the thematic unity of the Vārs and discusses all the important metaphysical concepts and Sikh ethics as they emerge from his Vārs. Among the concepts discussed in detail include those of Brahm, Nām, Saṅgat, Gurmukh, Manmukh, Bhagat, Jīva and Gurū. The author has laboured hard to find out lines from the poetry of Bhāi Gurdās which are almost identical or just a simplified version of some of the hymns in the Gurū Granth Sāhib. At the end of this chapter are given lines from the Sikh Scripture, with the name of their author and page number at which they appear, along with identical lines of Bhāi Gurdās. Chapter IV (pp. 161–210) is sub-divided into two parts: the first endeavours to bring out the historical and the second the Puranic elements. The references in the Vārs to the Sikh Gurus and the members of their family and relatives, the Bhagats and prominent Sikhs of the Guru-period have been analysed with a view to bringing out some important characteristics of their personalities. The second part of this chapter deals with the Puranic elements including the Puranic tales and diction.

Chapters V and VI are devoted to the aesthetics and poetics of Bhāi Gurdās. The author has discussed all the *rasas* used in the Vārs, prefacing this discussion with a definition of *rasa*, its origins and its place in poetry. Since the theme of these Vārs is, in the main, metaphysical and philosophical, *shānt rasa*, a sentiment creating an atmosphere of calmness and serenity, predominates but this does not preclude other *rasas* glimpses of which can be found there. The metaphors, similes, images, symbols and metaphysical concepts used have also been discussed in detail.

The concluding chapter deals with the language of the *Vārs*. Although the language of the Vārs is primarily Puñjābī, the influence of other languages is also obvious. Bhāi Gurdās was also a great scholar of Braj, Sanskrit and Persian, besides Punjabi. The words from these languages are also found in their original as well as Punjabized form.

The book is perhaps the best attempt made so far as regards the study of Bhāi Gurdās' Vārs from the point of view of theme, language, poetics and aesthetics. The publication is all the more welcome since it sets very high standards of scholarship thereby throwing a challenge to future works on the subject to attempt something even better and more laudable.

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