
Ernest Trumpp : The Application of Western Logic to Sikh Tradition

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Martial qualities and the valuable service rendered by the Sikhs during the great revolt forced the British Government to take such steps by which the Sikhs would be converted into permanent supporters by British rule. Now, they looked for the roots of their strength and weakness. For that, they wanted to get some first hand information about the social and religious background of this community. The government seriously began to understand the Sikh faith by sponsoring scholarly research and translation of texts. Although curiosity in the life style and religion of the new members of the empire contributed to the new attitude, the major force behind officially sanctioned schemes was politics. The official felt they had to know more about Sikhs in order to deal with them.¹

In 1859 therefore, the Punjab government initiated a project to translate authentic versions of Adi- Granth and Dasam Granth. Adi Granth – the Bible of the Sikhs, which is the central points of their faith. This granth was compiled by Guru Arjun Dev, the fifth Guru of the Sikhs in 1604 A.D., in the Gurumukhi script. The Dasam Granth, a collection of writings by the final Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, and his contemporaries, also supposedly contained vital information on Sikh tradition, especially the symbols and the militarism characterizing the faith in the eighteenth century.

The proposal was accepted by India office authorities who decided to entrust the work to a German Christian Missionary named Dr. Earnest Trumpp, who was studying and teaching Oriental languages at Karachi. Dr. Earnest Trumpp who was an eminent linguist, proficient in several languages western as well as an eastern, was born on 13 March, 1823 A. D. at Ilsfeldt a village in Wurtemberg province of Germany. In 1849 A. D. owing to political disturbances in his country, he migrated to London where he was employed as an assistant Librarian at the East India House, later on known as India

¹ See, for example, the detailed discussions of Sikhism and its political implication in Foreign Political 1859, April 8, 141-2 (Government of India, NAI, New Delhi), Foreign secret 1851, February 28, 37-44, Foreign General, July 1869, 68-9 KW.

office, London. Sponsored by the Ecclesiastical Mission society, Trumpp came to India around 1854 A.D. to study Indian Languages and to prepare their grammars and glossaries for use by the Christian missionaries.

Trump was teaching at the university of Tubingen when India Office authorities entrusted him with this project. He was considered the most suitable person as he was having good knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit and North Indian vernaculars. He is a scholar of repute in this field. "He possessed the scholarly spirit of enquiry and doubt, and would not entertain anything unacceptable to reason."² Trump had no interest in the religious tenets of the Sikh Gurus and their religion. His main aim was an accurate translation based on sound linguistic principles. Trump took the study of Sikh religion not out of interest but he was hired by India Office authorities of London to take up this work. As a philologist, Trumpp tried to do full justice to his work but as a historian his work contain various discrepancies. His treatment of subject lacks historical approach and he deals with the subject in a very cold and unsympathetic way.

Dr. Trumpp's work of the translation of 'Adi Granth' is in two parts. The first part which expands from page 1 to CXXXVIII pages (1 to 138) included 'Introductory Essays' and the second part which relates to the translation of the Adi Granth includes the translation of Japji, So-Dar, So- Purkhu, Sohila, Rag Sri Rag, Speech of the Bhagats, Rag Manju, Rag Gauri, Savair of the Bhattas etc.

Obsessed by his Christian missionary spirit and full of extreme bias and conceivable inferiority for other religions he set to study the Adi Granth and to translate it into English. He was also fully aware that the Imperialistic British Government which had employed him and engaged his services for the authentic works of sympathetic historians like J.D. Cunningham earlier. Moreover, he had neither any dictionary of the Punjabi language nor any scholars of the Sikh religion easily available to him from whom he could seek guidance. So with great difficulty he was able to prepare 'a crude translation of hardly one fourth of the Guru Granth.'

Dr. Trumpp's mind was biased with superiority of his own religion. The main theme of Dr. Trumpp's research work was that he does not accept Sikhism as a distinct religious culture rather he gives it out as a branch of Hinduism. He calls Guru Nanak by all means a 'Hindu Saint' who followed in all essential points the common Hindu Philosophy of those days. But Prof. M. Mujeeb says, "Guru Nanak was not a Reformer.

² See article by A.C. Arora on Ernest Trumpp in Dr. Fauja Singh (ed.), *Historians and Historiography of the Sikhs* (New Delhi, 1978), p. 155

We know he was not a Hindu who appealed to the Hindu scriptures in order to reform Hindu society. We know he was not a muslim trying to eradicate evils in muslim society by appealing to the Quran. I don't find in his teachings any attempt at a reconciliation of Hinduism and Islam, any combination of existing pattern. In fact, he set both Hinduism and Islam aside to get to the source of religion itself. He was an originator, a founder.”

His views regarding all Sikh Gurus especially Guru Gobind Singh were extremely erroneous. Perhaps he wanted to create a wrong impression of Sikhism amongst his western philosophy was far better than any other Eastern religion and philosophy. Thus, Dr. Trumpp seems confused in understanding Sikh culture, philosophy and scripture because he was grown up in scientific materialistic background of the West which was totally different from the Indian culture. To understand the idea behind the writing of a Historian as in the words of Prof. E. H. Carr is that : “Before you study the historian, study his historical and social environment. The historian, being an individual, is also a product of history and of society, and it is in this two fold light that the student of history must learn to regard him.” So, if Trumpp failed to appreciate Sikh philosophy he was not totally responsible for it, his environment and his time was also partially responsible. But a great historian is that who writes beyond the limits of time and society and who becomes impartial judge of his sources and uses his sources as sources and not as authority.

To be a historian, says Professor Toynbee, means trying to jump clear of the particular time and place at which one happens to have been born and brought up. It means trying to look at history from some stand point that is one's own and that is more central, and therefore, more objective than one's own is likely to be this is the first, the most important and the most difficult piece of business on the historical agenda. Owing to the temporary predominance of the west over the rest of the world, there has been a tendency, in the rest of the world to take over his western view of history uncritically together with the dominant western civilization, manners and custom.

Dr. Trumpp's main fault was that he used Persian sources for his work and considered them as authority. Instead of getting help from Sikh scholars of that time he made anti- sikh Punjabi Brahmins his advisers and guides. He depended very much on Sharda Ram Phillouri, a staunch Arya Samajist who wrote ‘Sikha- de-Raj -di-Vithiya’. As this book had given a tainted picture of the Sikh history, so Dr. Trumpp's research

was bound to be erroneous because he depended on it as his authoritative source material.

In the history of every religion we come across scholars who study a religion, which is not their own, with such profound reverence and insight that their work receives not only admiration but the votaries of the religion are tempted to say even our scholars have not produced such remarkable work. Such a scholar was Cunningham. On the other hand there are hostile scholars who devote all their talent and skill to condemn the religion they study, not concealing the sinister motives behind this attitude. Such a scholar was Dr. Ernest Trumpp.

Though Trumpp failed to achieve his goal in his work yet his work cannot totally be ignored. His labour is not going in vain. His work has always attracted the new scholars to redeem or rectify his mistakes and produce such a work which should be authentic. Main contribution of Dr. Trumpp to sikh history is that his work proved an acid test and thus attracted the Sikh to review their religion, history and culture in the twilight of the western impact and as such the reformatory work started by the Sikh Sabha Movement of that time came into being. Secondly it inspired Macauliffe to jump into the field of research of Sikh religion in order to redress the harm and insult done by Dr. Trumpp to Sikh religion, its Gurus and their sacred writings.