



English Historian Of Sikh Religion: Max Arthur Macauliffe

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Max Arthur Macauliffe was born on 10 September, 1841¹ at Newcastle West, Limerick, Ireland. He completed his primary education in Newcastle School, Limerick. He went to Spring Field College for his further studies and he completed his graduation from Queen's college, Galway in 1862. He studied Greek and Latin classic in the original. He also read French and Italian². In this way he received a broad humanistic education. In the same year he was selected for civil services in Punjab, India³. He reached there in February 1864 and started his services. He became Deputy Commissioner in 1882 and after two year he became Divisional Judge⁴. He thoroughly studied sub-bids of Indian languages e.g. Sanskrit, Prakrit, Arabic, Persian, Marathi, Gujrati, Punjabi etc.

Shortly after arriving in Punjab, he went to attend a Diwali celebration in Amritsar and from there his interest in Sikhism was sparked and he got attracted towards Sikhism. He wanted to know more about Sikhism so; he started to study Sikhism and hymns of Gurus and Bhagats. He was deeply engaged in the study and could not leave it afterwards. He was indulged in judicial work till 1893. On the request of some representatives of Sikh societies he resigned from his post of divisional judge⁵. He resigned his post earlier so that he can give enough time to the sympathetic study of Sikhism and Sikh history.

A German missionary Ernst Trumpp hurt the feelings of Sikhs by using the abusive language about Sikh Gurus and their sacred scripture. So, Macauliffe wanted to remove the stain caused by Trumpp to the Sikhs. As a result, he started to write Sikh history from the beginning. He spent twenty years of his life for

¹ Singh Harbans(Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Sikhism*, Vol. 3, Punjabi University, Patiala, Page-1.

² ਗੁਰਪ੍ਰੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ, *ਸਿੱਖੀ ਦਾ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ ਵਿਆਖਿਆਕਾਰ ਮੈਕਸ ਆਰਥਰ ਮੈਕਾਲਿਫ*, ਸਿੱਖ ਫੁਲਵਾੜੀ, ਮਾਰਚ 2008, ਪੰਨਾ-40.

³ Lal Harbans, *Max Arthur Macauliffe: The Western Gateway to the Study of Sikhism*, In *Studies in Sikhism and comparative Religion*, Vol xiv Number-1, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, Jan-June 1995, Page-54.

⁴ Ibid, Page-36.

⁵ ਮੈਕਸ ਆਰਥਰ ਮੈਕਾਲਿਫ, *ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ, ਪਵਿੱਤਰ ਰਚਨਾਵਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਰਚਨਾਕਾਰ*, ਅਨ. ਡਾ. ਕਿਰਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ, ਜਿਲਦ ਪਹਿਲੀ, ਪਬਲੀਕੇਸ਼ਨ ਬਿਊਰੋ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ, ਪਟਿਆਲਾ, 2003, ਪੰਨਾ-ix (ਭੂਮਿਕਾ).

researching and studying the Sikh sources. Initially, he wanted to translate the whole Guru Granth Sahib in English but due to some reasons he translated the selected Bani of Gurus' and other writers of Guru Granth Sahib. In the beginning Macauliffe did not include the biographies of Gurus and Bhagats of Guru Granth Sahib in his work but later on he did include the biographies as he considered that biographies are necessary for a correct interpretation of their writings.

After resignation from his post, he started to live on rental house situated at 2, Cantonment road, Amritsar. Afterwards, this house was recognized as theological institute of religion where Sikh scholars were used to get together and present their opinions upon Macauliffe's interpretation and help him to present the correct translation of Sikh scripture⁶. Among these scholars were Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha, Professor Gurmukh Singh, Bhagat Lakshman Singh, Bhai Sardool Singh, Bhai Sant Singh, Bhai Prem Singh, Bhai Ditt Singh, Bhai Hazara Singh, Bhai Dasodha Singh, Bhai Bhagwan Singh etc. He showed all of his work to these scholars and other Sikh clergymen to examine so that a correct translation can be presented.

Macauliffe was in favour of Punjabi as the official language of Punjab and believed that if Punjabi would be the official language, the Sikhs not get allured towards the books written in foreign languages⁷.

He was against the usage of drugs. He always opposed the usage of alcohol among Sikh societies. He used to talk about the drawbacks of drugs in front of general public and worked hard to pass the resolution against drugs in Singh Sabha, Amritsar. He was really disappointed about the usage of Cigar by Trumpp as Trumpp used to blow the smoke of cigar on Guru Granth Sahib and considered it as an insult towards the feelings of Sikhs. Macauliffe brought this matter in

⁶ Lal Harbans, *Max Arthur Macauliffe: The Western Gateway to the Study of Sikhism, In Studies in Sikhism and comparative Religion*, Vol xiv Number-1, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, Jan-June 1995, Page-36.

⁷ ਮੈਕਸ ਆਰਥਰ ਮੈਕਾਲਿਫ, *ਸਿੱਖ ਧਰਮ ਗੁਰੂ ਸਾਹਿਬਾਨ, ਪਵਿੱਤਰ ਰਚਨਾਵਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਰਚਨਾਕਾਰ*, ਅਨ. ਡਾ. ਕਿਰਪਾਲ ਸਿੰਘ, ਜਿਲਦ ਪਹਿਲੀ, ਪਬਲੀਕੇਸ਼ਨ ਬਿਊਰੋ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ, ਪਟਿਆਲਾ, 2003, ਪੰਨਾ-xx(ਭੂਮਿਕਾ).

front of the Sikh people as well as present his grudge in front of the higher officers of the that time⁸.

Macauliffe did not get any economic aid for printing the Sikh history. So he spent lavishly on his work about Sikh history from his own pocket.

Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha was a good companion of Macauliffe so he went twice to England for helping him to complete his work. He helped him to collect required material and pictures of Sikh gurus.

Once on their way to England Macauliffe's cabin in the ship caught fire but fortunately Macauliffe reached there on time and put the fire off with the help of the ship staff. Otherwise, all of his hard work could be burnt into ashes⁹.

In the end, his work on Sikh history was finally completed and his book, '*The Sikh Religion: its Gurus, sacred writings and authors*' were printed in six volumes by Calderon press, London in 1909.

All of his British companions left him alone due to his love and affections towards Sikhism. In 1911, Macauliffe arrived at Rawalpindi to take part in a conference. Nobody reached at station to welcome him. So Macauliffe hired a Tonga to reach at Bhagat Lakshman Singh's house¹⁰. In his last days in India, all of his British companions shunned his company and he was left alone in his room¹¹. So he was deeply hurt and went back to England.

He died at 10 Sinclair Garden, West Kensington, London on 15 March 1913. He was chanting 'Japji Sahib' before ten minutes of his death. His last wish was that his last rituals should be performed according to Sikhism but there were some controversies after his death. Christians said he was not a Christian anymore.

⁸ Lal Harbans, Max Arthur Macauliffe: *The Western Gateway to the study of Sikhism*, In *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*, Vol xiv Number-1, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, Jan-June 1995, Page-52.

⁹ ਰਛਪਾਲ ਕੌਰ(ਸੰਪਾ.), *ਭਾਈ ਕਾਨ੍ਹ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਾਭਾ ਦੇ ਅਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਿਤ ਸਫਰਨਾਮੇ*, ਵਿਜੇਸ਼ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਨ, ਨਾਭਾ, 1984, ਪੰਨਾ-135.

¹⁰ ਤੇਜਾ ਸਿੰਘ(ਪ੍ਰਿੰਸੀਪਲ), *ਆਰਸੀ*, ਪਬਲੀਕੇਸ਼ਨ ਬਿਊਰੋ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ, ਪਟਿਆਲਾ, 2001, ਪੰਨਾ-27.

¹¹ Lal Harbans, Max Arthur Macauliffe: *The Western Gateway to the Study of Sikhism*, In *Studies in Sikhism and comparative Religion*, Vol xiv Number-1, Guru Nanak Foundation, New Delhi, Jan-June 1995, Page-48.



Similarly some Sikhs said he was not a Sikh. According to the final decision made by them, his body was kept in a coffin for five minutes and after that he was cremated according to the Sikh rituals¹².

With the efforts of Bhagat Lakshman Singh, a society named as 'Macauliffe memorial society' was built. The motive of this society was to build a library in the memory of Macauliffe¹³. They could hardly collect Rs.3245 for this purpose but this collection was not sufficient for building a library. According to the suggestion of Sir John Menard, the collected funds were offered to Punjab University but due to some reasons the university could not accept these funds. Afterwards, the fund was given to the Khalsa College, Amritsar for honoring the researchers of Sikh history with medals.

Macauliffe filled the treasure of Sikh history with his almost 25 writings but the most important work of Macauliffe is '*The Sikh History: It's Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*'. Macauliffe worked hard almost about 33 years to complete this book, which is in six volumes.

This book has very long preface and introduction of 88 pages. Macauliffe discussed about the causes by which he started to write the Sikh religion and Sikh history. The very first cause was that he wanted to introduce the Sikhism to the western people. Macauliffe started his writing with these words, "I bring from the East what is practically an unknown religion. The Sikhs are distinguished throughout the world as a great military people, but there is little known even to professional scholars regarding their religion."¹⁴ In this way Macauliffe presented Sikhism as a great religion in Western countries.

Second cause was the inaccurate and unidiomatic translation of Guru Granth Sahib by Ernst Trumpp. Ernst Trumpp published his inaccurate work in 1877 under

¹² ਤੇਜਾ ਸਿੰਘ (ਪ੍ਰਿੰਸੀਪਲ), ਆਰਸੀ, ਪਬਲੀਕੇਸ਼ਨ ਬਿਊਰੋ, ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ, ਪਟਿਆਲਾ, 2001, ਪੰਨਾ-27.

¹³ Ganda Singh (Ed.), *Bhagat Lakshman Singh Autobiography*, The Roxy Printing Press, Ludhiana, 1965, Page-125 (Footnote).

¹⁴ Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*, Satvic Media Pvt. Ltd., Amritsar, Jan 2009, Page-v (Preface).



the title '*The Adi Granth*' and it was published as an official publication by British government of India. This work was not reliable at all. He presented Sikhism with worst and wrong comments. His work caused insult and grave injuries to the Sikhs and their faith. He took advantage whenever he got opportunity to defame the Sikh Gurus and their sacred writings¹⁵. So, Macauliffe wanted to make some reparation to this insult caused by the Trumpp. Macauliffe presented the accurate and trustworthy translation of Sikhism in front of the world.

The third cause was that the old gyanis (professional interpreters) of Guru Granth Sahib were dying¹⁶. As we all know that the Guru Granth Sahib has deep meanings so it would be very difficult for coming generations to understand the real meaning of Guru Granth Sahib and these meanings would be unintelligible to them.

The fourth cause was the change in local language. According to Macauliffe the local language was changing day by day and it was diverging far from the language of Guru Granth Sahib¹⁷.

The fifth cause was the local legends. Macauliffe collected the local legends of that time otherwise these could be disappeared after short period of time.

Besides these, the main point was that Macauliffe wanted to spread the sacred writings of the Sikh Gurus throughout the whole world. Macauliffe said if the Gurus and Bhagats would be alive they would be very pleased to see their writings translated into other languages like English. As English is spoken in many parts of the world. Macauliffe explained that those who are against the translation of Guru Granth Sahib have forgotten the words of Guru Arjan Dev Ji. According to him Guru Arjan Dev Ji wanted to translate the Guru Granth Sahib into Indian and foreign languages so that these sacred writings could be spread in the whole

¹⁵ Ibid, Page-vii (Preface).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, Page-viii(Preface).



world as oil spreads over the water. Macauliffe used Ras 3 of Suraj Parkash as a reference to clarify his words:

ਸੰਸਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਅਰ ਤੁਰਕਨ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਇਸ ਮੇਂ ਲਿਖ ਲੇਵਹਿ ਬੁਧਰਾਸਾ
ਸਭ ਉਪਰ ਪਸਰੈ ਇਹ ਧਾਈ ਜਿਮ ਜਲ ਪਰ ਸੁ ਚਿਕਨਤਾ ਪਾਈ।¹⁸

He explained, “I am not without hope that when the English people become acquainted with the merits of the Sikh religion, they will not willingly let it perish in the great abyss in which so many creeds have been engulfed. Other circumstances might have occurred which would have made the Sikh religion which has evolved the highest and purest ethical system, one of the foremost faiths of the world....”

In the introduction of this book Macauliffe presented Sikhism as, “Based on the concept of unity of God, it rejected Hindu formalities and adopted an independent ethical system, rituals and standards which are totally opposed to the theological beliefs of Guru Nanak’s age and country... it would be different to point to a originality or to a more comprehensive ethical system.”

Macauliffe also mentioned the dangers to the Sikhism in his book. According to Macauliffe the Hinduism was the biggest danger for the Sikhism. In his words, “Hinduism is like the boa constructor of the Indian forests. When an enemy appears to worry it, it winds around its opponent, crushes it in its folds, and finally causes it to disappear in its capacious interior. Sikhism may go this way.”

Macauliffe’s work was considered as the first work of its kind that contributed a lot to the promotion of contacts between Eastern and Western cultures and various religious traditions in an almost unproved field.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Dr Harnam Singh Shan in his paper '*Macauliffe and His Contributions to Sikh Studies and Contacts between cultures*'¹⁹ praised Macauliffe's work as, "It also resulted in a highly valuable and indispensable source-book as well as a beacon for subsequent efforts in the subject. It inspired the compilation and publication of dictionaries and grammars of Guru Granth Sahib and a large number of commentaries, translations and studies of its various parts and aspects began to appear soon after its publication. Panjabi, the mother-tongue of the Panjabis, and its indigenous script (Gurmukhi) in which the Holy Granth is recorded was adopted as the official language and script of the Panjab, as pleaded by Macauliffe in 1909, after its liberation in 1947 from the British yoke."

Beside this Macauliffe published his first three essays in *Calcutta Review* in 1880-81. These essays were:

1. *The Diwali at Amritsar*
2. *The Rise of Amritsar and the Alteration of Sikhism*
3. *The Sikh Religion under Banda and its Present condition*

After these essays, he presented his paper named as '*The Holy Writings of the Sikhs*' at Paris session of the International Congress of Orientalists in 1897.

In 1899 he was invited to Golden Temple and there he delivered a lecture about the '*Translation of Sikh Scriptures*.'

He published English version of '*Japji Sahib*' in 1897 and circulated it widely in India and abroad.

He produced a paper on the '*Life and Teaching of Guru Gobind Singh*' at Rome session of the International congress of Orientalists in 1899.

During 1900-1901 he published some other texts of Sikh scripture in various journals and in the forms of books. These were:

¹⁹ Paper presented by Dr. Harnam Singh Shan on 21 August 1990 at the 33rd International Congress of Asian and North African Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada.



1. *The Asa Di Var, a Morning Prayer of the Sikhs.*
2. *The Rahiras, or Evening Prayer of the Sikhs.*
3. *The Anand of Guru Amar Das.*
4. *The Sukhmani of Guru Arjan.*
5. *The Hymns of Bhagat Kabbeer.*
6. *The Hymns and Slokas of Guru Tegh Bahadur.*
7. *The Slokas of Guru Angad Dev.*
8. *The Bawan Akhri or Guru Arjan's Alphabet.*
9. *The Hymns of Jaidev, Ramanand, Trilochan, Pipa, Bhikan, Beni, Parmanand, Sadhna, Dhana, Surdas contained in the Granth Sahib of the Sikhs.*
10. *The Hazare De Shabad.*

During 1901-1903, Macauliffe published some biographies, such as:

1. *The Life of Guru Nanak*
2. *The Life of Guru Tegh Bahadur*
3. *Namdeva (1270-1350)*

Macauliffe presented two papers named as '*The Sikh Religion and Its Advantages*' on 6th July 1903 at United Services Institute of India, Shimla.

The last lecture delivered by Macauliffe was '*The Sikh Religion*' He presented this lecture before the Quest Society at the Kensington Town Hall, London on 12th May 1910.

The above papers and lectures were followed by an article on '*The Holy Scriptures of the Sikhs*' to the October 1910 issue of the Asiatic Quarterly Review



and the publication of three essays entitles *Sikh, Sikhism, Sikh Wars* in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1911.

As Macauliffe resigned his higher post for the deeply studying the Sikhism and worked hard for almost 33 years of his life. Research Scholars and Professional Interpreters of Sikhism and Sikh History will always take advantages from his *Magnus Opus*. Macauliffe's writings preserve a valuable tradition and have become a key to the understanding of the Sikh thoughts. So, His name will always be alive in Sikhs' hearts.