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**Contextualized Christianity – the Life of Sadhu Sundar Singh.**

**By Aleck Cartwright**

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Contextualised Christianity  
Sadhu Sundar Singh

India's prominent Christian "sadhu" of the early 20th century, felt called at an early age to renounce home, employment, marriage and family life to obey his Lord and tell others of God's love. His lifestyle was identical with Hindu sadhus of his day including dress, dependence upon others for his daily needs, and in spiritual discipline.

Sundar Singh was born to Sher Singh of Rampur, Punjab in India in 1889. His mother, a deeply religious woman, left an indelible mark on Sundar and nurtured him in the traditions of the Sikhs. Sundar often spoke of his mother with much love and respect because of the good foundation she laid for his life to come. Little did anyone know what God was about to do with this keenly intelligent and disciplined young man.

When Sundar was about fourteen, his beloved mother and elder brother passed away. This left the young boy in despair and spiritually restless. Sundar hungered for peace. He sought meaning for his life.

One night, a year or two later, after bathing in cold water in preparation for pooja he asked God, 'the all-pervading, impersonal, unknowable, incomprehensible universal spirit', to appear to him as an avatar. He wanted a divine revelation that would once and for all destroy his doubts and end his despair. His spiritual agitation was such that he made a vow to throw himself in front of the early morning passenger train that passed by his village if God did not reveal himself. This vow was not empty words! Shaped by the disciplined life of a devout Sikh, this strong willed youth meant to do exactly that.

That night as he prayed he became conscious of a light shining in the room. He looked outside to make sure it was not someone shining a light. Gradually the light took the form of a globe of fire and in it he saw the face of Jesus.

Jesus was the last person Sundar was looking for. After all, Jesus was the 'foreign god' of the Christian teachers at his school. A zealous Sikh, Sundar had publicly torn up a portion of the Bible to protest its claims. Amazed that his vision had taken the unexpected form of Jesus, Sundar was convinced in his heart that Jesus was the avatar in whom God reveals Himself.

Did Jesus speak to him? No one knows for sure; however, regardless of the nature of the 'conversation', Sundar threw himself on the ground and surrendered His life to Jesus. At once peace flooded his troubled heart. The weary struggle to seek enlightenment and moksha was over for Sundar, for in Jesus he found shanthi. This divine encounter with the Lord Jesus was to Sundar a rebirth into a new life.

The following months proved to be very difficult for Sundar and his family. Becoming a disciple of Christ was not taken lightly by his family nor his community. Misunderstanding his new found revelation to be a betrayal of all loyalty to his community he was excommunicated. Sundar may have been ill advised by some 'Christians' to cut his hair, unnecessarily maligning an honorable Sikh custom. Unfortunately, he followed their advice and cut his hair, a gesture that did not make things any easier with his family. His family was convinced he had renounced his Sikh heritage. However, through this strife and turmoil God cared for Sundar.

A month after he accepted the water baptism of Christ in the year 1905, he took the vow of a sadhu. He gave away his meager possessions, put on a saffron robe and became a barefooted wandering man of God. Among Christians the world over, this barefoot Sadhu was later called the 'apostle of the bleeding feet' because the soles of his feet were often covered in bloody blisters.

The life of a sadhu is hard and entirely dependent on God. Sadhu Sundar Singh's needs were met entirely through the kindness of people he met wherever he went. His life story has been written down for us by several of his friends and admirers. He also, reluctantly, agreed to put his teachings and experiences in writing saying that like His Satguru, he did not want to write a word. Sadhu Sundar Singh reflected the character of Christ in word and life; he had found peace in the abiding presence of Jesu his brother and Lord.

Sundar also became a great missionary travelling perilously over the mountains to Tibet where he was repeatedly persecuted as he attempted to share Christ with them. He suffered much at their hands but each year he would travel back to Tibet to show Jesus contextualised for the Indian and the Tibetan. He has revealed an Eastern God and taken Christ and made Him accessible to the Eastern mind and thinking. Modern missionaries still have a lot to learn from the missionary with the bleeding feet.

Some of his selected teachings can be found below. More details about the amazing life of this contextual Christian can be found in many books, some of which are still in print around the world.

The Teachings of Sadhu Sundar Singh  
(selections from his books)

The Unbridled Tongue

It has often been noticed that the woodlouse that eats and destroys hard wood and the insect that

makes holes in the rocks in the sea are very weak and delicate. even so, they can penetrate hard wood and stone to spoil them completely. The same can be said of the germs of evil thoughts and habits. However feeble and negligible they may seem, evil thoughts and habits eat into our lives to make us hollow and useless human beings. Unless, with God's help we are able to eliminate such germs, they can completely destroy us. Poisonous as reptiles, evil thoughts and habits cause death by biting and depositing their poison in the wound. Even bugs and flies, though not considered poisonous, are in a way no less dangerous, because they spread the germs of various deadly diseases and many are destroyed through them. Many people are like this. They do not outwardly appear dangerous, like murderous dacoits and criminals, but by insidiously spreading the dangerous words and poisonous influence to others with their unbridled tongues they are just as much of a menace.

#### A Foreigner in a Strange Place

When a person goes to another place or to a foreign country the people consider him a stranger and the dogs bark at the sight of him. So followers of Christ do not belong to this world but are strangers (John 17:14, Heb. 11:13). Therefore they should not be surprised or downcast when the dogs of the

world take them for strangers, bark at them, or frequently even attack and rend them. Having put our hand to the plough we must not turn back, nor should we slacken our speed, but press on like a caravan, because the dogs will turn back after chasing us for a while; they will fade out into silence, and we shall reach our destination in safety (Matt. 7:6).

A naturalist took the eggs of a nightingale to a cold country, and hoped that when they hatched the birds would regard that country as their home and remain there. But they came out, and, after the summer, they flew away to their native home, and never came back. Similarly, though born in this world, we are not for this world. As soon as the time comes for us to leave the body, we shall move away into our eternal home.

From "The Real Pearl" by Sadhu Sundar Singh, CLS Madras 1966.

#### Who is really blind?

If a blind man comes down the street the onus is on the person who can see to draw aside so as to avoid collision, and if by chance they collide he should not mind but rather beg the blind man's pardon and help him. If he should get annoyed that would only be proof that the blind man is really not less but more clear-sighted than he is, because he is blind with regard to both sympathy and intelligence. So if anyone opposes and persecutes us because we follow the truth, instead of taking it ill we must forgive, love and pray for him (Mat. 5:44, 45), and if he still does not repent and desist we are not the losers, because we ought to do this for the Truth, who gave us sight and is Himself is our reward.

From "The Real Pearl" by Sadhu Sundar Singh, CLS Madras 1966.

#### The Reality of the Living Christ

We see medicine for our eyes. It is in a bottle, but when it is in our eyes we cannot see it. The medicine cleans the eyes and still the eyes cannot see it. They feel the presence of the medicine. You say: "I have medicine in my eyes". So when Christ was in Palestine, in the physical body, many people could see Him, but now when He is living in our hearts we cannot see Him. Like the medicine. He is cleaning

our spiritual eyes from all kinds of sins. We are being saved though we cannot see Him. We feel His presence. (I don't mean by "feeling" a kind of physical sensation, this "feeling" is not an emotion either.) By "feeling" I mean we realise the reality of the living Christ and shall be able to bear witness for Him and to say: "Now we are in the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of God is within us".

From "Life in Abundance", CLS, 1986

Taste and see....

About four years ago I was talking to a very learned man. He said: "It is very useful to know all about the Bible, and also to analyse every part of it". Then, as an illustration, he took a cup of milk: he was a chemist. "Now, is it not so much sugar, and so many other things in milk?" He made everything separate. I said: "It is very interesting, I cannot go against it, but I should say that your little child of three years of age is better than you. This child cannot analyse the milk, but he drinks it and knows from experience that it is sweet, and in doing so, gets stronger every day. He does not know how many things it is made of, but he knows two important things: first, that the milk is sweet; second, that by it he is getting stronger. You have analysed it, and in doing so have derived no benefit, and you have spoiled the milk." There are many chemists who can analyse the Word of God. They say: "This part belongs to Palestine, this to Greece." They can explain many things about it in different ways, but they never drink the spiritual milk. They analyse the Word of God but never drink it, they have not strength enough to overcome temptation; that is why there is great danger in criticism, and our Lord knew about

these things when He took a little child and said: "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven". You must be like a child who takes and drinks.

From "Life in Abundance", CLS, 1986

Sandalwood and the axe

\* The good and spiritual man will always endure suffering in the world (2 Tim. 2:12), because people cannot understand him; and as their conscience and their feelings, by means of which they should find the truth and value it, are desensitized and deadened through sin, whenever they come across a good man they discover that his nature and his ways are incompatible with theirs, and so are compelled to persecute him. But those whose spiritual sensitivity and conscience are alive and alert uphold the man, and are influenced by the upright man's fragrant and winsome life. The life of a true Christian is like sandalwood – instead of harming in any way the axe that cuts, it imparts its own fragrance to it.

The Rose and its thorns

As long as we are in this world we have to undergo both joy and sorrow. The bee not only gathers honey; to serve a particular purpose it also carries a sting. It is not without reason that beautiful fragrant roses are accompanied by thorns; and Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' too (2 Cor. 12:7– 10) contributed to the fulfilment of a lofty objective. In the same way it is absolutely necessary for us too to go through such experiences for the fulfilment of a final and eternal purpose.

Worse than the Ox

Many live their lives like beasts of the field. They have tongues, but no power of speech, and are dumb as animals, with no message for themselves or for others. Animals indeed have tongues, but have no

ability to speak, because they have nothing to talk about beyond the usual animal feelings, which they express by sounds and movements. Those without spiritual life are like animals; but in a sense they are worse, for the ox knoweth its owner, and the ass its master's crib: but man, who is the crown of creation, does not know his Creator (Isaiah 1:3). His tongue is very swift to utter falsehood, but is slow to speak truth because he does not know the Lord his God (Jer. 9:3).

#### Suffering and being revived

As in the world, night lasts in some places for only a few hours, and in other places for several months, so there are always seasons of joy and of sorrow to be found in our lives, and all of us must at last pass through the 'valley of the shadow of death'. Those who in their lives bear the Cross may truly say 'We die but behold we live' (II Cor. 6:9), and as the tree which in winter loses its leaves and seems to be dying, in spring is infused again with new life and once more shoots out its leaves, so Christians in time of persecution seem to be ready to die, but again and yet again do their lives revive. In spite of all their sufferings 'their lives are hid with Christ in God'. As the Gulf Stream flowing up from the warm waters of the tropics saves the coast of Europe from the rigour of a bitter winter, so God's Spirit flowing through the lives of true Christians keeps them always in the glow of spiritual health and happiness.br> to read more great articles...www.god-life.com

Aleck is a missionary who has worked in Uganda, Zimbabwe, India, the UK, Germany, America and many other nations. To find out more about him log onto [www.god-life.com](http://www.god-life.com)

### **Devender Singh – "The Man with the Golden Brush"**

**By Sumeet Singh**

#### **Devender Singh – "The Man with the Golden Brush" by Sumeet Singh**

Devender Singh, an icon in the field of art was born at Amritsar on 6th November 1947. He received his formal education at Bombay, Amritsar, Ludhiana & Chandigarh but was initiated into the world of art by his accomplished father. He has participated in numerous exhibitions & got many a prestigious & reputed awards.

For Devender Singh, painting came as an inheritance from his father Late S.Sewak Singh a commercial artist, but the son turned the art into one of transforming Sikh religious history and in delightful compositions on pastels.

From his house in Sector 38, his Gurus and depictions of episodes have reached many Sikh museums across the country and abroad. Work never eluded Devender ever since his first collection of paintings on Sikh women was bought by Punjab and Sind Bank for their calendar in 1972.

Devender, a self-made man who thinks that his hobby-turned-profession was like any other job which provides a man with livelihood. His canvases are not in the nature of a 'satsang in colour' but carry meaningful delineation through the countenances of Gurus, silhouetted women and the elements in sober pastels. The walls of the Sikh museums in Paonta Sahib, Anandpur Sahib and Golden Temple are adorned with Devender's paintings. It did not take much time for the name to reach the NRI Sikhs

who flocked him with offers which resulted in his paintings reaching the Sikh shrines and attached museums in Singapore and England.

The BBC, London, too made a documentary film on him.

In fact, it was his series on `Bara Maah', based on compositions on seasons by Guru Nanak in raag Tukhari and Guru Arjun Dev in raag Majh which were made into calendars by Punjab and Sind Bank and Markfed.

Apart from the Sikh history, he has done innumerable work on Punjab culture, Hindu mythology, modern & abstract art. as well.

His main ambition now is to translate the Banis of the great Gurus into paintings.

None



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