

## REMEMBRANCE

# McLeod, Hew else

Prof Surjit Hans

Hew McLeod's death is a sad blow to Sikh studies. Undoubtedly, he contributed immensely to Sikh scholarship in the 20th century.

He revolutionised the historical understanding of Guru Nanak Dev with his *Guru Nanak And The Sikh Religion* (1968). The orthodox B-40 Janamsakhi brings out the Sikh ideology how the Guru is God, the unity of the spiritual flame of the 10 Gurus, and lends support to the foundation of Khalsa. The accompanying paintings pictorially achieve what the Janamsakhi narrative does in the original. Incidentally, McLeod translated B-40 into English for Guru Nanak Dev University.

His pioneering work later led to a more detailed understanding of different types of Janamsakhis.

His monumental *Early Sikh Tradition* (1980) (of Janamsakhis) is unlikely to be bested for generations to come.

Clarendon Press failed to send the book in time to the Times Literary Supplement, London, for a review. And the great publishing house did not want to be embarrassed by sending the publication for review after a pretty long time! The irony is that the classic of Janamsakhi is little known in the English-speaking world.

The Sikhs are obliged to him for his appearances in Canadian courts in defence of the Sikh identity. They are also indebted to him for physical survival of the *Chaupa Singh Rahitnama*. The original manuscript was burnt during Operation Bluestar in 1984. Luckily, McLeod had laboriously copied the manuscript. It was a joy to see how beautifully he wrote Punjabi.

The University of Otago

**BEFORE MANMOHAN SINGH BECAME PM, SIKHS WERE KNOWN IN THE WORLD EITHER BY THEIR APPEARANCES OR THROUGH BOOKS ABOUT THEM BY PROF HEW McLEOD OF NEW ZEALAND**

valiantly published a facsimile edition. McLeod was Emeritus Professor of History in the university.

*Historical Dictionary of Sikhism* (1995) is greatly useful for its accuracy, succinctness and the width of coverage. One wonders how he could be sensitive to the deras, which have of late acquired such a troublesome reputation.

Before he retired, McLeod had created a centre for Sikh studies. His legacy has already been institutionalised.

Also, before Manmohan Singh became Prime Minister, Sikhs were known either by their appearances or through books about them by McLeod: *Who Is A Sikh* (1989), *The Sikhs: History, Religion And Society* (1989), *Sikhs of The Khalsa* (2003) and *Discovering The Sikhs* (2004).

*Popular Sikh Art* (1991) is the second book of its kind in India that has specimens of popular art not photographically printed but physically pasted in the book.

Hew was a friend. He and his wife Margaret were gracious enough to visit my place a number of times to have what I rustically cooked. His death is a personal loss. "I shall not look upon his like again."

(Surjit Hans retired as a Professor in Guru Nanak Dev University's Department of History)

# Sikh scholar Prof Hew McLeod dies

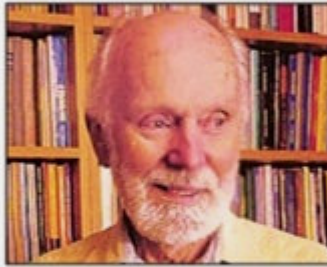
HT Correspondent

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**CHANDIGARH:** Renowned Sikh historian Prof W. Hew McLeod passed away at Dunedin in New Zealand on Monday after an illness. He was 74.

Prof McLeod had come to Punjab almost 50 years ago as a Christian missionary from New Zealand, but “fell in love with Punjab and Sikhs”.

He became a historian of Sikhs and Sikhism, and spent a lifetime researching the community and the religion. An international authority on the religion — perhaps the best known outside Punjab — he brought Sikhism



■ Prof W. Hew McLeod

to the Western academia.

His writings offended many Sikhs, though, as a historian, he wrote off accounts that cannot be reasonably proven. He is survived by his wife Margaret and children.

**CONTD P11**

## SIKH SCHOLAR McLEOD DIES

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Prof J.S. Grewal, former Vice-Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, said he had lost a fellow historian "who wrote Sikh history for the West".

Admitting academic differences, Prof Grewal said, "Our approach was different. He was looking at the life sketch of Guru Nanak and teachings, while I was interested in knowing the responses of Guru Nanak to His contemporary world."

Historian Himadri Banerjee said his death was a personal loss. "McLeod was as good as my answering machine in the domain of Sikh studies. He used to respond quickly to that part of my mail which needed an immediate answer and would silently ignore what was not relevant to my work," said Himadri, an authority on the historical account of Sikhs in Bengal and Northeast.

McLeod had been facing bitter criticism from a section of the diaspora, "but he remained true to his scholarship and taught us how to remain truthful, calm and carry on research in the midst of many sufferings and humiliations".

Gurinder Mann, a historian based in the University of California, Santa Barbara, said he would miss him as a historian who was a friend of the Sikh community.

Mann said it was now the responsibility of the fraternity of historians to carry on McLeod's legacy. "McLeod, a very supportive human being for next-generation scholars, lived a very productive life," said Mann.