

# **SO SAID GURU ARJUN DEV**

**By Prof. Dr. Harnam Singh Shan**

**Published by Government of Punjab, Information & Public Relations Department,  
Chandigarh.**

**Pages: 423 Price: Nil Edition 2007**

***A Review by Prof. Kulwant Singh\****

All the scriptures of the world are supposed to be the expression of the prophets who had a direct communion with the supreme Divine reality in their moments of rare meditational trance. The stimulus that they received during these moments and communicated through the written word was apocalyptic and revelatory in nature. It has the stamp of eternity, authenticity and universality. That is why it continues to be valid even after centuries and millennia whereas the secular word is dated though some works in the category of classics also have a long term appeal and relevance. Thus, the Divine verses, having their origin in revelation, continue to appeal and guide the lives of millions of human beings on this planet. The divine verses of Sikh gurus and other Indian saints included in the Sikh scripture Sri Guru Granth Sahib belong to this category/genre. Of the total verses in this scripture, nearly one third comprising more than two thousand hymns belong to the fifth Sikh Guru Arjun Dev. To him also goes the credit of compiling all the selected verses into a single volume and then installing it as a scripture in the sanctum sanctorum of the holiest Sikh shrine Harmandir at Amritsar for daily recitation. Since then, these divine verses have been paraphrased, translated, and commented upon and interpreted by innumerable scholars beginning with Bhai Gurdas in the sixteenth century to modern times. Different scholars have interpreted these verses from different perspectives. Saints and scholars have commented upon these verses from the spiritual, mystical, linguistical and literary perspectives depending upon their individual approach and experience of interacting with these verses. What is, however, distinct about these verses is their multiple import. It is from this multiplicity of cognition in these divine verses that a discerning scholar can glean and compile a list of prominent divine attributes and their impact on human life. One finds such a roving eye and a discerning look in Dr. Harnam Singh Shan's anthology of the hymns of Guru Arjun Dev in the volume, "So Said Guru Arjun Dev".

Being an excellent scholar of theology, religion and Gurbani and equally devout Sikh, he has culled and clubbed Guru Arjun's hymns under several heads, each heading pointing to a distinct divine attribute. Being a polyglot and an erudite scholar of Punjabi, Persian, Brijbhasha, Hindi and Linguistics, he is able to gauge the exact flavour, weight, nuance and import of the words used by Guru Arjun Dev in his hymns. Assigning a suitable heading to each hymn after understanding its quintessential meaning and message of each hymn is still a more onerous task. Dr. Shan has accomplished this task of culling and labeling each hymn quite successfully. As a result of this exposition, all the attributes of the divine, which Guru Arjun Dev visualized and experienced in his mystical communion with the Godhead, have been brought to the notice of the readers through the telling and terse headings assigned to different hymns. Another distinction of this anthology is that a modern reader feels highly rewarded by going through the English translation of each hymn. Whatever little ambiguity persists in the reader's mind after reading a hymn a somewhat archaic Punjabi of the original text is completely removed by going through the English translation of each hymn. For a majority of modern readers, reading English translation is more rewarding than the reading of the original text. The quality of English translation is sublime and as poetical as the text itself. That speaks volumes for the felicity of command of Dr. Shan over English

as well as Punjabi. Compatible translation is only possible when the translator is equally well-versed and equipped in both the languages. The end result of this labour is a bouquet of hymns which captures the eye and mind of the reader and transports him to the level of comprehending the various attributes of the Godhead. It would be appropriate to make a mention of some of the attributes of the divine as described in these hymns and appropriately brought by Dr. Shan under several headings. Some of the most prominent attributes of the divine – vis-vis the human and His creation are (His) pervasive abiding omnipresence, eternal immanence, omniscience and immutability; indiscriminate compassion, absence of malice, generosity of outlook and forgiving disposition towards human lapses, grace and benevolence, detachment in the midst of attachment, spiritual guidance through effulgence; healing touch of His name and its efficaciousness; His demeanor of providing justice, succor and protection to the needy, downtrodden, and the defenceless; fatherhood of man; being cause of all causes, being an embodiment of perfect peace-bliss-and boon; treasure of all treasures and gate and guide to salvation.

These divine attributes described in several hymns and recorded under different headings get permanently etched in the readers' mind and become an integral part of his memory. Their impact is indelible. Some of these hymns are so appealing and their import and impact so deep that they become a part of the reader's feelings. The reader is likely to recall and remember these attributes during the course of his everyday affairs and dealings with human and other creatures of the world. This is how these divine attributes percolate into the human nature. That is why we come across attributes of compassion, charity, goodwill and several other life-sustaining feelings in our fellow human beings. It is these attributes which make us human. Besides spotting out these divine attributes, we find hymns mentioned under other headings such as desirable human conduct, the need to meditate on the divine, seek His grace and ways to become worthy of His benevolence. There is hardly any aspect of divine and human life which has not been referred to in these hymns. Vision and realization of Guru Arjun Dev is comprehensive and vast indeed. The author has really preserved to highlight all the dimensions of this vision. With little more effort, the headings could be made more compact and generic than making these so numerous and repetitive as at present there are. Nevertheless, the attempt is commendable. Being a government publication meant to be distributed among the public and libraries, it is likely to benefit a large cross section of society and serve as a layman's guide to the divine verses of this great scripture.

## **I ACCUSE**

**By Jarnail Singh**

**Published by Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd.**

**11, Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110017**

**Price: Rs. 350 Pages: 208**

***A Review by Mahindar Singh\****

The author of this book Sardar Jarnail Singh, is a journalist, with a Master's Degree, in Political Science, plus a Diploma in Journalism. He worked with the noted Hindi daily, "*Dainik Jagran*", for ten years, covering mostly Sikh politics and defence. He has written extensively on the Sikh massacre in 1984 and its aftermath. He shot to fame when he hurled his shoe during a press conference held in April 2009 which was presided by the Home Minister shri P. Chidambaram. He did not have any intention of hurting the Hon'ble

Minister and the shoe went towards a place where nobody was sitting. He still accepted that this action was a violation of the code of journalism and was not an appropriate means of protest. But when the Home Minister said in his speech “ I am happy that my friend Jagdish Tytler has been acquitted by the C.B.I.” Such statement will hurt every Sikh as Jagdish Tytler was among the prime accused of the 1984 Sikh carnage when 4000 Sikhs were murdered or burnt alive in Delhi alone.

The next day Shri Chidambaram in an interview to a TV channel had said “ I understand the pain of the Sikhs. Not many people have been punished in the riots”. H.K.L. Bhagat was the mastermind of the Sikh carnage whom the new Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi included in his cabinet.

Giani Zail Singh, the then President of India, against any precedent, appointed Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister. The Congress Government popularized the idea that carnage of 1984 was the result of spontaneous anger at the assassination of his mother and, at his first public meeting at the Boat Club, New Delhi, on November 19, 1984, Rajiv Gandhi said: “When a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little”. The mobs, who were specially brought from Haryana were assured that nothing would happen to them as the Government was with them.

The book was launched in the Constitutional Club, New Delhi in November. The author explained that **the carnage of 1984 was a blot on Indian Democracy. Nearly a dozen inquiry committees (including two judicial ones) have not expedited justice for the victims. Almost all the prime accused in the case went scot-free, some even enjoy plum posts in the Government.**

Jarnail Singh remembers how he as an 11 years old have witnessed the violence first hand. He wrote that the police men who were the main accused but were rewarded with promotions and medals.

**Most human rights organisations that studied the violence have noted that far from being spontaneous expressions of “madness” and “ grief and anger” at Indira Gandhi’s assassination as made out by the authorities, the killing of Sikhs was the outcome of a well organised action to arouse passions within the majority community-Hindu Chauvenism in order to consolidate Hindu votes in the general election held on 27th December 1984 in which the Congress unprecedentedly won 404 seats in the Lok Sabha.**

Though the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has publicly apologised to the Sikh community for what happened in 1984, and the nominations of Congress leaders Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar were withdrawn in 2009 following widespread protests, the victims see these acts as mere tokenism to mollify the Sikh community.

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## **BETRAYED BY THE STATE – ANTI-SIKH POGROM OF 1984**

**By Jyoti Grewal**

**Published by Penguin; New Delhi; (2008)**

**Rs 295**

**Invoking Memories - For a cause!**

***A Review by Paramjit Singh Bawa\****

Which memories? Carnage of 1984 against the Sikhs. What cause? To make the authorities conscious of their obligation to prevent its repeat, to stem the drift to fascistic tendencies seen in Gujarat in 2002, the repeat of the drama in Mumbai in 1992-3, and the happenings in Orissa in 2008; to speak truth to power, using Edward Said's expression; and to solidify the mission statement in the Preamble to the Constitution - that proclaims the intention of promoting fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual, so that the state is conscious of its duty and dare not act roughshod by the selective process of majority's likes and dislikes which must not influence the domain of the state, as it is different from the mob and the individual.

The book by Jyoti Grewal is topical, relevant, and the need of the day, when there appears to be no reversal of the mindset and pathological goings-on with little hope of suitable state intervention, though the Centre has all the authority to undertake its responsibility and reverse the tide, for once, and intimate its intention to deal with the obnoxious firmly and prevent its recurrence, come what may.

History is necessary for prodding a national memory that gets inscribed only by the process of documentation; the more recent it is the better and more authentic the observations and results. It negates forgetting that often happens with the elapse of time. Hence it is important to have a memorial to memory. Therefore, record and recollection is called for in order to save memory and to ensure that passage of time does not result in dementia and emasculate the fact of events, the import, and lessons to be drawn.

### **Gory Prelude:**

The facts are too bitter to be repeated. Suffice it to say that the carnage followed the assassination of prime minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards from the Delhi police who were deputed to secure her from attacks but, in a role reversal - and taking advantage of their proximity, - performed a malicious and despicable act, because they felt intrigued by the attack of the armed forces at her behest, that led to the destruction of the holiest shrine of the Sikhs.

It bears recalling that one of them was killed instantly; the other hanged subsequently after a judicial trial. In fact, both died and fulfilled the punishment prescribed for the crime of murder in the Indian Penal Code. 'Death for death' is the judicial *nemesis*.

By what rationale, then, were more than 3000 people '*executed*' by the mobs is the theme of this well documented and reasoned book? Is it the rationale of irrationality of mob behavior, or is it the deliberate abdication of authority by the State that permitted those goons to rule the roads and suburbs and do whatever they found fit to punish the community to whom the assassins belonged? It was one of the most tragic episodes in contemporary India for which the scars still hurt as embers of memory.

The book is like a painting, with bold brush strokes that highlight a few things by putting these into sharp relief, thus avoiding the sickening details that may fill up space but lead nowhere. The author has accused Indira Gandhi and her lackey Giani Zail Singh on the one hand, and Bhindrawale, on the other, for the carnage of the Sikhs, with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD, a really sad acronym), the religio-political party of the Sikhs for its inability to put pressure upon the government as well as its ruthless failure to rein in Bhindrawale who at one point of time ruled the roost within the precincts of the golden temple, held sacred by the community. The political party could not control any of his militant activities within the complex and is thus accused of its acts of omission. The fact of the analysis points a finger

of responsibility both to Gandhi and Zail Singh they were responsible for erecting the stature of the Sant that went beyond their control and belied their expectations to divide the Sikh power for political gains of the party. They were also responsible for making the political party of the SAD irrelevant as, at no stage, did they try to have suitable parleys with the party. This emboldened the Sant who became a megalomaniac and considered himself to be a spokesperson for the community who were threatened by his pervasive powers, both pertaining to his having been armed and the softness of the state at the centre.

### **Riot - What Riot?**

The force of Grewal's argument lies in belying the labels given to the event. The nature the happenings cannot be described as 'riots' on the strict sense of legal parlance as the two communities never came to a clash. There was no retaliation by the Sikhs, neither in Delhi nor in Punjab, though the latter was feared. It was a one-dimensional act as only one side was active and the other dormant and bore the brunt of the aggression unleashed by the burst of diabolical energies of the mobs, allegedly orchestrated by the political bosses. It was also not a case of 'ethnic violence' as the communities had lived in peace and harmony and had social interactions. She gives the happenings the title of 'pogrom' that has more serious connotations than a riot.

The phenomenon of violence on the streets, the free-for-all syndrome operational in the context of facilitating the rioters, the justification of this being the 'emotional reaction', sadly described as the 'shaking of the earth when a big tree falls' point to the tragic conclusion that the Sikhs got what they deserved, they had '*to be taught a lesson*' as their activities were monstrous and beyond control, and thus here was an opportunity to outdo the state that could not with its might control the on-goings of a small dera chief whose forte was not politics but interpretation of the religious text and who was brought on the centre stage for political ends that the party at the centre thought would be served by giving him a latitude. Since then the vocabulary has been added and given more legitimacy. The latest in the series of these expressions is 'reaping the harvest' as one of the members of parliament from the ruling align, in a debate on the television, mentions thus condoning the inability of the state to protect the Christians in Kandamal, Orissa, as if they had sown seeds of death, destruction, and devastation of the kind that happened since the death of a Swami who had been openly challenging the other community of desisting from converting people of the tribal areas. Another spokesperson from the community terrorizing the minority and pushing them to seek shelter in the jungles, when confronted by the interviewer by saying that the underground outfit had claimed responsibility for the murder of the Swami, quipped back saying 'Why don't you check the religion of those people?'. There was thus another attempt at imputing the label of religion upon the offenders and consequently upon the whole community, and not taking the crime per se. The caveat is that propagation of religion is permitted as a fundamental right.

### **Repetitive?**

The common denominator of all the events of 1984 (Delhi), 1992-3 (Bombay), 2002 (Gujarat), and 2008 (Orissa) is the creation of the 'other' as a monster through a set of prejudices, and demonizing that creature who does not fit in the canvas of the majority, and therefore a desire to seek vengeance thus sidelining the state to bring the guilty to the book. This trend towards mob rule doling instant justice to the species of their wrath with a feeling of a catharsis is the most disturbing aspect of the phenomenon. 'Teaching a lesson' to those who had not even the slightest role or sympathy with what had happened, but at the same time attributing this to the celebrations of the community at the demise of the leader

are some of the farfetched rumours and tactics employed by the perpetrators all over the world. Do the innocents deserve a lesson? The poor Sikhs who had been living on the periphery of Delhi in the resettlement colonies and who were the least politicized of all as they had no time for the pleasure of politics. Why were they murdered, why were the women rendered widows, left to fend for themselves, and children made orphans, ones who did not know what had been brewing around them, and other personal trails of women? What for? Which lesson? The counter question can be, 'Who the hell are you? Do you not deserve to be taught a lesson?' But, by whom? And here we come to a close to the issue of the state that has abdicated its authority.

### **Sikhs' Struggle:**

The third insight of the study by Grewal is in the area of linguistics. For the first time linguistics has become a matter of concern as this becomes a part of the litany of governance. It is well contended in the book that the translation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution had created a misunderstanding that secured a heavy price from the Sikhs. The translation mutilates the letter of the original, may be for want of a suitable equivalent, and presents the community as 'qaum', that is a nation, thus imputing a different spirit than it was intended. The repeated references to the word 'nation' for 'qaum' played the mischief and made the people believe that Sikhs had been interested in carving out a separate country. This created a myth among the people, through propaganda, about the intention of Sikhs to secede from the nation. The interpretation imputed motives that were never in minds of the Indian Sikhs and gave ideas to the diaspora to seek what had never been intended locally. The fault lay with the translation and the accentuation of the mistake by continuous acts of repetitions. This was partly responsible for creation of the impression of Sikhs being secessionists, fundamentalists, and terrorists. The demand for Sikh homeland, therefore, was 'a constructed absolute lie'. The power of interpretation played havoc with the community when the intent was looked in the translation that did not carry the right connotations of the original.

### **A Supine State!**

One of the items that comes to specific focus is the total failure of State that had ceded its authority to the lumpen elements who tried to make the best of the opportunity, killing those on the margins and living in the periphery of Delhi, looting those who had enough as an eyesore thus rendering them homeless. The failure of the state is more pronounced in the abdication of duty with which the administration is legally loaded. It must be made clear that the politician, howsoever high he/she may be, has no role in the legal scheme of things. While the politicians are spotted out with evidence, yet the onus for taking action resided with the state mechanism. Hence it would be better to attribute the failure to the administration, rather blame the politicians, who should have been the subject of scrutiny under law. Some of the police officers deserved straight action under the rubric of the Constitution. They not only escaped that action, but also reached their tops in the profession in spite of their surrender of duty, non-use of power vested in them by law, thus defying the mandate as well as turning from the oath.

### **Aftermath Stinks:**

The situation was made more complicated by the nine commissions of enquiry, all of which burst like a bubble and produced hardly any actionable report. The last one, known as Nanawati Commission, did not bring the system to book. The Commission could countenance the fact that there could be only one FIR for over hundred deaths and makes no mention of the failure of the police to get the autopsies of the dead. The whole exercise

gives an impression of an eye wash. The cry for justice remains unheard and the quest for justice unappeased. The wounds keep smoldering because the government has been unable to fix accountability, despite various committees and commissions having pointed out, by name, the involvement of the officers concerned both for acts of commission and omission. At no point of time was Article 311 of the Constitution ever used. This could be done. But this action must be supported by a very strong will to undo the wrong and instill a sense of justice among the people. An opportunity was missed and government groped in the dark while the people lost their faith in the system and the perpetrations of the phenomenon continued later and elsewhere. It can be easily surmised that if the government had taken meaningful action then, the repeats of Gujarat, Mumbai, and Orissa would not have taken place. All the concerned and named officials reached their top with full benefits whatsoever and without any taint.

### **Secularism? Advantage Majority!**

The author has proposed a suitable alternative to secularism. Though it means what she intends saying, yet a focus on acknowledgment of diversity is a better bet than harping on religious equality and equal respect for religions. The focus must shift from religion, an explosive mix with politics, to diversity that can never be adulterated with politics as the two have no common linkage. This is, of course, innovative. Besides, the inculcation of historical consciousness is necessary to redeem the future, or else the memory shall keep haunting and lead to repetition of mistakes. The book, based upon interviews and analysis, is a welcome addition to the corpus on the subject. This might lead to policy, sometime, to undo the past wrong in the interest of the future. Such reminders are intrinsic to bringing about change for the positive. The memory must be refreshed. This book is just that and more as it is forthright, bold, and outspoken. It involves courage to refresh memory and ensure that it is not pushed under the carpet and thrown in the waste paper basket of oblivion. No one should like to live through the incidents again. But this keeps happening and shall go on till the state is committed to mean business, take instances to a quick logical conclusion, and not be a party to procrastination and complicity.

The author can be credited with the righteous indignation, and so be it. Such voices are required in a society with multiplicities that no other country is heir to. The book thus deserves serious attention, if not to undo the previous wrong for which time is past, but to correct the course for the future. The author deserves compliments for the study.

