

Hardeep - Literary Achievement

SOURABH GUPTA

THERE WAS A THIRD INDIAN in the 2008 Man Booker Prize contest. He was one of the five who decided whether or not an Indian will walk away with the prize. Because this turbaned Sikh was on the judging panel.

Meet Hardeep Singh Kohli, a popular writer, comedian, BBC presenter, director and cartographer from London and the judge for the 2008 Man Booker Prize for Fiction.

He put the seal of winner on one of the shortlisted - the Indian nominees, Amitav Ghosh (Sea of Poppies) and Arvind Adiga (The White Tiger), or Sebastian Barry (The Secret Scripture), Linda Grant (The Clothes on Their Backs), Philip Hensher (The Northern Clemency) and Steve Toltz (A Fraction of the Whole).

The other Booker judges are former MP Michael Porilo, critic Alex Clark, novelist Louise Doughty and Ottakar's bookshop chain founder James Heneage.

Hardeep's parents emigrated from India to Scotland in the 1960s and he was born in Glasgow.

But the 39-year-old is rekindling his connection with his roots - he is working on a food-travel book on India. His younger brother, Sanjeev Singh Kohli, 37, is a well-known TV actor and writer (he wrote for Goodness Gracious Me). And their elder brother, Randeep, 42, is a policeman.

But how Hardeep, a broadcaster, was invited to be a literary prize judge is as much a mystery as why a particular writer would win the Booker. Maybe this judge has a flair for comic writing that is also thought provoking.

Even though Britain's JK Rowling never made it to the Booker long list, here's Hardeep, on 'Harry Potter And the Deathly Hallows' (from a July 29, 2007 column in Scotsman on Sunday), ... Every night, I took it to bed with me like some clandestine lover, promising myself just one more chapter. I dreamt about it, I read it secretly on trains, half embarrassed, half ashamed. Kids would eye my hardback lasciviously, I would smile knowingly to myself and return to the printed pages... I know a few of you will have dropped the paper in disgust and will, as we speak, be removing me as your friend on Facebook. My friends in academia will be cursing me, and my agent may well be calling to drop me. So be it."

Hardeep proved elusive when we tried to contact him.



The Miracle of daily Gurbani Routine A Personal Testament

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I AM A STUDENT OF GURBANI CLASS, Mumbai, which is conducted by Satnam Kaurji. Besides many other important things about Gurbani, she taught us Daily Gurbani Routine (it is an illustrated book on the actions performed by us from morning to evening). It is also a

novel and interesting method to learn different *shabads* of *Gurbani*. The *shabads* are so simple and the pictures clearly relating, that my three-year old daughter has been reciting them.

A few months ago 'Auntyji' presented me with a small wall hanging which has a colourful picture of shabad (while watching TV) like the one given in the book. She told me to hang it next to the TV in the house. Even though we didn't recite it every time, the power of the *shabad* was such that just by it being at the appropriate place, because of a valid reason the television got shifted from our room, and the unnecessary time which was being wasted seeing the television was saved. I was amazed by the miracle. Such indeed is the power of *Gurbani* and the importance of the Daily *Gurbani* Routine in our lives.



1984 & I: I'll keep it in my Heart!

KOMAL KAUR®

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[Received by courtesy of Ms. Manjot Kaur of New York]. The writer is a Seventh Grade student from Connecticut, discovered by the Blessed Ms Manjot Kaur who, incidentally, now sports a Dastar!

As I sat, waiting for Inni Auntie to begin her monthly lesson, I thought about the many stories I had read about the brutal *Pogrom of 1984*.

Inni Auntie had told our class to read articles listed under the section *1984 & I*, on www.sikhchic.com. That was our assignment in preparation for this class. The class discussion was going to be on the importance of the events that took place in India, just 25 years ago.

Inni Auntie entered the class, and told everyone to settle down before she started. We all took our seats and she began by asking, "What were some of the stories you read? Which story touched you the most?"

A student raised her hand and said, "I read a story about when a school was burnt down. It was something that I could relate to because they were just kids, and I know if something like that happened at my school, I'd be completely terrified."

This took place at the Guru Harkrishan Public School in Delhi, India.

After discussing the stories for a little while, Inni Auntie told us briefly about the background of the pogroms. She told us that from 1947 to 1984, there was no significant violence or conflict between Sikhs and Hindus, or between Sikhs and Muslims. So what happened? Let's think about that.

"This is our history. How can we preserve it? How can we share it with the rest of the world?" Inni Auntie asked. She raised a question, "Why is it that the world knows all about the Nazi Holocaust, but no one knows about the massacre of innocent Sikhs in 1984? Is it because the Jews have made an effort to tell everyone?"

Inni Auntie stressed the importance of connecting and understanding our history. She explored with us as to how the events of 1984 affect us even *today*. Even though we were not there during the time, I felt something stir within me.

She talked about a presentation held in a college in the U.S. “At a University campus, there was a slide presentation on the Pogroms of 1984, which was open to all students. The non-Sikh Indian students present there claimed that no such thing had happened. 1984 did not happen? And they were right, because the media in India at that time did not record it. No one talked about it. So a generation has grown up believing that it did not happen,” she said.

Upon hearing this, Auntie Reena Kaur (whose brother was killed in the massacres) said, “Just three months after the pogroms, a Sikh family said to me, ‘Just forget about it.’ But how could I forget? The pain lingers, a member of my family was killed and I lived through it.”

At that moment, I learned the importance of keeping the memory of 1984 alive.

“Never forget,” Inni Auntie said, “You, the ‘Generation Next’ have to promise us that you will keep this memory alive and never forget it. If we forget 1984, it will be a crime. Promise me, you will not forget what happened to us in 1984. Forgive, yes. Forget, never!”

All of us in class were deeply moved. I think we all made a mental promise that we must keep the memory of 1984 alive, **and it should never be forgotten.**

Inni Auntie continued by telling us a story about when the British ruled India.

Lord Dalhousie, British Viceroy in 1850, wrote in one of his letters, ‘The way to break the Sikhs is to separate them from their Guru.’

“And, he was absolutely right,” she said.

“Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht, the two most revered places for the Sikhs, were attacked, but we rebuilt them,” said Inni Auntie. “As long as the Sikhs are connected to the Guru, no one can destroy them. But if we get separated from the Guru, then we lose. Remember that, the enemy can only win if we leave our Guru. In unity is our strength,” she said.

Amereen Kaur said, “The talk was very informative, and what was amazing was to hear what other students had to say. How they felt and how they would keep the memory alive.”

I would like to ask the Sikh youth to promise, “We will never forget 1984. We will keep the memory alive in our hearts. Forever!”



Delhi's Sri Guru Granth Sahib Vidya Kendra

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LOCATED IN A SPRAWLING COMPLEX amid serene surroundings, next to famous Qutab Minar is a centre for spiritual redemption and seva for mankind. The vast piece of land was gifted to this Kendra by a devoted family. An appreciable fact is that this Kendra is

run entirely on the financial and voluntary support of the devotees. I had the good fortune to visit this institution and really feel grateful to Waheguru for having given this opportunity to me.

The Vidya Kendra was started in 1980 with the initiative of late Sr. Hukam Singh Jee, former Speaker of Lok Sabha, and a few of his enterprising friends, to look after the needs of the under privileged and neglected Sikh boys. Now there are around 165 children in this facility - with full residential facilities. These boys are from various cities of Northern India. The effort is to imbibe in them the true spirit of Sikh Religion, specially:

- NAM JAPNA, [Remembering the name of GOD]
- DHARAM DI KIRAT KARNI, [To earn living through honest means]
- WAND CHHAKNA, [Sharing one's earnings with other needy persons]

The dedicated Chaiman, S. Satpal Singh is assisted by a highly dedicated team of teachers. Apart from full exposure in religious aspects, like *Nam simran*, Shabad Kirtan, use of musical instruments, Gurmat sangeet, Gurbani recitation, etc, the boys are offered a variety of vocational, technical and educational courses, like cutting and tailoring, computer application, driving, etc. Brilliant students with a scientific bent of mind are assisted to get trained at the Institute of Public Health & Hygiene, and similar institutes, for professional careers.

Most impressive aspect of Vidya Kendra is to make the boys better Sikhs, and therefore better citizens, with keeping in mind the basic tenets of Sikhism. In times of need they have helped in providing assistance to earthquake victims in Gujarat, victims of drought in Andhra Pradesh, cleaning the Venhi Nadi, at Sultanpur Lodhi, and similar projects.

It is indeed a commendable enterprise to help the needy boys to become useful citizens and, above all, good GURSIKHS. Where possible, the institute helps the boys in getting suitable employment in the disciplines they are trained. Other visitors (like me) who were there were most impressed with the dedication and devotion of the staff and management.

Our prayers are to the Waheguru for all progress of the Vidya Kendra to continue rendering service to the Sikh Community. Their devotion is accepted by many families for marriage, Akhand Paths and other ceremonies, thus encouraging this wonderful team of young boys and their teachers.

