

Educational Philosophy of Guru Granth: *Samuhik Sikhiya Sanchar Da Sadhan*

By Amrit Kaur Raina, M.A., M. Ed., PhD

*A Review by Harbans Lal**

I experienced a sudden emotional outburst on a sunny afternoon when the US Postal Service delivered a parcel of books that opened my eyes wide. I often receive books from my friends all over the world. They keep me upbeat on Sikh studies and abreast on news from the land of my gurus. The parcel I received on that day contained books by Dr. Amrit Kaur Raina.

I consider Amrit as my emotional and intellectual link with my dear colleague, the late Professor Harnam Das (1905-1971). Professor Sahib was a Sikh intellectual who devoted his lifetime in searching and disseminating the teachings of Guru Nanak. This vocation was his personal devotion to Gurmat and a commitment to be a leader in the field of Punjabi education. He served his mission until his retirement. He served as the Head of the Punjabi Department of S.D. College in Ambala Cant, and was the founding President of the Punjabi Sahit Sabha he promoted to propagate Punjabi Language and Sikhism. Because of his outstanding contributions, my colleague, Dr. Balkar Singh called Harnam Das a 'great and true scholar of Sikhism.'

Professor Sahib and I grew closer during my student days in Ambala (1947-49) and then in Amritsar (1949-52). It is then, that I introduced him to Master Tara Singh who, subsequently, invited him for visits many times. He raised his daughter Amrit Kaur as a 'gift' from Guru Nanak. Being a Sehajdhari Sikh he took his wife periodically to the Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib for prayers until she conceived their child. They named the child Amrit Kaur as a token of gratefulness at the feet of Guru Nanak. As was the traditions in her parental home, Amrit's marriage was solemnized as *Anad Karaj* in the true Sikh tradition.

Amrit retired from the position of the Principal of S.D. College, to devote full time to the pursuit of the mission her father had left for her to promote. Thus, she continues to write and publish works on the educational philosophy of Guru Nanak. Further, she developed papers and resource material on youth education based upon the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. I believe that the faculty of probing into universal knowledge and imparting it as education is an important purpose that the Creator assigns to every human body. Dr. Raina personifies this ideal in her writings.

I recently finished reading Dr. Raina's book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib: *Samuhik Sikhiya Sanchar Da Sadhan*, published by the Punjabi University, Patiala. After finishing it, I discovered Dr. Raina's "raison de etre" for writing it. I also felt called upon to spread her message on Guru Nanak's educational contribution.

Any novice for first time introduced to Sri Guru Granth Sahib will instantaneously realize it as an educational institution where a teacher interacting with a group of students constitute an integral educational unit. The Granth being the teacher and the congregation being a school for learners will immediately become the center of attention making every Sikh as the object of its emphasis. Thus, the institution of education becomes a central doctrine in the Sikh society. Any definition or any identity in the Sikh society will revolve around this doctrine.

Some years ago, I published a series of six articles on Guru's guidance on Education. Many others also wrote on the subject. However, Raina's writings are the first comprehensive treatment of the Guru Granth's educational leadership. Raina redrew the map of the Sikh view on education strictly according to SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB that is not communal, parochial or ethnic but comprehensive and universal. It is readily applicable to the civil societies all over the world.

The book should indeed have been written in English, with international idiom. That would benefit our Diasporas and civil society in general. Amrit promised that she would be working on the English version. She did have an earlier book on a similar subject in English. The title of that book was "The Educational Philosophy of the Sikh Gurus". In contrast to the book under current review, this book contains complementary material from the biographies of the Sikh Gurus.

Dr. Raina's thesis: 'Educational philosophy of the Guru Granth' earned wide acclaim, considered by some as the best work on the subject. Earlier, Amrit's essay, *Guru Nanak Dev Ji da Sikhia Darshan*, received the first prize from the Punjab University. Her essay in English received a prize from our esteemed journal **The Sikh Review** on the eve of Quincentenary of Guru Nanak Dev. Her essay: "*Vision of Gursikh in Gurbani*" won a prize at the All India Ganda Singh Memorial Essay Competition, organized by Guru Nanak Mission, Patiala, in collaboration with SGPC.

Raina's work has been followed, more recently, by Dr. *Lakshbir Kaur Bahra* who has been awarded Ph.D. (education) by the University of Lucknow. Her thesis: "Philosophy of Guru Granth Sahib and its Educational Implications".

The publisher - none other than Publication Bureau of the Punjabi University, Patiala is well known. As expected, there are no typographical and grammatical mistakes throughout the volume, indicating the utmost care in editing. Gurbani hymns are correctly given in the original. What is missing in this regard is the translation following each gurbani verse cited. The writers in Punjab often ignore this aspect. Perhaps our readers living near our shrines in India do not feel the necessity of the translations in prose that we need so badly in the Western countries.

The book is cohesive in presentation, and comes closest to being a masterpiece.

Raina's primary purpose is to rekindle a philosophical conversation on the essential questions with which our educational system is concerned. She revisits these questions in an intriguing and novel manner. There is a greater treasure of knowledge for the reader in these chapters.

Raina asserts that in our present educational system, cognitive dissonance makes us uncomfortable; rather than shifting our minds to accommodate new knowledge we tend to reject that knowledge in an attempt to ease the discomfort. Nevertheless, she argues that education does not need to be managed, coerced or quantified to be an effective tool.

The value of such research (on the Guru's guidance on education) will be determined by our attitude whether we are serious in implementing our Guru's views on education versus what is dictated by political, regional or ethnic considerations. Many educationists do think such research is an imperative challenge so that she was awarded a Research Project Grant by the Union Grant Commission of the Government of India to research the topic of "Guru Granth Sahib as a Vehicle of Mass Education".

In conclusion, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, as a means of **comprehensive educational tradition, is filled with captivating ideas about education, some new and some that need revisiting; all put in scholarly treatise for educationists, teachers and students alike.** Reading this book was a time-consuming process because it is so comprehensive and so well supported with quotes and comparisons. The contents frequently demanded that I stop to reread and ponder sections. It provides a banquet - not a morsel - of food for thought. I recommend it to anyone in education who is contemplating entering the field, or who is simply concerned about the path Sikh education was meant to follow. **I commend it to the intelligentsia who wish to comprehend the treasure within their tradition - viz. educational philosophy of the Guru Granth Sahib.**



A LITTLE WORK, A LITTLE PLAY

Autobiography of H.S. Malik

Published by Bookwise (India) Pvt. Ltd.

Pages: 296 Price: (Hardcover) Rs. 395

The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tsze (Circa 600 BC) is credited with the maxim: A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: 'we did it ourselves'!

ਨਾਨਕ ਤਾ ਕਉ ਮਿਲੈ ਵਡਾਈ
ਜਿਸੁ ਘਟ ਭੀਤਰਿ ਸਬਦ ਰਵੈ ॥

[SGGS: 952]

The above axiomatic truth is curiously apt for the self-effacing author of this – somewhat unpretentious – autobiography. Indeed, but for the filial devotion of Miss Harji Malik – his daughter – the book might never have been published. Even the title oozes modesty of a rare kind.

A deeply devoted Gursikh, whose saintly mother had been blessed by the legendary Sant Attar Singh Ji (1866-1927), the suave Sardar Hardit Singh Malik, ICS, was a towering personality of his time – both before and after Independence.

As chronicled by him: “What has always sustained me (was) devotion to the noble principles and traditions of my faith, which has given my life a spiritual content.” Pictures in the book are also in black and white – regardless of the celebrity status of those depicted – including HRH the Duke of Windsor – “the king who left a throne for the woman he loved,” and Golfing legend Ben Hogan.

At the peak of his diplomatic career, as India’s first ambassador to France, he earned the respect of the world statesmen - including the President, Vincent Auriol who easily recalled that, during World War I in 1915, young Malik had served as Ambulance officer in the Croix Rouge Francaise – the French Red Cross.

This remarkably inspiring autobiography, published almost a quarter century after the great Sardar passed away on Oct. 31, 1985, deserves to be read widely, particularly by the New Generation.

Pre-eminently readable, and characterized by a heart-warming sincerity, the narrative is breezy and the idiom bearing the stamp of Oxford where he studied at Balliol College.

- S.S.



SUKHMANI VICHAR SANGREH

By Dr. Mohinder Kaur Baweja (Canada)

Published by The Sikh Foundation, PO Box No. 3627, A-35 Lagpat Nagar, New Delhi 110 024

Pages: 460 (Coffee table size) Price: (Hardcover) Rs. 350

A Review by Avtar Singh*

** Member - The Sikh Cultural Centre, Kolkata, Email: avtar_cal@yahoo.com*

The Canada-based sociologist and research scholar, Doctor Mohinder Kaur Baweja, earlier associated with the Pune University as a research scholar, has recently released her latest book – (in gurmukhi) “SUKHMANI VICHAR SANGREH” In so far as the Soulful *Sukhmani* of Guru Arjan Dev Ji has a universal appeal, this exegesis must be reckoned as a significant guidepost for devotees.

Next to Nitnem Banis (and Asa di Var) Sukhmani Sahib has been a balm to countless people for centuries - because of its celestial effect on a reader’s mind and heart. Any such attempt at discursive interpretation can be a daunting challenge. Only kindred souls can fathom the depth of human emotions. In recent times Sukhmani Societies (Satsangs) have sprung up in various cities - particularly among women and house wives - who gather in gurdwaras to recite the Ashtpadis in chorus. Dr Baweja has made the task of comprehension easier in her Labour of Love.

The annotation has been presented well beyond the literal translation. The scope of each *Ashatpadee* has been explained in simple and easy-to-understand language. The central theme and conceptual meaning of the various terms (like “Saadh, Sant, Brahamgyanee, Daas) has been explained with relevant quotations from Guru Granth Sahib. Also the literal meaning of the difficult words, as given, helps the reader grasp the in-depth meaning of *Gurbani*.

At a time when so many fake ‘Babas’ are misleading common people by misquoting the meaning of terms like *Sant, Sadh*, in self-serving manner, Dr Baweja has made a genuine effort to explain concepts and philosophy of the great scripture.

The evocative Foreword by eminent scholar Prof. Darshan Singh, and the comments of Bibi Jagir Kaur and Dr. Amarjit Singh underscore the importance of comprehending the text of Sukhmani. Since the *gurbani* is the way of life that a reader must follow - and practice - throughout his (or her) life, this guidebook should serve as a guidepost.



“I Accuse: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984”

By Jarnail Singh, with foreword by Khushwant Singh

Published by Penguin Books India 2009. Available in Punjabi, Hindi and English.

English translation by Vaishali Mathur (165 pages)
A Review by Gurmukh Singh (UK)

The question uppermost in my mind as I finished reading Jarnail Singh's book "*Accuse... The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984*" was: "How can all checks and safeguards of a democracy fail so completely at the same time in the capital city of the largest democracy in the world?" Or, to quote the book cover note, "Why did the state apparatus allow it to happen?"

The guardians of the Constitution: the President, the Parliament, different branches of the administration, the judiciary, the media – all apparently abdicated their responsibility for three days from 1 November to 3 November 1984.

President Zail Singh felt that he had "no right to intervene." Delhi Police Commissioner Subhas Tandon said that he was "not informed" -even though he was seen with crowds attacking Gurdwara Rakab Ganj. Home Minister PV Narasimha Rao remained silent. Lt Governor, P G Gavai thought everything was under control, and did not consider it necessary to call in the army. To the President he said, "If the army is called in, the situation is going to get worse." A magistrate refused to sign an order to control mobs with force if necessary, even as Sikh properties and people were being burnt in his neighbourhood.

Senior Congress politicians, like Rajpal Saroj held private meetings on the evening of 31 October to make all arrangements right up to the finer details about distributing kerosene and a white inflammable powder to set the victims alight. Delhi transport and Police support was enlisted.

Doordarshan, the only TV station, played its part by repeatedly showing Indira Gandhi's body kept in state at Teen Murti Bhawan, alternating with scenes of mobs shouting "*khooon ka badla khooon*" (blood for blood in revenge).

According to this vivid account, all branches of government conspired to encourage violence against one Indian community – the Sikhs. The book is based on inquiry commission reports over the years, eye-witness evidence, horrific personal experiences (mainly of Sikh women) and how, even to this day, they continue to be denied justice and suffer in poverty.

Jarnail Singh was an eleven year old school kid in Delhi in 1984 and sufficiently aware of what was going on. Despite much hardship at home, he became a successful journalist. He grew up in Delhi during this period and interweaves own autobiography with the main theme of the book. He is now out of a job because he threw a symbolic shoe at political untruths and cover-ups, with an impact which shook and shamed a whole nation. As a dedicated Gursikh, following in the footsteps of Guru Nanak Sahib, who did not hesitate to call the ruthless invading Babar a tyrant (*jaabar*), Jarnail Singh could no longer remain silent, no matter what the cost to himself and his family.

The main media focus on 31st November 1984, was the assassination Indira Gandhi who had sanctioned army invasion of Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple complex), the holiest shrine of the Sikhs only five months before. Thousands of innocent civilians paid with their lives during that military invasion of civilian targets in peacetime.

However, by contrast, during these three days of slaughter of thousands of fellow Indians in the first week of November 1984, in Delhi and elsewhere, they were denied army

protection despite repeated requests on behalf of the victims. General A S Vaidya confirmed that “by 31 October midnight, a brigade from Meerut had reached Delhi.” Both, Home Minister Narsimha Rao and Lt Governor P G Gavai, either refused to call in the army or did not bother. Writes the author, “But this was happening in Delhi, not in some remote and inaccessible part of the country. Why did it take two days to call in the army – two days during which Sikhs were being killed and their properties looted ? The Nanavati Commission report puts the number of Sikhs killed in Delhi at 3000.”

Then, as soon as the world media with its TV cameras and reporters arrived for the funeral of Mrs Indira Gandhi on 3rd November, this fire started on 1 November, was extinguished with the same efficiency as it had been started. It was as if nothing had happened!

A failure of such magnitude in a country accounting for one fifth of humanity becomes a legitimate concern of all in the ever-shrinking global village. Not only that the whole system failed for thousands of Sikhs in India’s capital city Delhi and many other cities, but that it worked most ruthlessly against them as a relentless killing machine for those three days.

Jarnail Singh has highlighted November 1984, as a running sore for the Sikhs and right thinking Indians. He is not proud of his shoe throwing act and has gracefully accepted his job loss as a journalist. Whilst Sikhs with a nationalist agenda throng around him for photo opportunities, the so called “moderate Sikhs” admire his guts but keep away. In short, the author, the “shoe throwing” Jarnail Singh has become an icon in the Sikh diaspora. He is articulate, well versed in Gurbani and holds the attention of the Sangats in gurdwaras. He is almost certainly above Indian party politics or the Sikh internal “*jathebandi*” divides.

The book is written in a user friendly style for a wide ranging readership. The underlying message seems to be that the Sikhs should forgive if they are allowed to, by a system which, as yet, remains unrepentant; but Sikhs should not forget. My impression is that the Sikhs would very much like to forgive, but are continually being denied good reasons for being able to do that by a system, which seems to have lost its democratic moorings. The recent “clean chit” to one of the alleged leaders of this pogrom, Jagdish Tytler, who was promoted to a ministerial position in the Congress government soon after the massacre, adds insult to the injured Sikh psyche.

And so, the world, except for the occasional world media report coinciding with related Indian court cases, CBI and inquiry commission reports over the years, continues to sweep the massacre of a minority in the biggest democracy in the world, under the carpet, while the victims still await justice after 25 years.

Finally, one can but agree with Khushwant Singh when he writes in his foreword, “Jarnail Singh’s “I Accuse...” is a shocking book that should shame every citizen of India.... / *Accuse* ...opens wounds which have not yet healed. It is a must-read for all those who wish that such horrendous crimes do not take place.”

**Gurmukh Singh ACIS; MCMI
Ret’d Principal (policy), UK Civil service.
E-mail: ewauk2005@yahoo.co.uk**