

SAYINGS OF GURU NANAK
A Dictionary of the Thought of the Founder of Sikhism
By Professor Harnam Singh Shan, formerly professor and
chairman, Guru Nanak Chair, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
Published by Dharam Parchar Committee, SGPC
Pages 636, Price Rs. 70 (Hard bound)

*A Review by R.M. Chopra**

* 678 Marshall House, 25 Strand Road, Kolkata 700 001.

Guru Nanak (1469-1538 AD) was a crusading prophet who lived an ideal life based on true moral and spiritual principles, and saved many a people from moral and spiritual death by removing the deep-seated superstitions and the veil of ignorance. He was responsible for echoing the voice of God on earth. He brought the divine message of love and spirituality for the people at large by way of hymns singing the glory of God, which are duly enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Guru Nanak was born in a critical period of Indian History. The rulers oppressed the subjects and the condition of the low caste was much worse because they were refused access to the domain of knowledge and enlightenment. The communal hatred of the ruling Muslim elite against the Hindu subjects was prevalent. The society was faced with ruthless religious persecution and forced mass conversions. Added to this, the Hindu priestly class, instead of giving solace to the terror-stricken laity, thrust it deeper into superstitious terror, in order to protect its vested interest and further strengthen its own position. As a consequence of this, ignorance, superstition, religious bigotry, suspicion of one another and social evils emanating from these ills had taken deep roots. The condition of the society in general was chaotic. In this back-ground, Guru Nanak appeared on the scene.

While quite a boy, Nanak was indignant to witness the hypocrisy and cant that was prevalent in the land. He made up his mind to devote his life to the service of the nation and rid it of hypocrisy and bring his people back to a religion of simplicity and sincerity. As he grew, he was greatly influenced by the Bhakti movement enunciated by Ramanand, Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev, Jaidev and others. He had a firm belief that God is all-pervasive and He resides in the heart of a devotee. It is futile to search Him outside by going on pilgrimages and it is equally useless to perform various rites and rituals.

Guru Nanak was also profoundly influenced by the Sufis who were deeply religious, led an ecstatic life, practiced self-discipline for attaining intuitive knowledge of God, or *fana*-annihilation in God. Some of the important feature of Sufism which are distinctly found in the thoughts and teachings of Guru Nanak are: **Ecstatic loving devotion to God, self annihilation in god, love of God, through love of humanity and love of music.**

With the intention of putting an end to the Hindu-Muslim conflict, while deriving inspiration from the fundamental tenets of both these religious systems, Guru Nanak promulgated his new faith, Sikhism, wherein he not only tried to reconcile the two traditional religions in a harmonious way, which was the need of the hour, but also gave a new direction for universal ideas of humanity, moral upliftment, justice and

pursuit of godliness-principles which, in fact, form the real religion of man for all times. He set an example by taking as companions one Hindu, Bala, and one Muslim, Mardana, the first ever example of real secularism in practice, and visited different Holy places of both Hindus as well as Muslims.

Guru Nanak traveled far and wide: as far as Tibet in the north, Sri Lanka in the south, Burma (now Myanmar) in the east and as far as Anatolian Peninsula in the west, with his message of love. His wide travels and contacts with diverse people, cultures and religious thoughts made his outlook cosmopolitan and universal and, in his religious thoughts, he tried to show that humanity is one and the differences in race, caste, and creed are only artificial.

In his teachings, Guru Nanak has been a great critic of the absurdities of the caste system and has ridiculed superfluous rites and rituals. He has spoken in most sarcastic tenor about all outward forms of worship, penances and pilgrimages to Holy places as useless for God-realisation. He tried to remove deep rooted superstitions of the people professing different religious faiths and set an example by living the ideal life himself.

Guru Nanak “rose above nationalism and secular humanism and advocated super-nationalism and spiritual humanism”. In the spiritual sphere, according to him, all human beings are equal. Therefore, religious tolerance, understanding of others’ views and sympathy, which are so important and valued today, cannot possibly be more clearly exemplified in any other form of religious thought than in Sikhism

Guru Nanak’s great emphasis on the reality of the Oneness, Immanence and Transcendence of God, Brotherhood of Man, High Morality and Truth was immensely successful in bringing together the Hindus and the Muslims. As a seer, a saint, a redeemer, a divine master and a spiritual preceptor, he enjoyed so much reverence and popularity in his own life-time that his name became a legend which is reflected in the popular saying of the time-

*Guru Nanak Shah Faqir!
Hindu ka Guru, Musalman ka Pir.*

Guru Nanak has left behind a glorious tradition of holiness and disciplined worldliness, tolerance and benevolence, creative and practical activity. He was an embodiment of love and understanding, contentment and compassion, forgiveness and forbearance, piety and humanity. He was indeed a religious prophet who was far ahead of his times and, when he spoke, his sublime thoughts came clothed in words aglow with a rare poetic fervour that lifted his ideas to a level of high and sublime literature, hence their irresistible charm to the listener. All the sayings, containing his thoughts and message, are enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

Professor Harnam Singh Shan, MA, Ph.D., D.Litt., is a scholar of eminence in Panjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Persian and English. He was formerly Chairman of Guru Nanak Chair and Head of Panjabi as well as Sikh Studies at Panjab University, Chandigarh. His field of study and research work deals with a variety of subjects on Panjabi language, literature, culture, history, tradition and philosophy, with particular reference to Sufi and Sikh studies. His studies have been published by various universities, academies, foundations, institutes as well as by reputed Indian and foreign journals which have been well received in India and abroad. He is a recipient of many awards such as: Sahitya Shiromani Award of the Panjab Government and

Chandigarh Administration's Award for "Excellence in Literature". He has also received awards from the Government of India, University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Historical Research and Guru Gobind Singh Foundation, Chandigarh. He has to his credit more than four-score books, innumerable monographs and papers particularly on Sikh religion, Sikh scriptures and Sikh lore.

The book under review entitled-SAYINGS OF GURU NANAK, A DICTIONARY OF THE THOUGHT OF THE FOUNDER OF SIKHISM, by Professor Harnam Singh Shan, is a collection of some of the simple, terse, pithy and popular quotations taken from the hymns of Guru Nanak contained in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. These sayings are mentioned in Panjabi and have also been translated into English, with meaningful commentary. Any translation into another language, it must be admitted, cannot do full justice to the original text because full vigour and vitality of the original cannot be transferred. Despite these constraints, Professor Shan has done quite an appreciable job in capturing the original subject as far as practical for the benefit of those English-speaking people who desire to know, understand, meditate upon and follow the message and the teachings of the founder of Sikhism. Another laudable job done by Professor Shan, for which he must have laboured hard, is that these Sayings have been arranged theme-wise, and subject-wise, with most appropriate headings, giving references of the original Ragas and the page-numbers as mentioned in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and are presented in an alphabetical order, for easy reference, thus making his production a veritable dictionary of the Sayings and Thoughts of Guru Nanak.

The SAYINGS OF GURU NANAK are extremely relevant today and we can look forward to a better and brilliant future because the more we realize the value of comparative study of philosophy and religion, and look for unity amidst diversity, especially in the context of modern India with multi-ethno-religio-cultures and heterogeneous populations striving hard for communal harmony, the more we shall realize the importance of practicability of liberal, humane, universal and synthetic outlook of the ethical, moral and spiritual thoughts and sayings of Guru Nanak.

The revised edition of SAYINGS OF GURU NANAK is highly commendable and worth reading. It should be a much sought-after compendium by all those who are interested and seek solace from the thoughts of the founder of Sikhism. The book has an excellent get-up, exquisite printing and hard binding; the price is also very moderate and affordable. This book is recommended especially for the students and research scholars engaged in the study of comparative religions.

DEVELOPMENT – A SAGA OF TWO WORLDS

By V. Nath[#]

*A Review by Avtar Singh Rikhy**

* B/64 Paschimi Marg, Vasant Vihar, New Delhi. 110 057. (Ph. 2614-7000)

[#] Dr V. Nath, I.A.S.(Retd.) who passed away last year was an occasional contributor to this Journal. Mrs Kamala Nath can be reached at A-5/6 Vasant Vihar, New Delhi 110 057. (Ph: 2674-5183)

"Development A Saga of Two Worlds" by V. Nath, is more than an autobiography of a perceptive administrator of vision and irreproachable integrity. It provides some

significant insights into the working of India Planning Commission in 1950's in particular, its Evaluation Division of which Dr. Nath became a Director in the formative years. While he refers to Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru as the dynamic chairman of the Planning Commission, whose vision inheres in successive plans that transformed the Indian economy, he also mentions that Pt. Nehru had not critically examined in depth the "Soviet model" of planned development. For example, Pt. Nehru seems to have been oblivious of the fact that while 99% of the Soviet agricultural land was covered by state-owned and run cooperatives, the 1% which was left to be cultivated and husbanded by individual peasants contributed nearly 30% of the country's stock of food grains, fruits, vegetable and poultry products.

Dr. Nath's analysis of the cooperative farming, sponsored on a pilot basis in the Fifties in some states, showed that, despite the hyperbole, it had hardly succeeded at grass roots level. On the one end of the spectrum were the rich landlords who used the cover of cooperatives comprising their own family members and close relatives "to escape the Land Ceiling Acts", while, on the other end of the spectrum, were underprivileged landless labourers who did not have the wherewithal to develop the allotted arid land into productive fields. These realistic findings were however brushed aside by the authorities-that-be and cooperative farming, despite its known weaknesses, became the slogan of the Plans.

Similarly, Evaluation Studies of the newly launched Community Development Programme showed that it lacked well researched and realistic in-depth micro planning and was not getting integrated as a meaningful and productive programme at the grass-roots level. It was getting increasingly vitiated by the "unholy nexus" between the petty bureaucrats, self-seeking local representatives and rapacious contractors. No effective remedial measures were, however, taken to address the root problem, with the result that these shortcomings persisted over the decades.

Dr. Nath's tenure as a UNDP expert in Sierra Leone and Gambia, etc. brought home to him how the clash of human egos at various levels warped the functioning of the United Nations Agencies at grass roots level and generated a feeling of dissatisfaction and insecurity amongst its dedicated personnel.

For the people of united Punjab, the Autobiography is of special interest as it records how Partition of the country in 1947 uprooted the Sikh and Hindu families, who, through hard work and innate entrepreneurial skills, rehabilitated themselves, while keeping intact their humanistic and moral values. His devotion to his parents, his wife and children is an eloquent testimony to the uplifting civilizational values of the middle class. The quintessence of his life time's experience is reflected in the last chapter entitled "Reflections". He has thoughtfully added an index to facilitate reference.

A worthwhile reading for all those interested in understanding origins of state planning and implementation in the post-independence era.



