

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF GURU NANAK DEV JI

By Amrit Kaur Raina

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A Review by M.L. Sharma

The educational philosophy of Guru Nanak Dev occupies the foremost position. He is the beacon light. Although the mind of a pupil has great powers, it blossoms with the help of a real teacher. "The gems, the jewels, the rubies are in the mind. If one were to find them should hearken to the Guru's call, 'tis who giveth to each and all (on Him, on Him, O let me call)/Yea in the guru's words are the jewels (of wisdom)/And whosoever seeketh findeth these."

In no educational system, even the latest one, there is stress on the predominant role of a teacher. He is selected if he fulfills the requisite conditions set by universities or academic bodies, but according to the first Sikh Guru, a teacher has a challenging task as "only the guidance of the guru imparts light and restores confidence. It offers direction and purpose to one's life". The role of a teacher is not only to impart education but also to inculcate social and civic virtues so that the pupil, with a fully developed personality, is able to lead a disciplined life and is ready to do selfless service to mankind.

In brief, physical development, moral uplift and spiritual regeneration are possible through the institution of a worthy teacher or guru. About the challenging role of a teacher, or guru, the first Guru says, "When the true guru is merciful/faith is perfected/When the true guru is merciful/There is no grief/When the true guru is merciful/Nine treasures of *nam* are obtained. The true guru helps the disciple to overcome his weakness. The guru is an ocean, a mind of jewels," from whom are obtained the five blessings of truth, contentment, compassion, dharma and patience.

The book under review is by Amrit Kaur Raina, who holds a doctorate degree in education. She has done extensive studies in the field and her first book "*Educational Philosophy of the Sikh Gurus*" has been well received by educationists. The book offers a kaleidoscopic view of the Sikh philosophy and only four chapters of 11 deal with the actual subject. In the fifth chapter she focuses on the concept and aims of education, in the sixth, on curriculum, in the seventh, on method of education, and in the eighth, on the role of a teacher.

According to the author, Guru Nanak's conception of education is not one-sided as it encompasses the entire vista of man's life on the earth. The Guru has said, "That teacher alone is educated/who enlightens his mind with divine knowledge/Through right reflection in a spontaneous way."

Without the attainment of self-realisation and enlightenment, education is incomplete. An educated person, according to the Guru, is one who wears the garland of *Ram nam*. Ram stands for all-pervading universal spirit and *nam* for truth, life, joy, beauty, purity, righteousness and heroism. The aim of education is thus to liberate. This view has been upheld by Gandhi, Vivekananda and Tagore.

Book learning is ridiculed by the first Sikh guru in the words he spoke to Dharam Das, a Kashmiri Sanskrit scholar: "We may read and read books/ And fill carts with their loads/... Yet, says Nanak/That all our education will be a mere prattle of ego/unless we realise the philosophy of unity of God through it." It is a paradox that the Guru with no formal education has played a vital role in spreading education, just like Prophet Muhammad, Akbar the Great and Kabir.

The 12 fundamental principles of the Guru's educational system are (i) knowledge is strength; (ii) knowledge leads to wisdom and insight; (iii) knowledge elevates mind, body and soul; (iv) knowledge of virtue; (v) wisdom leads to spiritual consciousness; (vi) education as unfolding potentialities (vii) formation of character and infusion of piety; (viii) cultural, emotional and aesthetic development; (ix) physical development (x) education for harmonious development.

In the chapter, "The curriculum" the writer deals with the contents of education, which embody the following: (1) religious and moral education; (2) teaching of mother tongue; (3) study of arithmetic and book-keeping; (4) music and poetry; (5) physical education; (6) manual labour, art and crafts and; (7) informal programme.

Primary schools attached to gurdwara followed this syllabus, but with the changing time there was expansion with a wider programme. Guru Har Gobind was imparted knowledge in astronomy, agriculture, administration and other science. With the establishment of seats of education at Anandpur Sahib and Damdama Sahib, in the time of the 10th Guru, teaching courses comprised a study of Sanskrit, Punjabi, literature, philosophy, politics, astronomy, mathematics and literary criticism. Guru Gobind Singh was well-read and had studied all these subjects. He was a literary genius and a great educationist.

In the chapter, "Methods of education", she shows how education was imparted. To adult students, the method employed included *kirtan*, telling stories addressing congregations, fairs and festivals, adapting dramatic techniques and employing a sense of humour, discussion and debate, quest and inquiry, psychological studies, etc. Children's education had a different pattern. The methods of education included oral-cum-memorisation, poetry and songs, recitation and repetition, monitorial system and story-telling.

In the 10th chapter she sheds light on the concepts which are even today accepted and followed by the modern educational system. These are: humanism, idealism, pragmatism, naturalism and realism.

Guru Nanak Dev laid stress on the unity of Godhood and he was the most secular and universal in his approach to life. He enunciated the principles of true education and was averse to the prevalent social practices of isolation and ceremonial imparting of education. In those days, and till recently, the doors of the Vedas were closed to the lower caste Hindus, but the Guru showed to people the path of equality by stressing on universal brotherhood. He was a protagonist of value-based education inseparable from ethics and a quest for spiritual life. The Guru was a fearless person who donning the dress of a sadhu and a darvesh trodded even the untrodden path, including the holy Mecca and went through the whole length and breadth of the country, teaching unity of godhead, raising his voice against oppression, tyranny, formalism and too much stress on ritualism, in religious practice.

[Courtesy: *The Tribune*]

REDUCED TO ASHES: THE INSURGENCY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN PUNJAB

By Ram Narayan Kumar, Amrik Singh, Ashok Agarwal and Jaskaran Kaur (Committee for Coordination on Disappearances in Punjab)

Published by South Asia Forum for Human Rights.

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*A Review by Jasbir Singh Kang, MD**

Modern societies only progress if they learn the lessons of history and don't repeat mistakes of the past. The contents of **Reduced to Ashes: The Insurgency and Human Rights in Punjab** compel its readers to critically re-examine and re-assess the Indian state's tactics in crushing the “separatist” insurgency in Punjab during the 1980's and 90's. Even the internationally-acclaimed writer Khushwant Singh, who was an ardent supporter of the Punjab police's use of extra-judicial methods to crush the uprising, has praised the objectivity of the report's documentation and the professionalism of its writers.

Reduced to Ashes is a milestone in the human rights research on Punjab because of its highly empirical and systematic data. The report's principal investigators include social activists, academics, and lawyers from both the United States and India.

The book begins with a preface by Professor Peter Rosenblum of Harvard Law School. Professor Rosenblum admits his initial skepticism about researching human rights abuses in Punjab, but writes that the “careful methodology” of the report's investigators has appeased his initial skepticism. He surmises that the “sheer mass of testimonies” demonstrates that the work of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the courts in India has only barely begun “because there are glaring violations of rights to be addressed and responsibility to be apportioned” even after nearly a decade of relative “normalcy.”

In the book's introduction, Tapan Bose explains the rationale behind researching and writing the report. He states that this report was necessary to give “voice” to the victims of the state's human rights abuses, to shift the discourse of human rights in Punjab, away from partisan rhetoric, to an examination of the facts and the law, and to present a body of empirically-verifiable evidence to the NHRC and the courts (both domestic and international) in the hope that they will finally act in a meaningful way to apportion responsibility.

The core of the book consists of 582 case studies of residents of Amritsar district who were killed while in police custody, usually in “faked encounters” or by physical torture, and subsequently cremated as “unidentified bodies” in public cremation grounds. Each case-history is based on multiple sources of information, including cremation ground records, police documents, medical reports, press reports, and

personal interviews. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has also independently confirmed many.

The results of these case-studies reveal several patterns of state abuse that seriously challenge many of the previously held conceptions about the state's actions in crushing the insurgency in Punjab. For example, it was often assumed that the police used "illegal," extra-judicial means to "eliminate" only armed insurgents (or "criminals") who engaged in acts of violence. The findings presented in this study disprove this claim and demonstrate that a vast number, perhaps majority, of those killed by the police were not armed insurgents (or "criminals") but rather people whose only crime was being a "nuisance" for the police and the state.

This included members of Sikh nationalist (but non-violent) political organizations, relatives and associates of suspected dissidents (both violent and non-violent), human rights activists, and even "innocent" civilians. The police also often acted in its own self-interests by picking-up individuals for extortion **of bribes**, and killing them after their relatives could no longer afford to pay money. Most of the case studies presented in the book also pinpoint the place and date that many of the "unidentified" persons were killed and the police party which arrested them before their death. Khushwant Singh has described the case studies as being "spine-chilling."

The study also points to another disturbing pattern regarding human rights abuses in Punjab - the relative impunity of the police and its immunity from meaningful prosecution. With few exceptions, the study shows that cases filed against police officers have made little headway in terms of prosecution. This is so because of intimidation of applicants and witnesses by the police, the financial inability of applicants to sustain years of complex litigation, evidentiary complexities, and the reluctance of judges to prosecute agents of the state (i.e. police officers). In addition, the legal jurisdiction of the NHRC, which came into existence in 1993, has been so narrowly defined that it cannot effectively take up a majority of the cases relating to Punjab. Thus, the avenues for legal recourse for the surviving victims of the state's human rights abuses have been few and ineffectual.

This raises a fundamental question. The state can deliver various forms of "justice" to insurgents and criminals who threaten country's unity or who violate the rights of others. But, does this mean that agents of the state should be allowed to act with complete impunity regardless of their actions? Furthermore, does the state have a monopoly on all that is supposedly "just" and "righteous"? This book deals, in part, with the former question while the latter question is best left to political philosophers, which the authors do not claim to be.

A substantial portion of Reduced to Ashes is dedicated to its original investigator-the slain human rights lawyer, Jaswant Singh Khaira. Mr. Khaira came from a family of freedom fighters. His grandfather, Harman Singh, was a "pilgrim" passenger on the ill-fated *Komagata Maru* ship in 1914, and spent most of his life either in prison, or away from his home, fighting for Indian independence. Mr. Khaira's father, Kartar Singh, was an active member of the Indian National Congress before Independence. As a university student, Jaswant Singh Khaira had leftist leanings and was involved in numerous social causes. His spirit of activism continued into the 1980's and, especially, the 90's when he joined the human rights wing of the Akali Dal and began

to investigate the cremation of “unidentified bodies” by the police during the separatist insurgency. His research caused him to become a “nuisance” to the Punjab police. The police abducted him in front of his home in Amritsar in September 1995, and subsequently he was declared, “Disappeared.” His case, in which former Punjab police chief K.P.S. Gill is also a prime accused, has been lingering in the Indian judicial system for the last eight years without nearing any resolution. His widow, Paramjeet Kaur, is quoted in the book as saying, “I have no hope. In ten to fifteen years, we will also sit down and give up. How much can we do?”

In conclusion, the evidence presented is too systematic and compelling for the book to be simply characterized as a denunciation of the Indian state. The findings present a mirror for the democratic Indian polity to see that, with its many positives points, it has, in this case, failed to respect its own Constitution and the fundamental human rights of many of its citizens. This book is obligatory for well-wishers of human rights, as also for all well-meaning, enlightened Indians who wish to see their society progress into a healthy and just state. To forget and forgive injustices and abuses of today is to welcome their repetition in the future.

WE WEREN'T LOVERS LIKE THAT [Fiction]

By Navtej Singh Sarna

A Review by Nona Walia

On the one hand, he faces media enquiries on foreign policy. That's when he is precise and prompt. A man in control, who doesn't mince words. A man who talks straight and short. To the point. That's when he is Navtej, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs.

On the other hand, he is the author of a modern-day tale of a mechanised marriage gone stale. The emotional writer: The author who talks about spent emotions and regrets. A stark contrast from his bureaucratic world, which is emotionless, tough and icy cool. That's when he is Navtej Sarna, the writer, who has sketched a variety of human emotions in his debut fiction novel, **We Weren't Lovers Like That**.

In the novel, Sarna tenderly portrays a man jilted by his wife and best friend. He begins the 214 page novel with a simple line, 'I am leaving. Doing the one thing I feel I am still good at running away...'. Says Sarna, "I've tried to show that men are emotional too. We get hurt and jilted. We have regrets and make mistakes. Getting hurt isn't just a woman's prerogative."

From the world of power dealings and political handshakes, Sarna is venturing into the realm of passion, emotions and flawed relationships. "It's a fictional story of how human beings meet and then move into separate orbits. And like stars, they never meet for a million years. It's a tale of second changes, an attempt to reclaim long-lost love." says the Jalandhar-born Sarna, who studied at the Shri Ram College of Commerce, in Delhi University, before joining I.F.S.

It took Sarna 10 years to dream about this book and three years to write it. Is his protagonist a loser or a modern-day Devdas? While denying that his book is 'over-

emotional', he says, "No, Aftab - the protagonist - has an imperfect past, crowded with personal and professional compromises. He's disconnected with himself and the world around him."

While curiosity about his book is sky-high, Sarna has also been busy explaining to all and sundry that the story is not autobiographical. "Everyone's asking me if I'm having trouble with my marriage. No, I'm happily married. In fact, my wife, Avina, who is a doctor, has helped me a lot with this book," laughs Sarna, who is the father of 18-year old Satyajit, who is studying for a LLB in Bangalore, and Nooren, who is in standard seven. He has just finished writing *Book of Nanak*, a non-fiction book on life and times of Guru Nanak.

When Navtej Sarna, who joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1980, is not juggling bureaucratic duties with his protagonist's "imperfect past", he likes to play tennis or golf or capture candid moments in camera. Here's the 'write' man for all reasons.

[Courtesy: *Times News Network*]

TRIBUTE TO 3,000 SIKHS WHO DIED IN WORLD WAR II

(Album Size) Roll of Honour

Author & Ed. Surjan Singh

Published in Singapore

Foreword by Patwant Singh

It has taken him over a decade, but the Singaporean educationist and writer Surjan Singh has finally finished his book, "*They Died For All Free Men.*" It is a tribute to some 3,000 Indian soldiers with the surname "Singh" who died fighting for the British in World War II.

The book was launched at the Asian Civilisations Museum with a column prayer - an appropriate inauguration, as the book examines the role of religion underlying the Sikh martial spirit.

For the writer, Surjan Singh, a former teacher at Raffles Institution and Raffles Junior College, writing the book took him on a long journey through India and Malaysia. But it was at the Imperial War Museum in London that he made his greatest discoveries - rare black and white pictures of Sikhs in action during the war. The inspiration for the book, however, came from the author's own backyard, Kranji War Memorial. "The inspiration to write about the book came about when an Australian lady asked me about the Sikhs' martial spirit. She wanted to know why so many Sikhs' names are on the Kranji War Memorial," he said.

Professor Tommy Koh, who chairs the National Heritage Board, praised the tribute to Sikhs. "The book is also important because it's desirable for Singaporeans to learn about the Sikh culture, religion, of their compatriots. And very few Singaporeans outside the Sikh community knew the history of Sikhism and the origin of the martial tradition," he said.

1,500 copies of the book are being distributed to Sikh institutions, well-wishers and libraries.

