

Book Title: GURU NANAK DEV – Dispenser of Love and Light

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Dr Surendra Singh Bhatti is a multi-dimensional personality and a celebrated author with three doctorates in his kitty on three different subjects of his intensive life-long study. I had the privilege to review his "JAPUJI: Exegesis and Poetic Rendering" and "Notes to Myself" earlier. I quote from my review of Japuji: "The author (Dr SS Bhatti) claims that his interest in Gurbani was inherited from his father. But he also claims: "My research is thus the outcome of an assiduous application of the tools and methods of Architecture I have developed as teacher, theorist, researcher, and practitioner to the exegesis of Gurbani". I will like to call the technique used by the author as Architectonics of Gurbani which is displayed in abundance in his rendering of Japuji.

In the Preface to the present volume under review, Dr Bhatti writes: "I dare say mine is not a routine write-up of the kind that professional scholars tend to produce. It is backed up by a treasure trove of versatile artistry rooted in Creative Mysticism as my family's invaluable legacy across a few centuries".

Dr Bhatti has shown deep reverence and gratitude to the author of Japuji in the following words: "Guru Nanak is a prophet class apart because he brought 'religion' on a platter to the doorstep of the masses – illiterate, uninitiated, and without patronage of the clergy". In my recent tour of America sponsored by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR), I had the audacity to address the audiences under the title "Guru Nanak: A Universal Prophet without Borders".

In the Prologue to his book, the author writes: "My research has convincingly shown that Guru Nanak's *Bani* is neither Metaphysics, nor Mythology, nor the Muse, nor even Mysticism as 'religion of the élite'. It transcends the domain also of Science that has not been able to belie any of the Sikh Faith's tenets so far. For my part, *I have repeatedly proven to myself that the deeper I know of Science, its methods, and findings, the profounder my*

understanding of and deeper my faith in Gurbani gets". Dr Bhatti is vindicated by the recent survey about *Belief in God* reported in *Neuroscience News* (July 18, 2019): "Most Americans believe science and religion are incompatible, but a recent study suggests that scientific engagement can actually promote belief in God. These findings suggest that scientific engagement does not always erode belief in God. Instead, science-inspired awe can increase representations of God as a mystical cosmic force or as being beyond imagination".

Gurbani understanding demands knowledge of various disciplines and the author remarks: "Having worked in 55 disciplines/subjects conscientiously since 1961 and made versatile creativity a habit of mind in my approach to the understanding of what all we humans do—consciously or unconsciously in umpteen different ways—I am convinced that the understanding of *Gurbani* is not a matter of scholastic investigation presented in glib gobbledygook". He succeeded in doing so by using a mode of expression that transcends the grammars, scripts, and syntaxes of peoples of the world. This unique language is Love—the Guru calls it the only language that God uses, understands, communicates and blesses with. Even animals we know to be lower than us humans on the Ladder of Evolution understand Love and respond to it with open-hearted receptivity.

In Chapter 3, author writes about the advent of Guru Nanak and his persona: "Guru Nanak though born in a devout Hindu family did not accept without questioning the centuries-old ideas and influences that had come down to it rooted deep in the Hindu tradition. He came into the world with an inquisitive mind, contemplative temperament, undiminished longing for Lord God, unconditional respect for various faiths, and an unremitting love for entire humanity". The author goes on to define an important concept used in Gurbani, called *Sahj* as 'Unconditioned Spontaneity'—a state of consciousness in which body, Mind, and soul are in perfect alignment so that thoughts, words, and deeds meld into a single holistic, socially beneficent action.

The author defines the "Pragmatic Spirituality" of Guru Nanak as follows: "Guru Nanak, the greatest Prophet of the World, was painfully aware of how men in power exploited the meek and the hapless to turn them into eternal slaves in order to stay as their beneficent rulers. They used everything—muscle power, mental power, caste power, creed, social status, learning, political clout and what have you—to achieve the one-point agenda of making

people their slaves *en masse*. The Guru, therefore, sought to uplift the masses by means of what I call “Pragmatic Spirituality” that works by building self-confidence and life-affirming faith in divine dispensation. He offered the fruits of his Revelation on a platter to the lowliest of the lowly across the globe by the three-pronged formula of *Kirat Karo*, *Vand Chhako*, and *Naam Japo*".

The author has used the terminology of Computer Science to bring home the inter-relationship of Naam and Simrin: "I am inclined to think that, metaphorically, *SIMRAN* [God-Remembrance] is the activating of Memory that contains only *NAAM*, that is, Divinity's Data Files from which the deadly virus of Lust, Anger, Greed, Attachment, and Pride has been studiously removed to prevent the Human Computer, MIND, from crashing"!

Chapter 4 'What is Naam' defines this esoteric formula of Sikh Theology: "*NAAM* is the Lord Himself in the form of primal or creative Power. It is His means by which He projects Himself as His creation. It is Love [Universal-Timeless Script-Free Language], Truth [His Primal Attribute], Consciousness [His Sleep-Free Wakefulness], and Bliss [His Unchanging State of Mind]. Sound and Light, *Naam* has, therefore, come to be known as the *Shabda* [Sound] or Sound Current [*Shabda Dhaara*]. Those who know it from personal experience [not hearsay or merely reading of books] are drawn irresistibly to it". The relationship of *Naam*, *Shabad* and *Bani* is explained by the author explicitly.

I am obliged to the author for accepting my suggestion to explore into the uncharted realms of *Naam*. I am happy to note that Chapter 5 "*Nanak kai ghar kewal Naam*" has been included in this special volume. For the last 50 years of my life, it has been an enigma to understand the implications of *Naam*, the be-all and end-all of Guru Nanak's mission. Guru Arjun declares unequivocally about the importance of Naam in the house of Guru Nanak:

ਏਹੁ ਅਹੇਰਾ ਕੀਨੋ ਦਾਨੁ ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਕੈ ਘਰਿ ਕੇਵਲ ਨਾਮੁ ॥

*Lord God has to humanity given this gift
Nanak's home glows with only Name in it.*

[SGGS, M. 5, Page 1136]

Dr Bhatti has a probing eye to discern this topic under three headings: Significance, Magnificence, and Munificence of “*NAAM*” supported by quotes from Gurbani (Japuji & Sukhmani). He concludes: "*NAAM*-recitation or Divine-invocation is not confined to ceaseless parroting; nor is it the focusing of

attention on the letters of a word or meditating on an icon or idol. Much to the contrary, when consciousness attains to a state of mind in which no thought at all stirs it, it melts into formlessness. The meaning of *Naam*-recitation is Lord God's form with attributes [*Sarguna Saroop*] that is worshipped with profoundest longing for communion, most intense love, deepest devotion, and unwavering resoluteness. To uplift the mind to such high level of gumption or exalted spiritual state, it has to transform into liquefied psychic condition soaked in divinity".

Chapter 6 "Guru Nanak Dev: Dispenser of Divine Light" is the longest but also an important core chapter of this volume. It is based on hagiographic accounts of the life of Guru Nanak available in Janamsakhis and Suraj Prakash Granth of Bhai Santokh Singh. Modern day scholars find fault in these tell-tale stories by following Mc-Leodian School of thought but these are pillars of Sikh faith. They establish the divinity and authority of Guru Nanak. I agree with the author that Guru Nanak undertook these journeys to accomplish the task for which he was ordained by the God: "As Bhai Gurdas has aptly remarked Guru Nanak "rose to accomplish emancipation of the whole world". This is amply demonstrated in the long Missionary Journeys [*Udasis*] that the Guru embarked upon and travelled for over 25 years covering an incredible distance of 28,000 kilometres. He and his lifelong companion Bhai Mardana travelled largely on foot through uncharted terrains, dreaded forests, under frightfully inhospitable conditions and circumstances. He is the most travelled Prophet in world history who fulfilled to a large extent Lord God's Edict-Fiat [*Hukm*] to turn misguided Humankind towards Divinity".

In Chapter 7 "An Architect's view of Japuji", the author compares the edifice of Japuji to a 38-Storey Skyscraper starting from the Four-Pillar foundation of *adi sach jugadi sach; hai bhee sach, Nanak hosee bhee sach*. The amplitude of author's interpretation is depicted by his rendering of Pauri 5 and 6: "In the **Fifth Pauri**, the hard-earned wages of *Naam*- or *Shabda-Jaap* are placed much higher than idol worship and by extreme civility, it is asserted that God can neither be created nor installed like an idol on a temple. In a similar vein in the **Sixth Pauri**, the Guru discountenances ritual bathing at centres of pilgrimage. God is not pleased with ceremonial piety that such bathers expect by a dip in so-called holy waters. Focus is on good deeds thereby highlighting the Pragmatic Spirituality that is a hallmark of the Sikh Faith". In my view, the

ritual bathing by the Sikh devotees in *sarovars* is of no consequence if tested on the touchstone of Gurbani.

In **Pauri 19**, Prophet-Guru Nanak excels other religious leaders in revealing to the wonderstruck reader of *Gurbani* the immensity of creation at the cosmic scale. Nevertheless, then, he confesses, as an inner compulsion of Humility of which he is an unmatched paragon, that even the word ‘countless’ that he has used to describe the Divine Immensity is a burden on the mind. As is his wont, the Guru approaches each problem systematically, beginning with the concrete and comprehensible because such an example is available in everyday life. Therefore, using it as a launching pad, the Guru takes the devotee on a spiritual flight to farthest reaches of the cosmic void. He thus goes on to say that, in a similar way, when sins pollute the mind no soap except the detergent of Holy *NAAM* can cleanse it.

In Chapter 8, Dr. Bhatti reveals an original and meticulous rendering of Japuji in his inimitable style of a poet laureate of Guru Nanak's house. He has been conferred with the Best Book of the Year 2019 Award for his anthology "*Shu'oor-i-Bekhudi* [Knowledge of the Unconscious Self]" by the Chandigarh Lalit Kala Akademi. His rendering of Pauri 38 of Japuji is given as an illustration of his marvellous style:

Let continence be the furnace, and patience the goldsmith
Intellect the anvil and knowledge the hammer
God's fear the bellows, austerity's-heat the fire
Fill the vessel of devotion with the Holy Name's nectar
In such a sacred mint forge them the divine Word
They who by His glance are so favour'd
Are in such hallowed task blissfully absorb'd
Only heirs to His grace, Nanak, get this unique award

In my personal opinion, Chapters 9-11 need to be added in this volume as Appendices to the main text or as supplementary reading. "Glossary of some mystic terms frequently used in *Gurbani*" is a very useful chapter but the author has given very exhaustive treatment which goes beyond the boundaries of glossary. In Chapter 11, under the heading God Evidence, the author has given an exhaustive list of quotes on God by world's outstanding scientists. It indicates that all eminent Scientists, including some Nobel Laureates, are believers in God, except Stephen Hawking and the likes, who pride in calling themselves atheists! I will like to add that Scientific GOD Journal (March 2010,

Vol. 1, Issue 3, Pages 143-273) has published quotes from "50 Nobel Laureates and Other Great Scientists Who Believe in GOD".

The Chapter 13 is based on 41 "Sonnets" written by the author on the inspiration of his lifelong study of *Gurbani*. Dr Bhatti writes in his introductory note: "I have continued my forays into the Holy Book with mounting inquisitiveness and ever-deepening contentment. One undiminished gain that has accrued from this pursuit that is far removed from Architecture, in which I was formally trained to earn my livelihood, is that it has awakened my innate creativity and both sustained and replenished it through all phases of my life bolstering my joyous wonder at the immensity of the creation and creatures—and their unseen Creator, Lord God: Mysterious whose ways, indeed, are". These Sonnets are considered to be the best contribution of Dr Bhatti to the Indian English literature as well to the exegesis of *Gurbani* of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the living Guru of the Sikhs. This selection is drawn from his anthology of 275 sonnets titled "*Songs of the Soul*" that was published by RoseDog Books, USA, in 2010. It is the largest collection of poems of this genre written and published by any poet in the world.

This volume is a welcome addition to the Sikh literature produced during 550th anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Dev. Dr Bhatti tries to interpret Revelation of Guru Nanak in the modern scientific context. The only lacuna in this volume is utter lack of references in the text to make it authentic.

I will like to end my review with some opening stanzas from the wonderful poem by the author in appreciation of Guru Nanak:

"An Ode to Guru Nanak Dev"

When they of the West were content with their Renaissance
You ushered in an Era of Enlightenment
Through offbeat odysseys into the realm of mind
While America was Columbus' geographical find
You discovered many an unknown world
In the infinite cosmos within and without
When there was extinction of excellence
In literary culture and public virtue
You lighted the lamp of universal love.
You displayed the infinite power
Of humility, politeness, and simplicity
By the overwhelming eloquence of your own example.