

## **GURU NANAK'S REVELATION IN ARCHITECTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

Review of Dr. S.S. Bhatti' Book "Guru Nanak Bani-Revelation, Mysticism, Creativity.

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Based on the Thesis for his second PhD, the book under review has been written by eminent Architect Dr. S.S. Bhatti. Deeply steeped as he is in Guru Nanak's teachings through the parental guidance and inspiration right from his childhood, the author has produced a work that bears a decidedly unique Sikh mystical tone and content. It is an attractive, accessible book that reflects not only the great learning of its author, but also his personal experience of Sikh life of action and its mystical longings and strivings. Giving cogent reasons for his preference, Bhatti dares to cross disciplinary, generic, and denominational boundaries in order to project his concept of "*Creative Mysticism*" in preference to the traditional notions of religion.

Written in the context of an altogether new perspective of Architecture, not attempted by any one else so far, Bhatti fully utilizes his expertise as an Architect and joins his forceful utterance to the voice of those of a very limited number of Sikh scholars who have written on Sikh mysticism. He deplores the neglect of mystical/spiritual theology. This book sends out a strong message for recovering these lost branches of theological study, which enable us to focus on the questions intrinsic to theology, namely, the nature of God's reality and our human capacity to know God. The work on the whole is impressive, and its style simple, dignified, and forceful while the language is clear, and the reasoning, in the main, logical. Bhatti draws upon the Sikh Scripture freely and buttresses his position with relevant quotes from Guru Nanak Bani. This is a magnificent book—painstakingly researched and gracefully written. It offers a perceptive study of Guru Nanak's Bani with particular reference to his mystical theology.

It establishes clearly that Guru Nanak Bani is God's Revealed Word and shows that his Bani is none of these things: Mythology [Purest creation of the human imagination as TS Eliot had most aptly defined it], Metaphysics [branch of Philosophy that is purported to think things out to their ultimate significance], the Muse [Poetry which is the product of imperatives of prosody and literary rules enunciated by others], nor Science that has for its method hypotheses, theories, instrumentation, and lab models and experiments, not even Mysticism of the known variety which, as religion of the élite, has no use for the common man.

Guru Nanak's Revelation, being a verbal direct Revelation, implies that the Guru is not using any of his own faculties in conjuring up the make-believe world of Mythology or indulging in ratiocinative cerebration of Science or imagining romanticism as one comes across in Poetry...he is quite simply describing what the Primal Person has Himself shown him.

In his concept of Creative Mysticism, Bhatti treats Mysticism as Experience, and Creativity as its Expression. According to him, Mysticism, at its profoundest, is *creative*, and Creativity, at its highest, is *mystical*. Since the two come simultaneously from *The Source* by the same means, Revelation, they are the most authentic portrayal of Truth, as the Chief Attribute of God, and thus communicable even to the common man as an expression of love that is god's unique unlettered language!

The author has succeeded in showing the unique significance of Guru Nanak Bani in the context of world religions by carefully selecting the most representative tenet in each case without resorting to paraphrasing to avoid distortion. Dr Bhatti, who holds three PhDs, including one on Sri Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar, has, indeed, revealed Japuji to be the

‘Architecture of the Soul’. For this reason, coming unexpectedly as it does from an architect his work is certainly a work of inspiration rather than mere scholarship. His home had the right ambience in which such a divine influence would directly and immediately be exerted upon his mind. His grandfather read *Sukhmani Sahib* all his life, and his self-taught versatile father Sardar Balwant Singh, with unshakable faith in Guru Nanak Dev’s *Shabad*, designed two of Sikh Faith’s historic monuments: Gurdwara Panja Sahib, Hassan Abdal, and Takhat Sri Keshgarh, Anandpur Sahib. Above all, he successfully put his son Dr Bhatti on the God-lit Path of *Gurbani* on which is mortal journey has gained stronger and stronger foothold every passing day.

Dr Bhatti’s book may rank as among the best defences of Creative Mysticism brought forth by the Sikh Faith. It successfully achieves the objectives which the author had set forth his novel study.

This volume is an excellent addition to the scant literature on Sikh mysticism, covering as it does a wide range of social dimensions of Sikhism, besides providing innovative framework and insights for several important areas for further research.

Contents of the Book: To meet the requirements of the title of the book: "*Guru Nanak's Bani: Revelation, Mysticism and Creativity*" the book comprises eight chapters titled: An Architect's Approach to Religion; An Architect's Approach to Creative Mysticism; Revelation; Architecture of the *Japuji*; Mental Constructs of Guru Nanak's Bani; Guru Nanak's Revelation; Guru Nanak's Creative Mysticism; and Assessment.

*Chapter I:* Bhatti perceives Religion from the perspective of Architecture as "an Edifice of Faith, upraised of the same elements—Space, Structure, Form and Time requiring human beings to live "exuberantly" instead of treating Religion as "lack-lustre obligation". He attempts to show that Guru Nanak's Bani, with focus on *Japuji* is none of these—Mythology, Metaphysics and Poetry.

*Chapter II:* Giving brief description of mysticism and of creativity, Bhatti asserts that their mutually integrated product that he names as Creative Mysticism is difficult to hold. "Guru Nanak Bani is a paragon of creative mysticism, exhorting as it does the common man to a life of *Sachiar*, as pragmatic spirituality, during workaday existence." Describing various levels at which life functions, it is emphasised that the mind works at its full capacity in the realm of Creative Mysticism. The imperatives and criteria of Creative Mysticism are fully described. Summing up, Bhatti opines that "In Guru Nanak's Bani, Revelation makes his Mysticism a Timeless Experience and his CREATIVITY a Universal Expression for communicating Lord's Word (*Shabad*) for the general weal of all humankind."

*Chapter III:* The concept of Revelation as prevalent in different religious traditions is described. The objective is to provide "the necessary matrix in which to see the distinctive features of the Guru's Revelation" and to evaluate the nature and scope of Guru Nanak's Creative Mysticism. It is the nature of Guru Nanak's Revelation that distinguishes his Bani from all forms of Poetry, as a literary art. There is something which sets *his* Revelation apart from other forms of Revelation known to students of Religion.

*Chapter IV* deals with the Architecture of *Japuji*, its design, structure and form: Elements which manifest the objectives, stages, and means for the transformation of human beings, and are thus building blocks of Creative Mysticism.

*Chapter V* deals with the Mental Constructs for Guru Nanak's Bani:

- (i) Mysticism, its nature and significance, basic patterns, mystical relationships, symbolism of love and marriage, psychological aspects, problems of communications, and understanding; and
- (ii) Creativity: its characteristics, functions, elements, principles, objectives, and strategies.

*Chapter VI* deals with Guru Nanak's Revelation. The task of the book is to explain the nature of the unique Revelation which is contained in Guru Nanak's Bani. It asserts that "Guru Nanak's Revelation is mystically-creative and creatively-mystical insofar as it exhorts man as a privileged human person [possessor of *dur-labh deh*, his hard-earned "mortal frame"] to take initiative and aspire for an inner life through God-orientation (*gurmukh*) by transcending Mind-orientation (*manmukh*). The term 'orientation' used by the author is typically *architectural*.

*Chapter VII: Guru Nanak's Creative Mysticism: An Architect's Perspective:*

Dr Bhatti's perspective is delineated in very precise and crisp terms: "Guru Nanak's Creative Mysticism lays foundation for a non-denominational, non-communal, non-sectarian, non-ethnic system of Holistic Humanism whereby anyone and everyone is urged to an optimistic View and a fulfilling Way of Life" emphasising the essential requirements of being a true Sikh in accordance with the Guru's teachings. Bhatti lists 26 Principles/Axioms/ Aphorisms as these flow effortlessly from the Creative Mysticism of Guru Nanak.

*Chapter VIII: Assessment: Critical Evaluation of Guru Nanak's Creative Mysticism* emphasises that "the main aim of *Japu* is the integration of Body, Mind, and Soul into an organic whole..." leading to the stage of *Sahaj*. The seeker then becomes "a willing and an effective instrument of Lord's *Hukum*—Edict-Fiat". This involves total self-surrender. The effectiveness of such Creative Mysticism is the achievement of a "divinised state of being unchangeably optimistic, uncompromisingly life-affirming, and incomparably simple." It leads to the fusion of the human faculties of Reason, Emotion, and Imagination into Intuition.

Architect's interpretation of Gurbani line: "*Jo Brahmanday, soi Pindey*" in Architectural terms: "Man, as microcosm, has been architected in the same way as the macrocosm—with the three basic elements of Space, Structure, and Form. Space is his Soul, Structure is his Mind, and Form is his Body. By analogy, *Japu* (or *Simran*) is an exercise aimed at integration of the Temporal Architecture of Microcosm (soul, mind, body) vis-à-vis that of the Macrocosm (space, structure, form) ..."

The question of revelation is a formidable one in the proper sense of the word, not only because it may be seen as the first and last question for faith. Bhatti, therefore, attempts to present a full sweep of the idea of Revelation and devotes a full chapter on the subject of Revelation followed by another comprehensive Chapter discussing the concept of Revelation in different religious traditions and focusing on the uniqueness of Guru Nanak's Revelation.

Quoting Guru Nanak's Bani, he fully justifies his assertions:

1. "Guru Nanak's Revelation is mystically-creative and creatively-mystical insofar as it exhorts man as a privileged human person [possessor of *dur-labh deh*, his hard-earned "mortal frame"] to take initiative and aspire for an inner life through God-orientation (*gurmukh*) by transcending Mind-orientation (*manmukh*).
2. Guru Nanak's Revelation makes a radical departure from the teachings of other religions.
3. Guru Nanak's Revelation "differs from all known forms of revelation in several other respects: the depth of its mystical insight, the palpableness of its creative vitality, the universalness of its vision, the comprehensivity of its approach to the problems of workaday existence, the holism of its progressional spirituality—above all, its impassioned concern actively engaged in the amelioration of the human condition".

A major shift in the Sikh concept of revelation has been from revelation as a set of divinely imparted propositions to revelation as a set of events—the recurrent phases of mystical experience.

Discussing the relationship between Revelation and Reason, Bhatti seeks to recover a concept of revelation and a concept of reason that can at least enter into a living dialectic and together engender a fresh understanding of faith. The literary form and the profound moral tone of the work are sustained throughout.

Bhatti's is a pioneering work based on real insight into the mystical phenomenon of the Sikh Gurus, especially the unique and distinctive aspects of revelation received by them—verbal *direct* revelation as against non-verbal or revelation through an agent. His development of the concept of "Creative Mysticism" in Sikhi context is a very comprehensive thesis as compared to elementary treatment elsewhere in the literature on Mysticism especially by the Sikh scholars. I got almost overawed when I tried to do an analytical study of his book. Every repeat reading of the book opened up every time a new dimension of the mystical phenomenon. I needed several readings of the book to grasp the real essence of it so as to do full justice to it, but, in all honesty, I feel that I have not yet completely achieved my goal.

I am pained to find that Dr Bhatti's book has not been reviewed by any eminent scholar (according to internet reports). I wish someone does so, if only persuaded by my write-up, because I strongly feel that such a study of this unusual tome would be very beneficial for many others just as it has been in my own case, deepening my understanding of Sikh mysticism vis-à-vis its creativity—aspects which have not been dealt with by others.

The 240 pages book is moderately priced at Rs 500 to be within the reach of every reader. Besides its low cost the contents of this tome should attract readership ranging from those interested in Mysticism and those who have anything to do with Creativity, for in no single book the latter subject has been discussed so elaborately with a penetrating insight into its why's and wherefore's. What is more is that Dr Bhatti himself being well versed in the Theory, Practice, Research, and Pedagogy, with their hitherto unknown bearing on the four major fields of human endeavour: the Humanities, Art, Science, and Technology, brings to the subject a refreshing vitality that could inspire the reader to explore and develop his own creativity as a priceless gift of God in His ambient mysticism.

In my considered opinion, this book should embellish all libraries to be studied as a harbinger of an offbeat scholarship and a novel, holistic approach to its creative extension into the world of faith as it may shape tomorrow.

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