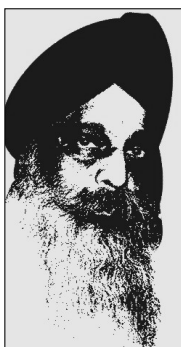


# Schools for scandal

## STATE TURNS SCOUNDREL



Philanthropy as business should not be allowed to work in Panjab, writes Jagmohan Singh

Dear Mr. Mittal:

I am sure you can respond to Sat Sri Akal.

I am livid with anger so you may excuse me if I am intemperate, though I assure you that I will be thoroughly logical and factual. A foundation set up by your company, called the Bharati Foundation, for its Satya Bharati School Program, is to receive chunks of land in many a village in Panjab free of cost!

All Panjabis who are worried about the dismal state of education in the state are shocked beyond words at the alacrity with which you are getting away with your manoeuvre.

There is no doubt that education in Panjab is fertile territory. I am sure that you and your team made a conscientious decision to enter in the pedagogical domain. The Planning Commission of India has remarked that 62 percent of Panjabi children

passing out from primary schools fail to achieve permanent literacy.

The primary education system in the state has collapsed. Everyone passes for no one wants anyone to fail. Teachers who do not teach, parents who are not bothered, society who couldn't care less, every one wants 100 percent results!

There are some 20,000 schools in Panjab, of which around 87 percent are located in the rural areas. The pupil-teacher ratio is very high and to talk of infrastructure for schools is considered sin. Jaswinder Singh Brar of the Centre for Research in Economic Change of the Punjabi University Patiala in his monumental study, "Punjab's Educational Progress and Educational Expenditure (1967-68 to 1993-94)" has pointed out that, "The education system in Panjab is not well integrated. The proliferation of multiple schooling with different affiliations has played havoc with the education system. The influential sections have withdrawn their chil-

You practice Yoga. Yogis do not eat away common wealth. If the government of Panjab pressurizes Panchayats to give away shamlat land to the Bharati Foundation is it not cheating, is it not un-yogic?

dren from government schools, both in the rural and urban areas. The education system has become an instrument of social stratification, rather than that of cohesiveness. The upgradation of government schools due to political considerations without providing the matching facilities has disturbed equilibrium. A multi-dimensional action is required in order to make education as an engine of growth."

I have no hesitation in saying that all you want to do is to take the government and people of Panjab for a

### OPEN LETTER

ride. In Panjab, scandals are discovered very late. Perhaps not discovered. Perhaps lost in the din of populism and politicking.

It is fashionable to use the word "Foundation" and route all your "corporate responsibility" through that tube. Philanthropy as business is the new side-kick of the emerging corporate giants in Panjab. Huge marketing success and skyrocketing Stocks have resulted in surefire political clout. With civil society nearly dead, (it was never much alive anyway in Panjab), philanthropy as business is the new mantra of people like you.

You have achieved tremendous success as a telecom giant and that has made

Panjabis proud and happy. It is commendable that you have set-up telephone manufacturing units in various parts of Panjab where rural women are employed. I congratulate you for this contribution.

Around three months back, I was told this by a village sarpanch. He said, "The party (read the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal) is using all its influence to force Panchayats to pass a resolution to donate land to your foundation." Political interference is the bane of the education system in Panjab and you are using that as the starting point! This benevolence will begin your confrontation with civil society in Panjab.

Corporate responsibility of business was my pet subject when I was a teacher of Management to undergraduate students of Mumbai University in the early eighties. I did read then as I do now of industrialists collaborating with governments to correct some inherent wrongs in society or to take care of a particular problem, but I have not come across an example of a rich industrial house, using its clout to inherit free land from the state, which through legal jugglery (called change of land use) will sooner or later be used for commercial purposes, maybe as simple as putting up towers of your telecom service to expand your reach into the heartlands of Panjab!

If your trust would begin such activities then it will be open for members of the public to cry hoarse and question the credibility of awards like the Golden Peacock Award for Corporate Social Responsibility, which was awarded to your foundation in 2006.

As a part of your corporate responsibility, your company's statement is that "you encourage employees to take decisions and design business-linked processes that are sensitive to the communities and environment." Have you ever monitored the Customer care services of your telephone company, Airtel? Like scores of others, I am a subscriber of your company's services. None of your executives speak Panjabi in Panjab. They speak the respective language of other states where your network functions, but in Punjab they simply ignore all pleas for Panjabi. Though you have not followed the footsteps of your father by joining Panjab politics, perhaps you continue the anti-Panjabi campaign launched by your father. The next and new generation should certainly not perpetuate the wrongs done by predecessors and forefathers. I strongly fear that in your proposed schools, an alien culture and system will be foisted, tearing apart the already strained social and cultural values of Panjabis. ►►

