

PREAMBLE

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FORMULATING METHODOLOGY FOR INTERPRETING GURBANI

September 21, 2013 Montreal, Canada

**Dedicated to Centennial Anniversary of
Max Arthur Macauliffe (1841-1913)**

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Chahal**



If we look into the way Sikhism is being preached and practiced today it confirms the statement of Macauliffe made during 1893—1899 (2): “*Hinduism has embraced Sikhism in its folds; the still comparatively young religion is making a vigorous struggle for life, but its ultimate destruction is, it is apprehended, inevitable without State support.*” Since that observation of Macauliffe Sikhi (Sikhism) founded by Guru Nanak is declining steadily without being noticed by the custodians of Sikhi. The major cause in decline for Sikhi is that Gurbani has not been interpreted in its real perspective so far.

Professor Puran Singh was the first researcher who noticed misinterpretation of Gurbani during 1920s:

“It is to be regretted that Sikh and Hindu scholars are interpreting Guru Nanak in the futile terms of the colour he used, the brush he took; are analyzing the skin and flesh of his words and dissecting texts to find the Guru’s meaning to be the same as of the Vedas and Upanishad! This indicates enslavement to the power of Brahmanical tradition. Dead words are used to interpret the fire of the Master’s soul! The results are always grotesque and clumsy translations which have no meaning at all.” (3)

For the last 90 years Professor Puran Singh’s concern about misinterpretation of Gurbani appears to have been overlooked. Moreover, it is also evident from the recent study of Dr Taran Singh, the then Head of the Department of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala that although there have been eight different **Explanatory Schools of Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS)** (*Viakhia Parnalian*), which have been working right from Bhai Gurdas to Maherban (Sodhis) to Sadhu Anand Ghan to Nirmalas and Samparday (Santokh Singh and *Faridkot Vala Tika*) to that of modern theologians like Prof Sahib Singh’s *Tika* and many other *tikas* prove that philosophy of Sikh Gurus was not different than that of Brahmanical and Vedic philosophies. He further stressed that although it appears that universities have taken good steps, their research could only establish that the truth in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) is not different than the truth of ancient India. Nevertheless, he acknowledges it as a ‘powerful achievement’ [(5) - Foreword]. Now a question arises about 409 years after the compilation of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib:

Can a standardized methodology be formulated for an ‘authentic’ Interpretation of Gurbani to discover the real message of Aad Guru Granth Sahib?

Current literature indicates paucity in the availability of a precise and comprehensive methodology for interpreting Gurbani. An exception is the formulation of Grammar of

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Gurbani by Professor Sahib Singh (4). Professor Chahal [(1) p – 64] has also attempted to discover the methodology used by Guru Nanak in his Bani. Therefore, the **Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS)** held an International Conference for “**Formulating Methodology for Interpretation of Gurbani**”, first of its kind, at Ville des Dollards-des-Ormeaux (near Montreal), Quebec, Canada on September 21, 2013 to highlight the methods that must be kept in mind while interpreting Gurbani in the AGGS. Scholars from Canada, USA and UK presented their papers in the conference. This conference was dedicated to Max Arthur Macauliffe on his Centennial Anniversary, which was on March 15, 2013.

The conference started and ended by reciting of *Kirtan*, in the morning by Miss Avneet Kaur Bhabra & Mr Manmeet Singh Bhabra (*Vidyia vichari tan parupkaari...*) and in the evening by Miss Mansirat Kaur & Miss Nimrat Kaur (*Kot koti mere arja...*). After welcoming remarks by Dr. Parminder Singh Chahal, PhD and introduction of IUS by Gurinderjit Singh, B. Eng., M. Eng., Prof. Devinder Singh Chahal, PhD, the founder of IUS, presented *Keynote Address* devoted to Macauliffe on his Centennial Anniversary who did 1st translation of Gurbani into English with the help of many Sikhs including Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha. Macauliffe noted that Sikhs who helped him with his job often translated the same verse of Gurbani very differently with entirely different meanings. The 1st translation of Gurbani in Punjabi was done by Giani Badan Singh with the aid of a group of scholars by 1883 under the Patronage of Raja Ripuduman Singh of Faridkot and later by Prof Sahib Singh in Punjabi and by Dr Gopal Singh in English followed by that of Bhai Manmohan Singh who did translation into Punjabi and English as well. All these translations and that followed later have been heavily influenced by the earlier work of *Faridkot Vala Tika*. It is generally agreed that all available translations have serious deficiencies.

The next Session started with Dr Avtar Singh Dhaliwal, MD, from North Carolina, USA who presented his paper titled “*Explicative Methodology for Interpreting Gurbani*” that highlighted many points for improving translations. This was followed by a paper present by Dr Kulbir Singh Thind, MD, from San Mateo, California, USA titled “*Some Pitfalls of Translation of Aad Guru Granth Sahib into English*”. Dr Thind highlighted requirements for a good translation and of those issues that cause difficulties in translation of Gurbani into English along with many examples. After this Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, PhD, from Laval, Quebec, Canada presented his paper “*Application of Science and Logic in Interpreting Gurbani*”. Prof Chahal also explained in detail that

application of etymological study can trace out real meanings of Gurbani words and if care is not taken it can result in entirely different interpretation. Dr Harbans Lal, PhD, from Taxes, USA presented his paper and highlighted the point that translations must be consistent with *Gurmat*. A paper was then presented by Dr Devinder Singh Sekhon, PhD, from Brampton, Ontario, Canada titled “*Formulating Methodology for Interpreting Gurbani*”. Dr Sekhon, along with many other points he explained how some incorrect splitting of *Larivar* (continuous text) into words have caused some errors in the correct interpretation of Gurbani.

The final session of the conference dealt with two unrelated but important issues. Lovpreet Kaur a PhD student from Wolverhampton University, UK presented her paper on “*Exploration of Gender Equality in Sikhism*”. The last paper “*Amrit Bani as a Trajectory of a Distinct Identity*” was read by S. Charan Singh from Community College, Ashwa, Ontario, Canada. Prof PS Bhandari, Montreal, Canada then presented a slide show of photos illustrating the role of IUS since its formation.

On Sunday, September 22, 2013, a round table conference with the speakers was held at the Committee Room of Gurdwara Sahib Greater Montreal, Ville des Dollards-des-Ormeaux, Quebec, Canada from 10AM to 12:00 Noon.

The following scholars were unable to present the papers at the conference but submitted their papers or just the Abstracts of their papers:

Dr Devinder Pal Singh from Brampton, Ontario, Canada and Dr Sukhraj Singh Dhillon from Mountain House, California, USA submitted their informative complete papers entitled, *Formulating Methodology for Interpreting Gurbani and Application of Knowledge from Various Sciences and Logic to Interpret Gurbani*, respectively.

Dr Gulzar Singh Kang, Prof Sri Guru Granth Sahib Study Center, Guru Nanak Dev University, and Dr Gurnam Singh Sanghera from Vancouver, BC, Canada and Dr Gurdev Singh Sangha from Kitchener, Ontario just submitted the Abstracts.

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