

PREAMBLE
CONFERENCE:
GURU NANAK'S PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE
Abbotsford Khalsa Diwan Society Gurdwara, Abbotsford, BC
November 5 & 6, 2011

**Devinder Singh
Chahal**



Scholars with other guests at the conference

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The *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* (IUS) in collaboration with *Khalsa Diwan Society*, Abbotsford, BC and the *Centre for Indo Canadian Studies*, the University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC held a **Conference on Guru Nanak's Philosophy and Science** on November 5 & 6, 2011 on the eve of Centennial Celebration of Abbotsford Gurdwara – The National Heritage of Canada as well as to commemorate Guru Nanak's birthday (*Parkash Divas*). S Kabal Singh, President, Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford welcome the participants and the dignitaries of the Abbotsford City.

The conference was inaugurated by Dr Satwinder Kaur Bains, Director, Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies, the University of the Fraser Valley in the presence of the following dignitaries of Abbotsford city:

Mayor George Peary
Councillor Mr Moe Gill
School Trustee Mr Preet Gill

The dignitaries congratulated the Khalsa Diwan Society, Abbotsford, BC on the Centennial of the National Historic Site Gur Sikh Temple (est.1911). They expressed their thanks to the conference planners, hosted by the Society in collaboration with Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal of IUS and Dr Satwinder Kaur Bains of the University of the Fraser Valley. They highlighted that the Sikhs have contributed to Canadian society for over one hundred years and they have contributed to all facets of life in Canada in a very positive and progressive manner. The Mayor, Councillor and Trustee all expressed that the City of Abbotsford is pleased to be a partner in the centennial celebrations.

During the Period of Renaissance (between 14th and 16th century) scientists started challenging certain concepts of religion in Europe. Meanwhile Guru Nanak (1469-1539)

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during the same Period of Renaissance was challenging some religious concepts by application of the Laws of Nature, which was later called 'Natural Philosophy', and logic in the South Asia and Middle East. Unfortunately soon after the Gurus' period the Bani of Guru Nanak started to be represented by the use of Vedic and Vedantic philosophies rather than use of Science and logic. The philosophy of Guru Nanak embodied in his Bani is still being represented by theologians having no knowledge of science so far. Although recently some theologians having no knowledge of Science and some scientists who have some knowledge of theology have started to interpret Gurbani with the application of Science and logic but satisfactory interpretation of Gurbani is still awaited.

This conference was the first of its kind to initiate interest among Sikh theologians and researchers that there is a great need to look into the philosophy of Guru Nanak, the Founder of SIKHI (Sikhism), from scientific point of view.

Prof Dr Devinder Singh Chahal in his 'Keynote Address' and research paper discussed Guru Nanak's philosophy and Science in details emphasizing that although Religion and Science is being looked from different angles by different people but his study of the Bani of Guru Nanak indicates that interpretation of Bani of Guru Nanak with the application of Science and logic clearly leads us to conclude that the philosophy of Guru Nanak (called *Nanakian Philosophy*) is relevant for the humanity of the Modern Science Age.

Dr Kulbir Singh Thind in his first lecture taught to the audience how to use his Web site, www.sriganth.org, to understanding Gurbani and for research purposes. It is very useful Web site which contains translations in English and Punjabi by Giani Badan Singh, *Faridkot Vala Teeka*, by Prof Sahib Singh, by S Manmohan Singh of SGPC, Dr Sant Singh Khalsa and some Dictionaries and much more.

In his second lecture, *Dr Thind*, mentioned that Religion is a matter of faith whereas Science deals with systematic knowledge of the physical world gained through observation and experimentation. Scientific facts are subject to proof. Scientific knowledge gained during the last 100 years has dramatically changed to way we live. However, human nature has not changed over time. The tendency to believe in the divine also appears to be part of human nature. This is the basis of many religions, many beliefs and many contradictions. But Guru Nanak has shown a different spiritual path based on reasoning.

Mrs Satwinder Kaur Bains, M. Ed., PhD (Candidate) has been exploring views that a few blogs have been representing and what the online Sikhi world portrays about current Sikh feminist views. What she has found has not been startling but it has been eye opening, giving her much to think about. Socio religious discourse at the Gurdwara in a small community in rural British Columbia (BC) and its response or lack thereof to young Sikh women who live in the community, was the subject of her research reported in her paper.

Dr Gurnam Singh Sanghera writes that Guru Nanak's teachings are an all encompassing philosophy of life's aspects--from spiritual and mystical to socio-economic and administrative. He examined certain of his thematic from the combined vantage point of both the human and social sciences. He emphasized that it is both apt and timely to analyze these themes in the context of Guru Nanak's internationally applicable philosophy and theorem. When accounting for today's sociological and cultural advances cum complexity emphasis is placed on Guru Nanak's and Sabd Guru's philosophies with other socio-religious ingredients and their applicability in today's global human relations and their trajectories for the future.

Mr Amandip Singh Sidhu has touched on a number of points on how Nanakian philosophy can be applied to the corporate world, and have provided an example of a firm that employs such philosophies. He says that it is to be noted that the teachings of Guru Nanak and the following Guru's are not philosophical thoughts and poetry but in fact are frameworks that can be applied to most situations to enhance the quality of the outcomes.

Ms Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra writes about Maharaja Ranjit Singh - the *Sheré Punjab* – the sole individual who was able to unite the Sikh empire into a unified entity which rivaled that of the great British Empire. She tried to create some connection between the Sikh ruler and the founder of the ideology of Guru Nanak – the founder of Sikh faith.

The following authors were unable to present their papers at the conference because of some pressing domestic affairs to be tackled by them. The IUS decided to include their papers in the proceedings of this conference since these research papers were prepared for this conference:

Dr Avtar Singh Dhaliwal emphasized in his paper that to comprehend the Truth in Gurbani written and promulgated by Guru Nanak, one has to compare the results of preconceived opinions of the 'Unknown' by historical interpreters based on Theology against the scientific approach appreciated and adapted by Guru Nanak himself and the succeeding Guru Sahiban. They

applied all evidence including religious literatures and praxis in search of the truth and realized that ultimate explanation of reality lies in accepting the freedom of natural phenomena and living by abiding it.

Dr Sukhraj Singh Dhillon discusses that truth cannot contradict itself. Truth from Science and truth from Religion must eventually converge into one grand whole, a unified knowledge of the laws that govern our Universe. Those who fight for superiority of one over the other are blinded by ignorance about both. In fact Science and Religion that blend truth and spirituality constitute the True Religion.

Dr Devinder Pal Singh discusses that everything is subject to change and alteration in the world. There is nothing that is fixed and permanent. Existence is a flux, and a continuous becoming. In Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS), the holy Sikh scripture, the concept of impermanence of things is enunciated to make us aware of the ephemeral nature of life and the material world. It articulates that the awareness and understanding of impermanent nature of things leads to liberation from the sorrows of human life.

Mr Arvinder Singh is of the opinion that ethnic and cultural diversity always pose a serious challenge to international peace, security and stability. Over the last 150 years, international community has experienced violent clashes on the basis of cultural multiplicity. Sikh social order ushers new global society which is based on idea of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity. Sikh Gurus played an extraordinary role in protection and promotion of multicultural society.