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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

FORMULATING METHODOLOGY FOR INTERPRETING GURBANI

September 21, 2013
Montreal, Canada

Dedicated to
Centennial Anniversary of
Max Arthur Macauliffe
(1837-1913)

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Institute for Understanding Sikhism

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Sikhi Sikia Gur Vichar
CALL FOR PAPERS

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 Sikh (Sikhism), founded by Guru Nanak, is declining steadily without being noticed by the custodians of Sikh. The major cause in decline for Sikh 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 Upanishads! This indicates enslavement to the power of Brahmical 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 Mahembra (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 tikkas prove that philosophy of Sikh Gurus was not different than that of Brahmical 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 408 years after the compilation of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib:

Can a standardized methodology be formulated for an ‘authentic’ interpretation of Gurbani?

Current literature indicates paucity in the availability of a precise and comprehensive methodology for interpreting Gurbani. An exception is the formulation of Grammar of Gurbani by Professor Sahib Singh [4]. Professor Chahal [1] has also attempted to discover the methodology used by Guru Nanak while writing his Bani. Therefore, the Institute for Understanding Sikhism (IUS) will be holding an International Conference for “Formulating Methodology for Interpretation of Gurbani” at Montreal, Canada on September 21, 2013.

Interested participants are requested to prepare their papers on “Methodology for Interpretation of Gurbani” on any one or combination of following suggested topics:

1. Ontological and epistemological study of Gurbani to reveal the God conceptualized by Guru Nanak.
2. Study of etymology of certain Gurbani words (Guru, Sabd, Naam, Hukm, etc) to find their appropriate meanings.
3. Interpreting allegoric, metaphorical and symbolic expression in their real perspective.
4. Interpreting Gurbani by distinguishing the questioning and answering phrases.
5. Poetic genre of Gurbani—logic, grammar, mythology and invariant features.
6. Interpreting Gurbani by distinguishing references to Vedantic and Semitic philosophies.
7. Gurbani interpretation with Gurbani maintaining necessary and universal essence.
8. Application of knowledge from various sciences and logic to interpret Gurbani

When writing and presenting papers, please, start documentation by quoting Bani of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikh, first then that of the other Sikh Gurus followed by that of Bhagats – Just like the sequence maintained by Guru Arjan in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib. Finally Standardized Methodology for Interpreting Gurbani will be formulated based on the results of all research papers.

Special emphasis of the conference is to discuss Formulating Methodology for Interpreting Gurbani, however, following additional topics will also be considered:

1. Nanakian Philosophy and Science
2. Amritbani as a trajectory of a distinct identity.
3. The Status of women in Sikhism
5. Attitudes towards Homosexuality amongst Sikhs.

Deadline for Abstracts (250-300 words):
15th May 2013.

Deadline for submission of completed papers:
1st September 2013.

REFERENCES