
REPORT ON LAHORE CONFERENCE: GURU NANAK HERITAGE OF INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE February 18, 2006

Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, PhD
Institute for Understanding Sikhism
4418 Martin-Plouffe, Laval, Quebec, Canada H7W 5L9
sikhism@iuscanada.com

I reached Lahore with my wife on February 16 after crossing Wagah Border. All the delegates were invited by Mr Tayab S Hasan for dinner on February 15. Since I reached one day late, he invited me, my wife and Dr Harbans Lal for Dinner next day on 16th. Mr Tayab S Hasan is our SD member, who arranged a special dinner for me without spices since I am allergic to spices. He is really a very pleasant and lovable person and we enjoyed the dinner and evening with him.

In Lahore, the conference originally planned for February 17-19 was reduced to one-day on February 18. This was due to the fact that most of the speakers from India could not get their travel visa to Pakistan since the organizers failed to communicate to the High Commission of Pakistan in Delhi as was told by some who could not get the visa.

The International Conference on Guru Nanak Heritage of Interfaith Understanding for Harmony and Peace was held on February 18, 2006 at the Ambassador Hotel of Lahore where Sikh and Muslim scholars made presentations on contributions of Guru Nanak in bringing Interfaith Understanding at the Ambassador Hotel of Lahore where Sikh and Muslim scholars presented their contributions of Guru Nanak in bringing Interfaith Understanding. Many observers told us that this was the first conference of its kind ever held in Pakistan.

The stage of this conference was organized by Dr Zafar Cheema, PhD, Director, Dyal Singh Research & Cultural Forum, Lahore, Pakistan and Bhai Harbans Lal. It can be said that it was quite a successful conference and we can call it as the first International Conference on Guru Nanak Heritage of Interfaith Understanding for Harmony and Peace. I wish that such conferences should be arranged in future which should be well planned before.

Academically I would say this conference was very successful. The first session after inauguration was moderated by Prof Devinder Singh Chahal, President, IUS and was presided by Honorable Mr Justice Ali Nawaz Chowhan, Judge United Nation's International Criminal Tribunal, The Hague, The Netherlands. The first paper, *Nanakian Philosophy for World Peace* was presented by Prof Chahal with slide on power point. It was received very well by the delegates, local guests, and the audience. It left a very good impression about Nanakian Philosophy for world peace. The paper on, *Contributions of Baba Nanak and Islam for Peace*, was presented by Syed Afzal Haider, Senior Advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan, and the author of a book, *Baba Nanak*. Besides two more papers not very related to the interfaith understanding were presented in this session. Hon Mr Chowhan in his presidential address appreciated the speakers for presenting informative papers and he himself presented very informative information on Interfaith Understanding to maintain peace between two countries, India and Pakistan and in the world. It was very clear that holding of such International Conferences on Guru Nanak Heritage of Interfaith Understanding can definitely develop harmony and peace between India and Pakistan in particular and for the humanity of the world in general.

In the afternoon second successful session was held. It is learnt from Bhai Dr Harbans Lal that all the papers presented in the conference will be published in the proceedings.

According to Bhai Harbans Lal this conference was especially rescheduled to coincide the date February 20 when 139 non-violent Sikh volunteers gave their lives to liberate *Janam Asthan* Sri Nanakana Sahib from the corrupt managers and clerics in 1921. This day has not been commemorated for the past 59 years due to partition. Sardar Ganga Singh Dhillon of Sri Nanakana Sahib Foundation of which he is the Founding President and



Delegates with Choudhary Hamid Ali Khan, Chief Coordinator, Reception and Arrangement Committee at his residence for breakfast before going to Nanakana Sahib.

Bhai Harbans Lal is the Founding Executive Vice President, inspired to start celebrating this event again beginning from this year. When we reached at Nanakana Sahib on February 20, 2006, there was not even a single person to attend this great event. The organizers found this situation only when they reached there. What could be the reasons for not holding this important event might be well known to the organizers.

and its relevance to our Gurdwara problems today. This commemoration was revived after 59 years of a pause due to partition of 1947. This commemoration was held in the outer Hall where the controversial and much talked Golden Palki was installed in a glass by the DSGMC, New Delhi. The Aad Guru Granth Sahib was also installed (*Parkashed*) in this Palki.



Delegates at Gurdwara Nanakana Sahib - Janam Asthan of Guru Nanak.

However, we commemorated the martyrdom day of those who gave their lives in a non-violent struggle for the liberation of our shrines. A Sabd was recited by Dr Kuldip Singh Hanjan of California, a poem written by Dr Teja Singh (SD Member) from Edmonton was recited by Mr Iqbal Qaiser. All the delegates spoke on the subject of Gurdwara Reformation Movement of the past century

We also visited other Gurdwaras in Nanakana Sahib associated with Guru Nanak. Besides, we also visited a Khalsa School in Nanakana Sahib City. We met with the Principal, Mr M Afzal, who explained that there are about 100 Sikh students all of them *kesadhari* with *patkas* on their heads.

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After visiting Gurdwara in Lahore on 17th and finishing conference on 18th we visited Gurdwara Kartarpur on 19th. Before departure, breakfast was served to all the delegates by Choudhary Hamid Ali Khan, Chief Coordinator, Reception and Arrangement Committee at his residence. We held a congregation to pray for world peace. Guru Nanak (1469-1539) spent last 18 years of his life in this town that he founded to build a community of spiritual householders who would spread peace and harmony. We paid our homage to his burial mausoleum built by Muslims and his cremation ground where Samadhi was built by the Hindus, both laying side by side, bearing witness to his teachings for the whole humanity irrespective of any caste, race, class status, etc. Dr Kuldip Singh Hanjan of California recited a Sabd and Mr Iqbal Qaiser recited a poem written by Dr Teja Singh of Edmonton, Canada who could not participate in the conference.

Mr Manjit Singh who was still busy there in renovation of the Gurdwara and Mr Iqbal Qaiser, the author of *Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*, told us that this Gurdwara was in ruin after the flood and mud and water was flowing on the ground floor of the Gurdwara for a long time. Almost all other houses nearby were destroyed by flood in river Ravi but Gurdwara still stayed there. They told that the first aid of \$20,000 for restoration of Gurdwara came from Dr Teja Singh of Edmonton (SD member) followed by more such aids. Further financial aid from other sources has enabled the sevadars to restore to its present magnificent building.

Now a proposal to build a corridor of about a couple of kilometers between Kartarpur and Fateh Garh Sahib and a bridge over the river Ravi is going on. This will not only help the people of India to visit this important Sikh shrine easily but will also build a strong friendship between India and Pakistan.

Now Dr Teja Singh and me are looking forward to initiate a project for including Kartarpur Gurdwara in the list of UNESCO Heritage Status. We should not forget to mention another milestone. We successfully negotiated a plan to establish a Sikh Resource and Research Center at Dyal Singh Library in Lahore. This center will welcome donations of books and other research material, and provide facility for scholars to produce Urdu literature on Sikhs and their religion. Although Lahore bears many imprints of Muslim Sikh relationship, there is no source of information on Sikhism for the new generation of Muslim communities in Pakistan. This center should be a step in

the right direction.

I, on behalf of the Institute for Understanding Sikhism, presented the latest issue of *UNDERSTANDING SIKHISM*, a copy of *JAP: The Essence of Nanakian Philosophy* by DS Chahal, *Sabd Guru to Granth Guru* by DS Chahal, and a booklet – *Some Salient Principles of Philosophy of Sikhism* to Dr Zafar Cheema, Director, Dyal Singh Library. The IUS will continue to send its future publications free of cost.

The most important achievement is that I was able to decipher the writings on a big stone monument (15 ft high and 6 feet wide) installed in a park on the sea shore of Istanbul, Turkey. This monument was discovered by me in 1994 when I visited Istanbul, Turkey. Mr Iqbal Qaiser, the author of the '*Sikh Shrines in Pakistan*' and Mr Syed Afzal Haider, Senior Advocate Supreme Court of Pakistan and the author of a book, '*Baba Nanak*', helped me to decipher a part of the writing which indicated that it is definitely connected with Guru Nanak. It is surprising that a monument with writings about Guru Nanak is installed in Istanbul. We are visualizing that Guru Nanak's travel could be extended to Turkey after his visit to Mecca and Medina before coming back to India via Bagdad. Our further research for deciphering the whole writing is going on.



Mr Iqbal Qaiser, Mr Syed Afzal Haider, Prof Devinder Singh Chahal trying to decipher the inscription about Guru Nanak from a picture of the stone monument found in Istanbul, Turkey.