

Need for Establishing Sikh Museums

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Legacy: The 2006 budget was released by President Bush on February 7, 2005. His Administration proposed to cut 184 Federal programs completely and also proposed nearly across-the-board decrease in all the other programs. I participated in Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. on Feb. 15-16, 2005 and visited our Congressional Delegates on Capitol Hill to help restore US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding. While there, I visited some of the museums and research centers created by Smithsonian Institute and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

There are eighteen museums and galleries, the National Zoo and nine research centers - housing 143.5 million objects which are most significant, artistic, scientific and historic American treasures. While there, I saw a new addition of "**The Sikhs: Legacy of the Punjab**," as part of National Museum of Natural History. The heritage, religion and culture of the Sikhs, the eighteenth century swords, contemporary Sikh art and crafts, replica of holy site of Darbar Sahib, the photos of Sakhis of Gurus, songs of the Sikhs, recitation of Gurbani, etc. are on display in the gallery devoted to Sikh Religion.

The gallery has been created by the efforts of devoted Sikhs led by Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, the founder of Sikh Foundation of San Jose, California.

Dr. Kapany, along with Jogi Bhajan, (now deceased) is a pioneer in advancing the cause of Sikh Religion in America and beyond. Both of them brightened the lives of people wherever they went to spread the word as volunteers as they took time to share their talents, efforts, scholarship, dedication and care. **All Sikhs should shower appreciation on them for their efforts of spreading awareness of Sikh Religion in their respective endeavors.**

According to Harmeet Dhillon, in her own words, in Indian Life and Style magazine, Dr. Kapany, a scientist, philanthropist and entrepreneur, is a connoisseur of Sikh art and culture. He started Sikh Foundation in 1967 to propagate Sikh art, literature and scholarship. In essence, he helped to establish Chairs of Sikh Studies at major US Universities and helped to publish more than seventy books relating to Sikh history, religion and literature. Dr. Kapany has collected art work concerning Sikh Gurus and Sikh monarchs.

An exhibition "Splendors of the Punjab: Sikh Art and Literature" was arranged in 1992 by Dr. Kapany with the help of U.C. Berkeley and Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. Such exhibitions were also arranged in London and Toronto. Satinder Kaur Kapany Gallery of Sikh Art at Asian Art Museum in San Francisco was arranged in April, 2003. "Heritage of the Sikhs" an exhibition at Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C. was his new addition. He is trying to open exhibitions of Sikh Art at Victoria and Albert Museums in London and Lahore Museum in Pakistan. Sikh museum at Lahore would include the priceless collection of Princess Bamba Dilip Singh which is at Lahore Fort presently. Major art work related to the origin of Sikh Religion, Sikh Gurus, and Sikh Kingdoms are housed in several small museums. These articles will be preserved in new Sikh Museum to fulfill the mission of Sikh Foundation. Dr. Kapany has arranged a commission to streamline available Sikh art. Sikh artist Arpana Caur is member of this commission. The purpose of the commission is to depict the events of Sikh Holocaust (1984-94) and explore such events in the Sikh art. The exhibits will commemorate the tragic

event in Sikh history, so Sikhs will never forget the attack on Darbar Sahib. The future Sikh generations will look at the displayed items and devise ways to prevent future holocausts throughout the world.

'*Museum*' is a Greek word meaning - a place sacred to the Muses. Hence, museum is an institution for the collection, preservation and display of objects of interest. Several museums function under the direction of governments of cities, counties or districts, countries, states, foundations, colleges or universities. Several stable countries have museums in their capitals. Smithsonian Institute and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C is the largest collection of American historical objects. Other notable museums are the National Gallery of Canada and National Museum of Canada in Ottawa; the British Museum, the National and Tate Galleries and Victoria and Albert Museum in London; Louvre museum in Paris, etc.

Punjabi American Heritage Society of Yuba City, Calif. is working with Sutter County Community Museum to add a section for Sikhs who established their homes in this region as immigrants. Sikhs in different regions can make such requests as well.

American Scene: There are several types of museums in the world. One outstanding example is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Los Angeles which represents history through the astonishing collection of artifacts, photographs, films and eyewitness testimony. The museum offers several stories developed by children and families who suffered in Holocaust during World War II (1939-1943). The history of Holocaust is represented from the prospective of young people growing up in Nazi Germany. The Sikhs should develop such museum for their three Holocausts which will help the future generations to prevent genocides in the future.

A section of every Sikh museum devoted to Sikh Holocausts will help Sikhs to get rid of traumatic stress and provide healing touch from the grief and horrendous attacks of Muslim and Hindu rulers. Sikh Holocausts are part and parcel of the life and experience of every Sikh. The displays should include the articles related to sacrifices of Sikh martyrs who died for the common benefit of all Sikhs. The vibrant Sikh people today are the result of their sacrifices.

The present day Sikhs should not forget them. The martyrs are part of Sikh lives and their display in museum will show they still live among Sikhs. Also, the display of victims of Sikh Holocausts will be the gruesome reminder of injustice.

Learning from History: Sikhs have been shaped by good and bad times in history similar to any other society. The articles in the museum will honour all those Sikhs who gave their lives in the holocausts. Similarly, the steady gains made by Singh Sabhas and sacrifices of the martyrs are the firm foundation of Sikh thoughts. The stories of these innocent victims will revolutionize the motivation in Sikh youth to be progressive in their thinking and actions. Before the Third Sikh Holocaust (1984-94), it was no secret that the perceptions and the voices of Sikh people were missing from the world scene. Sikh religion gained momentum and has progressed a lot in the recent years. Presently, Sikh religion is the fifth largest religion of the world. Installing the articles related to the landmark adventures will show the Sikh sacrifices and glory to our future generation.

Ludhiana's Rural Museum: There are very few museums in Punjab. Museum of Rural Life of Punjab at Punjab Agricultural University at Ludhiana has preserved several articles used by Sikh farmers. Notably some articles on display are dati, datra, rumba, gandasa, valna, gadda, phala, shanna, thali, phulkari, parat, garhwa, gharha, dhid shangi, langoja, tabla, dhol, jutti, dola, hal, etc. Darbar Sahib museum-Ajaibghar is the home of one of the largest and most diverse collection of Sikh religious and cultural objects which explore social, linguistic,

cultural, religious and political aspects of Sikh history. The museum serves as a showcase for a variety of pictures developed by Sikh artists. Some of the original creations depict-how effective art can be to tell a story. The impressive Sikh history collection portrays the excitement in a visitor. Ajaibghar was destroyed along with Sikh library during Indian army attack in June, 1984, as part of much larger Third Sikh Holocaust (1984-1994). However, it has been revived by the Sikhs in the last few years.

Khalsa Heritage: There is another museum which is still in developmental stages. Khalsa Heritage Complex is being constructed at Anandpur Sahib to install Anandpur Sahib Museum to commemorate the celebration of 300 years of Khalsa and 500 years of Sikh religion. Piara Singh Bhogal of Anandpur Sahib Foundation has requested Sikhs to pay for the construction of the museum. All the Sikhs should help him to raise the needed funds. The purpose of this museum is to preserve the constant struggle of Sikhs, their triumphs, valor, heroism and martyrdom. The opening of such world class Sikh museum will be a major event in present day Sikh history. Sikhs all over the world should try to be present at the grand opening or final inauguration ceremony of this museum which represents myriad generations- past, present and future. Art represents the soul of humanity. Several life processes occur all the times, some are forgotten and others make permanent impression on mind. These characteristic feelings intertwine and develop thoughts giving rise to different stories. The stories in the form of art in the museum represent history. Thus the museums represent the lives of ancestors and present day people. The people have inherent desire to see museums as they narrate stories of history, art, culture, language, religion etc. The tourist does not have to ask questions about such topics from people on the streets. In fact, all the cities in Punjab should have tourist attraction which will cause movement of people, extend secularism and social improvement - thus breaking the backbone of caste system, poverty, regionalism, linguistic confinements, religious chauvinism, etc.

Resource Centre: Since the people are opting for new technology and western way of life, the old techniques or instruments are not being used and should be preserved for future references. Sikh art is scattered throughout Punjab villages and towns. Several sacred objects and artifacts of contemporary Sikh way of life are being neglected in homes. These should be collected, salvaged and preserved before they disappear. Farmer's museum should preserve the old tools, household utensils and agriculture equipments.

Opening of Cultural Resource Center is another way to preserve Sikh way of life, both from the past and for the future. Actually, such collection is Sikh National Treasure which should be preserved in National Sikh Museum. A part of museum should be reserved for near extinct species of plants and animals. Monuments of old historic Sikh buildings and Gurdwaras and zoos for domestic and wild animals as well as plant reserves can also be created.

It is imperative that museum works as a museum- a place for curious individual, a place of beauty and knowledge, a place for shacking off doubt, a place for finding facts from the past for the discovery of the future. The place should never be used for any political purpose by any party. At the first sight, a visitor would glance at the fulfillment of Sikh vision, thought, planning, passion, hope and action that has gone into the development of a museum. The visitor will also explore Sikh religion and history as well as learning factors affecting both. The museum holdings will show facets of Sikh history, religion, Sikh rites, antiques, industrial art, sculptures, mineral specimens, fossils, stuffed animals, primitive artifacts, furniture, mechanical devices, decorated objects, souvenir items, pottery, cradles, locksmith works, baskets, wooden objects, needle works, carpentry objects, bead works, wood works,

goldsmith items, silversmith works, embroidery, khaddi items, ceremonies, games, folk songs, Bhangra, language, mothers songs such as Lories and Bolis, industrial objects, diagrams, illustrations, festivals, cultural life and spiritual items. Those facets will be enough to throw new light on the minds of visitors. Sikhs flourished in the rich and fertile plains of Punjab with its lush, green, and beautiful fields and waterways representing their life, blood and soul. The entrance of the museum should have maps of Punjab where the Sikhs are living for the last half millennium. The waterways, streams, hills, fields, cities, villages, towns, streets, lakes and mountains should be depicted in the maps placed in the museums.

[End of Part I]
- To be concluded
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