

# Celebration by Sri Hemkunt Group of Kenya A Report from Kenya

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MEMBERS OF SRI HEMKUNT GROUP (Jatha) of Kenya had undertaken 21st sacred journey to Sri Hemkunt Sahib in September 2002 under the leadership of the Chairperson of the Group, Mrs Ajeet Kaur Arora. This event and the 50th anniversary of organized jathas under the management of Chief Khalsa Diwan, Kanpur, India, to 'Sumer Parbat' in the Himalayan Mountains, where Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji (in his previous life as "Dusht Daman" is believed to have performed deep meditation that made him become one with God) was joyously celebrated by Sri Hemkunt Group (Jatha) of Kenya at the Simba (Sikh) Union Club, Nairobi, on Saturday, 22nd March 2003.

The highlights of the programme were kirtan; inter-faith prayers, launch of book on 'Hemkunt and the Valley of Flowers' and a slide show on Sri Hemkunt Sahib.

To perform kirtan the Kenya Group had invited a young Kirtani Jatha, comprising Bhai Manpreet Singh 'Anuragi', his wife Satnam Kaur and brother-in-law, Gurpreet Singh, from Jhansi, UP, India. The Kenyan Jatha had seen these youngsters in 2002 at Sri Hemkunt Sahib performing kirtan. These youngsters thrilled Kenyan Sikh sangat with their own musical composition of "Hemkunt, Parbhat Hai Jaha(n)" in ecstatic and melodious voices.

The Hemkunt Group invited religious dignitaries of all leading religious faiths, like Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Judaism, for the inter-faith prayers. All these dignitaries, led by our own Kirtani Jatha, took the opportunity to pray for world peace and tolerance by all religious faiths, poignantly a few days before the start of 'War in Iraq'!

The booklet 'Hemkunt and the Valley of Flowers' edited and compiled by Mr Satwant Singh Mahajan, Assistant Secretary of Sri Hemkunt Group of Kenya and Convenor of the 22nd March programme, was launched by Ms Heather Michaud, a Canadian, who works in the foreign service of Canada and is currently based in Nairobi. Heather has visited Sri Hemkunt Sahib more than 25 times in the last five years, a feat many Sikhs have not been able to achieve. She studied Anthropology, choosing Sikh Religion as her subject and has written many articles on Sri Hemkunt Sahib and Sikh religion in general. Recently she led a 'Kar Sewa' campaign of clearing up garbage and refuse left by *Yatris* on the way to Sri Hemkunt Sahib. Heather thrilled the audience by a talk and slide show of beautiful photographs of Sri Hemkunt Sahib and the Valley of Flowers personally taken by her during visits there.

Mr Baldip Singh Rihal, Hon Secretary of the Kenya Group, welcomed hundreds of people of different faiths who came to the programme. He explained the significance of how the Group was formed and, although being one of the smaller cultural societies within the Sikh institutions in Kenya, the achievements it had made in its objectives were significant. Every year the Group has organised a Kanyan Jatha to visit Sri Hemkunt Sahib since 1981; and fostered and propagated Sikh culture, history and religion among Sikh children through various youth programmes,

like symposiums and debates. In 1994, the Group hosted Sri Hemkunt Foundation International Youth Symposium in Nairobi, when Sardar Saran Singh, editor of '**The Sikh Review**' came to Kenya as the chief guest.

A day before Bhai Manpreet Singh 'Anuragi' and his Jatha left for home on 18th April 2003, a Youth Forum was held where young Sikhs of Kenya exchanged very interesting views on Sikhism and its tenets with the youngsters from India.

