

The Marble Slabs at Harmandir Sahib: A Pakistani Canard *Tarlochan Singh, M.P. **

** Translated from original Punjabi, received from the distinguished Parliamentarian.*

The Daily 'AJIT', in its issue dated January 20, 2008 referred to certain Press Reports, giving rise to a new controversy, published in various newspapers in Pakistan. The controversial report suggest that the marble used in Harmandir Sahib, Amritsar, during the regime of Maharaja Ranjit Singh was actually taken out from mausoleum of Jahangir, and from others Dargahs, and even from the famous Shalimar Bagh of Lahore.

I remember during my visit to Lahore in 1955, the guide who took me to Jahangir's mausoleum and to Nurjahan's grave, told us that its precious marble has been stolen! I corrected him on the spot that Sikh cannot even think of such sacrilege. Besides there are many other marauders who have, from time-to-time, attacked or fought a battle for possession of Lahore. The graves could have been damaged by such assailants.

It is time the Sikh historians probed such frivolous and provocative allegations, based on appropriate historical references - to bring the truth about this unwarranted controversy, and to put the matter in the right perspective

Since I was once the Head of the Museum and Archeological Department, under Government of India, I have gained good knowledge about the origin and histories of many Heritage buildings, including Harmandir Sahib. **To my knowledge, the present structure or Darbar Sahib was actually re-built after the attack of Ahmed Shah Abdali in mid 18th century. Abdali not only destroyed the then existing shrine but filled the holy Sarovar with debris. When the Sikh Misls regained sovereign power in Punjab, and foreign rulers were thrown out of Punjab, it was only then the reconstruction work of Harmandir Sahib was undertaken. Architects and masons who did a marvelous job of restoration, were mainly from Rajasthan. Interiors of Harmandir Sahib were artistically painted in Rajasthani style, and there was little use of marble.**

In 1801, when Maharaja Ranjit Singh came to power he appointed Sardar Lehna Singh Majithia in-charge of further restoration, to bring it to the gilt exteriors by gold plating the shrine. The artistic painting on the outer walls of Harmandir Sahib, (which were later covered with gold plates) were quite visible when - in the recent past – old gold plates were replaced with new one by the Nishkam Sewak Jatha. The beautiful historical artistic work of those days can be seen on the upper front side of Darshani Deorhi (unless it has been white-washed in the name of *Kar Sewa* by existing managing committee), Since long, I have been appealing to SGPC that the Rajasthani artistic work on Darshani Deori should be reinstalled.

The marble can only be seen on the side walls of the bridge that connect Darshani Deorhi with Darbar Sahib, which was originally brought from Rajasthan and even – as per the record – was once looted on way to Amritsar. During those days - due to many circumstantial reasons, and old belief system, the Sikh in general would not use anything which was touched by a beef eating Muslim. How can they use marble or stones for their most sacred place removed from graves and Mausoleums? If Maharaja Ranjit Singh could afford to put gold worth lakhs of rupees on the dome and interiors, why could he not afford slabs of marble for the holy Harmandir Sahib? There are also

instances that Maharaja Ranjit Singh spent generously on the Shahi Masjid, at Lahore (next to the Fort and his own Samadhi) to give it a new look. When the Kotwal of Lahore was a Muslim, how could he have allowed any one to remove the marbles from Jahangir's Mausoleum or Nurjahan's graves?

As per Sikh traditions anything, which is, once used, cannot be re-cycled for the use of a sacred place. It is also evidence from the historical records that when the Granthi of Darbar Sahib, in 1818, refused to accept the gold-embodied canopy from Maharaja Ranjit Singh (because it had already been used) how could those in charge accept second-hand slabs from the Mausoleum. All the marbles and other artistic works (including Marble *Jallis* and *Galiyaras* - on the bridge- between Darshani Deorhi and Harmandir Sahib) had been accomplished by *Rajasthani* artisans out of Sikhs own contributions.

The objective behind this misleading myth and canard in Pakistani Media is apparent: Fanatical elements in Pakistan do not want to see amity and good relationship between Sikhs and Muslims, because they noticed a distinct improvement in Indo-Pak relations. Now, with the help of Sikh Historians, we should urgently do something to stop this baseless and nefarious propaganda.

The holy Harmandir Sahib has emerged as a universal place of worship for the people of all faiths across the globe, and something needs to be done to curb such malicious reporting. *The Daily Ajit* which has a good rapport in Pakistan Punjab; should take a lead by disseminating correct information about the Sikh traditions for the benefit of in Pakistani scholars.

