

# **Sikh Shrines in Pakistan - Evidence of woeful neglect and apathy - A Report**

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“The historical Sikh Gurdwaras and other Sikh historical monuments in India and Pakistan are being lost due to the utter neglect of their custodians, both in India and Pakistan.” said Dr. Mohinder Singh, @ Director, National Institute of Punjab Studies, New Delhi.

He was delivering a talk at San Jose State University under the aegis of the Punjabi Studies Program of the University. A student club, Punjabi Alumni and Student Association formed by the students was inaugurated on this occasion. In Pakistan, barring a few Gurdwaras, like Janam Sthan Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji at Nankana Sahib and Panja Sahib at Hassan Abdal, more than two hundred comparatively less known Gurdwaras, are in a bad shape. Some of them have already vanished, and others at the verge of extinction. It is happening due to the fact that the Sikh community does not have access to those Gurdwaras. In India, a large number of Gurdwaras, commemorating the sacred memory of the Sikh Gurus, are either decaying due to lack of proper maintenance, or are being recklessly modified by the SGPC. In their place, huge costly marble structures are being raised, by removing the original monument sanctified by the Gurus. Dr. Singh showed photographs of many relics that have since been removed from the site.

Dr. Mohinder Singh stated that the Sants doing Kar Sewa, at the behest of the SGPC or DGMC, though honest and well-meaning, yet the people around them who are managing large finances on their behalf, have vested interest. Thus millions of dollars donated by the Sikh community are not supposed to have been spent properly on such projects. The worst thing, which has happened in this process, is that, the original objects or places, made sacred by the touch of the great Gurus’ feet, are being removed. Thus original objects making Sikh history are being fast removed from the site, thus destroying the sacred memories of the Sikh Masters. The havoc played by the custodians of this heritage with Gurdwaras is going to make a devastating impact on the history of the Punjab and needs to be checked at the earliest. He stressed the need of saving the old and original structures and conserving them with the techniques available to do so.

He also regretted that the UNESCO proposal of making Sri Harimandir Sahib an International Heritage was rejected by the SGPC without giving proper consideration to it. He criticized those who rejected the dossiers made by the UNESCO; hardly any of them read their contents.

In his 45- minute talk, he also pleaded for the preservation of scores of hand written copies of Sri Guru Granth Sahib lying at different places in India and abroad, which are fast decaying. He said that the Sikhs are lucky that their Holy Book, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, was authenticated by Sri Guru Arjun Dev Ji himself. Sarcastically, he said, “we are spending millions of rupees on constructing Sri Guru Granth Sahib Bhavans, without conserving and preserving the old handwritten copies of the Granth which have a great historical value.”

Dr. Singh said that it was unfortunate that marks of history were vanishing at such a fast speed that our posterity will be deprived of their heritage in original form of which our community is so proud. There is a need of our community to wake up and intervene in this situation in order to prevent the wiping out of the marks of our glorious history.

The talk was presided over by Dr. Karl Toepfer, Interim Dean, College of Humanities and Arts, and followed by a cultural evening, formally inaugurated by Dr. Mahinder Singh Madan, co-ordinator, SJSU Punjabi Studies Funding Support. The members of the Punjabi Alumni and Student Association organized it. Mr. Gurveer Singh, convenor of the Association welcomed the guests. Giddha performance by two teams, namely '*Tian Teej Dian*' and '*Tiranjanan dian Kurian*' were greatly applauded by the audience. The dances were produced respectively, by Arshinder Kaur and Surjit Kaur. Sukriti Kaur, an alumna of Association, enacted the poem, '*Ambi da Buta*' written by the legendary Punjabi poet, Mohan Singh. An eminent Bay Area poet and singer, Azad Jullundhary, regaled the audience by his songs. Mrs. Paramjit Kaur Uppal gave a power point presentation, featuring the Glimpses of Punjab. Zahid Chowdhary, a Pak-American singer in San Jose, sang Sufi songs of famous Punjabi mystic poets, which were highly appreciated by the audience. Parmjit Singh and Renu of Cool Women, Stockton, also sang songs embellished by rhythm and melody.

Interestingly, the audience comprised of Punjabis of both Indian and Pakistani origin who expressed a great joy over this re-union based on common shared heritage of the same land, which now stands divided into two parts.

The program was organized by Punjabi Alumni and Student Association comprising of Gurveer Singh, Prabhjot Singh, Geetpal Kaur, Gurminder Singh Kamboj and Navdeep Singh, who with their tireless hard work, made this event a roaring success. □