

# **International Seminar on Teachings of Guru Granth Sahib - A Report**

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Recently there was held an International Seminar on Teachings of Guru Granth Sahib at Pune. It was the first in the series of 4 such seminars which will be organized all over India, culminating in the grand finale at New Delhi. The event was sponsored by Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> year of the installation of Shri Guru Granth Sahib. The ministry chose Bhai Vir Singh Sadan, New Delhi to undertake this task of organizing such seminars in all the four parts of the country i.e. North, South, East and West. Accordingly Bhai Vir Singh Sadan chose Pune in the West to kickstart this momentous event.

The seminar at Pune was organized by the Dept. of Philosophy, University of Pune. It was held from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> July 2005. The most unique thing about the event was that, though it was an intellectual exercise where noted Sikh and non-sikh scholars were invited not only from all over India but also from abroad, yet an attempt was made to involve the local populace at the maximum. Accordingly the inauguration ceremony was held at and under the aegis of the main Gurudwara of Pune- Gurudwara Nanak Darbar. It was a path breaking idea and it ensured a large participation even when the event, later on, shifted to the lecture halls of the University.

Further the event was inaugurated by Bibi Jagir Kaur, the S.G.P.C. president. It was a masterstroke and her visit to Pune gave the event a very wide publicity. Also by involving the SGPC, the event was made national. Other SGPC members who attended were S. Manjeet Singh Calcutta (Ex Punjab Education Minister) and S. Jaswinder Singh (Advocate). These two gentlemen sat through the entire three day seminar and contributed a lot in the discussions with their comments and insights. One another distinguished guest was Giani Kewal Singh, the Ex-Jathedar of Takht Shri Damdama Sahib. He too, keenly participated in the entire seminar and sat through all the papers, often contributing with his rich experience. He was humility personified. S. Manjeet Singh Calcutta, despite being a politician, surprised everybody by his learned comments and his ability to speak extempore on any topic. It was a humbling experience to see such important people perform so honorably.

The main seminar had such erudite speakers like Dr. J.S. Neki, Prof. H.S.Pannu, and Prof. H.S.Virk. While Dr. Neki presented the Keynote address and spoke on 'Sikh Religion and Guru Granth Sahib', Prof. Pannu presented a very interesting paper on 'Time: A Gurbani Perspective' and Prof. Virk spoke on his favourite topic 'Glimpses of a Scientific Vision in Guru Granth Sahib'. All these papers were very interesting and thought provoking. These 3 highly acclaimed speakers took the discussions in the seminar to a very high level, yet explained everything in such a simple and beautiful manner so that the audience could appreciate it. Besides them the notable speakers were Prof. Ashok Kolaskar, Vice-Chancellor, University of Pune, Prof. S.S. More, Head, Department of Philosophy, University of Pune, Prof D.A. Gangadhar, Benares Hindu University and Prof. Ashok Kamat and Dr. S.E. Bhelke of Pune.

But the find of the seminar were some young speakers who mesmerized the audience and literally dominated the event. The Generation Next of Sikh Scholars justified the trust reposed in them and presented highly intelligent papers. Their refreshing choice of subjects

and their critical analysis was immediately liked by one and all. Besides all of them won the hearts of everyone by their simplicity and humility and the way they interacted and mixed with everyone including the audience. It was obvious that these scholars had 'arrived' and were ready to take the torch forward from their illustrious seniors, whenever required.

#### **Gen Next.**

1. S. Sarabjeet Singh - is Assistant Prof. of Journalism, Centre for Communication, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. This ever smiling young man spoke on the topic-'Way to enjoy eternal bliss'. His knowledge of SGGS is impeccable and he quotes the verses at will. But he is equally knowledgeable about other thoughts. He emphasized that 'Each religion should strive to recover its dormant spirituality' and concluded by quoting Stephen R. Covey-'We are not human beings on a spiritual journey. We are spiritual beings on a human journey.'
2. Dr. J.S Rai - Dr Rai came from U.K. and is the Director of U.K. based Sikh Human Rights Group. He is also a highly learned man and has done yeoman's job for Sikhi and Sikhism. He presented the most thought provoking paper -'Resolving Paradoxes and locating the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib'. He is very sincere and hugely dedicated man.
3. Dr. R.K. Rohi - Dr. Rajindr Kaur Rohi is a Reader of Religious Studies, Punjabi University, Patiala and she presented her paper on 'Guru Granth Sahib: An interfaith Scripture for social harmony.'
4. Dr. Paramveer Singh - Dr. Singh is a Lecturer, Sikh Studies, Deptt of Correspondence Courses, Punjabi University, Patiala. He has a book to his credit-'Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji De Darshnik Chintan' in Punjabi. His topic at the seminar was 'Guru Granth Sahib- An Ecumenical Perspective'
5. Dr. Shashi Bala- Dr Shashi is a Reader in Deptt. Of Guru Nanak Studies, G.N.D.U., Amritsar and is also an accomplished writer with books and papers to her credit. She spoke on 'Guru Granth Sahib: Beacon-Light for Subaltern Revival'.
6. Advocate Jaswinder Singh. He is perhaps the youngest member of SGPC and one of the most dynamic ones. He is associated with the Akal Purakh Ki Fauj whose website is quite popular all over the world. And still more popular is the GLZ -Gurmat Learning Zone, the largest Sikh Yahoo group. His topic was 'Message of Guru Granth Sahib to the Youth.

The spectacular success of this seminar owes a lot to the husband- wife team of Prof. Parduman Singh and Dr. Surjeet Kaur Chahal. This highly devout Sikh family is very active in promoting Sikhism in Pune. Prof. Parduman Singh is working as a Lt. Col. at the Armed Forces Medical College, Pune and is Head of its Bio-Technology Department. Dr. Surjeet Kaur Chahal is working with the Department of Philosophy, University of Pune and it is they who brought this seminar to the city of Pune and organized it successfully. Both of them worked tirelessly and even their two teenaged sons took a very active role in the organization of the event. The Pune University reposed complete faith in them and coordinated with them for the organization of the seminar.

In fact it is because of the efforts of these two enterprising and devout Sikhs that University of Pune has recently agreed to constitute a Chair on Sikh studies. It is a very prestigious University and already has Chairs on Jainism, Sant Namdeo, Sant Tukaram, etc. The announcement to this effect was made by the Vice-chancellor of the University of Pune, during the inauguration of the Seminar and in fact Bibi Jagir Kaur was considerate enough to immediately announce a grant of Rs. 10 Lakhs on behalf of SGPC. The Constitution of the Chair requires more funds, but the duo is hopeful that they will be able to raise it.

The event was overseen by Prof. Amrik Singh, the highly acclaimed Sikh Scholar, on behalf of Bhai Vir Singh Sadan, New Delhi. He was highly satisfied by the quality of papers that were presented and with the organization of the seminar. In fact all the speakers had send their papers in advance and the organizers got them printed in a book form and distributed it to all, at the start of the event itself. This went a long way in enhancing greater appreciation of the seminal work of these scholars.

Overall it was a highly successful seminar and those who are interested in going through the papers, the same can be provided to them. One set is being sent to the **'The Sikh Review.'** □