

## The Universal Message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Soon after the September 11<sup>th</sup> Incident in 2001, a Sikh gasoline station owner was shot to death by a white man. It is expected that the Sikh community stand up and speak out to the whole American society about their faith and life. Unfortunately, we did not hear such a message through mainstream media; we do not “feel” much of the existence of Sikh community in our usual life even though there are many Sikh population living around us in Silicon Valley area. Thus it is very welcome for San Jose State University to host the International Conference of “The Universal Message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib” on May 8-9, 2004.

The year of 2004 also marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of installation of Sri Guru Granth Sahib at Sri Harmandir Sahib after compilation by Guru Arjan Nanak Dev Ji. In this connection, a number of programs and celebrations are taking place all over the world. It is not an exaggeration that this conference in San Jose represents the highest level of Sikh study.

It is an honor to be invited to learn a completely new knowledge from so many internationally renowned scholars on the universal message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. I fully participated the rewarding, enjoyable and memorable two-day program. Some articles discuss the formation of the Granth from the ancient Hindu (Brahmanic and Shamanic) and medieval Islamic (Siddha and Sufi) forms. Some articles interpret the creedal essence of the Guru Granth Sahib, such as “Everything except God is transitory. Although God responds to prayer and sincere supplications, yet to invoke Him there is absolutely no need of a mediator or priestly class.” “It enjoins upon the people that a living based on honest livelihood, service to mankind and truthful living are as essential as praying to earn God’s grace to attain salvation.” (Dr. Balwant Singh Dhillon: Guru Granth Sahib: Formation and Its Message, p.17, Conference Records). This is truly a priori to establish universal brotherhood of mankind under one God.

Besides abstract analysis, there are also interesting realistic arguments. One article presents Sri Guru Granth Sahib as a “juristic person” (!) based on India’s Supreme Court judgment delivered on March 29, 2000 (Dr. Kashmir Singh, pp.86-98, Conference Records). This reminds us that India is also the largest multi-cultural multi-religious society. A retired Microbiology professor teaches us the origin of universe (the “Big Bang”) according to Nanakian Philosophy (Professor Devinder Singh Chahal, pp.34-47, Conference Records). This reminds me of my student time at Tsinghua University’s Modern Applied Physics Department. When I realized that my philosophical knowledge (either Eastern or Western philosophy) was so poor to interpret the physical universe, I knew that I would be no use to the science of Physics. Until today, I still cannot understand how light speed could be constant. Worst, I do not believe any philosophy could help in this regard, even the universal Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

In a challenging presentation, Santa Clara University’s Civil Engineering Department professor & head asks why “Sikhs who are the custodian of Guru Granth Sahib have no peace or harmony among themselves”, why “Sikhs have not been able to demonstrate to

the rest of the world what they claim” (Dr. Sukminder Singh, Betrayal of Guru Granth Sahib, p.195, Conference Record). It seems that he is asking any faith or non-faith based human community. He concludes “instead of spending too much energy on worships, celebrations and wasted rituals, a Sikh must find time to sit with his/her Guru Granth Sahib to read and to seek His blessings for a understanding of Gurbani.” (p.198). During my conversation with several participants, I boldly (naively) asked whether they would reform their symbolic ritual to cut hair, they explained that the ritual is their pride as well as identification. It is true that now they do not receive death penalty or explicit discrimination because of their bound hair, however, do you know that all Chinese men one hundred years ago and all British gentlemen two hundred years ago also kept long hair? As a Jain said in the multi-faith discussion panel of the program: “you don’t need to be a Jain to be a Jain,” why do you need to keep long hair to be a Sikh?

And this is the pity of the conference: despite the high level of presentation, there are not many participants from outside, thus lacks conversation between Sikhs and other faith researchers or practitioners. A. Toynbee is right when he said “Guru Granth has something special of value for the rest of the world.” It is up to the Sikh community to spread their special universal value to the rest of the world. It is up to the world community to learn each other, to communicate among civilizations.

Jing Zhao

Comparative Policy Review, May 2004



Comparative Policy Review