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## Sikh Gurdwaras: Epitome of Peace and Harmony

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### Abstract

Interfaith dialogue come to be understood as fundamentally working for and toward peace and harmony and is thus closely linked to Political, socio- cultural phenomena of our time. Interfaith activity or dialogue includes the importance of better understanding of other religious traditions ,to secure greater social and religious acceptance and hope for closer growth together of the cross border religious ideologies .With the passage of time, many institutions, organisations were devoted to interfaith and inter religious dialogues. Sikhism ,based on tenets of equality and universal brotherhood “ Sarbat da Bhalla” through the teachings of the Sikh Gurus, motivates towards harmony in all spheres of life. The role and function of Sikh institutions specifically Gurdwaras articulates Sikh aspirations, which proved ultimately liberating for the society from centuries. This paper articulates the origin and role of Sikh Gurdwaras in the uplifting society irrespective of any caste, colour or creed. An attempt is made in this paper to articulate three tenets of Guru Nanak “Naam Japna, Kirat Karna and Wand Chhakna ”, through the study of Gurdwara Sri Kartarpur Sahib , Pakistan and Gurdwara Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar.

Key Words: Interfaith, Sikhism, Gurdwaras , Universal Peace and Harmony.

### Sikhism: An Introduction

*There is only one breath;  
all are made of the same clay;  
the light within all is the same.  
The One Light pervades all.  
This Light intermingles with them,  
but it is not diluted or obscured.<sup>1</sup>*

Sikhism, the youngest religion of the world was founded by Guru Nanak in the sixteenth century. He raised voice against the social and political hierarchies ,and laid special emphasis on the fundamental of abiding faith in God ,good conduct ,a harmonious society, and how one can seek salvation through harmonious ambience. His precepts reiterated by the successor gurus form the basis of Sikh thought. Century later, in 1604, fifth Guru Arjan Dev, compiled the hymns of Guru Nanak and successor three gurus, and provided the Sikhs, literally meaning disciples, the learner's, with a scripture of their own. Adi Granth, comprised the compositions of saints from different regions of India, irrespective of their caste ,creed and colour. The next stage ,a revolutionary one came another century later when tenth guru Gobind Singh, organised the community into a distinct well knit group of Khalsa. By infusing a new spirit into them, he wanted them to be saint-soilders.

Guru Nanak's advent on the Indian socio-political fabric coincided with the Bhakti movement and the appearance of Sufism. He raised voice against ritualism, superstitions, caste distinction and injustice and he

<sup>1</sup> SGGS, Raag Majh M. 4, p. 96

travelled extensively spreading the message of love, tolerance for humanity and meditation as its soul. His three tenets, "Naam Japna, Kirat karna and Wand Chhakna" become the main insightful path for the followers in the coming centuries. All subsequent Gurus carried on the spiritual message of Guru Nanak and gained more and more followers. After the execution of Guru Arjan Dev, during Mughal emperor Jahangir's time, to call upon the community, to fight for justice and righteousness, the sixth Guru Hargobind carried two swords of Miri (temporal) and Piri (spiritual). Ninth Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur was beheaded in 1675 by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, when he fought for the cause of righteousness and refused to convert to Islam. Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh spent years in battlefield and lost his four sons in these battles in resistance to the contemporary Mughal power. In 1699, the Guru, in an epoch making ceremony baptised his followers into Singhs after taking Amrit from Panj Pyaras. Under Sikhism, there was no compartmentalisation on the basis of caste or status. Soon a community of pacifiers, devoted to religion, were transformed into great warriors for the cause of liberty, justice and religion. With the demise of tenth Guru Gobind, personification of Guruism was over and in its place Shabad Guru, Guru Granth Sahib was now the revered one. The Sikhs seek peace, guidance, Harmony and enlightenment through the Sikh scripture. Besides being the monotheistic religion, Sikh scripture and its composition in Gurmukhi is easily comprehensible. It lays great emphasis on the role of the guru, who imparts knowledge, initiates and guides Sikhs in way to salvation. Since the scripture contains message of great souls, their composition or bani in vernacular languages of their region, Guru Gobind gave it the status of Guru Granth Sahib "The Bani is Guru, Guru is the Bani". "Guru Granth Sahib, the scripture of the Sikh faith, is the best example of Religious Pluralism as it comprises the revelatory hymns, called bani or sabd, of six of the ten Sikh Gurus and compositions of Bhakti and Sufi saints".<sup>2</sup>

*Recognise all mankind as one*

*The same Lord is the creator and nourisher of all Recognize no distinction among them*

*The temple and mosque are the same*

*So are the Hindu worship and Muslim prayer Men are all one.*

(Akal Ustat, Dasam Granth)

Based on the inclusion of Bhagat bani in Sri Guru Granth Sahib, compositions of fifteen bhagats from different regions, further elaborates the concept of pluralism in Sikhism.<sup>3</sup> An Islamic view of Interfaith Dialogue, refers to the Guru Nanak's quotes in SGGS regarding Islam and Contemporary Muslims to teach them the reality of Islamic thought based on Quran He finds an "Echo of Spirit of Islam in Sri Guru Granth Sahib"<sup>4</sup> He claims: "The 'Bani' of Baba Nanak reveals that he was the pioneer of interfaith dialogue in true sense in his age. He remained in continuous dialogue in his whole life with various faiths and their respective practices".<sup>5</sup> Guru Nanak was a pioneer of Interfaith Dialogue and Guru Arjan as a compiler of global scripture in the history of world religions: "Guru Nanak began his missionary journeys by holding the first-ever Interfaith Dialogue at Sultanpur Lodhi (India) and by visiting major religious centres of the world where he promoted Interfaith Dialogues and understandings. Guru Arjan followed and compiled the first world scripture, the Guru Granth, where he invited multiple coauthors, from contemporary and the past centuries".<sup>6</sup> In the researched paper: "The Need for Intra-Faith Dialogue: Expanding our Understanding of the Sahajdhari Sikh", the roots of "Sahaj" in the Buddhist literature and its use by the Sikh Gurus in SGGS. She further wants to probe if the Sikh community and its leadership can broaden the definition of Sahajdhari based on SGGS and Sikh history.<sup>7</sup> The Sikh history revolves around Sikh shrines. During the lifetime of Gurus these Dharmshala and Gurdwaras were kept under the service by dedicated Sikhs, but during the Mughal persecution of the Sikhs, Udasis Mahants who had renounced the world, were appointed to look after the historic Shrines. With the passage of time they became increasingly irreligious and started treating Gurdwaras as their own property. The structure narrates the making, destruction, and remaking throughout the history. The architectural vocabulary also changed with time and reign of various people. In general, the spaces were encapsulated in strict spatial order

<sup>2</sup> Harvinder Singh Virk, *Interfaith Dialogues: A Sikh Perspective*, New Delhi, 2020, Dharam Singh, "Sikhism and Religious Pluralism".

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, Pasaura Singh, *Guru Nanak's Vision of EK-Anek in the context of Religious Pluralism*, P.91

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Mohammed Habib, *Guru Nanak's Approach to Interfaith Dialogue: Reflections on Islam and the Contemporary Muslims*, p.101.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P.101

<sup>6</sup> Bhai Harbans Lal, *Guru Nanak Pioneered Interfaith Dialogues, Associations, and Global Scriptures*, P.115

<sup>7</sup> Ek Ong Kaar Khalsa Michaud, "The Need for Intra-Faith Dialogue: Expanding our Understanding of the Sahajdhari Sikh", P.126.

in both Hindu and Muslim architectures. Due to missing encapsulated forms for the different spaces, the Sikh architecture defines itself as non encapsulating architecture. The architectural forms were simulated in quiet a different manner. The Sikh architecture got a different dimension added to the philosophy.<sup>8</sup>In the series of developments made by Sikh Gurus, the Sikh town/cities were made in various historical layers.

## Gurudwara Sri Kartarpur Sahib: Foundation and Architecture



**Fig.1.Gurdwara Sri Kartarpur Sahib, Pakistan**

Guru Nanak during his Udasis whenever entered a new village or town he chose a suitable place called Dharamsal, where people lodged in to to be part of his discourses. The congregation came to be known as Sangat and their meeting place to be known as Dharamsal.<sup>9</sup> The Guru spent last days of his life in Kartarpur, now in Shakargarh tehsil of Narowal district in Pakistan, town founded by him and named it Kartarpur- the city of God. After travelling for two decades, the Guru thought of creating a commune where he can teach his followers what he had been preaching with an objective of moral and spiritual upliftment of humanity. He had set up sangat. It was here that the Guru put into practice his teachings of Naam Japna, Kirt Karna and Wand Chhakna. Guru Nanak took off the robes of a pilgrim which he had worn during his preachings and instead put on a dress of a common householder.<sup>10</sup> Kartarpur, more than a town flourished as an institution which helped the Sikh commune established there to identify their daily life with the precepts the Guru had been preaching through his hymns, discourses and dialogues.<sup>11</sup> Irrespective of their castes and creeds people like Giani, Asectics, Mendicants, Digambar, Sanyasis, Yogis and Sidhas, Faqirs and Darvesh, Hindus and Muslims, Bhaktas and Sufis all joined to improve their spiritual moral and ethical life. Guru Nanak as was the practice in those days all holy man to establish their living places or dears near rivers or water bodies, easily accessible to common man from different directions. The selected site near tributary of river Ravi was a apt place to meet the future requirements of irrigation and development of the place. Waterbodies

in form of a Sarovar along with an open space ( a wide open hall for the congregation to meet and sing has



**Fig.2.Mazar of Baba Nanak and Mari of Guru Nanak in Kartarpur Sahib**

been an important requirement while erecting a Sikh Gurdwara even today, not far from the main darbar hall.<sup>12</sup> Situated 80 kms from Sialkot, a centre of Islamic studies and about 35 kms from Batala, an important

<sup>8</sup> Chahal, K.S., Aulakh, R.S. The perception of Space in Sikh Architecture and Philosophy. Major research project. New Delhi. University grants commission. 2010.P.40.

<sup>9</sup> M.K.Gill, "Guru Gobind Singh: A Historical Political perspective", New Delhi, P.137.

<sup>10</sup> Bhai Gurdas, Vaaran, Var, I:38

<sup>11</sup> Dr.Dharam Singh, "Kartarpur: The First Center of Sikh learning", New Delhi, BVSS, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, P.32.

centre of Yogis-Kartarpur provided opportunities for dialogue and a place of learning for both. By setting a new Centre of learning, the Guru rejected the caste differentiations by articulating his religious philosophy of oneness of God, by rejecting the fanatical Muslim ideology churned out of Islamic centres, always inspired his Sangat to follow the message of their faith. Kartarpur seemed to be an ideal place and institution to work in this path as pilgrimages coming from their holy places halted here and with passage of time participated in the Sangat and listened to the discourses given by the Guru: As per the available information based on a Janamsakhi, House's entrance door was on the eastern side and another from the southern corner. In the sitting area was a raised platform of about a cot's size, where the Guru would spread dry stalks of grass and recited hymns and give discourses to his disciples.<sup>13</sup> Karori a, who donated this land, also helped in the construction of this place. During the successor Gurus, nothing much available about this site, as they established new towns with the intention to spread Guru's message to different areas and people.

"Ghar ghar andar dharmsal, hove kirtan sada suhela,"<sup>14</sup>

Kartarpur suffered neglect for many years, Surat Singh in his Tazkira Pir Hassu Teli, refers to his visit to Kartarpur in 1647.<sup>15</sup> He along with his mother visited Guru's mari (cremation site) and also mentioned a mazar (tomb) by the side of Mari. This site got effected by the natural calamities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dera Baba Nanak (eastern side) and Kartarpur (western side) of the Ravi in Pakistan stand separated by an International boundary line, two kilometres apart from each other. In the twentieth century it was reportedly repaired in 1995 and was fully restored in 2004. The Ardas of Guru Nanak's Sikhs for "Khulley Darshan Didare of Sikh Shrines" was finally accepted by two governments to open the "Corridor of Peace and Harmony" was thrown opened on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2019 facilitating the first Jatha to visit Sri Kartarpur Sahib without visa.

In Sikh traditions, Sri Kartarpur Sahib, not only as a Gurdwara as an institution shaped and moulded the Sikh way of life in the coming centuries. It emphasised on the relevance of being an householder than an ascetic, Sangat: evolution of Sikh community and daily maryada (daily way of life), Langar and Pangat: community kitchen with equality of all and last not the least, beginning of scribal tradition for the Sikh community. Maintaining the Guru's tradition Bhai Lehna, the second Guru, Guru Angad, kept written records of Guru Nanak's hymns and compositions in Guru's language. At least some parts of Japuji and the composition of Siddha Goshti were composed here in Kartarpur.<sup>16</sup>

## Gurdwara Sri Harimandir Sahib: Foundation and Architecture

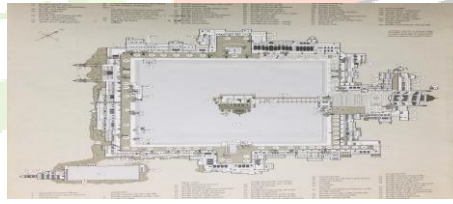


Fig.2. Golden Temple and its layout.

In the lifetime of the third guru, Guru Amardas, Bhai Jetha on his advise dig a tank, small water body, amritsarovar. As per some sources the sanctity of the pond was also known to the first Guru, Guru Nanak. This sanctity became guiding factor for whole of the city<sup>17</sup>. The fourth guru, Guru Ramdas started excavation of Ramsar, believed to have been gifted by Mughal emperor Akbar<sup>18</sup>. Guru Ramdas died in 1581AD, a township, names Ramdaspur come into existence.<sup>19</sup>, and fifth guru, Guru Arjan Dev started construction of Ramsar within the excavated area. Before this, the place where Guru used to stay was known as Dharmsal. So this structure was the first to be known as Gurudwara- a place where Guru is seated. The Sarovar became popular as- Sri Harimandir Sahib. This was the time when the migrants from the near surroundings came for the construction of holy shrine. The temporary structures were made out of thatch roofs, Guru Arjan Dev enlarged the tank, using burnt bricks. He decided to combine the tank with a place of worship (dharmsal), and

<sup>13</sup> Dharam Singh, Ibid, ibid p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> Bhai Gurdas, Vaaran., Var.1

<sup>15</sup> J.S Grewal and Irfan Habib (Ed's.), Sikh History from Persian Sources. p.86

<sup>16</sup> Bhai Gurdas, Vaaran, ibid..

<sup>17</sup> Parm Bakshish Singh, (Ed). Golden Temple. Patiala. Punjabi University. 1999. P.1

<sup>18</sup> Mehar Singh, Sikh Shrines in India, Publication Division, Patiala, 1975. P.12

<sup>19</sup> J.S Grewal, The City of Amritsar, Amritsar, 1996. p.5

was able to complete the construction of the sacred tank in AD1589 .Hazrat Mian Mir,a Muslim saint laid the foundation stone of the Harimandir ,at the invitation of the guru.The Guru started compiling the bani of his predecessor ,adding his own and as well as compositions of the other regional Bhaktas.The work of compilation was completed in 1601 ,and the Granth( Scripture )was installed there in 1604..The Granth Sahib rested at a seat under the canopy, whereas the Guru and the Sikhs slept on the ground.”After its installation, Guru Arjun directed that during day time the Adi Granth should remain in the Harimandir Sahib and at night, after the sohila was read, it should be taken to the room he had built for himself in Guru ke Mahal. The Granth Sahib was placed on the appointed seat and the Guru slept on the ground by its side.<sup>20</sup> For two hundred years,Sikhs refers to it as Harimandir Sahib ( the temple of God) or Darbar Sahib.<sup>21</sup>



**Fig 3.4. Inside Golden Temple, Indo- Islamic Orientation: Gold plated Art work**

This is the only structure, in which all art forms are blended- Like Gach (Stucco work), Tukri (Mirror inlay work), Jaratkari (stone inlay work), and Mohrakashi. The idea of making the structure inside the pool of nectar would have been to give fourth dimension, as reflection of structure over the water surface, to the sanctum sanctorum..This marked a foundation of new architectural school of Sikh architecture. There are various assortments and sorts of the compositional components, the exacting portrayal of which is spoken to by the Gurudwaras crosswise over Punjab and abroad . The Sikh Gurdwaras depicts , different interfaith ,syncretic components and highlights importance of the structure, different arrangement frames, design components like Dome, chhattries, Cupolas, Arches etc. New architectural styles get enlivened from the indigenous structural styles, in India, where societies developed from the foreign invaders slowly progressed toward becoming absorbed into an indigenous character. Sikh architectural designs additionally by all accounts motivated from the Mughal and Rajput architectural and ornamental styles. It is conceivable that Sikh architects owed a portion of its highlights to the Rajasthan and Mughal models, these highlights were embraced, adjusted, and at last acclimatised and another compositional style was produced by the Sikhs<sup>22</sup>. This style has been interpreted by Percy Browne<sup>23</sup>, as a “late” form of “the Mughal style of architecture” Golden Temple is the acme of Sikh architecture. The Sikh architecture is at once striking and attractive and presents a certain character of its own although it’s components adopted the Muslim architecture and harmonised it with the Hindu style<sup>24</sup>. Special feature of the the central structure of the Harimandir is the square building having dome shaped roof, plated with the copper-gilt covered with gold. The dome is designed after the shape of a lotus flower. “The Hindu Kalash, based on mount Kailas ,atop this shrine is a fanciful elaboration of the Islamic dome above the Hindu cubist architecture, inspired by the syncretic Sikh faith,”<sup>25</sup>. The petals of the dome present a very harmonious setting, neither exclusively, the Hindu nor the Muslim one. it shows evolution of its syncretic style. The walls on the hall on the first floor are decorated with floral designs and it’s arches are ornamented with with the verses from the Guru Granth reproduced in letters of gold. This

<sup>20</sup> Kharak Singh,. Guru Granth Sahib- a unique scripture. Abstract of Sikh Studies. Vol.III, Issue 4. Chandigarh.p.14

<sup>21</sup> Mehar Singh, ibid, p.12

<sup>22</sup> Madanjit Kaur, The Golden Temple, Past and present, Amritsar , 1983. P.142

<sup>23</sup> Percy Browne, Indian Architecture: Islamic Period, p.114

<sup>24</sup> Harinder Singh Roop, Sikh Te Sikhi, p.46.

<sup>25</sup> MulkRaj Anand(ed), ”Homage to Amritsar “, Marg, Vol.XXX, No.3, June, 1977, p.2.

seems to be an imitation of the Muslim practice of engraving verses from the Quran<sup>26</sup> The Sikh artist Jaratkari (craftsmanship) reminds us of Petra dura tradition. It somewhat resembles Mughal technique as used in Taj Mahal, but Jaratkari of Golden temple has an edge over of the Taj, as Sikh artists may have taken motifs from the vedantic concept of life.<sup>27</sup> The conception of the total complex of the Harimandir Sahib is not the work of an individual mind rather outcome of a composite mind of the whole community.<sup>28</sup> The walls contains Mohrakashi or fresco paintings, said to be modelled after the wall paintings of its time found in the Kangra valley. Most of these paintings are, thus an adaptation of the Hindu, the Persian and the Mughal motifs. It very well may be drawn from the investigation is the undoubted truth that the Harmandir Sahib holds a novel and moving position as a Gurudwara and Sikh Architecture in true sense, spoken to be best prototype of Interfaith, Inter religious based on the religious pluralism not only in the spiritual sense but also in the depiction of its philosophy in the architectural expression of the same.

## Conclusion

Sikh Gurdwaras, apart from being places of worship, stand for epitome of love, peace and harmony with social harmony of universal brotherhood, equality of all and social service (Sewa) are the integral pillars of Sikhism. Sikh Architecture is extraordinary and Sikhism is by all accounts spoken to through the Sikh Gurdwaras. Guru Granth Sahib is well-known in the Scriptures of the World Religions for its cosmopolitan spirit and for being an ideal role model for initiating interfaith dialogue, for reflecting the contemporary religious traditions with an in-depth understanding and vision by incorporating the spiritual compositions of Bhagats and Saints belonging to different traditions, regions and castes. It is imperative for Sikh institutions to initiate the inculcation the vision, envisioned by the Sikh Gurus of interfaith dialogues right from Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism within the society in collaboration of different national or international forums. Interfaith dialogue demands love and respect for others. It is also necessary to have knowledge about others religious scriptures, doctrines, rituals, ethics, customs, beliefs and social attitudes, without any feeling of prejudice. In the present century, Sikhs following Guru Nanak's spirituality and philosophy of universal peace and harmony for humanity through Sewa are coming forward with Langar of everything, providing everykind of help to the humanity, not only in India but also around the world. KHALSA AID is an institution, spreading its wings of helping humanity, which is the need of the hour.

I am a friend to all;

I am everyone's friend.

When the sense of separation was removed from my mind,  
then I was united with the Lord, my King. ||3||

SGGS, Dhanaasaree, Fifth Mehl:

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<sup>26</sup> Harinder. Singh. Roop, op.cit., p.47.

<sup>27</sup> ibid

<sup>28</sup> Madanjit Kaur, p.146