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MONUMENT OF GURU NANAK IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY *A NEW DISCOVERY*

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INTRODUCTION

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) promulgated a unique and universal philosophy of humanism in the Indian subcontinent when renaissance was taking place on European continent (14th to 16th centuries) and scientists were challenging illogical religious concepts and beliefs. Guru Nanak carried his message far and wide in South Asia and Middle East. He held discussions with religious leaders - Hindus (Brahmans, *Sidhs* and *Jogis*), Muslims (Sufis, mullahs and *Qazis*), *Jains* and Buddhists in India, Middle East, Tibet and Ceylon. During his travels (odysseys, *Udasis*) Guru Nanak challenged the ancient mythology, wrong religious concepts and rituals with which the peoples of South Asia and Middle East were shackled for centuries. People were unable to express their free will in any aspect of their lives because their lives were controlled by their religious and political authorities. Guru Nanak launched his movement to liberate the masses from ignorance and religious and political tyranny. His philosophy, termed as '*Nanakian Philosophy*', is embodied in his Bani (Word), which has been incorporated in the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS). Nanakian Philosophy was further explained and strengthened by the Sikh Gurus who succeeded to the '*House of Nanak*' in their Bani, which is also incorporated in the AGGS. A critical study of Nanakian Philosophy demonstrates all characteristics of universal acceptability and compatibility with the current Age of Science.

Although there are many gaps in the travels of Guru Nanak, Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh, Sikh historians, have collated the information from various sources into

three major travels as follows [2]:

1. From Talwandi to Sultanpur to Benaras to Dhubri to Assam to Dacca to Ceylon to Ujain to Mathura to Talwandi.
2. From Talwandi to Kailash (Sumer) Parbat to Talwandi.
3. From Talwandi to Hinglaj to Mecca to Baghdad to Kabul to (Talwandi) Kartarpur.

Besides the above travels there are many short ones in Punjab and adjoining areas. Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh [2] have also mentioned that according to '*Janam Sakhis*' (biographies of Guru Nanak) by Meharban and Bhai Mani Singh Guru Nanak had also travelled to Palestine, Syria and Turkey, although there is no definite supporting evidence. Some writers of '*Janam Sakhis*' have extended his travels even to some countries in Central Asia. Nonetheless, it is evident from the information collected by Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh that the complete travels of Guru Nanak are still to be discovered. Moreover, research on the discourses held between Guru Nanak and the heads of various religious centers also need to be described, although some discourses, e.g. *Sidh Gosht*, *Arti*, and *Onkar Bani* are found in the AGGS and some isolated verses of Guru Nanak are linked to some travels in some *Janam Sakhis*.

NEW DISCOVERY

I was attending an International Conference on Bio-energy in Istanbul, Turkey in 1994 where I also presented my research work on the '*Production of Ethanol as a Source of Energy from Wood*'. On the last day of the conference all the participants went on a

cruise in the Straits of Bosphorus (Bosphorus), connecting the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmora (about 32 km) long. The Straits of Bosphorus is an important place where East Ends (Mainland of Turkey in Asian Continent) and the West starts (Istanbul in European Continent) (Fig. 1).

On my return from the cruise, when I was walking towards the bus waiting for us, I discovered a big monument. This monument is about 15 ft high and about 6 ft wide constructed in mortar. It is situated in a public park at the shore of the Straits of Bosphorus towards Istanbul, Turkey. It has some inscription in Arabic/Persian Alphabet. When I looked at the inscription on this monument I found very clearly ‘Nanak’ inscribed at the end of the first line of its inscription. The bulk of inscription is not legible because of the effect of weathering agencies and there are some small and big cracks which were filled with cement. Moreover, it is in old Turkish language in Arabic alphabet that is difficult to read. However, I was able to read “Nanak” for sure since I know Arabic alphabet and I decided to take a picture of the monument with its inscription for further investigation later (Fig. 2). Next morning I came back home to Canada.

On my return I consulted a student of mine from Turkey to decipher the inscription. She showed her inability to decipher because it was not legible. Then I tried a couple of more persons from Turkey without any success. Further research to decipher its inscription remained dormant for 12 years till I visited Lahore, Pakistan to participate in an International Conference on Guru Nanak Heritage for Peace on February 18, 2006.

THE INSCRIPTION

I found the importance of the monument only when Mr. Iqbal Kaiser, the author of a book, ‘Sikh Shrines in Pakistan’, and Mr. Syed Afzal Haider, Senior Advocate of Supreme Court of Pakistan, and the author of a book, ‘Baba Nanak’, helped me to decipher the first line of the inscription, which is in Turkish language (Fig. 3). It clearly indicated that it is dedicated to Guru Nanak. The first line deciphered by them is as follows:

In Turkish language
(Transliterated in Gurmukhi Script):
ਜਹਾਂਗੀਰ ਜਮਾਂ ਹਿੰਦ ਲਤ ਅਬਦ ਅਲ ਮਾਜੀਦ ਨਾਨਕ ।
(*Jehangir jaman hind lat abd al majid Nanak.*)

Meanings in Punjabi:
ਜਮਾਨੇ ਦਾ ਮਾਲਕ, ਹਿੰਦ ਦਾ ਬੰਦਾ, ਰੱਬ ਦਾ ਨਾਨਕ ।
(*jamanay da malik, hind da banda, rab da Nanak*)



Fig. 1: Straits of Bosphorus (Bosphorus): Left side is Istanbul on European Continent, where the monument of Guru Nanak is situated. Right side is the end of Turkey on Asian Continent.

Astronaut photograph ISS008-E-21752 was taken by the crew of the International Space Station on April 16, 2004. The International Space Station Program supports the laboratory to help astronauts take pictures of Earth that will be of the greatest value to scientists and the public, and to make those images freely available on the Internet. Additional images taken by astronauts and cosmonauts can be viewed at the NASA/JSC [Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth](#).

Meanings in English:

The Lord of the time, resident of India, Nanak – the man of God.

The rest of the long inscription is not legible and is still to be deciphered.

THE TRAVELS

The above new discovery of a monument of Guru Nanak may connect the travel of Guru Nanak from Mecca to Israel, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey and then to Baghdad rather than directly to Baghdad from Mecca as is generally accepted. The general accepted travel of Guru Nanak, entirely based on the information given by Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh, is drawn in solid lines in Fig. 4.

According to them Guru Nanak started his travel from Talwandi to Sultanpur to meet his sister before proceeding to a long travel. From Sultanpur he went to Pakpattan (Ajodhan) to renew his old contacts with Sheikh Ibrahim Farid II. From there he proceeded to Multan to meet Baha-ud-Din, a descendant and successor of famous Sheikh Baha-ud-Din Zakria, founder of *Suhrawardhy Sufi Silslah* in India. From Multan Guru Nanak proceeded to Uch (Deogarh). Here Guru Nanak had a meeting with Sheikh Haji Abdulla Bukhari (d. 1526 CE), a successor of Kalal-ud-Din Bhukhari.

From Uch to Sukkur to Lakhpat (Basta Bander) probably by boat (in river Sind?). There is an old Gurdwara in the memory of Guru Nanak's visit. From here he proceeded to the seashore where at Kuriani he visited old temples of Koteswar and Narayna Swami. From there he proceeded further to Sonmiani (or simply Miani). Before boarding a boat to Mecca he visited a Hindu temple in Hinglaj. There is a Nanak Dharamsala (inn) in this town.

According to Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh Guru Nanak boarded a boat which sailed from Sonmiani through Gulf of Eden and Red Sea to Jeddah (Al Aswad), a port near Mecca. They say that after visiting Mecca and Medina Guru Nanak traveled directly to Baghdad in Iraq then to Tehran and Kabul and finally back to (Talwandi) Kartarpur. They argued that Guru Nanak followed direct and shortest route to Baghdad than that of long route through Palestine, Syria, and Turkey as mentioned in some *Janam Sakhis*.

However, Dr Trilochan Singh [3] has reported that there are some indications that Guru Nanak visited Cairo (Egypt) where during the war Sikh soldiers were shown a place on the outskirts of the town where there was a stone memorial (Captain Bhag Singh, Founding Managing Editor of the Sikh Review, was told about the existence of this monument when he was at Cairo during World War II. Unfortunately he could not go there and see.). Dr Trilochan Singh [3] has also reported from the work of Sydney Nettleton Fisher [1] that in Egypt or in Istanbul (Turkey) Guru Nanak had



Fig. 2: Monument of Guru Nanak

This monument is about 15 ft high and about 6 ft wide constructed in mortar. It is situated in a public park at the shore of the Straits of Bosphorus towards Istanbul, Turkey, where the West starts (Fig. 1). At the end of the first line of the inscription 'Nanak' in Arabic/Persian alphabet is clearly legible. Rest of the inscription starting from second line onward is not easily legible to be deciphered.

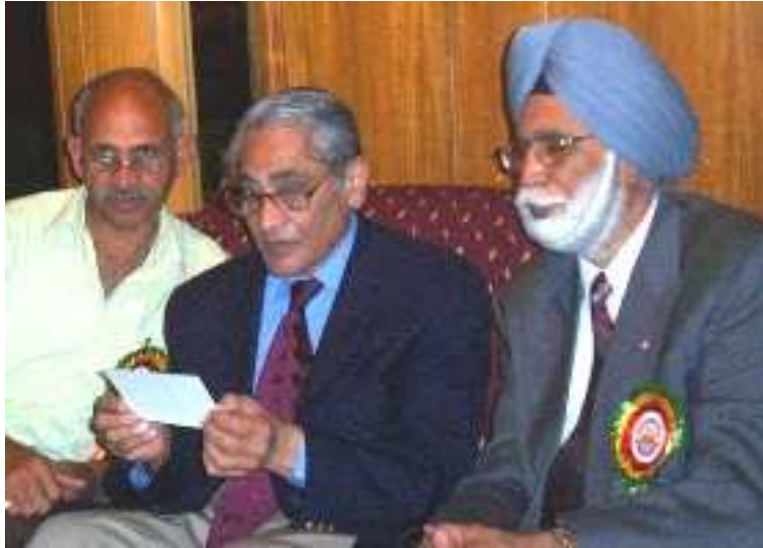


Fig. 3: (From Left to Right) Mr. Iqbal Kaiser, the author of a book, 'Sikh Shrines in Pakistan', and Mr. Syed Afzal Haider, Senior Advocate of Supreme Court of Pakistan, and the author, Prof Chahal, of a book, 'Baba Nanak', helping the author to decipher the first line of the inscription.

met the Emperor of Rum, Salim (1511-1520 CA). Dr Trilochan Singh further says that Guru Nanak might have visited Jerusalem.

Because of a lack of any solid evidence, Fauja Singh and Kirpal Singh [2] further strengthened their views that the shortest route from Baghdad to Mecca was first marked and prepared for Khalifa Harun Rashid's wife, Zubaida Begum, for Hajj (the pilgrimage) to Mecca. And then during 14th century Ibn Batula adopted the same route for his journey from Baghdad to Mecca.

They have ignored the fact that the passage to Palestine, Syria, and Turkey and then to Baghdad might be easier than that of direct route proposed by them. They have also ignored another fact that while in Mecca Guru Nanak was very close to the center of ancient civilization in Cairo (Egypt) and center of Jews, Jerusalem (Israel), and a Sufi center established by Hazrat Moulana Jallaluddin Rumi in Konya (Turkey), whose philosophy was very prevalent not only in the Middle East but also in India and now in the West. Since Guru Nanak has not left any place connected with Sufism, and religious centers, therefore, there is every possibility that Guru Nanak might have visited the ancient civilization in Cairo (Egypt), Wailing Wall of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem, Sufi center started by Sufi Rumi in Konya (Turkey) and might have met the Emperor of Rum, Salim, in Istanbul (Turkey).

If the inscription on the newly discovered monument confirms that it is a memorial to Guru Nanak then it will confirm that Guru Nanak did not proceed from Mecca directly to Baghdad but went to Cairo, Jerusalem, Syria, and Konya and Istanbul in Turkey and then to Baghdad as shown in dotted lines in Fig.4.

OBJECTIVE

Dr Trilochan Singh [3] has reported that Qazis and Hajjis addressed Guru Nanak as 'Nanak Hindvi' or 'Nanak Hindki'. The first line of the inscription clearly indicates that it is related to Guru Nanak who has been addressed as "hind da banda, rab da Nanak." Therefore, it becomes imperative for scholars and the Sikhs at large to decipher rest of the inscription to find out:

Is this inscription about Guru Nanak's visit to Turkey?
 If the inscription is about Guru Nanak then what is the complete message?
 Is it a memorial constructed in commemoration of Guru Nanak? And so on.

The *Institute for Understanding Sikhism* has taken up this research project to study the history of this discovered monument dedicated to Guru Nanak on the following lines:

- To relocate the site of the monument and the importance of that site to the tourists visiting Istanbul.
- To discover the original inscription of that monument and deciphering it into English and Punjabi.
- To discover any information related to the visit of Guru Nanak in Turkey.
- To visit various shrines of Hazrat Moulana Jallaluddin Rumi to discover the possibilities of discourse of Guru Nanak with the then religious leaders of those shrine of that time.
- To search for evidence of meeting of Guru Nanak with Emperor of Rum, Salim, in Istanbul.
- To discuss the matter with the Archeology Department and the Municipality of Istanbul about

the future maintenance of this monument and to discuss the possibilities to erect similar monuments with English and Punjabi translations of the original inscription of Turkish.

- To deliver a talk on '*Travels of Guru Nanak in India and Middle East*' to the faculty and students of the Department of Archeology, University of Ankara.
- To discover the return route followed by Guru Nanak after visiting Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia.
- Finally to publish a Report about the findings of research conducted and then writing a book, *Travels of Guru Nanak*, with special reference to discovery of this monument.

APPROACH

I am already in contact with Mr. Tugrul Biltekin, First Secretary in the Embassy of Republic of Turkey in Ottawa, Canada. He is ready to help me to conduct research on this project and allow me to consult the concerned documents in the Department of Archeology in Ankara and its branch in Istanbul and also the municipality of Istanbul. Meeting with the religious leaders of shrines of Sufi Rumi in Konya, Turkey will also be arranged by him to discover the possibility of visiting this shrine by Guru Nanak.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Deciphering of the whole inscription on this new discovered monument will confirm the visit of Guru Nanak to Turkey.
- The confirmation of connection of this monument with Guru Nanak will further strengthen the possibilities of visits of Guru Nanak to Cairo (Egypt), Jerusalem (Israel), Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey (dotted lines) covering the whole Middle East since visit to Mecca, Baghdad, Tehran, and Kabul (solid lines) has already been confirmed (Fig. 4).
- The location of the Monument on a public park on the shore of the Straits of Bosphorus towards Istanbul, Turkey on European Continent enhances its importance for the tourists of the world (Fig. 1).
- The above achievements, on completion of this research project are going to prove the travel of Guru Nanak to the end of Middle East (Turkey) and beginning of the Europe (Istanbul) and establishment of a new shrine (A place or structure esteemed for its importance or centrality in Sikh history and as a memorial to Guru Nanak) - - A pride for every Sikh.



Fig. 4: Map of India and Middle East

Solid lines show the general accepted travel of Guru Nanak.

Dotted lines show the new possible travel of Guru Nanak from Mecca to Cairo, Jerusalem, Syria, Konya, and Istanbul then to Baghdad.

FUTURE PLAN

The original monument is to be preserved as such with its damaged inscription. A similar monument is to be constructed with the original inscription, which would be clearly legible. Still another such monument is to be constructed on which the translation of the original inscription in Punjabi to be inscribed on one side and English translation on the other side. This will become an historical pilgrimage for the Sikhs in Istanbul on the shore of Straits of Bosphorus on European Continent where the East meets the West.

The role of UNESCO in maintaining this monument as World Heritage will be explored after deciphering the inscription on the newly discovered monument of Guru Nanak.

FUNDING

The estimated funding required to complete the first phase of this research project is about \$50,000. The devout Sikhs and the Gurdwaras are requested to mail their checks (in the name of '*Institute for Understanding Sikhism*') to the Institute for Understanding Sikhism, 4418 Rue Martin-Plouffe, Laval, Quebec, Canada H7W 5L9. The Institute for Understanding Sikhism is charitable organization federally incorporated in Canada. Receipts for donations are issued for Income Tax deductions.

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