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The Sikh Monuments in Pakistan, conservation and preservation: Can Monument of Kartarpur Sahib bring peace between India and Pakistan?

Abstract

Kartarpur is the symbol of international harmony where all the three prominent religion of the region converge. Situated on Indo-Pak border on Pakistani side Kartarpur is the place where Baba Guru Nanak passed away in 1539 AD. The interesting part of the story which makes it a universal place is that when Nanak abandoned his mortal body the question arose whether it should be buried the Islamic way or burned according to Hindu rites. Further there are legends and legends but the harsh reality of the present day is that we have three intact mausoleums of Guru Nanak, then erected. A Smadh and a Grave each are in Pakistan territory while the third one is in India. Then there is river Raavi making a garland of serene waters around Kartarpur.



Sikh style of samadhi or tomb of Baba Nanak in Indian territory at Dera Baba Nanak

Kartarpur is situated in the Pakistan about 2Km. from Indo-Pak border on the right bank of river Ravi. The shrine building stands out singly as there is no habitation around. There used to be a railway connection to it and the station is named

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‘Darbar Sahib Kartarpur’ on the Lahore- Chak Amru line. It lies in the tehsil Shakkar Garh district Narowal of Punjab and is 117Km from Lahore.



Hindu marhi or tomb of Baba Nanak at Kartarpur

Opposite nearest town on the Indian side is Dera Baba Nanak [1Km. from Border] in the district of Gurdaspur. Dera is duly connected by road and rail and is about 50 km from Amritsar, 39 Km from Gurdaspur and 35 Km from Batala. Another historic town Kalanaur is at a distance of about 10 Km only.



How Kartarpur sahib looks from Indian Border, Queque of devotees for telescope on Indian border

Adjoining Dera Baba Nanak is the historic village Pakhoke where our lord Guru Nanak used to visit his devotee Ajita Randhawa. Governor of the area Duni Chand Karoria met Guru Nanak at Pakhoke and donated 100 Acre land to Guru Sahib. This land is on the right bank of river Ravi. On the Guru's acceptance of land Guru decided to settle there and building or hut was constructed. Kartarpur thus became the first Sikh centre. There is a reference in the historical books that Guru formally laid the foundation of Kartarpur on Magh 13, 1572 Bikrmi year [1515AD]. Apart from Duni Chand, Guru's disciple Doda was also helpful. Now there is a village named Doda near Kartarpur.

It was here that Guru Nanak appointed Lehna his spiritual successor after severe tests and made him the second Guru of Sikhs on July 14, 1539 AD. Lehna was called Angad the one born from Guru's own limb. Guru also handed over a pothi the book of hymns to Angad.



Mazar or tomb of Baba Nanak at Kartarpur

Before Partition of the country in 1947, Kartarpur was in district Gurdaspur. When Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew the boundary-line he happened to allot the whole of district Gurdaspur to Pakistan (see June 3, 1947 announcement). How could the universal point go to Pakistan alone? The miracles then began to happen. J.L.Nehru first Prime Minister of India exercised his influence over Mountbatten and the Partition Plan was revised. This time Gurdaspur was bisected. Radcliffe's scissor made a cut right across Kartarpur; half of it going to Pakistan and other to India.

Since then this shrine remained completely abandoned till the year 1997 AD. Being on the border and that too on the bank of river, it was surrounded by wild elephant grass that would grow up to 10 feet. We are told that the Pakistani rangers would seldom allow Muslim devotees to go near the shrine due to security reasons. While the grass grew over grave the wildness has all along been witnessed in the international relations in the region; may be a divine curse.

But then the miracle happened. Mrs. Benazir Bhutto's Govt in Pakistan realised the importance of Kartarpur in international relations in the year 1994 AD and agreed

to grant a visa-less free corridor to Kartarpur shrine from the Indian border. Since then the Sikh devotees are impressing upon the Government of India to accept the Pakistan proposal and allow Sikh pilgrims visit their holiest of holy shrine.

Yes, Kartarpur is the most important shrine for the Sikhs not only since Nanak passed away here but for the fact it was here Baba Nanak himself practically demonstrated the new concepts of his philosophy practical aspect of his philosophy. It was here 550 years ago that he challenged the Hindu concept that sanyas or renunciation is necessary to attain God. At Kartarpur the Guru shed whatever his hermitage dress and wore Punjabi farmer's clothes and started cultivation. Here he started living a house holder's life and shifted his family; father, mother, wife and sons here at Kartarpur from Talwandi (Nankana sahib where he was born). It was here he challenged the caste system in Hindu society and ran a community kitchen the Langar and asked the so called high and low caste people to dine together.



Gurdwara Kartarpur sahib

Baba Nanak lived 70 years but most of the time he was on the move: from Iran/Iraq to Myanmar (Burma) from high lands of Tibet to Sri Lanka etc. But Kartarpur is the place where he stayed: 18 long years. It is said he formally launched his philosophy by founding the place of Kartarpur i.e the creator's abode. He did farming here. Sikhs thus treat Kartarpur as the birth place of Sikhism.

There is a very strong Corridor Movement going in East Punjab since the year 2001 AD. Sikhs do prayers on Indo-Pak border demanding Corridor and peace in the region. Three different organisations do prayers on different dates every month.



Sikhs demanding passage demonstrating at border

Now as said above that Pakistan has agreed to grant a free corridor and several announcement have been made by it since 1999. East Punjab Assembly Chandigarh passed a unanimous resolution on Oct. 1, 2010 requesting the Indian Govt to positively take up the Corridor issue with the Govt of Pakistan. All along these years the Government of India has a cold shoulder to this development and maintained calculated silence over the demand. Political analysts say the demand is embarrassing for the Govt of India because Corridor means better Pakistan Sikh relations and the Indian leaders secretly allege that Pakistan is pampering Sikh community.



Chola sahib the gown of Guru Nanak preserved at Dera Baba Nanak which has Quranic verses the ayats on it.

At times however the Govt of India's sympathisers claim that Corridor is not possible in view of the tense Indo-Pak relations. However at the same time the Govt of India is seeking a corridor to Kailash Temple in Tibet Himalayas. The Govt of India becomes silent again when the Sikhs advance logic that India doesn't enjoy very cordial relations with China also. The Govt of India gets clueless when the Sikhs claim that it is the Indian citizens who are to visit foreign territory thus there is no danger to Indian security.

Sikhs are impressing upon the Govt of India that the concept of cross country pilgrimages is beyond the mutual relation of neighbouring countries and site example of Saudi Arabia which have never banned Mecca Hajj of its enemy country citizens be it Iraq or Iran. It respects the faithfuls' right to Hajj even at the height of hostilities.

Similarly the Sikhs site several examples of these faiths existing beyond the territories.

In fact there are several monuments on the Indo-Pak border which enjoy respect beyond frontiers. Chimliyal on Jammu border is equally important for Pakistani nationals and Indians. In the month of June a mela is held on both sides of border.

Again in Amritsar district is a tomb of Sheikh Brahm (incidentally contemporary of Guru Nanak) is only 50 yards away from the border line. Muslim devotees from across the border gather on every Thursday. Earlier the Pakistanis were allowed in Indian territory but now Indian border police (BSF) don't allow.

In fact there are several places of mutual interest on border but Kartarpur sahib is most important of all.

Thus opening of Kartarpur sahib will usher into an era of peace between the two poor but always at war countries.