



ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ

Sikh Gurdwara San Jose Newsletter



**A Report on the
Sri Hemkunt Foundation International Sikh Youth Symposium and Keertan Darbar
From July 25-28, 2024 Hosted by Guru Nanak Khalsa School of the Sikh Gurdwara San Jose**

Our Gurdwara Sahib, through its Guru Nanak Khalsa School is a proud member of an international organization Sri Hemkunt Foundation. Our children along with around 2000 children world-wide participate in the annual Speech competition and the Keertan Darbar

Sri Hemkunt Foundation Inc. of New York, USA was founded by visionary S. Shamsher Singh Ji in 1980. (Except for the name, this foundation has no connection with the Gurdwara Sri Hemkunt Sahib in India). The sole purpose of the Foundation is to convey the Sikh Guru Sahiban's message to the children/youth in Diaspora. The foundation organized speech competitions among the children in different age groups and awarded prizes to the winners. In 1984 the operations were expanded beyond New York. In the last 40 years, the participation has grown from 19 to over 2,000. The program has reached various parts of USA, Canada, Kenya and United Kingdom.

Presently, 69 Gurdwaras in the western hemisphere participate in the program. These are divided into 25 zones. Each zone has three or more centers and each center has ~35 children participating. Children are divided into five age groups. (for details, please see www.hemkunt2.org). Children first compete at the center level in their age group; winners then compete at the Zonal level. Winner from the Zonal level proceed to the international symposium. Every year a different book is prescribed for each age group and the children are required to answer five questions from the book in a time span of 5-7 minutes. This needs a lot of study and practice and public speaking skills. These speech competitions have been very successful in teaching the Sikh History and Gurmat to the Youth and their families and a strong community has evolved around these speech competitions.

Guru Nanak Khalsa School from Sikh Gurdwara San Jose became a center in 1992 with Dr. Gurinder Pal Singh as the center convenor. Later in 1990s our Gurdwara Sahib got promoted as Silicon Valley Zone. Thanks to the interest taken by the school families, children from our Zone have consistently won more prizes in speech symposiums than any other zone. Using the public speaking skills learnt at these symposiums, our students are also shining in their professional careers. More important, the participants are familiar with Gurmat principles and can confidently present Sikhi to others.

The international symposium is hosted by rotation by different zones. Our Silicon Valley Zone hosted the first international symposium in 2006 at the Sikh Gurdwara San Jose. To welcome our international guests, we had created a Punjabi Village "Mera Pind Meri Shan" at the site where now the main hall of gurdwara sahib is located. The program was a great success and the families that are still associated from that time have fond memories of the event.

At the 2006 symposium, S. Shamsher Singh Ji proposed starting also a Keertan Competition for the youth. The idea was to promote singing of Gurbani shabads in the raags as prescribed in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. In addition, it was also to revive the use of heritage string instruments like rabab, Saranda and Taus that were used by the Guru Sahiban. The singing was to adhere to the rules of the Gurmat Sangeet as prescribed by Punjabi University Patiala. This was a major deviation from the singing practiced by regular ragis, that ignored the raags, the string instruments and used the Indian classical music styles. This Keertan Darbar has been a part of the symposium since 2007.

In the year 2007, S. Gurumukh Singh Tiwana took over as the Zonal convenor for the Silicon Valley Zone and Dr. Gurinder Pal Singh became the Regional-coordinator for the Western-North Keertan region. Dr. Paramjit Singh Everest was the co-coordinator. Presently, S. Narinderpal Singh is serving as the co-coordinator. Sn. Leena Kaur and S.Surjit Singh Dheri have also played an important role in the organization of the Keertan darbar. Both the Speech and the Keertan programs have been making great progress. Due to increased participation from the Guru Nanak Khalsa School, the Silicon Valley Zone has been assigned three Zones for international participation. These are Silicon Valley East, Silicon Valley Central and Silicon Valley West. As a result, in the speech competition now 15 students from GNKS can participate in the international speech symposium, instead of 5 for a single zone.

For Keertan Darbar the 25 zones have been assigned to five regions, Western North, Western South, Sun Belt, Eastern and European Region. Each region has a coordinator and a co-coordinator. The children are divided in 4 age groups ranging from 9 to 25 years. Every year a Raag is specified for each age group and the participants have to pick a shabad from the specified raag. Participant in form of 3-5 member jathaas first compete at the regional level and the winners go to the international level. More rules are available on Hemkunt2.org.

Importance of the International Youth Symposium and Keertan Darbar

While qualifying for the international symposium and keertan darbar takes a lot of effort on part of the children, it is a very rewarding experience. They get to meet other Sikh Children from all over US and parts of UK, Canada and Kenya. These friendships continue long after the international symposium is over. Separate Meetings are held among the participants, parents, convenors, judges and the Hemkunt Foundation board members and the feedback provided is presented in a joint meeting of all. This process of free discussion and feedback leads to continuous improvements in the program and keeps it current to the needs of the participants.

The motivation provided by the urge to go to the international make children work very diligently. This has led to continuous improvements in the quality of speeches and the keertan performances. We could not have imagined that our children will learn to play the heritage instruments like Rabab, Saranda, Taus, Dilruba etc. and play them so well.

Hosting the international event is expensive for the host, but the participant parents who have been to the international symposiums at other places, see the value and are happy to donate to support it. Also, it is only after a long time that a zone has to host the international. In San Jose, we hosted this program after 18 years (Effectively 15 years, as it was not held in 2020, 2021 and 2022 due to covid). Our next turn may be beyond 2040. In San Jose this year, funds donated by these parents and volunteers paid for all of the hospitality costs for the guests for events held outside the Gurdwara Sahib.

Planning for the Events

Last year the International Symposium and Keertan darbar was scheduled from July 25 to July 28, 2024. The discussion on the preparation started more than six months before the event. An organizing committee was formed. We considered following items,

1. Selecting a hotel, where our outside guests could reserve rooms at reasonable rates. Suitability of the rooms for family stay, openness of the lobby area and the availability of the rooms for the meetings etc. were main criteria. Special rates for hotel rooms were negotiated. Similarly special car rental rates were negotiated with the car rental companies, so that our guests could arrange for their own transport from hotel to Gurdwara Sahib. Special arrangements for rides were made

only for guests from UK, as they drive normally on left.

2. In Gurdwara Sahib we needed five rooms for the speech competition and two halls for the keertan competition. For this the stage and audio systems in the North Hall needed to be upgraded. A new mixer was also installed in the main hall. These upgrades are much appreciated by the Gurdwara ragis also. We are thankful S.Onkar Singh Sangha, S. Bahadur Singh Deol and S. Sanjiv Singh for these upgrades. In addition, an audio system was also installed in the South Hall, which will also get used by GNKS staff for its meetings. Thanks to the Gurdwara maintenance team and school volunteers, a thorough cleanup of all the spaces was undertaken.
3. A computer APP was specially created for registering the participants, their families, judges, volunteers, zonal and center convenors, Keertan coordinators and officials from Sri Hemkunt Foundation. This app was also used to send notifications about the programs etc. This was supplemented with a website Hemkunt.us to communicate the program and other arrangements.
4. A boat trip around the Golden gate bridge area was organized for the amusement/relaxation of the participants and their accompanying family members. Due to limited Boat capacity, participation of the local families was restricted. This was followed by a musical talent show by GNKS students and dinner at Paradise hall in Fremont.
5. It was decided to prepare Two short Punjabi plays by the GNKS students. The training was provided by Punjab Lok Rang theater volunteers headed by S. Surinder Singh Dhanoya. Over 20 students participated in rehearsals.
6. A careful planning was done for menus for all the meals from July 25 to July 28, keeping in view to provide variety, child friendly meals and good quality snacks. Care was taken to make sure that all meals served by us were vegetarian.
7. A special book cataloging all the Speech and Keertan darbar participants was prepared.
8. Commitments for financial support from all the volunteers were taken in advance. These donations ranged from \$100 to \$10,000. Generous contributions from Sikh Gurdwara San Jose and Chardikalaa Foundation are gratefully acknowledged.
9. A checklist of all items to be completed before Wednesday evening was prepared.

The Final Preparation

To facilitate the program, many of the volunteers took the week of July 22 off from work. A cleanup of the major areas of Gurdwara Sahib was undertaken. The South Hall, North Hall, Main Hall, Library and the School rooms carpets were steam cleaned. The school courtyard was pressure washed. The front fountains were cleaned up too.

Satinder Singh and Mandeep Singh
pressure washing the School courtyard



Volunteers preparing Rabri, Matri, and
Mathian in the Gurdwara Sahib Kitchen

We were expecting around 600 guests from outside. To save costs and ensure quality, snacks were prepared in large quantity for the four days of stay of our guests and our own Sangat. Needed supplies were procured and the background posters showing Gurdwara Sahib pictures were installed in the five locations to be used for the Speech Symposium and the Keertan Darbar.



Left: Our hardworking sewadars S. Gurpreet Singh, S. Akbal Singh, Dr. Mandeep Singh, S. Kulveer Bhella and S. Sukhdev Singh have a look of relief and gratefulness to Waheguru for having checked boxes on all items of preparation on Wednesday evening.

The guests started arriving on Wednesday, July 24. A simple dinner was arranged for them in the hotel.

Thursday, July 25, 2024

Program on Thursday was very busy. It started with Nitnem at 6:00 AM. A group of students was specially prepared by Bhai Manmohan Singh Ji to do Nitnem with Vajja and tabla. Parents brought them to the hotel for this early in the morning on all days of the symposium.

During the day there were meetings of Hemkunt Board Members, Zonal convenors, participants and finally a joint meeting of all where, feedback from all the meetings was shared.



Dr. Jaswant Singh Sachdev from Phoenix addressing the joint meeting

After the evening tea, every one assembled in the banquet hall. A stage, a background LED screen and audio system was specially arranged for the play. These all worked flawlessly. Our students performed two short plays titled "Satgur Nanak Pargatya" and "Bedawa of 40 Mukte". The performance of our students in the plays was fabulous and was much appreciated by the audience, which watched the performance spell bound.



Left: Play Preparation Team: S. Surinder Singh Dhanoya, Sn. Jaswinder Kaur, Sn. Jyoti Rana, Sn. Ramneet Chaudhary

Right: Audience watching the Plays





Scene from the Play: "Satgur Nanak Pargatya"



Scene from the Play "Bedawa of 40 Mukte"

Considering the enthusiasm of the students and their families, It is now planned to introduce the theater training in the Guru Nanak Khalsa School, San Jose in a regular way in collaboration with Punjab Lok Rang Inc. Videos of the plays are available on Youtube.

The plays were followed by the Panthic Digital Videos program of the Hemkunt Foundation. A selection of short videos produced by the young children were screened.



This program was followed by a sumptuous dinner served by the Mynt restaurant at a very subsidized rate. There was a meeting of the speech judges after dinner.

Two young musicians Sukhamrit Singh on violin and Sehajpreet Singh (from east coast) on tabla were practicing Jugal-bandi in the hotel courtyard in preparation of next day's program.

The work of volunteers was still not done. They returned home after cleanup shortly before mid-night.

Program on Friday, July 26, 2024

On Friday, the day started with speech competition for five groups in parallel at the Gurdwara Sahib. We had three participants from GNKS in each group. A total of 93 children participated in the speech program. The competition was very tough and the judges had hard time deciding the winners. The speeches were rated Gold, Silver and Bronze based on the contents and the delivery by the speakers. Pictures of some of the participants from GNKS are given on the next page.

After the speech competition, the delicious highlight of the day was fresh onsite baked 'Tandoori Pizza'.and salad. There was also traditional langar and ice-cream for children of all ages. We are very thankful to the Tandoori Pizza team for this delightful sewa. All our visitors appreciated this.

A picture booth was also setup in the langar hall. Hundreds of visitors had their pictures taken, and took their pictures with them to keep the memory of the days at Sikh Gurdwara San Jose alive.

Some pictures of the speech competition participants from GNKS are given on next page.



Above:
Left: Navnidh Kaur,
Center: Fateh Singh
Right: Jasleen Kaur Toor

Below
Left: Sangam Singh Dhaliwal
Right: Harshaan Singh
Gandham



In the afternoon starting at 2:00 PM, there was keertan darbar. This year 31 Jathaas with 143 members participated in the Keertan Darbar. Largest number of jathaas were in groups II and III, it was decided to hold the keertan darbar for these in parallel on Friday afternoon. Group II program in the North Hall continued until 7:30 PM. These Jathaas sang Shabads from Raag Soohi in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The Group III program in the Main Hall continued until 5:25 PM. These Jathaas sang Shabads in Raag Ramkaali. Two panels, each of three expert judges were arranged for the Keertan darbar.



Keertan Darbar in Progress
in the North Hall. See the
beautiful flower
decorations around the
Palki Sahib and the
Keertan stage. The Keertan
stage was widened to
provide space for five
participants and their
music instruments.

Pictures of some of the Jathaas from GNKS are given below. These jathaas had been trained by our keertan teachers following the strict Gurmat Sangeet guidelines provided by Sri Hemkunt Foundation.



The day ended with langar at the Gurdwara Sahib. The outside guest returned to the hotel and the volunteers started preparing for the next day.

Saturday, July 27, 2024.

The day program started at 9:30 AM in the Main Hall with Keertan darbar for group I children. There were only six jathaas in this group. They sang Shabads from Raag Bilaawal in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The program finished around 11:45 AM.

Highlight of this day was that boat ride had been arranged in San Francisco for participants, judges, convenors and the families visiting from outside. Since the boat had a limited capacity, participation of local families had to be limited. Buses were arranged to take all the participants to San Francisco, to avoid the parking problems there.

A langar of Chole Bhature was ready around 11 AM and every one was requested to have langar and board the bus before 12:30 PM. Buses were assigned numbers and everyone was asked to remember the bus number they board. Every bus had a coordinator and a co-coordinator to ensure a smooth operation. Around 560 guest took advantage of the bus ride and others decided to drive on their own. The bussing operation worked very smoothly and were able to transport all the guests on time. Some guests (around 80) drove themselves.

The Boat Ride:

The guests boarded the boat at Pier 41 in San Francisco. There were 637 guests on the boat. They were each provided with a snack pack from Subway for enjoying during the ride. As the boat started, the guests relaxed and started enjoying the views of the ocean, the San Francisco Skyline, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Bay Bridge and snacks. Hot tea was served. Which was very much appreciated by the older generation.

Younger people started moving from one deck to the other and started making connections with each other. There was a clear atmosphere of relaxation, joy and togetherness on the boat.



Our sewadars worked hard and after serving tea to everyone got together for a group photograph (see above).

Left:Hemkunt Board Members Enjoying the boat Ride

Everyone enjoyed the ride and our guests appreciated the effort. This will certainly be part of the memory for our guests for years to come.

It was now time to board the buses and drive about 45 minutes to the Paradise Banquet hall in Fremont. Since all the guests knew their Bus numbers and volunteers were there to help them, this part of the trip also went very smoothly.

The Evening at the Paradise Hall:

As buses arrived the paradise hall and as the guests got their snacks and got seated, the planned program started. The first item was the 31 Raag presentation in 20 minutes called Raaganjali, by our Sikh Heritage Symphony students



Sikh Heritage Symphony students Performing the 31Raag Raaganjali in the Paradise Hall.

trained by Sn. Leena Kaur Ji. This was a delightful music performance highlighting the Gurmat Sangeet tradition started by our Gurus.

The Raaganjali program was followed by a jugalbandi with Sukhamrit Singh from GNKS on Violin and Sehajpreet Singh from East Coast on Tabla. This was a great example of friendships and connections formed across the country. Their performance was indeed delightful.

This program was followed by the Sri Hemkunt Foundation board members honoring the Zonal and center convenors and the Keertan coordinators. So as not to take attention away from children this ceremony was done in an informal and speedy way.



Left: The center and zonal convenors, Regional Keertan coordinators and judges were presented with gold pins by Sri Hemkunt Foundation Board members. S. Akbal Singh Karlcut (in red shirt) from San Jose is walking back to his seat, while Dr. Jaswant Singh Sachdev from Phoenix is receiving his pin.

Dinner was served and was enjoyed by everyone. Around 10:00 PM, buses started leaving for the Gurdwara Sahib and they made a stop at the hotel to unload the passengers who needed to rest, while their family members continued to the Gurdwara Sahib to fetch the car parked there. For our volunteers

the day ended around mid-night. Everyone was in high spirits and was looking forward to the final day of the symposium.

Sunday, July 28, 2024

After Nitnem and Breakfast, everyone headed to the Gurdwara Sahib. The program started in the Main Hall after the Ardas at 8:30 AM. We had Keertan Darbar for the group IV, the highest age group. There were five jathaas in this group. The shabads they sang were from Raag Gond in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. This program was over by 11:15 AM. This was followed by the prize distribution.

We also honored some of the key sewadars for their hard work and contributions. These were S. Pavneet Singh for preparing the App that was used to register all the attendees of different categories and send notifications to them. Sn. Pushpinder Kaur had prepared the Symposium Book, including pictures of the all the participants and messages from some of the dignitaries. The third award went to S. Gurpreet Singh, who headed the team of volunteers, which through their meticulous planning and hard work ensured smooth running of the program.

We also honored the Keertan darbar Judges, present at that time.



Left: The Keertan Darbar Judges with the San Jose Gurdwara Head Granthi Bhai Mohinder Singh after receiving Siropas. From Left; Sn. Soni Kaur, Dr. Bachittar Singh, Dr. Manpreet Kaur and S. Manmeet Singh. Three Judges; S. Shivpreet Singh, S. Nirmal Singh Soora and Dr. Gaganpreet Singh were not present at that moment. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

After this came the moment, that participants were eagerly waiting for. It was the announcement of the results and award of certificates. Every child was called on the stage, either alone or in a group and given a certificate. All the Keertan participants and their trainers were also presented with a book on Gurmat Sangeet, compiled by Sn. Leena Kaur and Dr. Gurnam Singh.

This was the final program and after Ardas and Hukam, it was time to depart. Many of the participants and organizers were emotional. Everyone congratulated the host team for an excellent and smooth-running program. Some of these messages are given here. Other testimonials are available online.

Message from Karamjit Singh – Vice President of the Hemkunt Foundation:

“Congratulations on the successful completion of the international program! It was a tremendous success, thanks to your exceptional leadership and the dedicated efforts of the entire team of selfless sewadars. The extensive facilities and unwavering support of the Gurdwara management team were invaluable. The initiative to extend the Keertan Darbar over several days greatly contributed to the smooth execution of the program.

Please extend the Foundation's heartfelt gratitude to all the sewadars for their selfless service.”

Sn. Naginder Kaur representing the European zones and Sn Rajinder Kaur, daughter of late S. Shamsher Singh, the founder of the Sri Hemkunt Foundation visited the school office to thank and congratulate the volunteers. Sn. Naginder Kaur said I will say about this symposium execution in one word. It was “Flawless”.



Sn. Naginder Kaur
(Third from Left) and
Sn. Rajinder Kaur (second from Right)
with school Volunteers
in the school office.

S. Gurumukh Singh Tiwana, who was the chief organizer of the event, praised the organizing team with these words



"I am so fortunate to be part of this DREAM TEAM that organized the 35th International Symposium. Each and everyone in the team contributed with passion, creativity and commitment. We received words from many that this event will be hard to match. From the fabulous play to impeccable organization of the speeches and Keertan Darbar, and the smooth management of the bus and boat trip along with the entertainment on the boat and the dinner in Fremont - all executed to perfection. It should make us all proud of what we achieved together."

Left: S. Gurumukh Singh Tiwana

The actual programs and the testimonials by the participants and the visitors are on the Youtube. The references to the links are here.

Speeches by Children various groups

Group 1 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntSpeechGroup1>.

Group 2 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntSpeechGroup2>

Group 3 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntSpeechGroup3>

Group 4 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntSpeechGroup4>

Group 5 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntSpeechGroup5>

Keertan Darbar for various groups

Group 1 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntKeertanGroup1>

Group 2 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntKeertanGroup2>

Group 3 - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntKeertanGroup3>

Group 4 and Award Ceremony - <https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntKeertanGroup4andAwards>

31 Raag Raaganjali performed by Guru Nanak Khalsa School students

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntRaganjali>

Violin and Tabla jugalbandi by Sukhamrit Singh and Sehajpreet Singh

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntJugalbandi>

Testimonials by the participants

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntParticapantTestimonials>

Testimonials by visitors

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntVisitorTestimonials>

Plays done by Guru Nanak Khalsa School Students

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntPlays>

Photos from the Awards Ceremony

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntAwardsPhotos>

Other Photos including from Photo Booth

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntOtherPhotos>

Hemkunt Magazine

<https://tinyurl.com/HemkuntMagazine>

Sikh Gurdwara-San Jose (California)

3636 Gurdwara Ave

San Jose, CA 95148

NonProfit Org.
US POSTAGE
PAID
SAN JOSE, CA
PERMIT NO 1118

Message from Gurdwara President S. Bhupindar (Bob) Singh Dhillon

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh,



I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the organizers and volunteers of our Gurdwara Sahib for their hard work and dedication in hosting the International Sri Hemkunt Foundation Youth Symposium and Keertan Darbar. This event brought together Gurdwaras not only from across the United States but also from Europe and Africa, creating a truly global gathering.

Youth participants have shared that preparing for the Speech and Keertan Competitions in the symposium was a valuable learning experience. In addition, it also provided a wonderful opportunity to connect with fellow Sikh youth from Gurdwaras across the country and beyond. For many, it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, filled with inspiration and camaraderie. I am delighted to hear that the event was so meaningful for them, and that they are now eagerly looking forward to traveling to Houston for the International Symposium and Keertan Darbar in July 2025.

I am incredibly proud of our event organizers for forging strong ties between our Gurdwara and this esteemed worldwide organization dedicated to Sikh youth development. Hosting such an event requires immense financial and logistical efforts from our volunteers and Gurdwara, but the benefits far outweigh the costs. Given that the opportunity to serve as a host arises only once every 15 to 20 years, this accomplishment truly sets our Gurdwara apart among Northern California's Sikh communities.

On another important note, the **San Jose Gurdwara's Election/Selection** is scheduled for **October 12, 2025**. I urge all families to ensure that every member aged 18 or older is a **Registered Member**. Additionally, those who previously registered using a passport or green card should now obtain a **California Real ID**, which is the preferred ID for voting in the election. I also encourage you to support a progressive team—one that will not only continue our current programs but will also introduce new initiatives to meet the future needs of our Sangat.