

Nirankari Youth Conference: Vision 20/20 Held in New York Metro Area—A Grand Success!

Nirankari Vision 20/20, a two-day Youth Conference/Samagam was held on July 2nd and 3rd, 2011 at the Renaissance Hotel and Conference Center in Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA. The event was the fifth youth conference of the Mission in North America and was hosted by the New York Metro Branch, with more than 250 participants, in the age group of 13 to 30, from all over the United States and Canada. Thanks to the visionary behind Vision 20/20, Satguru Baba Hardev Singh Ji, who gave the youth this opportunity to congregate, engage, interact, discuss and draw an action plan to implement his clarion call: ***“Stop Globalizing Hatred...Globalize Love...Live in Harmony!”*** The two-day event was presided by Rev. Sandeep Khinda Ji and graced with the presence and support of several members of the US and Canada Executive Committees of the Mission.



This Youth Conference/Samagam received accolades from all participants, attendees, and the press for its interesting content, interactive presentations, brainstorming segments, and remarkable multimedia format which created an overall immersive and unforgettable experience. Two months prior to the event, as soon as it was announced that the New York Metro Branch will be hosting the conference, the preparations began and picked up pace almost instantaneously. The youth, 13-30, took upon themselves the responsibility of brainstorming for the content, format, and organization with minimal guidance, on as- and if-needed basis, from the elders and organizers on local and national level. They were given the discretion to take their decisions and they followed through, putting together a flawless conference, demonstrating that they are ready for the future.

This was indeed a program of the youth, for the youth, and by the youth. The youth designed and created an event website (<http://www.nirankari.org/newyork/yc2011/>) to disseminate program-related information and to facilitate attendee registration. The website was well-utilized by the participants and attendees. Most of the participants arrived the day before the event at the Renaissance, Elizabeth, New Jersey—a convenient location close to the airport and the NY Metro Satsang Bhawan. An impressive exhibition created by the youth and langar was also arranged at the same location.



Day 1: Saturday, July 2, 2011

On the morning of Saturday, July 2, the participants lined up to receive their welcome packages which consisted of a back-pack bag with conference insignia, a program binder, a T-shirt, a name badge, a copy of *Gurudev Hardev*, and a wrist band bearing the slogan—Universal Brotherhood. The conference hall was arranged to accommodate the youth participants in the seating area directly in front of a large stage and other attendees on the sides. The hall was equipped with projection screens on both sides of the stage. The stage was adorned with a massive blue backdrop with a portrait of His Holiness Satguru Baba Hardev Singh Ji looking into the theme of the conference, Vision 20/20, as if to bless the youth to be imbued with His vision.



The Formal Opening segment began with brief welcome remarks by Rev. Arun Ahluwalia (General Secretary, SNM, USA). Youth coordinator in-charge Sarabjit (Chand) Michra welcomed Rev. Sandeep Khinda with a bouquet of flowers. The formal opening of the conference took place with a special message from His Holiness Baba Hardev Singh Ji who expressed His happiness that the Fifth Youth Conference was being held and blessed the event for success.

In His message of blessing to the participants, His Holiness Baba Ji stated that youth is a part of life that is specially endowed with energy. It behooves the youth to utilize and channelize this energy in constructive pursuits and lead a moral, ethical life that bears a testimony to their spiritual enlightenment—the Divine vision. He acknowledged that the veterans of the Mission were once young too; now, it's the new generation that has to be prepared to render selfless services and be ready to take the Mission into the future. This continuity is a process that will continue as our youth today dedicate themselves to the cause of the Mission.

Thereafter, the conference co-moderators, Ankit Chelani and Nancy Sangha, took the stage.



What followed next was eight 30 to 60-minute long interactive, educating, entertaining, and enlightening segments with a lot of slides and video content shown on dual screens using modern interactive technologies to convey the precise and profound message. These modules were interspersed with inspiring commercial breaks, which were enacted live by the youth to convey powerful inspiring messages using the format of famous commercials we often see on television. The audience admired the creative use of this medium to skillfully infuse humor into the program and convey profound messages. Unlike on television where commercials are perceived as interruptions, the attendees at this event eagerly looked forward to seeing the next commercial. Each commercial served as a perfect segue to the next segment. The segments included:



Introduction and Icebreaker: During this opener, the participants were asked to get to know one another. The binder included various to-do tasks for this activity.

Nirankari History/Trivia: Taking a cue from the famous TV show, Are You Smarter Than A Fifth Grader!, this interactive program was formatted with a focus on the important historical and organizational aspects of the Mission.

Importance of God-knowledge (Gyan): An in-depth segment which had so many dimensions that the audiences of all ages were spellbound. It was a truly multi-media and multi-sensory experience including narrative, didactic, interactive, audio, and video. It delved deep into the subject by explaining the nature of creation and then moved on to expounding upon the Creator and His knowledge.

Formation of Teams: A breakout session during which each group was given a challenging issue that the youth faces today. The group members discussed and came forward to present their recommendations to tackle the issues.

Nirankari Vision 20/20: The youth defined their perception of “Nirankari Vision 20/20” and addressed the goals that need to be achieved by the year 2020.

Role of Youth in Vision 20/20: In this interactive session, many video clips were shown highlighting different scenarios such as peer pressure, alcoholism, and common problems confronted by the youth today. The youth showed how they would deal with those situations according to the teachings of the Mission.

Unity in Diversity and Introduction to the Mission: In this 2-part segment the participants first discussed different forms of discrimination in the society and recommended ways to change such radical behavior. In part two, they suggested different ways to introduce the philosophy of the Mission.

Avtar Bani: This segment provided the history and teachings of the Avtar Bani in a quiz format. Each multiple choice question was followed by an explanation for the correct answer.



The event concluded with brief remarks from Revs. Iqbaljit S. Rai (President, SNM, USA), Surjit Arneja (President, SNM, Canada) and Sandeep Khinda.



Cultural Program: The long day ended with cultural activities which included skits and devotional hymns while keeping the theme in focus. The upbeat mood of the participants was at its peak in this grand finale to the first day of the conference.



TV Asia covered the Youth Conference event including interviews with the youth and the presiding saint Rev. Sandeep Khinda Ji. The taped excerpts of the program and the interviews were telecast throughout the United States and Canada in TV Asia's Community News segment twice and reached thousands of audiences.

Day 2: Sunday, July 3, 2011

The songs and speeches on this day reinforced the theme of the conference—Vision 20/20. Many speakers impressed with their thoughts on the need to implement Baba Ji's call to **“Stop globalizing hatred...globalize love...live in harmony.”**



In his address to the youth, Rev. Sandeep Khinda Ji said:

The youth needs to have a firm belief that the only things that are ever true in life are Satguru, Sadh Sangat and Nirankar. He said that in this youth conference the enthusiasm was evidently high. Now there is a need for the youth to go out in this world and become an inspiration and role models. One important thing to take from this conference is that we need to understand the Gyan and its application in our day to day life. We need to imbibe Gyan into our life and become one with Gyan, which really means to become one with the Satguru because there is no difference between the two. He exhorted the youth to become an asset to the Satguru. This can be achieved if we surrender ourselves unconditionally and let the holy master utilize and help us to help others.

In their concluding remarks, the NY Metro youth coordinator Sarabjit (Chand) Michra and the New York Metro Branch Parmukh Rev. Ashok Wahi admired the effort of the youth and thanked the attendees and the Satguru for the opportunity to host this event.

A few verbatim words of appreciation, from the attendees and the press, about the Youth Conference/Samagam:

- “Have never seen such a Samagam in North America before!”
- “This should have been webcast live for everyone to see!!”
- “A similar Youth Conference should be planned in India too!!!”
- “Previous youth conferences were good too, but this is it!”
- “A wonderful effort and contribution; an event and exhibition from which everybody will gain a lot.”

- "It was an interesting experience. A samagam that needs to be continued every year."

