

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

#### • Introduction:

District Khanewal of southern province of Punjab, Pakistan is a conflict prone area where violence is often committed in the name of religion. Decades before the communities of this district have been living in peace and harmony by sharing their sorrows and joys together and the spirit of sympathy existed in all the diverse communities regardless of any difference of caste and creed. There social bonds were very strong at that time but in the late 70s the waves of extremism and hatred expanded in such a way that intolerance among communities took over the stage of tolerance. In Khanewal district, the efforts for the promotion of democracy and protection of universal human rights are sabotaged due to a general denial of the rights of the marginalized segments of the society based on ethnicity, religion and class system because country has suffered through long three military regimes which established a culture of degraded human rights values and their practices. During the last oligarchy, the discriminatory laws were introduced and religious extremism was promoted to prolong the autocracy. It erupted sectarian violence both of intra and inter religious conflicts aggravated intolerance and inequality in the society. Apart from situation, there are other genuine and validated reasons, which are source of motivation to work in this area to promote Interfaith Harmony and human solidarity because in this agricultural belt situation of Education, Health, and Economic Development has been ignored for a long time that is lack of tolerance, violence and disharmony occurs very often on minor issues such as incident of Shantinagar in 1997 when a mob attacked on Christian Village Shantinagar of Khanewal district along with other adjacent Christian localities were burnt to ashes on false accusation of desecration of Holy Quran. This series of Incidents have not stopped in Khanewal region and in July 26, 2013 an incident of same kind occurred in village 31/10-R. Where personal grudge of a Muslim farmer against a Christian farmer turned into a mob attack on the house of Christian farmer as a result of this attack the house of Christian farmer was badly destroyed and a person expired. This type of situation still exists in Khanewal region recently on August 15, 2017 a young college student was killed by a mob of extremist students in Khanewal city on sectarian basis. Khanewal district has always been experiencing backlash on religious minorities on any incident against Muslims in any part of the world especially in non-Muslim countries. The policies of revenge against religious minorities have made them vulnerable and target of fanatics. Recently such behavior was quit starkly noticed during the US led war against terrorism especially against Taliban after September 11 incident is USA.

To bring people closer, despite of their religious, ethinic, sectrian and linguistic differences, BETHAK organization initiated this event "Interfaith Peace Evening" in the context of World interfaith Harmony Week. It is hoped that having provided such awareness about Composite Culture as a tool of peace and harmony to our people; they would be enabled to contribute their share to the enrichment of society and establishment of a culture of peace in conflict prone society of Pakistan. They should know that they are not alone, God who made them and placed them in this breath taking world will be at their side to inspire and guide them as they forge ahead to make the world a better place than they find it now.

A journey from dialogue to practice through interfaith peace cultural festival for peaceful coexistence help people to practically enage into day to day life, building the gaps, accepting the difference, coming from dialogue to practice was the sprit of this event.

### **Background of Event:**

BETHAK as not for profit and non partisan organization it has been working since 2004 in Southern Province of Punjab, Pakistan to promote peace and harmony in this conflict prone region because of fundamentalism and its historical attitude towards non-Muslim communities. The prevailing situation has opened up a new Pandora box with new challenges. Religious intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion remain as one of the root causes of a number of conflict, bomb blasts, and suicidal attacks on going violence in Pakistan. The incidents of Peshwar, Sukhur, Omar Kot and burning of a Christian couple at Manga Mandi and the places of worships of Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis were not spared.

Keeping the existing situation in mind BETHAK organization has celebrated the interfaith cultural festival for peaceful co-existence to release the catharsis of the people and acknowledge the commitment of the people who invested their energies with BETHAK organization to promote peaceful, harmonious and dignifies existence of all human beings as equal citizens of this region by bridging gaps of caste, colour, creed and race.

# LOCATION AND FOCUS GROUPS

• Location:

This Event was organized in Khurampura colony of district Khanewal, which has mixed population of Christians and Muslims in target area such as:

- Khanewal city area ( colonies and blocks)
- Christian colony civil lines.
- Khurampura colony
- Railway colony
- Chak 72/10-R, Shantinagar

# • Focus Group(s):

BETHAK organized a team of 5 members to contact people of good will from all walks of life and try to convince them to join hands with BETHAK to bring people of all faiths closer to one another as people of same culture. There had been individual as well as collective meetings with intellectuals, journalists, religious leaders, politicians and youth of all faiths. BETHAK's efforts proved successful and a group of intellectuals, mass media personnel's, teachers and students showed their willingness to be a part of BETHAK's Event for promoting a love of the good and love of the neighbour in Khanewal region. The biggest achievement of BETHAK was to achieve the sympathies of religious leaders of AhI-e-Hadees, Deobandi and Shiah sects. Besides all this the 4 local NGO's and human rights activist of Khanewal also helped BETHAK to hold thought providing event in the context of World interfaith hermony week for promoting a culture of peace in khanewal region.

### • GOAL & OBJECTIVES

### • Goal:

To focus composite cultural values and attitude among people of different background this will encourage general public for building peaceful society and ultimately a peaceful world.

# • Objective(s):

- To work for a clear understanding of peace and harmony in the context of World Interfaith Harmony Week..
- To promote theme of social relationship and spirit of brotherhood through social gathering at Interfaith Peace Evening.
- To identify the dynamics of personal and social transformation particularly in the area of women, youth and environment of peace.
- To create awareness in society about importance of tolerance and increase interfaith collaboration at grass root level for promoting love of the good and love of the neighbour.

# MAIN COMPONENTS OF THE EVENT

# • Recitation of the Holy Books:

The Interfaith Peace evening started with recitation from holy Quran, Geeta, Granth Sahib, and Bible by Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Christian participants. The content of recitation of all the four holy books was about that all of us are people of the same God and we must live in peace and harmony respecting the religious values of all the religions. About this component of the event the audiences were of the opinion that as the people of different faiths living in this region are not strangers to one another. They are facing the same crisis of terrorism, communal as well as religious discrimination therefore they have to join hands to defeat the lurking forces of evil in our midst by promoting traditions of cultural festivals, and they are based on tolerance and mutual respect for each others as people of the same culture and God. According to the general consensus of the participants, it was decided that all of us must follow the social teachings of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity and promote an atmosphere of social gathering where people can meet to promote a love for good and love for neighbour.

# • Peace Messages:

In this session peace messages given by peace promoters were very thoughful messages about peaceful co-existence and love of the neighbour without any distincction of caste and creed. The messages were read before the audience which they approved unanimously and promised to act upon the messages of peace promoters in their localities. These messages have good impact on the minds of the audience. It seemed that the peace festival proved to be meaingful attempt to bring change in the minds of the audience.

## **Pictorial View:**







## **Outcomes/Results**

- Awareness was created in society about importance of Tolerance and living together as people of same culture.
- Religious leaders recognized the prime importance of the inspiring role to create a better world order in peace and justice
- Audience discovered and understood the ways, which people from other cultures and religions think and act about peace and harmony.

# • Peace Poetry:

In this session Nadeem Najid a famous Muslim poet read his poems on peace because the existing chaotic situation created by terrorists by self suicide and bomb blasts has made every pakistani very senstive. The teaching of Guru Nanak who promoted peace and harmony among communities proved to be much impressive. Mr. Najid's poetry was highly appreicated by the audience.

# **Pictorial View: :**





#### **Outcomes/Results**

- Peace poetry formed a firm platform on which to build a better future where diverse people can feel that they belong to same culture.
- Participants were briefed with the composite personality (Guru Nanak) of their society that could live a life with integrity and peace.

# • Peace Songs:

In this session local singers entertained the participants with peace songs and folk music. The audience not only appreicated the peace songs and folk music but also began singing themselves with the singers. Peace Songs provided an opportunity to Christian, Muslim and Hindu artists to get acquainted with one another and thus they developed a close friendship and ties of brotherhood as well. Musical interaction creates social values of acceptence. Two or more people create something that is greater than the sum of what they create each on their own. And sympathies are formed with strong feelings of belonging as one nation. Music making in a group brings out the social dynamics of the group. Harmonic as well as strained relationships are brought to the front. Through musical dialogues the interrelationships within the group are explored. The participants both Christian and Muslim appreciated the efforts of BETHAK and they requested the BETHAK Project Coordinator to hold such functions of Christian Muslim get together through such festivals.

## **Pictorial View:**









#### **Results/Outcomes**

- Confidence was developed to make oneself acceptable.
- Artists showed their willingness to promote culture of Peace through Music.
- Peace songs helped to build confidence and created opportunities among artists to develop competencies on peace and social cohesion to live and work in dignity and to participate in development of peaceful society.

# • Meal Sharing:

At the end the participants of all faiths shared dinner with one another and left the place with a new zeal to make Pakistan a place of harmonious and peaceful co-existence. Mr. Burhan a Muslim and Mr. Sheraz Naseer a Christian, Ms. Huma aHindu and Sardar Ramesh Singh a Sikh shared meal in the same plate. Which was a sign of solidarity among communities, such sharing of meal indicates that they are people of the same family and there is no discrimination of race, caste and creed among them. Likewise most of the participants shared meal in the same plate as a sign of one people of the same nation. All of our peace activities were carried out with aim in raising awareness about the significance of interfaith dialogue, peace building, universality of love and peace and importance of peace creating love for neighbor without discrimination. BETHAK succeeded the achieving the maximum possible results by taking preventive and restorative measures when needed.

## **Pictorial View:**













#### **Outcomes/Results**

- Through sharing meal the interrelationships within the group are explored.
- Participants learned how to accept people in daily life without any discrimination of religion, caste and creed.
- People have learned to play their part consciously or unconsciously in making religious coexistence a reality.

### • IMPACTS OF THE EVENT:

This may be too early to state about the sustainable impact of the event in the target areas at this stage. But it is notable that the activities undertaken in the event had the following impact as the result/indicators of event interventions:

- BETHAK-Pakistan observed the positive impact from the micro level of individuals to the meso level of communities through its interfaith peace cultural festival on promoting a culture of peace for social change in Khanewal region.
- It is felt that religious intolerance has been reduced and people are accepting each other on humanitarian grounds as people of same culture rather than on the bases of their faith and believes
- Peace building has reflected positive changes in the lived experienced of all those who lived in this conflict prone area.
- Interfaith Peace Cultural Festival has opened the way for discussion and exploration of interpretation and type of social interaction between and with in groups.
- The event has targeted problems at grassroots level and in a short span of time, it is clear that the this festival has achieved in relation to peace building in the area and the biggest contribution of the event has been to bring the dialogue on promoting culture of peace into the public space.
- Help counter extremist propaganda in region that pulls individuals into radicalization and then into extremism.
- Community relations have been improved.

- Inter –ethnic trust has been built.
- Explicit peace building measures.
- It is a source of joy and encouragement that credibility and networking of the organization (BETHAK) is being strengthened

# **Media Watch:**

The Interfaith peace cultural festival for peaceful co- existence was well covered by local and national print media. BETHAK received many calls of appreciation for conducting this interfaith peace evening in Khanewal's conflict prone area where sectarian as well as religious conflicts abrupt on very minor issues. Following are some news cuttings of the local and national newspapers



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41 文 心 よっしんれっちっちちっちっちっちっちっ נינ גמיוי לעוב לי נהל באו לא באו באו 「いんというがんしといういしょうの كروارادا كرعى إيراس موقع يرموا الأفقل مباس. قاد قاد تل شريف بإدرى فيم ، مرداد ريش داك افتر معين اوديد قركالجى كماتا تعاكد بم ب موذياءك دمرتى كرب وال إن الد با الماد رك ولل اذات بات اور غابب ومسالك كمشترك للافى مد المان بن - مر الغيران دول المت ب ال لا دين لل المور - م الك مح مر الله في ノイシンシン いかいっ シートー トーノン تارية باذا جدادت الكى خواجورت ردايات موجود یں جان بھی سالک شاہ بادرداؤں کے حالے = شاخون كرواد محف كاخرور ف مور ف تدى كا جال محى بكداوك رودمره وتعدكى ش مضبوط مالى رفتون indickervieznenc צי לב היצו האוש מול של אב ب يوكرور يوفى جارى جد خاب ومقائد اور سالك مارى ذاتى شاتيم من مي حين ام ب ك וא ל מווב אני גיעוט ביות ייל גוייונ ار ويد فال ماستاد يسف وال والى كار تدم خان ל לוציב יואי בי אי אין אין אין על فيرى كل شاد، رياسليم ومشاسليم ، رفق خان ، عابدانى ، جادید بلی فراطرس اور مر ما جد فرایج این کرت اور شامری وژن کی جدو مرحالی تلقیموں تے تعلق رکھنے -Softistable

فافى تقاريب الى دويون ش بمترى لاف ش اجم كردارادا كر عنى إي یف ادر آب تظم کے زیادتا م ہفتہ برائے ثان الدا اب بم آنگی کومنانے کیلے ان فیرہ تیں اینک کا ابتمام کیا گی ىلىل الماريل الماريل الماكي مارك - مى ما كو سلم الاك كيلا الحق رك محمر كارامام الاماري عن الماريس المالية المان مالي الداري الماري الماري 11 مالي ما يك الإنجاري الماريس كي الاندر المراج (ان المراد المراد المراد المراد

eekiy SAFEER-E- PAKISTAN KHANEWAL يديده أيماقيل فيرشى ﴿ جَدْمُ را 8 فَرورى الما فرورى 2018 صفحات 4 قيت 4 (شاره مبر 50)



- 10/2/13/2310



بالأامية والقصار

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5-2-2018



فاندال: مفتد برائ ين المداب بم آبتل مناف كيلي انترفيته في الونك كاابتمام فاغدال (فرائد فحوص) بيفك ادرآب تطيم ع ويابتام بغديداع عن المداب بم آبل كومنان كفي الزفيرة في المنظ كاابتدام كاكيا- في ش عماكم ا مسلم اور میچی کم وی سے تعلق رکھنے والے فوجوانوں ، مسلم اور میچی کم وی اوں ، مالی ورکردوں، فوا تین اور فنکاروں کی کثیر تعداد نے ישיט-גולון במוך לב אב גוולאל بین معلم شرار در اسی کا کما تا کر شر که تا فی در د. کی تروی می مان کار با اقیاد شد ب س در که لوکون بر در مان تو لیک کی دو ن بیدار کر علی ب اور تا فی 「こうかん」というからしとういうんにしい كرعى إلى ال موقع ومولا والصل عدام، فادر في الوكل شريف، بادرى فيم ، مردار رميش، واكر اخر حسين ادويوتر في خطاب كيا-



Following are youtube links for Video clips

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXyPIwFOekA&t=8s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYABgzseiV0&t=93s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jlYJc1sCxc&t=1s

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