

Press Release - August 24, 2006  
By Jai Birdi

**Subject: Dalit centennial celebrated by the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Vancouver (Canada)- with the blessings of Shri 108 Sant Niranjan Dass Ji and Shri 108 Rama Nand Ji of Dera Sach Khand Ballan, Jullandhar (India)**

Vancouver: Dalit-Canadians from across Canada gathered at the Shri Guru Ravidass Community center in Burnaby in the morning of August 20 and then in the evening they gathered at the Surrey's Bombay Banquet Hall to pay tributes to the pioneers of Canada.

To have these celebrations blessed, the organizers invited Shri 108 Sant Naranjan Dassji and Shri 108 Rama Nandji of Dera Such Khand Ballan (Jullandhar, Punjab). Among other occasions, the Sabha had also previously invited Sant Niranjan Dass Ji and Sant Rama Nand Ji in 2000 to officially inaugurate the community center (and a temple) at 7271 Gilley Avenue in Burnaby.

Among organizations that came to participate included Shri Guru Ravidass Society of Calgary, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Montreal, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Ontario, Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Trust of UK, Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Charitable Trust of Vancouver, and Chetna Association of Canada. These organizations were represented by Sunil Raju, Sewa Viridi, Jaswinder Rana, Charanjit Banga, Tilak Toora, Sukhdev Rattu, Santokh Sund, Nirmal Chandarh, Kamlesh Chandarh, Virinder Bangar, and others.

Religious celebrations in the morning at the temple and social celebrations at the banquet hall were packed. All participants were displaying a sense of pride in their heritage and were cherishing the occasion that was one of the significant milestones in the Dalit history of Canada.

While the morning was blessed by the grace of Sant Niranjan Dass Ji and with the kirtan by Sant Rama Nand Ji, the evening was entertained by the pop-singer Kaler Kanth who provided a delightful entertainment with the music that was played by Kishore Kaler on the keyboard, Raymon Bhullar of Dhol Nation Academy on the Dhols, and Vijay of Vijay Academy and his team on other instruments.

The celebrations were organized the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Vancouver under the chairmanship of Bill Basra and with the support of the honorary chairs Mayor Derek Corrigan (Burnaby) and Commissioner Lahori Ram (Economic Development, State of California).

The Indian Consul General Mr. Ashok Kumar also shared his greetings. The greetings and message of the Indian High Commissioner Ms. Shyamela Cowsik that "The Dalit

Centenary celebrations will naturally give pride of place to one of the giants of the Indian independence movement, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who was also one of the leading architects of the constitution of independent India” was also acknowledged and appreciated.

Others who participated and graced the occasion by their presence included councilor Sav Dhaliwal (Burnaby), MLA Raj Chauhan (Burnaby-Edmonds), MLA Dave Hayer (Surrey), MP Peter Julian (Burnaby), MP Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey-N. Delta), MP Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver), MLA Sue Hammel (Surrey), MLA Bruce Ralston (Surrey), councilor George Chow (Vancouver), and Deputy Commissioner Paul McDonnell (Burnaby, Parks and Recreation). MLA Hayer added to the celebrations by making a special presentation of a proclamation to the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha.

Gurpreet Singh, broadcaster with Radio India also participated in these celebrations along with Ram Partap Kaler, Nirmal Chandarh, Harjinder Mal, Roop Ahir, Satpaul Mahey, Kamlesh Chandarh, Nagina Bangar, Gulshan Kalsi, Dyal Karra, Rajesh Angral, Sucha Jassi, Dr. KP Singh, Sunil Raju, Sewa Singh, Jaswinder Rana, Tilak Raj Toora, Charanjit Banag, and others.

Early settlers who came to Canada included Mr. Mahia Mehmi of village Mathida, Mr. Basanta Ram of village Mahilpur, Mr. Essar Ram of village Lageri, and Mr. Gurditta Ram of village Upplan. Descendents of these early settlers who came to receive the recognition included Jai Mehmi (from Victoria), Kamal Bhullar (of Surrey) and her brother Kewal (from Delta), Hukam Chand from Burnaby, and Sudarshan Ardhawa of Burnaby.

The primary reason for organizing these celebrations was to pay tributes to pioneers and the other reason was to display pride in the Dalit heritage”, said Bill Basra, president of Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha and the chair of the Dalit centennial celebrations committee. “We have a strong history, and our forefathers have survived the most secluded conditions that were imposed by the caste system and we are grateful to our forefathers for persevering and keeping the heritage alive ”, continued Basra.

The same sentiments were expressed by Lamber Rao and Gurmit Sathi, members of the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha.

“This was a great occasion to reflect on our Dalit identity and heritage”, says Rao.

One of the other milestones that were laid at these celebrations was the national meeting of the Ravidassia organization that took place on August 19<sup>th</sup> at the Shri Guru Ravidass temple in Burnaby.

“This is the first time in the history of Canada that the Ravidassia organizations have come together to discuss their common platform and plan for establishing the national or international federation of the Ravidassia organizations”, says Amarjit Lealh, the 1<sup>st</sup> vice president of Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha.

The next national meeting of the Ravidassia organizations will be held in Calgary, announced Sukhdev Rattu of Shri Guru Ravidass Society of Calgary.

For this occasion, a souvenir magazine was also published by the editorial team of Gurmit Singh Sathi, Lamber Rao, and Jai Birdi. It was released at the temple by Shri 108 Sant Niranjana Dass Ji and at the banquet hall, it was released by the Indian Consul General, Mr. Ahok Kumar.

In addition to paying tributes to the early settlers, others were also recognized for their contributions. Among these included a renowned poet and an activist Amrit Diwana of Surrey and the Kabaddi star Lamber Jassi, who now lives in Calgary.

“Celebrating these centenary celebrations is truly an honor and privilege that we will cherish for the rest of our lives”, says Roop Chandarh, treasurer of the Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha.

Chandarh also extended his congratulations to all on this auspicious occasion.

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