



Above, the Gur Sikh gurdwara in Abbotsford, a National Historic Site

Below: Dr Satwinder Bains, right, with community leaders at the installation of the Guru Granth Sahib at the University of Fraser Valley

100 years of Gur Sikh Temple, 1 year of celebrations

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Even as Canada celebrates the Year of India, the Sikh community is gearing up for year-round celebrations to mark the centenary of the foundation of the Gur Sikh Temple, Abbotsford, British Columbia.

The gurdwara, a National Historic Site, was built between 1908 and 1911 by pioneering immigrants from India. 'One hundred years later, the community of Abbotsford is proud to dedicate 2011 as the Centenary Year for the founding of this historic temple,' sponsors of the event say.

To mark the centenary, the Center for Indo-Canadian Studies, University of Fraser Valley, has joined hands with the Khalsa Diwan Society of Abbotsford, which manages the gurdwara, to organize a three-day academic and scholarly conference to discuss history, culture, etc, says Dr Satwinder Bains, director, CICS.

"It is an academic response to the centennial celebrations," she told *India Abroad*. Titled 'Transnational Punjabis in the 21st Century: Beginnings, Junctures and Departures,' the conference will be held at the UFV May 5 to 7.

"We will have scholars who can help us envision where we are going in the future," she added. "We don't get to do that very much... but we now have a place and an opportunity to mark 100 years of our heritage (*in Canada*) and to mark this year as a very important time. We can say our people



got together, and these were their ideas about us. We want to share that message."

The scholars will look at the various layers of the Sikh community in Canada.

"There are lots of Punjabis who are first immigrants, 2nd country, or 3rd country immigrants. There are immigrants who came 100 years ago, the settlers, their history and what that has been like. Then there are citizens who have become Canadians as much as anybody else and

there are also the leaders. There are activists who are always pushing the envelope and are saying what's happening in the future and where we need to go," Bains said. "We have this unique opportunity to take... the different journeys of different trajectories of life in Canada and put them together and say where we are going."

"Before this, we have been just in the settling mode," she added. "Now we are beyond settling. We have actually moved

into where we are an integral part of the Canadian agenda, Canadian life, Canadian citizenship... We have the whole citizenry of people who are active in Canadian politics, Canadian education, Canadian system... By that I don't mean just contributing, but actually setting the agenda and saying these are our demands, this is what we believe in."

Bains believes the Indo-Canadian community has "evolved and matured at a very important time in our lives and this conference is to find out and fine tune our response to what it looks like at this stage, and 100 years later."

The conference will also see discussions on the ups and downs of the community — including the demand for a separate state of Khalistan, the Air India tragedy of June 23, 1985 and drugs and gang violence among young Indo-Canadians.

The latter will be part of the under-graduate conference. Students will address issues of "How they fit in, how structured are the Indo-Canadian youth... Student participants will say what's going on in their lives," Bains said.

The emphasis of the conference will be Punjabis, and it will, in no way, mar the secular character of the conference, she said. "To keep religion out, we are not using the word Punjabis," she added. "We will be talking about the cultures of Hindu Punjabis, Sikh Punjabis, Muslim Punjabis. We are not talking of the religious side."

Parneet Kaur, India's minister of state for external affairs, and Jason Kenney, citizenship and immigration minister, are expected to attend the event.