



BHAGWANT KAUR GILL

Love, Solace and Courage

The story of Bhagwant Kaur Gill is a rare capturing of the experience of migration and movement, thanks to the work of her daughter, the late Dr. Kuldip Kaur Gill, a renowned writer, who had preserved Bhagwant Kaur’s story through her writings.

Bhagwant Kaur Gill was born on November 10th, 1914 in Ferozepur, Punjab, India.

The story of how Bhagwant Kaur reached Canada, is through her marriage to Indar Singh Gill. Indar Singh Gill was sponsored by his father, Naranjan Singh Gill, to join him in Canada in the year 1927. The couple were arranged to be married while Indar was in Canada, with the formal marriage taking place on February 18th, 1934 in India upon his return visit.

According to Dr. Kuldip Gill, the parents love for each other was apparent as revealed through their letters to each other between the time of their marriage and the year 1939 when they would be reunited again. Indar Singh returned to Canada soon after their marriage and would sponsor Bhagwant Kaur and their younger son Kalvan and daughter Kuldip.



1. Kuldip Kaur 15.2.34 Female
2. Bhagwant Singh 10.9.36 Male

DESCRIPTION
SIGNALEMENT

Place and date of birth
Lieu et date de naissance
Dhander, B.K. Ferozepore
10.11.1914

Domestic
Domicile
Wife
Femme

Height
Taille
5 ft. 3 in.

Colour of eyes
Couleur des yeux
Blue

Colour of hair
Couleur des cheveux
Black

Visible distinguishing marks
Signes particuliers
Scar on left arm.

CHILDREN ENFANTS

Signature of Wife
Signature of the bearer
Bhagwant Kaur

WIFE FEMME

PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER

GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB

(Photo)

Bhagwant Kaur – having never left her homeland, would venture to British Columbia beginning on December 4, 1938, and reach British Columbia in 1939 with her two young children Kuldip and Kalvan on the Empress of Japan.

The family’s route, as part of an intricate pattern of migration and movement, began with a train from Punjab to Calcutta. And from there, by boat to Hong Kong. Bhagwant Kaur travelled through the CPR Empress Line when she was quarantined for a whole month in Hong Kong because Kuldip had contracted a slight illness.



The Reach P11904

Bhagwant Kaur was only twenty-three years old when she first migrated from India to Canada, travelling with an infant (Kalvan) and a four-and-a-half-year-old daughter Kuldip.

Dr. Kuldip recalls that they were astonished to see the meat hanging on strings in the ship “pork, grizzled chickens, heaped gizzards, glazed everything, fish, pineapples, small red bananas, peeled tangerines – all smelling of each other,” and it was a big cultural shock for the first-timer travelling abroad.

Bhagwant Kaur purchased a granite-pestle to make masala, two saris, a cut-velvet jacket dress, and for her neck, a hammered gold gingeeri (hand-made gold chain) to take to Vancouver.

The family first resided in New Westminster and then Mission, Ladner, finally settling back in Mission where her father worked in the lumber industry.

The love captured between both Indar Singh Gill and Bhagwant Kaur is best revealed in their daughter's, the late Dr. Gill's poem entitled "Samaran: Hand to Hand to Hand":

"Would Theirs Be a Life to
Disregard
Hand to Hand to Hand....."



"I hold your letters in two hands,
As when in temple receiving prasad
Letters written by my father to my mother,
A Man in Canada to his young wife in India.

His hands wrote these lines
Her hands held these letters
Her eyes eked meanings from the sounds
Of his words, from between the lines
Letters read first by his mother,
Sister, brother, someone who could
Read them fast, get the message, get the tone.

She read them last, slowly,
Eking out each sound,
e-a-c-h v-o-w-e-l
To hear his voice,
To remember how he strung his words,
Breaths and sighs, long sounds
And breaks. She melted words, riddled
meanings, for her alone.

She read them like this
On rose-pink sleepless mornings
Before the house woke,
At the peacock's first shriekings;
She read them in moonlight haze,
On starlit nights, as sheet lightning
Filled the skies.

She folded and unfolded,
Reading the words of a lovesick Canadian husband
Eventually, she tied them into packets,
Placed them locked in boxes
In her trunk. Brought them back to him
With children's sweaters, seeds and chooran and saffron
The books he ordered, the surma for her green eyes,
Their fulkari and their bagh

-Dharam Rasa, Dr. Kuldeep Kaur Gill