

THAKUR SINGH BANGA *
The man, his family and the Gur Sikh Temple

Thakur Singh Banga came to Canada in the year 1906. During his early days he spent some time in Vancouver Island, New Westminster and Abbotsford. His fourteen year old son, Nand Singh Banga and his younger brothers Pritam Singh and Hardit Singh joined him in the year 1920. They began working along with their grandfather. The family also worked in Coombs on Vancouver Island and later moved over to the mainland Vancouver to work for the Mohawk Lumber Company in the city of New Westminster. Bimb's grandfather Thakur Singh, his father and uncle, his mother, his three sisters and two brothers, along with his uncle Pritam Singh's three sisters and two brothers all lived together in the two houses, which were constructed very close to each other, spread in about 4 acres. In 1938, Bimb's mother went back to India along with her three daughters and son Mohinder Singh to stay. Bimb and his elder brother Ajit Singh continued to stay in Canada with their younger Uncle Hardit Singh, who had earlier returned from Punjab and their grandmother. The family from Canada all got along very well with cousins in India. They returned to Canada after enjoying their stay in India for some time.

The Banga family had a long association with the Gur Sikh Temple. Bimb's grandfather, Thakur Singh, while working for the Thretheway lumber company at the end of Mill Lake Road carried lumber with other men after their shifts to the Gur Sikh temple site and helped construct the Gurdwara. This was done so that everyone in the community had a place to come, whether they were living in Langley, Chilliwack or Mission. The Banga family used to come to Abbotsford from New Westminster quite often where they met Sunder Singh and Harry Singh. Harry Singh and his brothers became great companions to enjoy Abbotsford with and gelled well with the Banga brothers. Together they used to visit the Gur Sikh Temple every Sunday. They spent most of their Easter and summer holidays in Abbotsford, and looked forward to their visit to the Gur Sikh Temple. Sunder Singh's boys would pick them up from Queensborough and then they would all enjoy working in the farms of Sunder Singh or Harry Singh. According to Bimb,

“We enjoyed it out here in the country and went to the Gurdwara, Gur Sikh Temple every Sunday. When there was a service at the Gurdwara we definitely went there and enjoyed the congregation which gave a feel of a close knit family of Sikh people to us, here in Abbotsford. There were only a few families that lived in Abbotsford and Chilliwack, Mission and we all got together at this one Gurdwara. This was the closest Gurdwara for this area and everybody knew everybody. And, my Dad right from the days when he lived in Queensborough, in New Westminster visited the Gurdwara to help in cooking and the service there for all the years I can remember as a child”.

When the Banga family moved to Abbotsford to live in the year 1951-52, they leased Harry Singh's farm for two years. The family bought cows and some of the equipment and established their dairy farm. Unfortunately, Harry Singh passed away and his children for some reasons did not lease the farm back to them. The Banga family's friend Ken Neil from Mission, Canadian Canners, suggested to him to use some of his land he had for dairy farming. He also built a barn for the cows. The family moved to Mission and remained involved in the business of dairy farming until the year 1958. Even when they were in Mission they continuously visited and participated in the activities of the Gur Sikh temple.

According to Bimb, one of the leading Sikh couples who supported every one in Abbotsford, were the Tayaji and Tayiji of the Thandi family. “I learnt most of my farming skills from Tayaji. From his way of farming, running the machinery, planting, spraying, literally everything. And we enjoyed that life. They were like our parents”, recalls Bimb. Bimb believes that it is crucial for the coming generations to learn about Tayaji and Tayiji and pay their tribute to what they did for the Gur Sikh temple and our community in Abbotsford. They donated lumber, their time, and money to make sure that the Gur Sikh temple was kept in good shape and order.

The Banga family is very pleased that the Gur Sikh temple is now officially declared as the National Historic Site of Canada. Bimb sharing his thoughts says, “I hope this historical site, will give a little bit of insight to all the people not just some of the East-Indian people but all the people of Canada or whosoever comes onto the history of it. An in depth look at what the site really means to everybody here in Abbotsford and whosoever, and whoever grew up with in that environment of that temple”.

*This interview was given by Bimb Banga on behalf of his grandfather late Thakur Singh Banga.