

FAMILY OF DHARM SINGH GILL: Journey from Dhudike to Abbotsford

Today, Rajinder Singh Gill's family of Aldergrove is a prosperous farming family. This is due mostly because of the pioneering efforts of their family patriarch, Dharm Singh Gill.

It was actually Dharm Singh Gill's uncle Jeewan Singh who arrived on the Komagata Maru ship to Vancouver. When the ship was turned back and was on its way back to Hong Kong Jeewan Singh changed ships to begin his journey back into Canada a second time. After staying in San Francisco for a while he took a train to Calgary. Jeewan Singh's journey was full of adventures as he had to jump off the train while trying to avoid the train guards. After wandering for many days, he eventually arrived in Calgary. But it was in Golden, BC where according to Rajinder Singh, there was a Gurdwara, that Jeewan Singh was able to find work. After getting well settled in Canada he decided to call Rajinder Singh's Gill's grandfather, Dharm Singh Gill to Canada in the year 1928. For some time his father stayed with his uncle.

Dharm Singh Gill worked very hard while in Canada. He got his resident status due to the efforts of Dr. D.P Pandia who was a lawyer in Vancouver and a great supporter of the Indo-Canadian community. According to Rajinder, his father, Zora Singh told him that there were at least 250-300 men who were illegally living in Canada. It was due to the efforts of Dr. Pandia that they attained the legal status to live in Canada. Dharm Singh Gill was blessed with a baby boy in India, Zora Singh Gill, father of Rajinder in the year 1929. Zora Singh grew up in the Village Dhudike, was married and had two sons. It is interesting to note that it was not until 1954, when Dharm Singh traveled to Punjab, that he met with his son, daughter in law and his two grandchildren.

It was in the year 1959 that Dharm Singh Gill called his son Zora Singh to come to Canada from Dhudike in Punjab. Zora Singh then was able to sponsor the rest of his family. Rajinder Singh had grown to be nearly sixteen years of age during this time and began working for a saw mill upon his arrival to Canada. The family moved into farming and today owns a farm, in Aldergrove. Not a day passes by in which they do not think about the Gur Sikh temple, and its betterment.

The Gill family has had a long association with the Gur Sikh temple. All the family events have been celebrated at the Gur Sikh Temple. Dharm Singh Gill, who was also known as 'Baba ji,' led a wonderful life. According to Rajinder he was very good friends with everyone, especially with Paul Singh Dhaliwal. All his friends were very fond of him and so was he. He was very adaptable and everyone in Abbotsford knew him well. He was always proactively involved in doing the sewa of the Gur Sikh temple. He was often seen doing the chavar, fly whisks sewa at the Gurdwara. He was also seen lighting incense in the Gurdwara. There was another important person, at that time, Baba Nand Singh. He along with Dharm Singh worked together in the Mohawk Mill, at New Westminster. At the mill, there were two brothers-Pritam Singh and Nand Singh, all these friends along with one more, used to work in a ship for a Caucasian man who had a slight limp. He once fell in the water from the ship. Baba ji and his friends used their turban to save his life and pulled him out of water. That Caucasian man then said to Baba and Pritam Singh: "I always insisted on Sikhs wearing a hard hat, but from now onwards I will not." He thus accepted the turban as a permitted part of the work uniform.

Rajinder Singh was married at the Gur Sikh temple. According to him, the Gur Sikh Temple had always been like so, lively and full of sangat. Everyone participated, Bhai Nand Singh got ration for the wedding, Mukhtiar Singh helped too, Basant Kaur, Minder Gill and Gurdial Kaur made langar and helped in the wedding proceedings. There were no caterers at that time there. It was always a joint effort of the community in any event of any family. Mohinder Kaur 'Tayee' Thandi used to take the lead and help in making food for the community. Rajinder Singh's two sons and one daughter were also married in the Gur Sikh Temple.

According to the stories Rajinder Singh heard when he was younger, the Gadree Baba's were in great support of this Gurdwara and used to visit it often. They used to come from California. They found their way to the Gur Sikh temple by looking at the Nishan Sahib, which was a cedar tree trunk. There was a light fixed on the top, which was used to direct the Gadree Sikhs and alert them about the presence of border patrols on guard. These Gadree Sikhs had contributed immensely to the Indian freedom struggle.

There is not a single day when Rajinder Singh Gill's family members cannot be seen in the Gur Sikh temple. Their bond has become stronger every day. He is very happy to know that the Gur Sikh temple, which epitomizes the history of the Sikhs in British Columbia has received its long due representation on the internet. It will help people to know and learn about the long history of Sikh families in Canada.

There is an interesting anecdote associated with Rajinder's Great Uncle Jeewan Singh. During the second-world war, the government had rationed food and other stuffs for everyone, especially the Gurdwara at the second avenue. Ghee was an important ingredient for the making of Karah parshad and was required in abundance daily. The secretary of the Gurdwara at the time, Naginder Singh Gill, of village Churh Chuk, took Baba Jiwan Singh to the court to meet the judge in order to explain to the judge that the Sikhs needed Ghee to make Karah Parshad in the West 2nd Avenue Gurdwara. The Judge then asked them to prove that the amount asked for is what they should be allowed to have. At that instance Naginder Singh Gill asked Jeewan Singh who was very fond of ghee to demonstrate it to the judge. The veteran of Punjab ate a full pot (2 pound) of Ghee, which won him and the community the right from the judge to get as much Ghee as much it was required for the karah parshad for the Gurdwara. A fascinating anecdote indeed for a fascinating Sikh pioneering family with such deep roots in the Valley.