

BY NARGIS ABRAHAM

"We should integrate into mainstream Canadian society." Seated in his comfortable office on the seventh floor of a high rise in New Westminster, Dr. Gurdev S. Gill exudes a friendly charm. His message to Indo-Canadians is simple and direct: integrate.

"We have come a long way from the limited opportunities that the first immigrants had to face," Dr. Gill states. "We should not ignore the contributions of those early settlers. They opened the doors for us by proving themselves as a hardworking people, and being accepted by the local citizens. We have good work ethics, which people here appreciate. Also, India is a free country, and this has increased the esteem of our people."

Dr. Gill came to Canada in 1949 at the age of 18. His grandfather had been the first of the family to come, in 1906. In those days, families of immigrants were not encouraged to join the main earners, and hence Dr. Gill's grandfather had to leave his family behind till they could join him many years later.

Dr. Gill had finished high school in India, and completed a final year in high school in Duncan before registering at the University of British Columbia. He graduated in 1957 with a medical degree from UBC and interned at Portland, Oregon before returning to New Westminster to start his medical practice in 1958.

The first Indo-Canadian to receive the Order of B.C. in the year it was instituted, Dr. Gill's recent

## INTEGRATE INTO MAINSTREAM CANADIAN SOCIETY: DR GURDEV GILL

appointment to the Board of the B.C. Cancer Society is just one more acknowledgement of his contribution to the medical field. He has served patients in the area for many years now, and is on the active medical staff of Royal Columbian Hospital, St. Mary's Hospital, Egel Ridge Hospital, and Queen's Park Hospital. Besides his regular schedule, Dr. Gill has through the years volunteered his services to raise funds for the Cancer Society, Children's Hospital, and the Rotary Club.

Dr. Gill co-founded PISA, Physicians with an interest in Southeast Asia. PISA aims to help medical practitioners in the region through the exchange of ideas, involving them in conferences and seminars, and communicating with the associations there.

Besides his activities in the medical field, Dr. Gill has felt the

need to offer his services to the Indo-Canadian community and further their interests. As early as 1954, while still a student, he took an active part in cultural activities at the Ross Street Temple. At that time, the temple was one of the very few points where people originating from the sub-continent could get together and share their common culture.

moved to West 2nd Avenue, Dr. Gill was instrumental in setting it up and seeing that it continued to serve the community.

Dr. Gill has served as the president of the Khalsa Diwan Society on more than one occasion. In the early 80's, he organised the India Cultural Centre that bought 80 acres of land in Richmond. Plans are underway to build a commu-



DR GILL ( RIGHT ) BEING CONGRATULATED BY THE LT. GOVERNOR, DAVID LAM, AFTER RECEIVING THE ORDER OF BC

"Even people from other religions would come and join in and contribute towards the activities", he states, with a certain pride. Subsequently, when the temple was

nity house for the elderly, and a place of worship. Dr. Gill is also a member of the East Indian Canadian Citizenship Welfare As-

sociation, a founding member of the National Association of Canadians of Origin in India, and President of the Indo-Canadian Friendship Society. These bodies work for the promotion of mutual understanding between Indo-Canadians and Canadians at large.

Dr. Gill has actively helped smoothen the immigration process, participating in delegations that have made representations to the government on the issue. Asked about the reason why Indians immigrate to Canada, he said that there is a lot of insecurity these days in Punjab, people are moving out and investment is moving out. But mostly, according to him, Indians are economic refugees. He himself makes regular trips to India, and keeps in touch with current issues there.

Questioned about role of the Indo-Canadian community in today's time of recession, Dr. Gill said, in such times, whether now or in the past, the minority groups inevitably get picked on. But, it is a sad fact that ethics of honesty and integrity have downslided.

"Religion is our greatest strength, but it is also our greatest barrier", he said. "We should be able to go beyond religion, and create something else, something that brings us together because of our common background, our common culture." Dr. Gill bemoaned the fact that ours was the only major community that did not have its own Home for the Aged or any proper facilities for our young people.