

Spreading Divine Love The Extraordinary Lachman Chellaram

Dada Lachman Chellaram, 62, is a man devoted to the mission of spreading the message of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib in India as well as in other countries, including Canada and the United States. Since September 2001, the Karachi-born Sindhi who now belongs to New Delhi, has been touring North America and has just completed his mission in the US. He has been performing *kirtan* in Vancouver, and at Richmond's Guru Nanak Niwas. Then went to Victoria, doing *kirtan* before taking off for New York.

In 1992, Chellaram completed a five-year project of translation of the holy SGGS comprising 1430 pages, and 5800 hymns into Sindhi, Hindi, English and Punjabi. His translation of the hymns with prose commentary runs into 4800 pages, and has been further translated into nine Indian languages. He stresses the need to practice love, peace and universal brotherhood, rather than just preach about it.

Chellaram says: Guru Granth Sahib is a religious teacher that is truly universal. It has messages of not just Sikh Gurus, but also of Hindu saints and Muslim fakirs. It does not speak just about Sikhs, but about mankind in general. It contains messages of peace and life. Words like Ram, Hari and Allah occur as many times as Waheguru in the book."

He adds that very few people know "of the treasure contained therein" and exhorts all to learn about it. Based in New Delhi, Dadaji roams the world to spread the love of God.

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Over 200 Dalits Convert to Sikhism in MP

NDTV correspondent reported last May from Guna, Madhya Pradesh:

In Madhya Pradesh's Guna and Vidishia district more than two hundred Dalits have converted to Sikhism in order to free themselves of discrimination by the upper castes - a tradition that has been prevalent for years. Though this has not yet led to a change of mindset, more Dalits look all set to convert to Sikhism. 80 year old Dungal Rai is now Dungal Singh. All his life, he says, he has suffered discrimination from upper castes Hindus and has now decided to convert to Sikhism.

"We were not allowed to enter the temples and were shunned by everybody," said Dungal Singh. The village of Deomari is VIP constituency in every sense of the word. It is part of Jyotiraditya Scindia's parliamentary constituency and also part of the Raghogarh assembly constituency represented by Chief minister Digvijay Singh. But here, too, Dalits have been traditionally discriminated against and four families in this alone have converted to Sikhism. Many of the villagers say their first introduction to the religion came when migrant labour from the village went to Punjab.

Conversions have since been reported from 11 villages in Guna district and four villages in Vidisha district. "In January 2002 alone 42 people converted. In March at least 200 people converted, said Giani Bhajan Singh, Guru Singh Sabha, Guna. (MP)

Dalits here are still learning to tie the turban and the basics of their new religion but the outward changes have yet to bring a change of the mindset through which others see them. "Even today, after conversions, we still have problems. We are still shunned and humiliated. said Nishan Singh. Pracharaks have yet to instil the heroic spirit of Sikhism.

[Courtesy: *Sarbhpreet Singh*]

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Distinction for Sr Swaran Singh Sanehi

A research paper written in Punjabi by Sr. Swaran Singh Sanehi, "Available Sikh *Rehatnamas* - A critical assessment" as been awarded the first prize in a competition held by The Dr Ganda Singh Memorial Trust, Patiala. Another research paper by him, entitled 'Religious impulses of Maharaja Dalip Singh' had been awarded a prize by the same Trust in 1995. Sanehi-ji has been a recipient of the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1969) and other honours by the State Languages Deptt.

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Right to wear "*Kirpan*" Upheld by Canadian Court

The Press Trust of India reports from Toronto: In a significant ruling, a Canadian court has termed as "prejudice" the suspension of a Sikh student from school for wearing *kirpan*, and allowed him to return to class with the religiously compulsory dagger.

Granting a temporary injunction in favour a 12-year-old Grade VII boy, Gurbaj Singh, last April, Superior Court Justice Claude Teller, in Montreal, said, "It is apparent that the loss of a school year for a child of this age constitutes clear prejudice." The judge, however, said the *kirpan* must be wrapped in cloth and worn under Singh's clothing at all times till a final verdict on the issue is delivered. The injunction also allowed the school personnel to check that the *kirpan* is secure.

The Sikh community is generally happy with the proceedings. "We are happy he's OK and that's why we love Canada, justice is done," Gurdeep Singh, who is not related to the boy, said.

The school suspended Gurbaj Singh early this year citing safety rules after his *kirpan*, which he has been wearing since his baptism, fell during recess.

Gurbaj's parents refused to accept suggestion that he carry a plastic replica of the *kirpan* to school, saying it goes against the Sikh religion and went to court.

Afghan Sikhs pin hope on "Loya Jirga"

Kabul: Afghanistan's tiny Sikh and Hindu communities, forced to the brink of extinction by the Taliban regime, are hoping to make a social and political re-emergence at this week's Loya Jirga assembly.

The minority groups, persecuted during the six years of the ultra-orthodox Islamic regime, were represented by four delegates at the tribal gathering which was to select a new leadership for Afghanistan. Community leaders said their presence at the assembly was a reassertion of the rights of the nation's only non-Muslim minorities and that they expected the gathering to alleviate the suffering of the country's 30,000 Sikhs and Hindus.

"We take it as the return of our luck. In almost a decade, for the first time our rights have been determined and we have to defend our rights," said Awtar Singh, a delegate to Loya Jirga from the eastern province of Paktia.

"We want somebody who would treat all Afghans - irrespective of their religious and ethnic backgrounds - as his own equal children," said Singh, who is in charge of the main Sikh Gurdwara in Kabul.

Sikhs and Hindus, united in adversity, are close in Afghanistan. In the predominantly Muslim nation they share the gurdwara as well as many religious ceremonies.

[Courtesy: *The Times of India*]

The Sikh Forum observes Anniversary of Assault on Darbar Sahib, 1984

While speaking at public meeting organized by the Sikh Forum, on the 18th Remembrance Day of Operation Bluestar, Sr. Simranjit Singh Mann, M.P. demanded that the Lok Sabha should pass a resolution expressing an apology to the Sikh nation for Operation Bluestar in June 1984, when the Harmandir Sahib was desecrated and damaged by the Indian army, while Sri Akal Takht was destroyed. He stressed that when Americans have apologised to the Japanese citizens for their excesses in World War II; the Japanese have apologised to the Koreans and Chinese for aggression, the German govt, have apologised to the Jews for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, what is holding the present Indian govt. from apologising for the killing of thousands of innocent devotees, in June 1984, assembled in large number on the solemn occasion of Martyrdom Day of Guru Arjun Devji, the fifth Guru. He said that Sikhs shall not forget the sacrifices made by them in the freedom struggle (numerically highest amongst all Indians) have not been given due place of honour by successive govts.

Dr. Maheep Singh deplore the fact that the sacrifices made by thousands of innocent Sikhs during Operation Bluestar were being ignored and the Sikhs' representative bodies prefers to keep mum. He stressed that Sikhs should carry out an introspection of "Operation Bluestar" and

ponder the dark forces which were behind this operation. The assault was meant to demoralise the Sikh community.

Sardar M.S. Batra compared the "Operation" to the attack of Ahmed Shah Abdali on Harmandir Sahib in 1762. Mr. Batra said during June 1984, he was incharge of the AIR when, in protest against Operation Bluestar, Capt. Amrinder Singh (present chief minister of Punjab) resigned his seat as MP in Parliament. The then Minister for Information and Broadcasting, twice rang Sr. Batra up to ensure that this news was not broadcast. It is an irony of fate that the same Amrinder Singh is, after 18 years, now head of the govt. in Punjab. He stressed that a detailed history of this tragic event be recorded. This work should be assigned to a group of renowned historians.

Justice R.S. Narula regretted that when Punjab was under an Akali govt. for 5 years, no action was taken to probe the history and investigate the rampage of Amritsar. S. Bhagwant Singh Dalawari said we must remember our martyrs and never forget Operation Bluestar, but we should also look inwards and see our weaknesses.

Sardar H.S. Phoolka disclosed that a 'CD' was being prepared to record all documents concerning the shameful massacre of Nov '84. A similar documentation was needed for Operation Bluestar.

Col. Manohar Singh said this Operation was a assault meant to keep minority community as subordinate to the majority community. Col (retd.) JPS Sahi wanted that the killing of innocent Sikhs by the Indian army in June 1984 was a fit case to be taken to International Court of Justice at the Hague.

Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora presided over the meeting.

[Courtesy: R.S. Chhatwal, Secretary, the Sikh Forum, 86, Hemkunt, New Delhi]