

A Tribute to the Ladies of Our Gurdwara

By Baljeet Kaur

It's difficult to imagine our Gurdwara's birth and development without the role of a group of steadfast, dedicated and farsighted Sikh ladies. It is also difficult to imagine a Commemorative Issue that celebrates the journey of our Gurdwara that does not put on record their selfless sewa. A tribute that matches their dedication is perhaps difficult, but a humble attempt follows, if only to say that we will never forget their sacrifices.

The very idea of having a Gurdwara in the Boston area was conceived by Sikh ladies. The nearest Gurdwara involved a three hour journey back and forth once a week or fortnight. The distance was a real obstacle to the sort of intimacy and connectivity they desired from a Guru Ghar. They dreamt of a place that would be accessible by public transportation so that they did not have to wait for their children, families or relatives to drive them there. They imagined a place where their children and grandchildren

could learn Gurbani, Kirten, and Punjabi in weekdays and weekends. Their children were growing up with weakening links to Sikh culture. If they did not reverse this trend, the generation would drift and lose forever its link to the great spiritual, cultural and linguistic traditions of the Sikh community. Such bleak prospects worried them into taking bold action.

In 1997 a group of concerned lady sewadars gathered to discuss their shared fears, hopes and aspirations. Given the urgency of the matter, they took the first step commensurate with their rather limited resources. They volunteered to hold Weekly Sunday Diwans in their homes by turn. They also decided to toil to raise awareness about the lack of Gurdwara among the Sikh families living in the Boston Area. They further decided to do fund raising and began to think of purchasing a building for the Gurdwara.

For many months this group of ladies went to all the Sikh homes and businesses in the Boston area to collect donations for the Gurdwara. They also urged people to host the weekly Diwans at their homes. The ladies used every Gurburab to collect funds. They would start monthly sessions of Sukhmani Sahib before the Gurburabs to motivate people to come to the Gurdwara. Everywhere they went they took

their cause with them. If any of the ladies went to another state or country for a wedding or Akhand Paath she would ask the sangat there for donations for the Boston Gurdwara.

These ladies took the tradition of Sangat and Pangat very seriously. Every week they helped out the family that was hosting the Sunday Diwan. They offered to make langgar at their homes if the host family did not have the facilities available. In the cold snowy days of the winter they sat in driveways and garages to cook for the sangat. The Sangat was provided with breakfast and lunch each and every Sunday. They did this Seva for seven years even as the Gurdwara was moved to a rented house and then a commercial building to accommodate the growing Sangat because none of these rented places had kitchen facilities. Such was their devotion.

These ladies contributed in other ways too. Those who could read Gurbani volunteered their time to teach how to read Guru Granth Sahib to anyone who was willing. Once Sardar Karminder Singh Ji started Kirten classes they enrolled their children to start the Gurdwara's own Kirten Jatha. He insisted that the students' mothers accompanied their children to the Kirten class and sat in with them for the full duration. The mothers had

the responsibility of making their children read the shabads correctly, practice well enough, and this meant that the mothers were an integral part of the Kirten class. It was also the mothers' job to ensure their children came prepared and on time to do their Kirten on Sunday. It is through hard work and encouragement of the mothers of the Jatha members that Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar's Kirteni Jatha has become so proficient at doing Kirten. They further encouraged their children to participate in all the activities organized for them by the Gurdwara such as Punjabi Class, Samelan and Competitions.

Finally, the Commemorative Issue you have in your hands has an overwhelming contribution from the lady sewadars. Two dedicated ladies performed the vital task of marketing the magazine to the local businesses community. Other ladies did sub-editing, photography, writing, Akhand Path organization and supervision of a full and thorough clean up of the interior and exterior of the Gurdwara in preparation of Vesakhi 2005.

These ladies have inspired young girls like me to participate more in the Gurdwara activities. Thank you for your leadership by example. And thank you for your dedication and hardwork. Above all, thank you for showing us the way. End.