



From the desk of Dr Gurdev S. Gill, Chairman, Synergy Foundation

THE VILLAGE REFORMER PAR EXCELLENCE

Generally, the persons who immigrate from less developed to more developed and rich countries forget about their motherland, their national scenario and the condition of their countrymen. On the other hand, there are persons, who always carry a built-in feeling of doing something for the welfare of their people back home. As and when they get a chance to do something benevolent for their people, they come forward with zeal. Dr Gurdev Singh Gill is a person of that kind. He was born in 1931 in village Kharaudi, District Hoshiarpur. After passing his matriculation from High School, Mahil Pur, he immigrated to Canada in 1949. His revered father, Mr Dilbag Singh visited Canada for the first time in 1924. When Mr Gurdev Gill immigrated to Canada along with family, his father was settled in Duncan, a city in Victoria Island. In 1951, Gurdev passed his twelfth grade from High School at Duncan and sought admission in University of British Columbia for higher education. Consequently, he obtained a Degree in Medicine from University of British Columbia in 1957.

He was the first Indo-Canadian student for having obtained a degree of 'Doctor of Medicine' (M.D.) from University of British Columbia and for opening a clinic at New Westminster for the benefit of patients. He practiced there from 1958 to 1996. In addition to his medical services, Dr Gurdev Gill also contributed by performing duties of a Teacher and an Examiner in St John Ambulance Brigade from 1958 to 1970. From 1960 to 1975, he held duties of an Assistant in the matters related to Forensic Medicine under the aegis of R.C.M.P. During his voyage of medical services, Dr Gurdev Singh Gill also participated in the teams of executives of the Royal Columbian Hospital; St Mary; and Queen's Park Hospital. For many years, he served as a Trustee of organizations such as B C Cancer Agency and India Culture Center.

At a time with him in connection with an interview, When I wanted to know from him about his contributions toward community and the Punjabi fraternity over and above his services being rendered under his medical profession, he narrated that he

had been taking part and contributing under the aegis of different organizations, right from his school days. He shared that while he was a student in Punjab, he was a member of the Students Federation of India (S.F.I.) and that when at University of British Columbia, he founded East Indian Students Association (E.I.S.A.) of which he served as a Secretary. When he was studying at the University of British Columbia, he was made the Secretary of the Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver in 1954 for the first time. Thereafter, he streamlined the working of the Khalsa Diwan Society, by being its President for many years. He was one of the leading members of the Management Committee which was assigned the responsibility for establishing a Gurudwara Sahib at the Ross Street. When the Ross Street Gurudwara Sahib was inaugurated in 1970, Dr Gurdev Singh Gill was the President of Khalsa Diwan Society Vancouver. He is one of the founders of the 'India Culture Center' established at Road # 5 in Richmond B C. Further, he has served as President of 'East Indian -Canadian Citizen Welfare Association' for many terms. He disclosed that as Medical Adviser, he formed part of the Deputations for Ottawa in the context of difficulties being faced by immigrants coming from India, on many occasions. He added that his suggestions and proposals were accepted that provided relief from unnecessary formalities concerning medical examination, to the immigrants. Rather than going to New Delhi for getting the formalities of medical examination completed, now the facility is available right in Punjab and it is really convenient for those who wish to migrate from Punjab to Canada. In 1972, as President of 'NACOI', the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India, he developed an effective liaison with the Canadian Government in the context of demands and grievances of the Indo-Canadian people.

Although, Dr Gurdev Gill is in Canada for a long time, he has not undergone any change under the exposure to western civilization. He is very much linked with his mother tongue Punjabi and the richness of Indian culture. He, in alliance with the medical doctors, who feel concerned with the health care of people of South East Asia, made an organization called 'Association of Medical Doctors'. From time to time, he visited India and offered free medical aid to patients through hospitals. He had been on several terms President of the cultural organization 'Indo-Canadian Friendship Society of British Columbia' and is still holding this position.

Dr Gurdev Gill is the first Indo-Canadian, to have been bestowed by the government of British Columbia with the coveted award 'Order of British Columbia' in 1990, in recognition of his outstanding services aimed at community welfare. The National Indo-Canadian Council also recognized him for his social services, in 1992. The University of British Columbia honored him with an honorary degree of Doctor of Science in 1996. In this felicitation function, the President of the University of British Columbia, Dr David Strong way, expressed, "the strength of a nation depends on its people. For its strength, Canada owes greatly to those people who strive to foster comradeship among its diverse people of different races and to understand feelings of others. I feel greatly proud that Dr Gurdev Gill is one such human being, who has played a pivotal role in understanding them and befriending with them". In 2013 six members of the HEC alumni community were bestowed with achievement awards for making the world a better place. Dr Gurdev was one of them. He was honored with a global citizenship award for his outstanding community services in Canada and India. Addition to the awards and honors highlighted above, Dr Gurdev Gill has been honored with the award of medals on account of '125 Anniversary of the Confederation of Canada'; and the 'Golden Jubilee Celebration of Queen Elizabeth II'.

For the last about 15 years, Dr Gurdev Gill has initiated a campaign for environment protection in rural areas of Punjab. To my query, as to what prompted him to feel concerned about the Punjab villages, he responded that he himself hails from a Punjabi village and that when he happens to visit his village, the derisory drainage from the village streets and the likely risk of ailments for the villagers worries him a lot. He seems to have been motivated for community work by his forefathers, who played their part in the India's struggle for freedom and looked after public welfare through their deeds. He started campaign for welfare work from his native Village Kharaudi in the District of Hoshiarpur. Giving details, he told that the scheme of welfare work in his village was given the final touch by him and his colleague, Dr Raghbir Singh, former Vice Chancellor of Rural Alaska University. As per the scheme, the planned project would involve a budget estimate of rupees one crore (Rs 100 lakh or Rs 10 million). The non residents of Village Kharaudi, who lived abroad, had gathered a sum of Rs 50 lakh and the matching grant of Rs 50 lakh was given by the Government of Punjab. According

to the proposed plan, the sub-soil pipes were to connect all the 150 houses to the sewerage system. The street roads have been laid with metaled roads. System for cleaning the sewerage water has also been provided. Solar lights have been provided in the village. The village school has been provided with computers and peripherals. Special arrangement for teaching English in the school has been made. Well landscaped parks with flower beds have been provided where children can play and people relax. Now the villagers drink filtered water. A modern crematorium has been developed. As per the information shared by Dr Gurdev Singh Gill, the entire project was completed and implemented within the allocated budget of rupees one crore. He added that had it were to be completed by the Punjab Government, the expenditure would have been not less than Rs three crore. Kharaudi is now famous as a model village, not only in Punjab but in India as a whole.

When Hon'ble Ujjal Dosanjh, the Premier of British Columbia, visited Punjab in 2002, he paid a special visit to Village Kharaudi and the Punjab Chief Minister, Mr Parkash Singh Badal too accompanied him. In the presence of Mr Ujal Dosanjh, Mr Parkash Singh Badal appreciated the community work done in the village and presented a cheque of Rs 10 lakh to the committee that has been formulated to look after the facilities created in the Village. In 2004, when His Excellency the President of the Republic of India, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam visited Punjab, he also went to Village Kharaudi. The efforts of Dr Gurdev Singh Gill and Dr Raghbir Singh in the Village are drawing appreciation from far and wide; and now there is no dearth of money for such projects (as are accomplished through leadership by example).

With the work done in the Village Kharaudi, the residents of adjoining villages have derived motivation to do similar improvement in their villages as well. Mr Anantpal Singh, a well known personality of Vancouver, through 'Village Life Improvement Foundation' founded by Dr Gurdev Gill, has carried out improvement work in his village Behrampur in District Ludhiana on the pattern of Kharaudi. The Non Resident Indians immigrated from that Village and a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have contributed \$ 60,000 each for the development of the village while the Government of Punjab contributed Rs 40 lakh for this. Dr Gurdev Gill was delighted in mentioning that many projects have been implemented and completed under the aegis of his organization and that

development work is also being taken up in four more Villages. One of these villages is Deegriana, the native village of Mr Herb Dhaliwal, former minister of the Federal Government of Canada. For the development of his village, Mr Herb Dhaliwal has donated Rs 10 lakh out of his own pocket and the remaining expenditure will be met by the villagers and the government. As per the estimate of Dr Gurdev Singh Gill, for installing sewer system, drinking water supply system, laying of street roads, laying of concealed telephone cables, setting up a centralized computer system in the village, the per household expenditure works out to be Rs 22,000/-. The village development and improvement program initiated by him has been appreciated not only by people in Punjab and India but also in Canada. A Canadian philanthropist, Mr John Lee has not only applauded the work initiated by Dr Gurdev Singh Gill but gave a donation of \$ 100000 (One hundred thousand) as a support to this benevolent campaign for rural uplifting. Each village has a Panchayat (local government). Each Panchayat should apply for the government grants for undertaking such development works as installation of sewer system, system for clean drinking water, etc. These facilities are vital for the protection against ailments and general health care of villagers. From the data gathered through the surveys about the occurrence of diseases in rural areas, it is evident that the incidence of diseases like dysentery is just one per cent in the villages which have the facility of underground sewerage system. On the other hand the incidence of the disease is as high as 15 to 20 per cent in the villages which do not have the facility of underground sewerage system.

The Indo-Canadian Friendship Society organized a function in the magnificent Hall of the Windsor Art Gallery, on the Granville Street, Vancouver, on June 20, 2012 to mobilize collection of funds for the Organization founded by Dr Gurdev Gill to contribute toward village development programs in India. The proprietors of diverse trades and entrepreneurs from among the Indo-Canadian Fraternity participated in this function. The Director the 'Friendship Society', Mr Garry Pooni, apprised the participants and guests about the activities and programs being carried out by Dr Gurdev Singh Gill and his organization 'Village Life Improvement Foundation'. Mr Herb Dhaliwal, former Indo-Canadian Minister of the Federal Government of Canada, greatly appreciated Dr Gurdev Singh Gill for the village improvement campaign he has launched in Punjab. He appealed to the audience to make efforts for the development of their native villages. Mr Raymond

Louise, a Member of Vancouver City Council too lauded the efforts of Dr Gurdev Gill. Mr Ajit Singh Thandi, my neighbor shared that he had made efforts and gathered funds for the development of his native village, Daulatpur, having about four hundred houses. My friend, Mr Baldev Singh Sangra, who is running a car insurance company, said that he hailed from village Jandiala, which has also been greatly upgraded with the help of Dr Gurdev Gill's organization.

During the function, a befitting exhibition of the photographs showing various aspects of the up gradation work carried out in Village Kharaudi was organized. All the participants were keenly interested to see their native villages have the needed development and improvement. Dr Gurdev Gill proposed his vote of thanks to all participants and guests. He declared that his organization was always willing to support the cause of village improvement and will be ever ready to help whosoever will come to it

Towards the conclusion of the function, the one who presented Dr Gurdev Singh Gill's organization with a donation of US \$ 100000.00 was honored with a plaque. In case a village does not have enough resources, even then Dr Gurdev Gill's organization supports its development with services and also with financial contribution. The villagers interested in the up gradation of their villages with the installation of sewer system and/or to have other services concerning environment conservation, should send their applications directly to the Deputy Commissioner of their District or else the application could be routed through 'Village Life Improvement Foundation' to get the benefit of its expertise. After retiring from his medical practice he spends half of his time in India and half in Canada.

Dr Gurdev Singh Gill received numerous proposals from Corporates, PAN India for execution of projects in skill development, information technology, health & hygiene, animal's welfare, clean drinking water etc. under corporate social responsibility (CSR).

To execute these projects under able guidance of Dr G.S. Gill, an all India Charitable Trust namely **Synergy Foundation** was incorporated in which highly educated, professionally qualified like minded peoples having expertise in their respective fields joined hands to give back to the society.