

The Shri Guru Ravidas Temple

By Karin Kronstal



Introduction

This report is a follow-up of the visit to the Shri Guru Ravidas Temple, located on 8205 DuRocher. The Gurdwara is fairly new, having been started four years ago in 1997. However, they have only been at the current address for the last four months. As is common, the Gurdwara is open every day of the week from five-thirty in the morning until ten o'clock at night. The congregation has about four hundred members, many of whom are new immigrants. There are considerably more men who visit the temple than women; the day of our census the ratio of men to women was five to three. There are also very few young adults, the data we collected showed that for every three people in the fifteen to twenty-one age category, there were seventeen adults. The majority of the congregation are immigrants, with five first-generation immigrants for every four Canadian born members. They also tend to be fairly new immigrants; for every two immigrants who have been in Canada more than five years, there are three who have been in Canada less than five years.



Removing Shoes at the Entrance

Religious Services

When one enters the Gurdwara, it is expected that you will take off your shoes and socks and cover your head. This is done as a sign of respect for the Guru Granth Sahib, and is a practice common to all Gurdwaras. There is also opportunity to wash your hands, and in some Gurdwaras (though I did not notice this in the one I visited) there is also a place to wash your feet. The name Gurdwara, which was given by Guru Hargobind, means "the gateway through which the Guru can be reached". When one enters the Gurdwara, it is believed that you are entering the presence of the Guru. Both men and women have the opportunity to participate in the service. Sikhs are unique in their use of music in the services. The Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh scripture, is largely composed of verses which can be sung. There are a total of sixty-one *raags*, or arrangements, which are used in the singing. Many of these *raags* were written by the Gurus themselves, who were quite musically inclined. The official singers of the ragas are called the *Ragis*. The title Ragi has been traced back to the fifth Guru, Sri Guru Arjun Dev, by the Sikh musician scholar Professor Kartan Singh. The Guru encouraged his Sikhs to learn music and gave them the name Ragis, while Muslim singers were called Rababis'. At the Shri Guru Ravidas Temple the hymn singing, which is called the *kirtan*, is performed by the Ragis. Ragis must undergo extensive training in order to be able to sing the raags properly. The instruments used in Sikh worship can be divided into four categories; stroke, bow, lute and percussion. At the Shri Guru Ravidas Temple, the instruments used are the Vaaga (a harmonium) and the tabla (the drums). It should be noted that the singing of the raags by other members of the Gurdwara is not prohibited. Most members, however, prefer to listen and contemplate the meaning of the verses.



Guru Granth Sahib

At the Shri Guru Ravidas Temple the Granthi is responsible for the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, which takes place at the end of the service. Any man or woman can be a Granthi, which is a title indicating that the person is proficient in the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib. It is important to note that a Granthi is not the equivalent of a priest, as Sikhism does not have priests. The Granthi is also responsible for the distribution of the Ardass, or the final group prayer. It is proper to remain seated for most of the service, but during the reading of the Ardass it is respectful to stand and face the Guru Granth Sahib.

A special part of the service unique to the Sikh tradition is the distribution of the Parshad, or holy sweet. The Parshad is considered a gift given to the congregation on behalf of the Guru. It is prepared with equal parts wheat flour, sugar and butter, making it easy to prepare and distribute. The Parshad is distributed equally, without discrimination or favour. It would be easy for observers to think that a bowl of Parshad is offered to the Guru Granth Sahib. This is, in fact, not the case; a bowl of Parshad is placed by the Guru Granth Sahib but is actually intended for the Granthi, who is busy attending to the Scripture. At the Shri Guru Ravidas Temple, the Sevadars distribute the Parshad. The Sevadars are members of the Sangat, which is the Sikh term for congregation.