

East Indians sing in the New Year

The first day of a new year is a time to put old problems behind you and begin anew. Again, this New Year's Eve, I celebrated in the typical Scottish-Canadian manner, complete with Auld Lang Syne and Happy New Year greetings to family and friends.

Then at 10 a.m. New Year's Day I joined my East Indian friends in an inspirational New Year's service at the Paldi Sikh temple. The sweet sound of the Baja or harmonium, and the rhythmic beating of the hand drum mingled with the lovely voices of the singers, greeted me as I stepped from the car.

The service always begins with Kirtan, which is the singing of religious hymns. The hymns for New Year's Day are chosen to suit the occasion and are always sweet sounding and relaxing.

New Year's Day services began in the Paldi Temple when the present executive committee was elected in 1978. Sikhs in India do not celebrate the new year but always observe Sangrand, which is the first of the month according to their ancient calendar. Here in Paldi they observe the beginning of a new year in Canada as well as at the beginning of each new month.

When asked why this special service in Canada, Meetow Singh, the committee president, explained that as we are now Canadians, we share the customs of our neighbors in giving thanks for events of the past year and starting off a new year with prayers and the singing of God's praises.

Indo Canadian

Joan Mayo



There is no set time to be seated. People are arriving singly and in groups all during the singing. They slip in quietly and after paying the traditional respect to the Holy Book take a seat on the thickly carpeted floor. Many carry gifts of oranges, apples, milk for the tea, or some food to be served after the service. This is the wonderful thing about these services, in that everyone wants to give something.

Rajindar Bhopal of Duncan is a regular singer at the temple. As I entered the temple her voice mingled with the male voices of the priest and his sons. Seated on the floor behind their instruments their offering of praise continued for a full hour. Following the service I asked Rajindar to explain the service to me and to translate some of what the priest said in his short readings.

She explained that after the singing the service began with Hukam Nam which is the start of every service whether happy or sad, and ended with the usual closing called Anand Sahib. Translated simply,

it means whatever we have started we have finished and you have helped us complete it. Everything in your house and the people who have heard your name are at peace. When I asked why this service on New Year's Day, she answered, "What better way to start a new year? When you hear Sachi Bani, that which is written in the Granth Sahib or Holy Book, all your problems disappear and once again you are at peace."

She brought her own Granth Sahib from her bedroom and after laying a clean cloth on the table laid the book on it and began reading some of the passages to me. Translated it meant, you are my father, mother, brother. You are everything to me and fulfill all my dreams. Everything that happens is your will. I pray you will never desert me. Although she reads her Granth Sahib regularly at home she says it has more meaning when you go into a Sangit (gathering) because everyone is there sharing it with



SINGING PRAISE . . . Sikhs at the Paldi temple join North Americans in ushering in a New Year with singing and feasting.

you. In the same way the food tastes better at the Langar, the church kitchen.

She went on to explain that at Paldi there is a special feeling even before you get out of the car. Perhaps because it has always been there, being one of the first temples built in Canada. But most probably because so any special services have been held there.

Religion and family play a big part in the lives of the Sikhs. Six

days before Christmas I met a friend on the street and when I asked how she and her family were, she told me her husband was in hospital having suffered a mild heart attack. I felt saddened and expressed my wishes for his recovery. She then told me he would be coming home on Sunday and with a smile said he would be home just in time for "Merry Christmas time". Her smile and her gratitude at having him home in time for Christmas were all I needed to prove once again, we are all God's children.