

COMMUNITY

# Tribute paid Valley pioneer

Last Sunday family and friends paid tribute to the late Bal Singh Mayer, a pioneer of the Cowichan Valley who passed away peacefully on May 24 at the age of 97.

An Akand Path was celebrated at the Paldi Sikh Temple. This service requires the complete reading of the Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Book. The 1429 pages are read continuously in 2 hour shifts which takes a little over 48 hours.

Friends and relations drop in anytime they can to listen and take comfort from the scriptures. Prayers are offered both for the soul of the departed and for the peace of mind of family and friends left behind. Meals are served Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Bal Singh was a conscientious and righteous man, a man of strong faith who instilled in his children a love of God and community and a pride in their cultures both Indian and Canadian.

Born June 6, 1890 in the village Uncha in Punjab, Indian, he was the second youngest of five children. The son of a farmer, he received his schooling at the small village school and in the nearby city of Jullunder.

In 1914 at the age of 23 years he enlisted in the Royal Indian army to serve until 1919. In Egypt he was assigned to the Royal Army Field Ambulance Corps and served in front line recovery and treatment of war injured through the Middle East in the Mesopotamia and Palestine campaigns.

During his service with the British Field Ambulance he met a U.S. army surgeon and they became good friends. Captain Reilly encouraged Bal to come to the U.S. and helped to expedite a student permit. With the blessing of his father, Bal left for San Francisco in May 1919. He worked in the California fruit orchards and studied at night school to improve his English.

In the fall of 1924 he was accepted as one of the first group of students to be enrolled in the Ford Motor Co. trade school, graduating in 1926.

In 1927 he returned to India and with the financial assistance of the Ford Motor Co. and a prominent Jullundre businessman, Sate Ram Chand, set up the first Ford dealer-



## Indo Canadian By Joan Mayo

ship in Jullunder. They serviced the Model T and the Model A and Fordson tractors. In fact until just

a few years ago a 1917 Fordson tractor imported by Bal Sing, ran the Grist mill in the village Uncha.

In 1929 Bal came to Duncan by way of Seattle Washington. He had married and had a son Amrik, but could not bring his family with him due to regulations at the time.

Amrik's mother died whilst Bal was in Canada and in 1935 he returned again to India. On that trip he married the present Mrs. Shanti Mayer and quickly made arrangements to return to Canada which was to become and remain their home.

The Mayers lived first in Paldi working for Mayo Lumber Co. then in Duncan working for Doman Singh. For the first four

years he lived in fear of deportation because of Canada's strict immigration laws. Bal Singh was arrested and held in jail pending deportation when the Canadian Gov't, in a show of compassion, granted his freedom and allowed him to return to his wife and infant son. The following year in 1940 Canada granted amnesty to all East Indian aliens and Bal and his young family settled down to a peaceful life in Canada.

He worked for Hillcrest Lumber Co. and at Youbou before starting his own sawmill on Mt. Prevost. He ran the sawmill from 1944 until 1950 and then went into the general trucking business.

