

Toronto Then and Now

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By Dr. Ram Singh

In January 1977 when I was 81 years old, my maternal grandfather visited us for a week. He had just returned to India after 30 years of residence in Canada. For one full week, every evening, my father and I would huddle together around the fire, eagerly waiting for Uncle Munshi Singh to tell out stories of his adventures in Canada. He spoke of his natural beauty, mountains, cities, its honest and hard working people and the way he was able to work hard and acquire a rich and comfortable life in Canada and would die in Canada, when he was 80 years old. He kept reminding that he had become a part of Canada and would die in Canada, when he was 80 years old. He kept reminding that he had become a part of Canada and would die in Canada, when he was 80 years old. He kept reminding that he had become a part of Canada and would die in Canada, when he was 80 years old.

During the second world war, while in India, they are all one nation. Why not visit Canada some day, I said my father, if you get a chance. I am sure you will like it. His open-minded invitation convinced my father to visit Canada, especially Toronto, if the opportunity would ever arise.

The chance to visit Canada came in 1948 and 20 years after my first introduction to Canada through Uncle Munshi Singh's adventures. In April 1948 the World Council of Churches Youth Division invited me for a youth conference held in Whitley. At that time I was studying at Yashwantrao Chavan High School, New Delhi. I was very happy to receive this invitation. It was a fulfillment of my childhood dream. The conference was to last for one full week. After the conference, I was asked to stay on for a couple of more days to speak to church groups around the Toronto, London, and Kingston area. I met several Canadians and a few Indian young people. I also had the opportunity of looking around the countryside, admiring its natural beauty, unspoiled by man, and looking through the eyes of one Indian and Bob Gibson and Art Pearson. Between 1948 and 1961 I made about half a dozen trips to Toronto and Whitley to participate in conferences and to deliver lectures. Every time I visited Toronto I was impressed by its beauty, parks, its roads and clean houses and fields. During my brief conversations with people from the Punjab, I found that many were doing very well. One conversation was with the Taj Mahal Restaurant owner. He said he was happy to be there. Things here are good. He said that the government here looked independent and not interfering people, strong and hardworking, and willing to

could not but feel that the Toronto subway was something unique. The subway cars were spacious, neat, and clean. They were designed for comfortable travelling. They were not cluttered with cigarette ashtrays, papers like some of the subways I had seen. The subway stations were spotlessly clean, and for travellers convenience they were placed along with shopping centres. The idea was seldom mentioned, just coming out of a picture book.

In the twenty-seven years since I first visited Toronto many changes have taken place. The city has developed into a cosmopolitan metropolis. Its population has increased from less than a million to almost 3 million. There are large high-rise buildings, complexes, plazas, shopping centres, and highways. There have been many more ethnic groups settled in Toronto, including a large number from India and Pakistan, Africa, and the Caribbean. Today, Toronto is the most important business and commercial centre of Canada. It has no ghettoes or slums, no slums, no ghettos, and it is one of the most scenic and cleanest cities in the world.



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In May 1975 during a visit to the Board of World Mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I was told that there was a considerable amount of

Canada and seen Stanford Upton's description there. I had also got a glimpse of it in England by being interested to see "the coloured people working outside." But I found the situation somewhat difficult to comprehend because my impression of life in the United States and Canada had created a very different impression about Canada. To me, Toronto was vibrant and full of opportunity, and it was in my mind. I asked the Mission Board to give me time to look at the situation to see whether or not such a study was really warranted. I spent the next two years making personal visits to Toronto and friends in Toronto, students who number more than 60, and discussed the Mission Board's concern with them. During my discussions, I received suggestions for and against the project. Some of the people who complained about discrimination did not think such a study would prove useful, and it might reveal a "white backlash." But most of them were in favour of bringing these facts into the open and to the notice of the government. For these were told other people who might demand the existence of discrimination and planned discrimination. The group, most of whom had come to Canada before 1965, said that part of the blame for this discrimination was on the part of the immigrants themselves. They said that it is a two-way process and immigrants must accept part of the responsibility. However, they also said that, given enough time, we should be able to overcome it. After these discussions, I went back to Yale University Library to study the material already available on discrimination. I made up my mind in the first week of June. I accepted the Mission Board's offer to conduct this study and make specific suggestions how to overcome the problem.

As I was going through the material on discrimination, I

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