

Serving humanity an important practice for Sikhs

BY NEENA LAMBA

IVISIT the Thunder Bay Gurudwara on Fort William Road as often as I can to perform Seva — an important practice for the Sikhs, people from the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent.

In Sikhism, Seva is selfless community service, similar to volunteering in the Canadian culture. The word Seva, came from the Sanskrit root word 'sev' which has two distinct connotations. The first is to serve, to attend, to render obedience and the second is to worship, to adore, to pay homage. For Sikhs, they merge together in Seva — to practice serving humanity.

According to the Sikh scriptures, Seva must be done without desire (nishkam). Each and every one is encouraged to volunteer and do nishakam seva to help the needy, poor, and the sick. It is the most important conduct expected of a true Sikh in providing comfort and resources to the less fortunate.

Seva can be rendered in various forms and ways: through the body (tan) that is being present physically to serve others, through mind (man), or through making donations of materials things (dhan). These actions encourage us to shun vices and make us humble and are impera-



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.

tive to our spiritual growth and well-being.

In Thunder Bay, the close-knit Sikh community meet at the local Gurudwara to celebrate communal festivities. When I visit the Gurudwara, I also share a meal called the Langar, or free kitchen, prepared in the community kitchen with the help of the volunteers.

The Langar is a hearty vegetarian meal and generally includes rice, roti or naan (flat bread), lentil, vegetables, and a dessert. The practice is to sit in rows (pangat) on the floor or to enjoy this delicious and simple food, that is freely served to the congregation at the conclusion of every gurdwara program. This serving of food is a long-standing



PHOTO COURTESY THUNDER BAY SIKH SOCIETY

Community members sitting in rows — or pangat — enjoy Langar at the Festival of Guru Gobind Singh's birthday celebration.

tradition called Guru ka Langar (the guru's kitchen) and originated with the first Sikh guru, Guru Nanak around 1521.

The act of sitting together in rows in the Guru ka Langar was a revolutionary idea at that time

to abolish the caste system and to symbolize that a king and a pauper could sit together, share the same food, and in the same way. Most Sikhs believe in the Langar as it is a powerful reminder about equality for all people regardless

of birth, gender, faith, or social status. It also generates a sense of belonging and the communal spirit.

Many Sikhs all over the world served meals to people in need on the auspicious day of Vaisakhi, the annual harvest festival that falls on April 13. This year, due to the pandemic, this gesture has been ongoing and has been profoundly more meaningful. In Thunder Bay, the Sikh Society volunteers collaborated with KhalsaAid organization to provide food supplies to approximately 150 people during the pandemic.

The Thunder Bay Gurudwara, which opened its doors to the Sikh community on Sept. 9, 2018, is the site where Sikh youth get together to organize relief aid packages and other Seva activities. I invite you to visit the Thunder Bay Sikh Society website at www.tbaysikhsociety.com to learn more about the Sikh community in Thunder Bay.

Neena Lamba is a settlement coordinator at the Thunder Bay Multicultural Association (TBMA) and has been a Thunder Bay resident since 1994. Neena is an active community volunteer. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.