

EQUILIBRIUM OF LOVE

DERA BABA JAIMAL SINGH



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RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS

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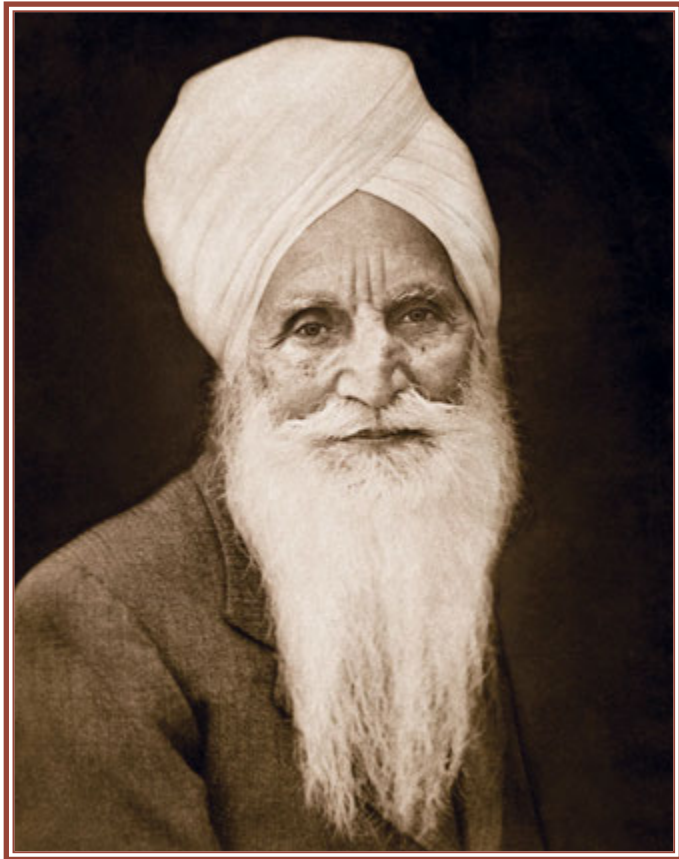
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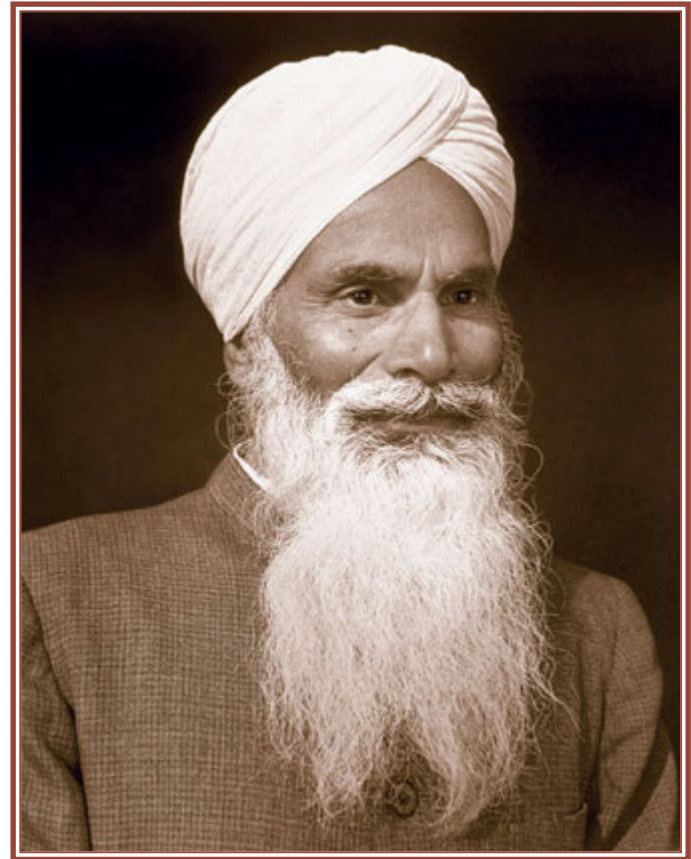
*“The best way to find your self is to lose your self
in the service of others.”*

Mahatma Gandhi

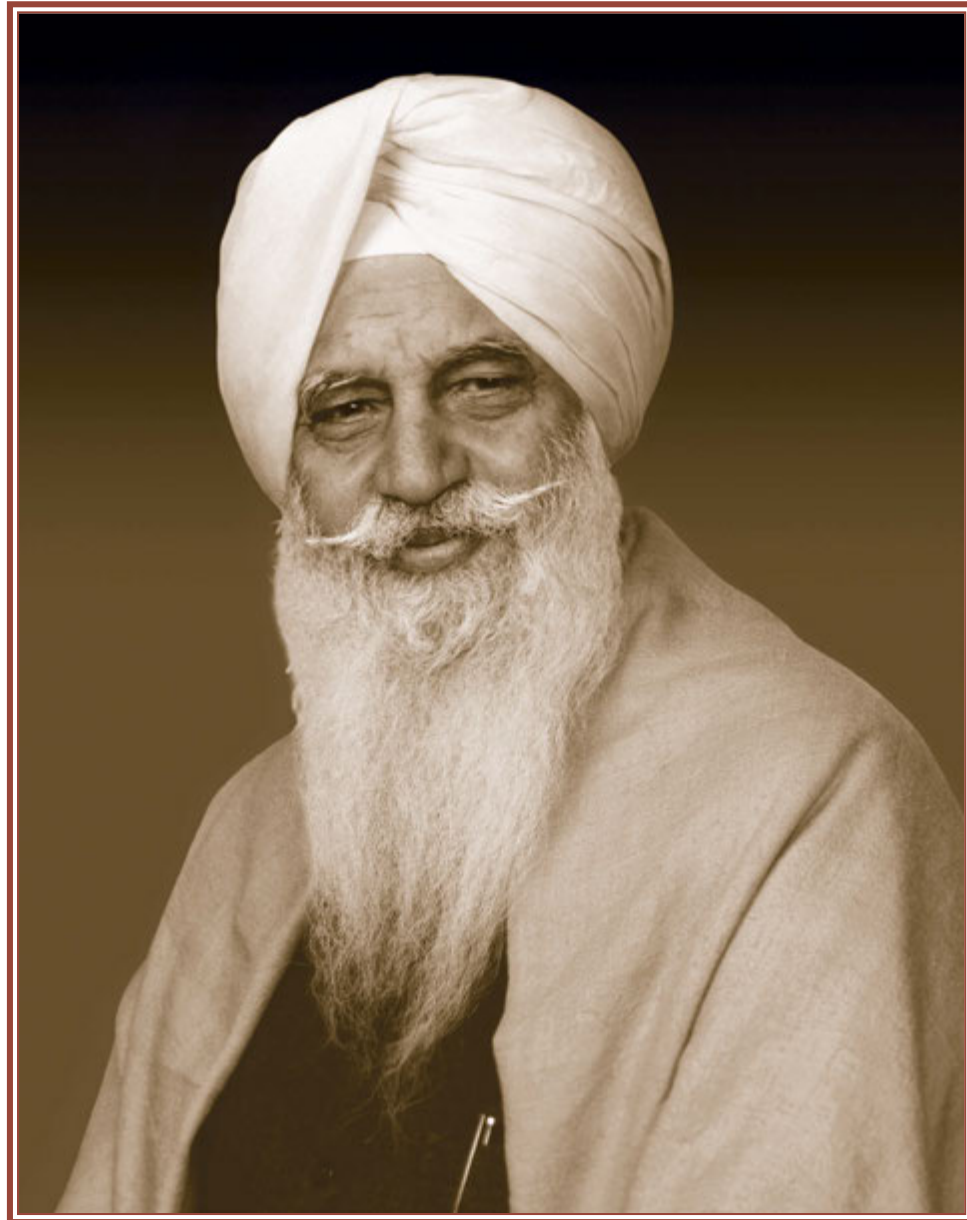
THE SPIRITUAL MASTERS AT BEAS



Maharaj Sawan Singh was master from 1903 to 1948. An engineer by profession who served in the British-Indian military engineering corps, he built the Dera's first well and other early structures, including the large satsanghar, laying the groundwork for the colony one sees today. Under his long period of mastership, the Dera grew from a simple hut into a small village.



Maharaj Jagat Singh was master from 1948 to 1951. A retired chemistry professor and university vice principal, he led the Dera during the especially difficult time of Partition, providing shelter and assistance to many refugees. Although he was the master at Dera for only a few years, he was highly respected for his disciplined and scientific, yet compassionate approach.



Maharaj Charan Singh was master from 1951 to 1990 and drew tens of thousands to his discourses from all over India and abroad. Under his leadership, the Dera developed from its small nucleus into a large township. Trained as a lawyer and farmer, he transferred his personal ownership of the Dera properties to a non-profit charitable Society, which continues to run the Dera today.

RADHA SOAMI SATSANG BEAS

Radha Soami Satsang Beas was registered as a non-profit Society on October 11, 1957, under the Societies Registration Act. Until that time, the properties and management of Dera Baba Jaimal Singh were solely in the hands of the living Master (the Satguru). The Master at the time, Maharaj Charan Singh, was a lawyer by profession. He knew that the time had come to move the Dera from this traditional arrangement to the more pragmatic and legally viable entity of a Society. Once the Society was formed, the Master transferred all the satsang properties to the Society. The responsibilities were divided, with the Master becoming the spiritual head and Patron of the Society; and the Secretary of the Society, along with the Executive Committee, managing the properties and all related administrative functions. Thus all the building blocks were now in place to move the Dera effectively forward into the modern world.

In the book *Heaven on Earth*, Maharaj Charan Singh is quoted as having said that the Masters have always considered themselves as trustees rather than owners, because they hold this property in trust for the sangat (congregation), never using it for personal needs but always for the benefit and development of the sangat. This principle of trusteeship, he said, should now be given a legal and well-defined shape for the benefit of the sangat and for more efficient management of the properties. The Master added that this arrangement would also relieve him of much responsibility and give him more time to serve the sangat in other ways.

Today, the management of Radha Soami Satsang Beas, with its headquarters at Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, is organized into various departments, each having a head and an assistant. There are regular meetings of all department heads to discuss and improve the functioning of the Society and the Dera. On a higher level, the Executive Committee, which includes all the key sevadars in charge of the most important departments, as well as the Secretary, meet several times a year to discuss long-term plans, keeping in view the needs of the sangat and the sevadars.

The Master concerns himself with the primary purpose of the Society – satsang (spiritual discourses), seva (voluntary service) and initiation. The Executive Committee, headed by the Secretary, decides how best to meet these requirements. It also decides day-to-day issues such as prices for goods and services, as well as the level of subsidy to be provided to the sangat and sevadars. Enhancements to the quality of life for the sevadars and sangat is always a high priority in such areas as health care, education, housing, care for the elderly, and many other management issues.

In addition to the Dera, there are currently about 5,000 satsang centres throughout India. The Society's Department of Indian Satsang Centres gives oversight to all these centres through a structured system of management – from large zonal areas, to smaller regional areas, to the local centres. Outside of India, satsang is held in over 90 countries. Boards of management have been set up in all the large countries. The Master has appointed Representatives in many of the countries to conduct initiations on his behalf. The Department of Overseas Satsang Centres at Dera provides oversight for all satsang activities outside India. It helps ensure that the overseas centres follow the established guidelines for administration of satsang centres abroad, and that they conduct themselves in the spirit of love and service as exemplified by the Master.

The coordination and management of satsang activities by the sevadars is an enormous undertaking. Without the feeling of love and service, and gratitude for the spiritual enrichment given so wholeheartedly by the Master, the Dera could not function at the level that it does. Love and selfless service in the name of the Master are the building blocks on which the success of all else rests.

Introduction



“Wherever there is a sangat, there is a Dera. Dera is not a place made of bricks and mortar and other things. Dera is made up of the devotees, of the lovers of the Lord, of the seekers of the Father – that is Dera. When sangat is there, Dera is there. Without the sangat, there is no Dera at all. So don’t think that just by making a few buildings or houses or a colony you are able to make a Dera. Dera is just your love, your harmony, your affection, your understanding, and your cooperation with each other. That is Dera.”

Maharaj Charan Singh

Dera Baba Jaimal Singh is a community where people live, visit, and work while trying to put into practice the spiritual teachings of the saints (Sant Mat), a path of selfless service and meditation.

Dera is both a place and an idea, a state of mind and attitude of the heart. Here people come from all over the world for spiritual guidance and inspiration, and to practise the principles of love, harmony, and service 24 hours a day – not because anyone has told them to do so, but because they genuinely want to serve the master and the sangat.

Baba Gurinder Singh is the current spiritual master of the Radha Soami line of saints, as well as the spiritual patron of the Dera. Visitors and residents attend his discourses (satsangs) and perform voluntary service (seva) as a means of expressing their love and gratitude. Spirituality at the Dera is not a collection of theories but the translation of those theories into action.

The word “ashram” does not correctly describe the Dera, for it is not only a spiritual retreat but also a full-fledged township that operates on so massive a scale that it must be seen to be believed. Hundreds of thousands of people come at designated times throughout the year to

attend satsang, receive initiation (instructions on how to meditate) and perform seva. The challenge facing the Dera is to ensure that visitors are comfortable and cared for – because when their physical needs are met, they are free to delve into the teachings of the mystics and seek spiritual fulfilment.

So, while the central purpose of the Dera is to create an environment which supports the pursuit of spirituality, the Dera also seeks to create a cost-effective yet flexible infrastructure that meets the sangat’s physical needs. Long-term planning is required to anticipate future growth in areas such as vehicular and pedestrian traffic; the placement of parking, food outlets, shelter and toilet facilities; and the provision of many other necessities. This infrastructure incorporates alternative energy practices, sustainable agriculture, green spaces using local indigenous plants, modern sanitation and treatment of water and wastes. To help meet its goal of self-sufficiency, the Dera fabricates many of its own building materials, such as tiles, bricks, railings, windows and doors.

In the end, however, it is the love and service of the Dera’s many dedicated sevadars (volunteers) that build and maintain this unique colony.



The Dera's developed area spans approximately 1,900 acres, with an additional 1,250 acres under cultivation. It has a permanent population of about 7,000 residents, the majority of whom are the 1,500 full-time sevadars (and their families) who serve the sangat throughout the year.

During the 19 designated weekends each year when the master delivers satsang, the Dera's population swells to as many as 200,000 to 500,000 people. They come not just from India, but from all over the world. They may come for only a weekend or they may stay for a few weeks at a time. They are from different cultures, religions, social backgrounds and income levels. They are doctors and farmers, professors and taxi drivers, housewives and students, computer specialists and construction workers. In other words, they come from all walks of life and may be of any age, gender, caste or nationality. Practically every religion is represented, as one does not have to give up one's religion to follow this path.

Many of the visitors participate in seva during their stay. They take time off from their jobs and other responsibilities to work shoulder to shoulder in a spirit

of love and humility. A housewife may help to translate a book. A banker may work side-by-side with a student to help build a road. These sevadars come for one reason: to learn how to mould their lives according to the highest spiritual ideals. Saints teach that performing seva is a way to learn humility through sacrifice. Sevadars sacrifice their time, energy and status. There is no incongruity in seeing an elegant woman in a sari carrying a bucket of sand on her head for road building, for example.

People may also donate money or farm produce, such as rice, wheat and vegetables. Farmers even come with their tractors and other equipment to use on certain projects. Donations are not solicited; people naturally want to contribute however they can.

In fact, the Dera, which is legally a charitable, non-profit society, is funded only through such donations. Necessities like food and basic household supplies, and the Dera's many publications, are sold below market rate or on a subsidized basis. The master does not accept gifts or money for himself or his family from the sangat; all money donated in seva is channelled into supporting the sangat.











Leaving satsang

THE DERA'S STORY OF LOVE

What do people actually do once they arrive? How are they organized, fed and housed with the orderliness for which the Dera is known? How the Dera meets the needs of its guests and residents is the story this book will tell.

What is perhaps most striking upon first entering the Dera is the efficiency with which the huge crowds are managed and cared for. No detail is too mundane to receive close attention. Every aspect of handling up to half a million people at a time is planned and implemented with efficiency, competence and grace.

For example, parking is provided close to the satsang venue for the convenience of attendees and to minimize traffic throughout the colony. Broad, inviting boulevards and well-maintained sidewalks channel the crowds. Sevadars direct foot and vehicular traffic. If a child becomes separated from her family, someone makes sure that she is delivered safely to her parents. The elderly and handicapped are given special consideration to accommodate their needs and limitations. And the Dera is a safe place, especially for women. A woman may walk alone at night without being harassed. The streets are well lit, and sevadars unobtrusively patrol the streets and grounds.

Other striking aspects of the Dera are its cleanliness and the simple yet sophisticated beauty of its layout, architecture and landscaping. It is a spotless, orderly place with all the modern conveniences as well as considerable aesthetic charm. The grounds are free of trash and litter and landscaped with lush lawns, flowers, shrubs and trees (grown in the Dera's own nurseries). Green space abounds, covering a full half of the Dera, creating an environment where families can relax and children can play. Fresh drinking water and modern sanitation are available throughout the Dera. Dust is kept to a minimum through the regular watering down of streets. The buildings are designed by professional engineers and architects for ease of maintenance and to maximize coolness in summer and heat in winter, using the simple, practical and appealing design elements of rural Punjab.









Sevadars arriving at Dera

Another noteworthy aspect of the Dera is the way its values and routines inculcate self-discipline and good manners in its visitors. For example, people don't break queues while entering satsang or waiting to be served food. Everyone observes the traffic rules, which are strictly enforced. No one honks their horns while driving; even the cyclists and rickshaw drivers refrain from clanging their bells. The sangat respects the cleanliness of the Dera, and large numbers of sevadars constantly maintain it. And finally, everything at the Dera is done with absolute punctuality. The daily satsang begins on the dot, the various shops open and close at the prescribed time and all those who work in stalls, shops and offices arrive punctually, with nobody leaving before the appointed hour. Such orderliness greatly contributes to the sense of calm that permeates the Dera despite its constant activity and the large crowds that regularly come and go.

Regardless of whether one is taking a quiet evening stroll or walking eagerly to satsang with tens of thousands of people, one sees that the values that form the foundation of the Dera – both its spiritual purpose and physical infrastructure – reveal themselves in details both great and small. For example: where do thousands of families from distant villages, sleeping together on the ground in large sheds, store their luggage and valuables? In strategically placed storage rooms and lockers, supervised by responsible sevadars. How might a visiting scholar or student of mysticism learn more about Sant Mat, or any other spiritual path for that matter? A modern research library has been built and is being stocked with literature from every religion and spiritual tradition, past and present. The Dera hopes it will become a world-class facility that will attract scholars from around the world. These are just two examples of how the Dera has created facilities that ensure a comfortable and meaningful stay for its visitors.

Moreover, everyone is welcome at the Dera. No one is turned away. One need not be a follower of Sant Mat to attend satsang, use the Dera's library, enjoy its langar, grab a bite in one of its snack bars, or buy fruit and tea in its markets. The Dera offers spiritual sustenance to all who seek it, while keeping them safe and comfortable. People travel here from all over the world for one purpose. Here they can escape worldly distractions and focus on the meaning of their lives in an atmosphere of peace and serenity.





Beas train station





The Early Years



*“The foundation of Dera was laid by
Baba Jaimal Singh and Hazur Maharaj
Sawan Singh on love, seva, humility and
meditation. In Dera all are equal – rich and
poor, women and men, of any race, of any
religion. There is no question of caste or creed.
The Dera belongs to all, to every satsangi.”*

Maharaj Charan Singh

The history of the Dera coincides with the history of the masters at Beas because, inevitably, where there's a master, spiritual seekers gather for inspiration and spiritual sustenance.

The seed of the bustling Dera of today was planted in the late 19th century on the desolate banks of the River Beas, where one master meditated alone in a cave for days at a time. He was Baba Jaimal Singh (1839–1903), a disciple of Soami Ji of Agra, who initially came to this area on the western bank of the Beas River during his military leave to meditate, and then settled here permanently after he retired.

In the 1870s and 80s, the area was forbidding and isolated, a jungle of thorny acacias and spiny shrubs, with deep ravines and gullies where snakes, scorpions, jackals, vultures and other wild animals roamed freely. People were frightened of the place, thinking it was haunted, so they stayed away. No doubt it was this utter solitude that attracted Baba Jaimal Singh. On retiring from military service in 1889, he built a small room for himself made of mud walls and a thatched roof. He had very few disciples then. Within a year, as news of the saint at Beas spread through nearby villages, he began holding satsang in the open air, in front of his hut.

A few years later, in 1894, Baba Jaimal Singh initiated Baba Sawan Singh who became his successor and was often referred to as the Great Master. Baba Sawan Singh was a civil engineer by profession. Seeing that Baba Jaimal Singh's disciples carried water for drinking and for their master's bath from a well a mile away, walking through a dense jungle, Baba Sawan Singh asked Baba Jaimal Singh to allow him to build a well close to Baba Jaimal Singh's hut. After sitting in meditation Baba Jaimal Singh granted him permission, telling him: "All right. I have no intention of binding myself to this place, as I have very little time left to live, but now you will be bound to this place."

One could say the modern Dera was born when that well was built, since other structures gradually grew up around it to accommodate the growing sangat.

Great Master giving satsang in the 1940s





A PLACE FOR SATSANG

After building the well in 1898 (bottom right corner), the Great Master received permission to also build a small room for satsang, to protect people from rain and sun. First a room measuring about 30 by 15 feet was built that could hold fifty or sixty people. In those days, it rarely filled to capacity. Afterwards, a few guest rooms were built so people could spend the night. As the number of guests grew, a bigger hall was constructed, called the Nam Ghar.

By the time Baba Jaimal Singh passed away in 1903, he had initiated more than two thousand people into the path of Sant Mat. For large satsangs at the Dera, about 150 people would gather, both men and women sitting in the one small hall. The gatherings expanded gradually, and a verandah was built on to the Nam Ghar. The Great Master would sit there and give satsang to a small crowd seated on the

ground in the courtyard that had been built around the well. Later on, a larger hall was built for satsang near the Nam Ghar.

In those early days, the courtyard, and the small compound of brick buildings surrounding it, was the Dera, all of it built by a few loving disciples. As time went on, and as Great Master travelled to villages and cities throughout India and what is now Pakistan, more and more seekers began visiting the Dera and wanted to settle there. Housing was built for new residents as well as visitors. The sangat had outgrown both satsang halls, and even the courtyard where people sat outside for satsang was now too small for the crowd. As in the earliest days, the sangat had no protection from the weather, so construction of covered structures for satsang and accommodations became a priority.



Finally, in 1934 the Great Master approved the construction of a new satsanghar. A large, majestic building, combining the classical and medieval styles popular at that time, was completed in just three years. During the design phase, many elaborate plans were presented to the Great Master by various engineers and architects who were disciples, but he rejected them all. Being an engineer himself, he drew his own plans, giving the building a simple T-shape so that the dais on which he would sit and give satsang, in the middle of the crossbar of the T, would be in clear view of everyone on all three sides.

He had in mind a very simple design, with none of the spires and minarets you see today. But eventually he agreed to the sevadars' request for a more ornate structure.

As the sangat continued to grow year after year, in 1984, under the direction of Maharaj Charan Singh, a huge "multipurpose" steel-framed shed was built, with a simple mud floor, lightweight roof, and partially built-up concrete lattice walls. Built for holding satsang during inclement weather, it was designed to seat some 90,000 people.

In the 1990s, as the sangat had grown considerably under the mastership of Baba Gurinder Singh, the current satsang shed was constructed in the low-lying area toward the Beas River. It has been enlarged in stages and now has a covered capacity of roughly 500,000 people. (The current total capacity of the shed and the open shamiana-covered grounds behind it is 700,000 to 800,000 people.)





ABOVE: *The original Nam Ghar built by the Great Master, measuring about 55 by 20 feet, held about 150 people.*
BELOW: *The larger satsang hall in the compound was built later and quickly outgrown.*





ABOVE: *Satsanghar under construction, 1936*

BELOW: *Great Master leaving satsang*







The more elaborate satsanghar was built to accommodate about 2,200 people, but by the time it was completed, in 1937, the attendance at monthly satsangs had grown beyond all expectation. It was clear that even the new hall would be too small for the growing sangat. The Great Master therefore decided to use it for initiations only, and the satsangs were once again held outdoors, on the surrounding grounds.

On one occasion, Great Master remarked that all future satsangs would need to be held in the open fields, as no hall would ever be large enough to accommodate the crowds that would attend. For many years satsang was held in a field behind the satsanghar, with shamianas (canvas coverings supported by poles) used to protect the crowds from rain and sun.

Elderly and disabled people attending satsang in the satsanghar, 2013





OPPOSITE: Great Master giving satsang in the 1940s on the steps of the old library
ABOVE: Maharaj Charan Singh giving satsang at the same place in the 1960s

FEEDING THE SANGAT

People who come to the Dera for satsang also need to eat. For this reason, there has always been a langar here – that is, the serving of free meals. Langar was first introduced by Baba Jaimal Singh in the 1890s and has been operating ever since. At first the langar was established in front of Baba Jaimal Singh's small hut. Vegetables, dal and fuel were purchased from neighbouring villages.

For more than 100 years, masses of people have flocked to the langar, and there has never been a shortage of food, nor has the sangat ever been asked for money to support it. The Great Master used to tell the sevadars to serve food to the sangat "with affection and big-heartedness because Baba Jaimal Singh's treasure is inexhaustible."

At first, during the Great Master's time, the langar was held in the courtyard of his home, with the cooking done nearby. There was no electricity; all the food was cooked over open fires – the dal and vegetables in huge iron pots – with lanterns used for lighting. There were only a few griddles for cooking chapatis.

Earlier, during Baba Jaimal Singh's time, at most a hundred people would need to be housed and fed during special satsang weekends. By Great Master's time, up to 30,000 people would come. The sangat grew so rapidly that all the facilities became inadequate, and so the langar kept having to be expanded. In the early 1950s, the number of people to be fed at bhandaras (special satsangs held throughout the year) increased to more than 50,000 in a very short time. Since only 3,000 to 4,000 people could be fed at a time, the langar had to operate nearly 24 hours a day, serving everyone in shifts.

During the time of Maharaj Jagat Singh (1948–1951), the numbers of people visiting Dera remained constant, except for the large number of refugees coming from Pakistan during the Partition who were invited to take shelter at the Dera and eat in the langar. Then, after the passing of Maharaj Jagat Singh in 1951, during the time of Maharaj Charan Singh, the langar grew exponentially and underwent significant changes. (Today the langar feeds 50,000 people at one time and 300,000 at one meal.)





OPPOSITE: *Great Master giving darshan in the langar*
ABOVE: *Cooking in the early langar*

One night early in his mastership, Maharaj Charan Singh was kept awake until 2:30 in the morning by noise from the langar. He discovered that the sangat was still eating, with several thousand waiting in line to be served, and was disturbed to hear that his sangat had to wait until 2 or 3 in the morning to eat. As he later explained: "In 1955, the langar was very small, with only one small gate, yet two lakhs of people (200,000) would come on the bhandara of the Great Master's birthday. So many would come that they were still feeding them at 2:00 in the morning. I used to be in my bedroom, restless, wondering what should be done to take care of these satsangis who come in memory of Great Master."

Maharaj Charan Singh wanted to expand the langar to seat at least 20,000 people at a time, so that even a crowd of 50,000 could be fed within about three hours. The langar was surrounded on three sides by Dera buildings, so the only direction in which it could expand was eastward, toward the low-lying marshlands.

He realized that the only way the langar could be expanded was by filling in the ravines and levelling the ground. The Dera management was hesitant to do so, as they felt the ravines were too wide and too deep to be filled. They said that even if it were possible, it could take as long as 10 to 12 years. The master replied, "Even if it does take 10 years, it doesn't matter. At least then the sangat will be able to eat in comfort."

And so he announced that the filling of the ravines would be done as seva. It came to be known as mitti seva, or earth-moving seva. This also had been done during Great Master's time, but it took off on a large scale in the 1950s as construction increased. Bulldozers were not used. Rather, each person would fill a shallow basket with dirt and carry it on his or her head to a ravine and dump the dirt into it.

The master began the practice of going to the seva grounds twice a day, morning and evening, to encourage his sangat as they performed this seva. Gradually more and more people joined in; during bhandaras, sometimes as many as 10,000 sevadars participated. Large hillocks disappeared in a matter of days. Deep ravines were transformed into level land. Young and old, rich and poor, the able and the infirm, initiates and non-initiates – everyone worked together shoulder to shoulder. Mitti seva became an integral aspect of the Dera during that time.

Eventually the sangat moved more than a million cubic feet of earth, and the ground was levelled in just two years. Through Maharaj Ji's determination and the sangat's seva, the langar gradually expanded in phases. With the levelling of the ravines and the gradual reclaiming of some marshy land after the river shifted its course, there was space to build more cooking sheds and provide more seating space.





Once when the master was discussing the expansion requirements for the langar with his management, he told them the sangat should never be inconvenienced. "We must give them what they need," he said. "What are we here for? Why should we tell them, 'Do not come because we cannot feed you'? We must try to rise to the occasion and be able to serve them to the full extent."

That generosity and consideration manifested in another significant way in the langar. Through his influence Maharaj Charan Singh was responsible for a social revolution at the Dera that modelled for the sangat the spirit of love and equality that is a core value of not only the Dera but of every saint who has ever lived there or, indeed, anywhere.

The langar was designed as a place where everyone can sit together and eat a meal, regardless of their religion, caste or gender. But in the early days of Maharaj Charan Singh's mastership (the early 50s), when visiting the langar one day, he was disturbed to see that, although

the caste system had been declared illegal in India, different castes were sitting separately, with the very poor huddled together apart from the rest of the sangat. He went to sit and eat among the lower caste groups, along with several prominent Dera administrators. From that day forward, people of all backgrounds prepare food together and eat together because of Maharaj Charan Singh's loving example.

Today, as the sangat has continued to grow, the langar has expanded and some mechanized production methods have been introduced to meet the enormous need, although the traditional manual seva also goes on. The langar adheres to the principle that there should always be enough food for everyone.

RIGHT: *Maharaj Charan Singh inspecting food in the langar*

BELOW: *Everyone eating together in the langar*





PROVIDING SHELTER

From its beginnings, the Dera has never stopped growing, whether accommodating the early disciples of Baba Jaimal Singh in the late 19th century or the hundreds of thousands who flock to the satsang of the present master, Baba Gurinder Singh, in the 21st century.

The Dera has also opened its gates to refugees, people caught in crises of war and civil unrest. After Partition, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, families moving from Pakistan to India and from India to Pakistan sought refuge here, with what was left of their worldly possessions, until they could find places to resettle. The Dera also sheltered hundreds of people – Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs – when the Punjab was beset by terrorism in the 1980s.

In the time of Baba Jaimal Singh, covered accommodation was very limited. Visitors would consider themselves lucky if they could sleep on a covered verandah, of which there were just a few. Mostly people slept in the open, with no protection from rain, heat and cold. In the early 1900s, a two-storey building known as “nine kothris” was built near the small satsang hall. The building had five rooms on the

ground floor and four rooms on the upper floor, where up to six people could sleep per room; eventually a tenth room was constructed by covering the open stairwell.

This area is what came to be known, in the early days of Maharaj Sawan Singh’s mastership, as Dera Baba Jaimal Singh: a small compound of brick buildings – two small satsang halls and a guest house – surrounding a well and a courtyard.

Even government officials who came stayed in the little guest house, sleeping on the floor. There was no electricity, only oil lamps and candles. And there were no bathrooms; the entire sangat bathed in the river, which was so close that the sound of running water could be heard everywhere in the Dera.

From 1911 to 1932, several new buildings and private houses were built. For the most part, these were simple brick buildings that resident sevadars furnished and maintained themselves, and which were also used for guests.





Old residential area



Early Dera showing domed Library in centre



HERITAGE SQUARE

The Great Master designed and supervised the construction of all the new buildings, giving specific directions to the masons and engineers and paying attention to the smallest details (as his master had done before him). He was the architect and planner behind the early development of the Dera that we see today.

In 1916, a large, elegant, two-storey brick building was built, privately financed, as a private home. This distinctive building still stands. No longer a private residence, it was used for many years as a library and reading room, and even as storage for grains; today it houses sevadars.

In 1923, the Great Master built his own three-storey house alongside Baba Jaimal Singh's 8-foot-by-10-foot room, across from the original well. The Great Master's house has been renovated and anchors what is now known as the Dera's Heritage Square, which includes the original well and the Dera's oldest buildings.

It was during the 1930s and 40s that the Dera began to take shape as a well-laid out colony of more than a hundred houses. It is this area that is often referred to as the "old Dera" by those who remember it.



Great Master's house



Heritage Square today

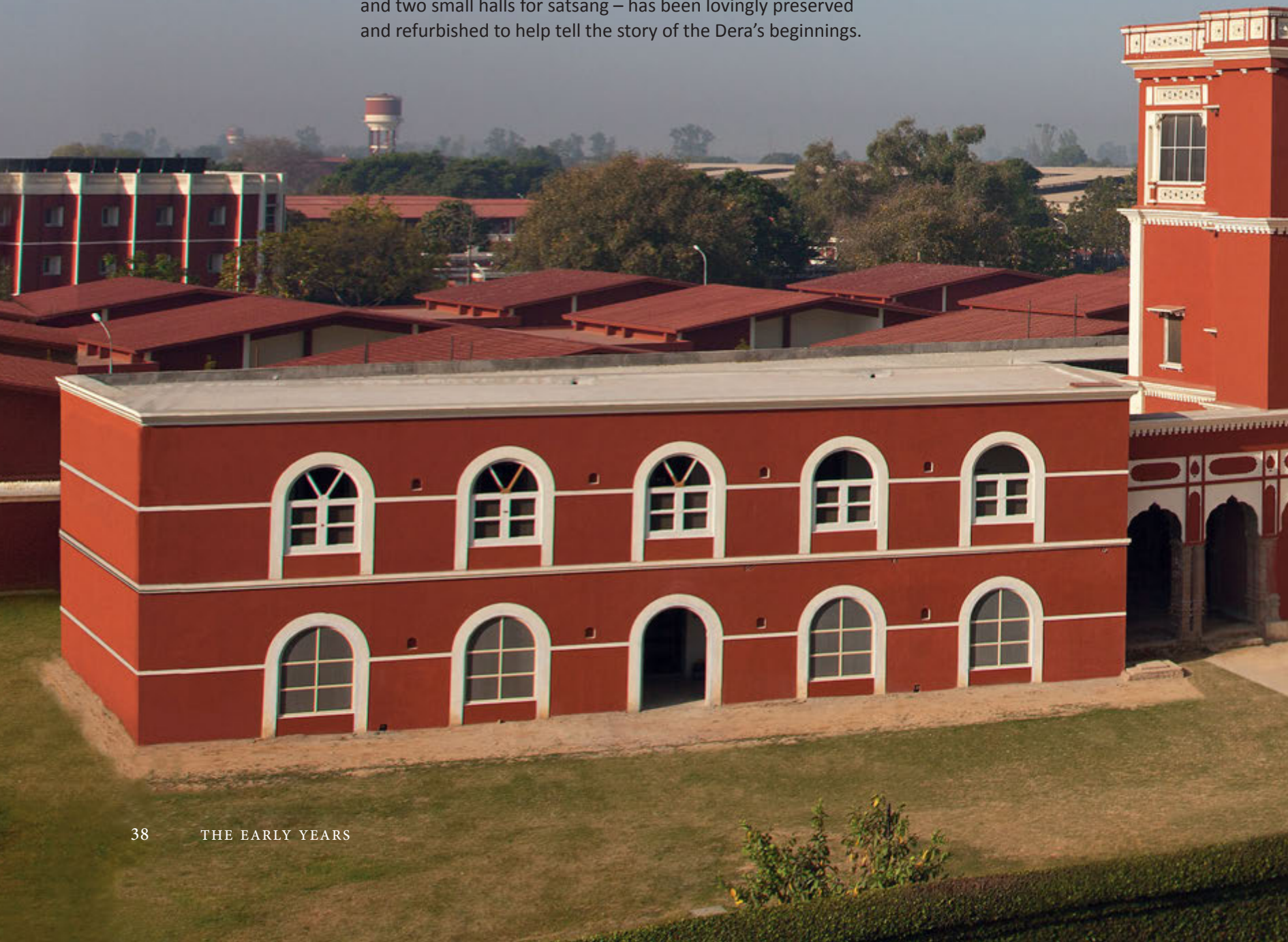


The well and old satsanghar



View from old satsanghar

This central heart of the Dera – where the Great Master built his house, the well, a few rooms for basic accommodation, and two small halls for satsang – has been lovingly preserved and refurbished to help tell the story of the Dera’s beginnings.





A house built in the 1930s for Dr Julian Johnson, an American visitor, is now occupied by the family of Maharaj Charan Singh.



One of the original guest houses, recently renovated







THE GROWING SANGAT

Sevadars have worked continually, for more than 100 years, to give a shape to the modern colony, filling in ravines, levelling land, building roads and creating an infrastructure (clean water, sewage, electricity, etc.) to support the growing sangat. It is this seva that has built the Dera, from its earliest days until the present time.

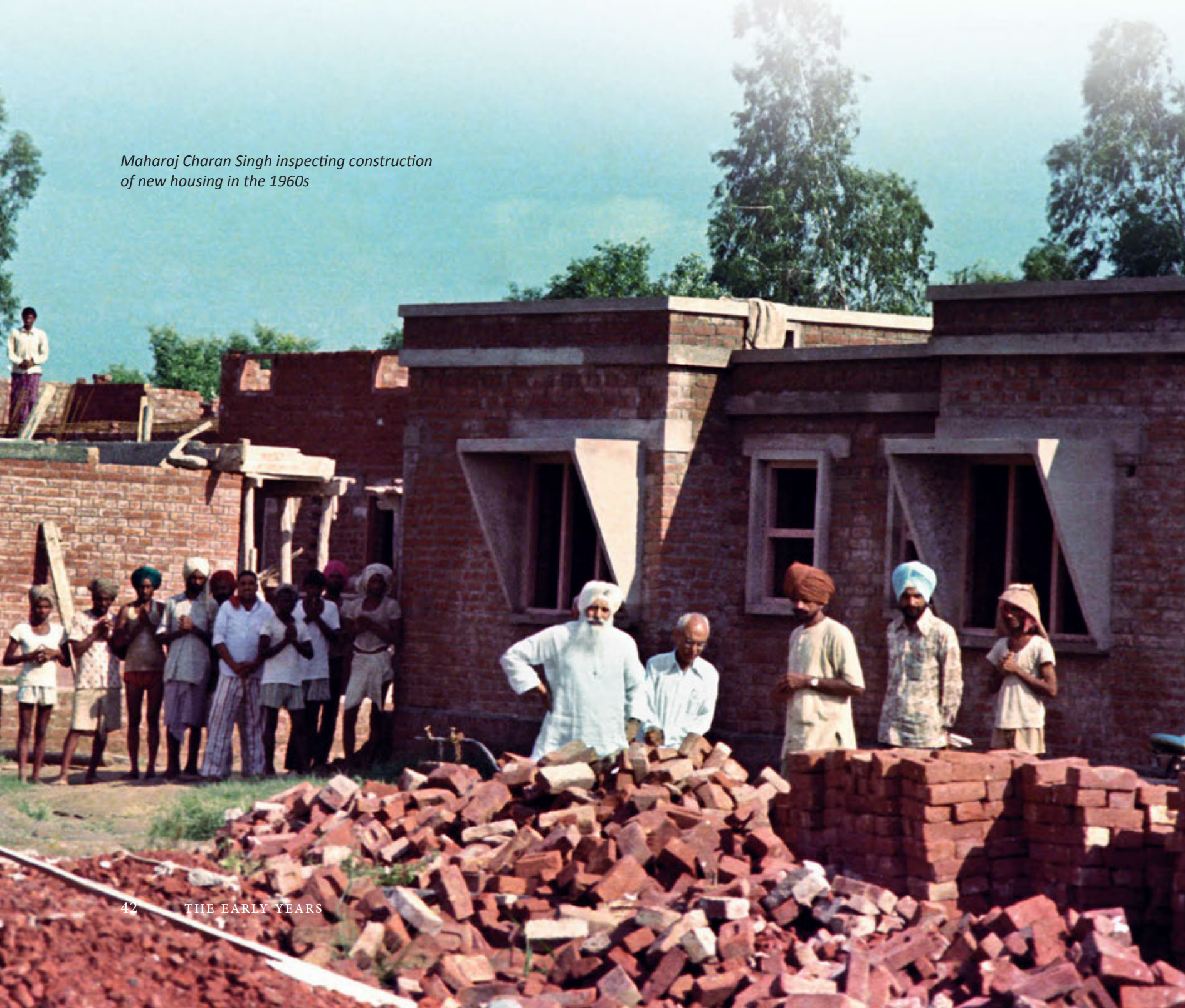
With the mastership of Maharaj Charan Singh beginning in 1951, the Dera's development – its infrastructure, amenities and services – surged, along with the number of visitors and residents. It was he who established the Dera's contemporary layout. He also enabled the entire sangat to participate in expanding the Dera at all phases of construction. The atmosphere and scale of the Dera began changing from a quiet, somewhat remote rural village to a bustling town complete with agricultural lands and shops selling basic necessities.

In the 1950s, full-scale water-supply and sewage systems were built and electricity was brought into the colony. With plenty of water available, large lawns and gardens were planted, and the colony eventually became lush with flowers, trees and shrubs, all grown in the Dera's own nurseries. Roads, residences, offices and guest houses were built, with landscaping to provide shade and restful green spaces throughout the colony.

In the 1960s, the first complex of residential houses was built specifically for sevadars who lived and worked at the Dera. As time went on, more and more sevadars came to live here, and additional homes were built, all with modern amenities.

Around this time, the number of foreign visitors also began to grow. Westerners had begun visiting the Dera in Great Master's time, but until the early 1950s, there was only one guest house for them, consisting of just four bedrooms.

Maharaj Charan Singh inspecting construction of new housing in the 1960s



Accommodations were quite basic. Although electricity had recently been installed, there were frequent power outages, and there still was no running water – bath water had to be delivered to the rooms early in the morning. In the mid-50s, more foreign visitors began coming to the Dera from the United States, Europe and South Africa, and those numbers grew steadily after the master's foreign tours in the 1960s. By the mid-1960s, an International Guest House was built within a beautifully landscaped compound consisting of 36 guest rooms with en-suite bathrooms, a lounge, cafeteria-style dining hall, meeting room, laundry facility and offices.

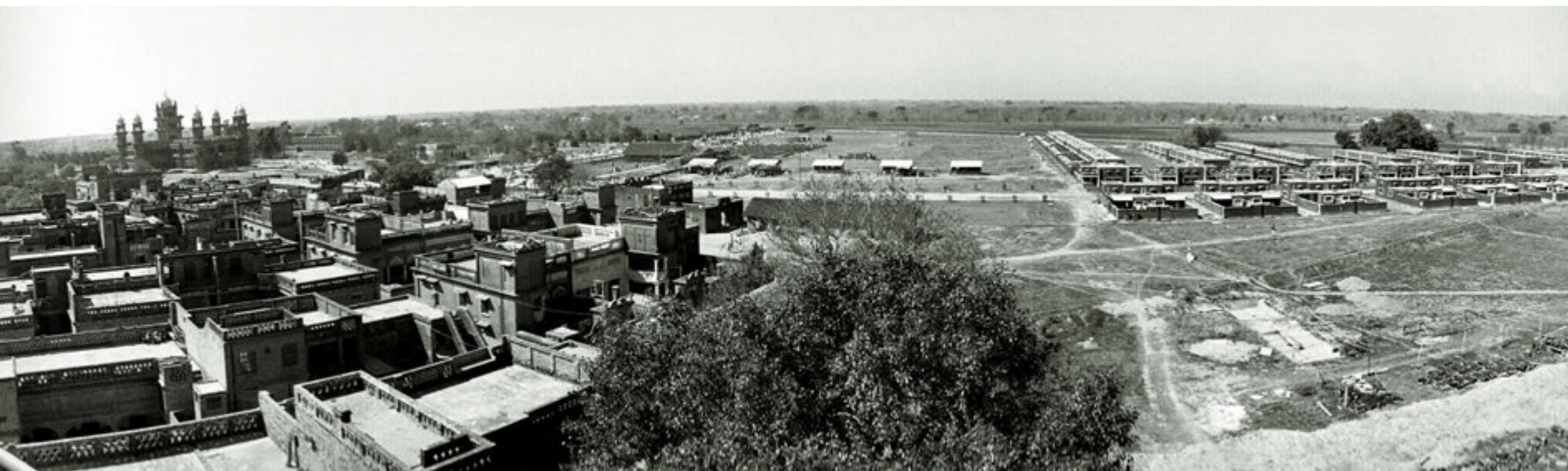
Thus, from the beginning of the 20th century, the building of guest houses, sleeping sheds, dormitories (sarais), private houses, apartment complexes and bathroom facilities has continued without a break.

In the early years, the Dera's accommodation department was an informal arrangement consisting of a table and a few chairs under a banyan tree across the street from the satsanghar. Visitors would sleep anywhere – if not in a guest house or a resident's home, then on a verandah, a sidewalk, or a bit of ground. Today, the department is housed in a modern office building that is open 24 hours a day. Fully computerized, its sevadars allocate accommodation efficiently and systematically to people from all over the world.

Despite the explosive growth of accommodations, both in capacity and quality, the spirit behind housing the sangat remains the same as in the Dera's earliest days: attention to the sangat's comfort and convenience so that visitors can leave behind their worries and cares and focus on their spiritual purpose.



Reviewing plans with the engineers



Old Dera with the newly constructed housing to the right

“Before Baba Jaimal Singh came here, I am told that there used to be an apparently half-witted fellow, but really a very spiritual person, who would often pick up bricks from far and near and make them into small heaps at the place where the Dera is now situated. He was called Kanhom the half-witted. If people asked him what he was busying himself with, he would stop and say: ‘This will be a very flourishing place. Splendid houses will be built here. It will be populated just like a city.’ In those days there was absolutely nothing here – no buildings of any kind. It was all wasteland and desert.”

Maharaj Sawan Singh





2014

1992

1973

1954

Heritage Square
1920s

GROWTH MAP OF DERA

The Dera Experience



*“The Dera is a unique township;
the law here is sympathy, understanding
and love. In a world overcast by hatred,
Dera radiates love; in a world blinded by
prejudice, it encourages understanding;
in a world of selfish pursuits, it is an
example of selfless dedication; in a world
battered by strife and enmity, by distrust
and jealousy, Dera is an abode of peace.”*

Diwan Daryai Lal Kapur, Heaven on Earth

The feeling of being part of the massive flow of people into the Dera at the start of a designated satsang weekend must be experienced to be understood. Thousands of people arrive in a steady stream by train, bus, car, motorcycle, bicycle, scooter and even on foot. Without undue fuss or even a hint of chaos, they will all find a place to stay for the next few days, with time left over for relaxing and visiting with friends old and new.

Superficially the Dera may look like any pleasant and well-ordered town, but it has an important difference. It is designed to quickly absorb, with minimal disruption, an influx of visitors that can swell its population 50 to 100 times its normal size.

Because so many visitors travel to the Dera by train, extra trains are scheduled by Indian Railways during designated satsang weekends, and extra coaches are added on to trains scheduled to stop at the Beas station. The Dera has taken joint responsibility with Indian Railways to improve and beautify the Beas train station for the convenience of the large numbers of travellers.

In addition, the government has helped the Dera by constructing a four-lane bridge over the train tracks, and they are planning to build a special exit lane from the main highway which would bypass the congestion in the village of Beas and prevent traffic backups after large satsangs, when people leave Dera en masse.

Depending on where they are coming from, people enter the Dera through one of three entrances, or gates, which remain open to traffic at all times. Large parking areas close to two of the gates can hold 18,300 vehicles, including buses and scooters.

On arrival everyone is required to go through a security check – all baggage is scanned; and all electronic gadgets, including mobile phones, cameras, iPods, MP3 players and laptops must be handed in, to be collected at departure.

Those people who have booked their accommodation, often months in advance, go through a process of registration and are then directed to one of various hostels or sarais (dormitories). Those who have simply arrived without booking ahead, particularly those from the rural areas of India, are sent to one of thirteen vast sleeping sheds, each accommodating 7,000 to 11,000 visitors. For anyone new to the Dera, this can be an awe-inspiring sight: a river of people pouring into the colony, moving mostly on foot in a steady and orderly stream, carrying their luggage and perhaps also their bed rolls and children as they head for the place allocated to them for their stay.









Arriving at the Beas train station and boarding buses for the Dera







One of the gates into the Dera





The entire Dera is designed to ease the flow of people to and from the satsang venue. Physically, you could say that all roads at the Dera lead to satsang. Some people come on foot from within the Dera, but many arrive by car, bus, truck, tractor, bicycle and motor scooter.





Baggage drop and sarai registration







Security check on arrival



*Depositing mobile phones
and electronic devices*

At peak times of the year, about 3,500 sevadars direct the crowds to the various entrances into satsang. The number of sevadars recedes to about 150 during the rest of the year. The sangat walks through electronic metal detectors. No one is allowed to bring in electronic items, including cameras and mobile phones. After screening, members of the sangat are directed to their seating area, with men on one side and women on the other. Before satsang begins, doctors walk through the crowd to see if anyone looks ill. There are first-aid stations throughout the satsang pandal (enclosure) and large, clean toilet blocks and drinking water located nearby.















Sangat arriving for satsang from many directions

Men entering satsang at mand pandal





The word “satsang” means a spiritual discourse, or literally, “association with the truth.” In satsangs at the Dera, the master or a designated speaker explains the teachings of the saints, the same basic spiritual truths at the core of all world religions. The listeners are exhorted to do their meditation, if they are initiated, and to follow the precepts of Sant Mat, which include a vegetarian diet, abstinence from intoxicants, and adhering to a moral way of life. With stories, humour and logic – meticulously

supported by references to scriptures and mystic poetry of past saints – speakers give discourses that everyone from illiterate villagers to Ph.D.’s can understand. Teenagers and elders, farmers and surgeons, men and women – all can make sense of these teachings because they are delivered in simple terms in the universal language of love. The central tenet of Sant Mat – as in all world religions – is that God is love. We are all a part of God, and we can, through meditation, realize God within ourselves.







PREVIOUS: *Maharaj Charan Singh giving satsang in the 1980s*



Not a day goes by at the Dera without morning satsang. It is held rain or shine, summer and winter. Attendance may be only a few thousand – when the master is travelling and not in residence – or else the mand pandal may be packed with weekend crowds of hundreds of thousands who have come from all over India and the world. But satsang is a constant that can always be relied upon, the steady beat, the heart of Dera. Indeed, satsang is the reason for the Dera's very existence and the purpose of all the work thousands of sevadars do every day, day in and day out. Without satsang, there is no Dera.

ABOVE: Daily satsang today





The satsang shed at the mand pandal is a vast open-sided structure with a roof fabricated of a lightweight steel space-frame design. It provides a covered area where up to 500,000 people can be seated, and can easily be expanded as the need arises. The floor is made of compacted cow dung and mud, a material traditionally used in India for its antiseptic and insulating properties. The floor is covered with large pieces of woven matting made of jute. Ceiling fans keep air circulating in hot weather, and there is a sprinkler system underneath the roof panels, which releases mist to cool the air in the hot dry season.





Aerial view of mand pandal



“The purpose of satsang is just to strengthen our faith and meditation, to create the atmosphere in which we have to build our meditation. If we have any doubt, any question, any obstacle, it gets answered, dissolved, resolved. It is no ritual, no ceremony. We just go there to be a source of strength to each other, to build our faith, to be helpful to one another, to be a support to one another. That helps us a lot in meditation.”

Maharaj Charan Singh













A state-of-the-art sound system enables the crowd to hear the discourses from anywhere in the pandal, and twenty-six jumbo video screens project the master's image as he speaks, for those seated farther back. Before satsang begins, these screens are used to show videos dramatizing social issues, such as organ donation and the empowerment of women, to educate and inform the sangat about their rights and responsibilities. Simultaneous-translation facilities can render the discourses into eight languages, including English, French, German, Spanish, Czech and others, depending on the availability of proficient translators.

OPPOSITE ABOVE: *Sangat watching video screens*

OPPOSITE BELOW AND THIS PAGE: *Simultaneous translation in satsang*




On weekend afternoons during certain times of the year, the master holds question-and-answer sessions with young adults aged 15 to 25. They may ask the master anything, as long as the questions are related to Sant Mat or about following the Sant Mat way of life. Their questions are generally refreshingly sincere and deeply felt, as they struggle to reconcile living a spiritual life with making their way in a rapidly modernizing society undergoing dramatic social and economic changes. The master, ever-approachable and kind, answers with humour, affection and penetrating insight. A few young people on these weekend afternoons also get the opportunity to sing shabds to the master, their sweet, young voices often moving the crowd to tears.





Youths asking questions and singing shabds



Toward the end of the satsang weekends, the Dera empties quickly as visitors pack up and head home, collecting their families, reclaiming their baggage, mobile phones and whatever else they may have left for safe-keeping. As the exodus begins, people head for the buses or trains or whichever means brought them here – returning to their lives beyond the Dera walls, hopefully having received the spiritual nourishment they came for. Mobile book stalls are located near the gates for people who might want to buy books on the Sant Mat philosophy as they enter or leave, in order to study the teachings they've heard discussed at satsangs.







Where do people eat at Dera? Or perhaps the bigger question is, how can such large numbers of people be fed efficiently and hygienically? The answer lies first and foremost with the langar. By far the Dera's largest cooking and dining facility, it serves simple vegetarian food free of charge to anyone who comes. The langar can serve up to 50,000 people at one sitting and operates 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Tea, breakfast, lunch and dinner are served daily.

Other places where one can eat (at a nominal cost) are the bhojan bhandars (dining halls), snack bars and canteens, which are scattered conveniently throughout the Dera. They all provide nourishing food at subsidized prices, offering a variety of meal choices without sacrificing the simplicity that contributes to the Dera's serene

atmosphere. These food outlets also help to disperse the crowds and ease congestion, as people are not all going to the same place at once. In addition, counters at the sarais (dormitories) and sheds sell packaged juices, biscuits, chips and chocolates to the visiting sangat.

The Dera is no ascetic outpost where people subsist on only bread and water. Pure ghee, milk, freshly ground oils and grains, and fresh vegetables are used in all food preparations, ensuring that although people come to Dera to be spiritually nourished, by the time they leave, their physical hunger will have been satisfied as well. Perhaps the most important ingredient in the food served at Dera is the love with which it is prepared and served by the sevadars, making it taste especially delicious.





LEFT: *Snack bar*
ABOVE: *Langar*

LANGAR

Before and after morning satsang, throngs of people head for the langar, the Dera's largest cooking and dining location. The meaning of langar is more than a place where free food is distributed; literally, in Punjabi, langar signifies "the guru's langar" because it is where the guru or master bestows his grace on everyone who comes.

The Dera's langar has grown into a vast high-tech operation encompassing 48 acres; it is operational 24 hours a day, every day of the year, preparing and serving three meals a day for crowds who may come at any time. It takes about 20 minutes to serve 50,000 people. That means that, at maximum capacity, the langar can serve 300,000 people in two to three hours. Sevadars work in shifts around the clock to meet the demand.









The langar includes six covered sheds where food is served, and in the remaining area several hundred trees have been planted, providing shade and a pleasant green space for those eating outdoors. Guests sit on canvas strips in rows up to 90 meters long, and sevadars serve them traditional foods like dal, vegetables, kichri, chapatis and pickle, and then return to offer second helpings. Tea is served from morning till evening. No one is ever turned away. Everyone is served the same simple, nutritious food with the same generosity and grace.





Food is served to the sangat by the sevadars much in the same way as it was in years past.



Langar in the early days



BHOJAN BHANDARS, SNACK BARS AND CANTEENS

The three bhojan bhandars have set menus for each day of the week. Each meal consists of a vegetable, rice, dal, chapati, salad, pickle and curd. Light food is also available for those who prefer to eat less oil and spices. These bhojan bhandars (one more is under construction) are the mainstays of food preparation outside of the langar. On a busy designated weekend, approximately 42,000 thalis are served at each meal.

There are two snack bars where tea and quick hot meals are served, including traditional North and South Indian fast foods like idli sambar, masala dosas, samosas, pakoras, chana baturas and other snacks and sweets (ladoos, jalebis and gulab jamuns).

There are four canteens, which offer snacks, baked goods, sweets, soft drinks and tea. They also sell packed lunches “for the road” on designated satsang weekends. The simple menu and large size of the canteens make it easier to serve big crowds.



OPPOSITE: *Bhojan bhandar*

ABOVE: *Canteen*



ABOVE: *Snack bar*
LEFT: *Bhojan bhandar and snack bar*



PREPARING CHAPATIS



The cornerstone of a langar meal is the chapati or roti, an unleavened Indian flatbread made from fresh-ground whole wheat flour. No meal is complete without chapatis. The langar estimates that it serves three chapatis per person at each meal. So when 300,000 people come for lunch, nearly a million chapatis are prepared. To mix, knead, roll and bake that many chapatis, sevadars begin work the night before and keep working throughout the day to meet the demand.

A staggering 80 tons of flour are used for the millions of chapatis that are prepared during a large satsang weekend. Lorries carrying wheat – or sometimes corn – arrive at the top level of the modern four-storey flour mill (built in 2011), and the wheat is funnelled into two large computerized silos. Each silo has a storage capacity of 2,000 tons. (There are plans for the construction of two more silos to meet the growing need.) In the silos, aeration and fumigation processes keep the grains free of mould and pests. When flour is required, the wheat grains flow to the mill through five gates, at 5 to 20 tons per hour. In the mill, the wheat is cleaned and ground into flour by one of the four grinding machines. The flour is refined four times. After the wheat is ground, the flour is sifted into stainless steel bins, each of which holds 25 tons of flour. In all, up to 150 tons of flour can be stored in the mill until needed. During the langar's busy periods, 15 to 55 tons of flour are on hand at all times. During quieter times, at least 3 to 3½ tons a day are available. The idea is that there should always be sufficient flour to meet any need.

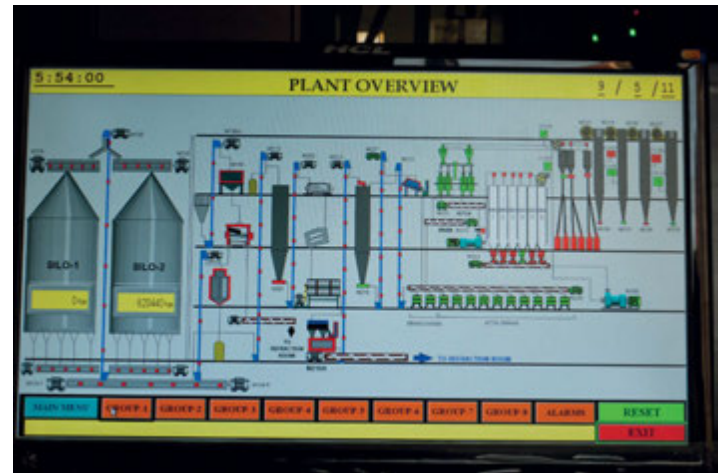
Because of the vast requirements for making chapatis, much engineering research has gone into introducing mechanized production methods. Current operations utilize six dough-kneading machines that can each produce 128 kilos of dough (enough to make 1,550 rotis) in 3½ minutes. The dough is distributed by wheeled trolleys to seven open-sided sheds where traditional preparation methods are still used: 3,000 to 4,000 women roll the chapatis by hand and then cook them on large iron griddles placed over fires fuelled by dry grass. Each of the seven chapati sheds contains 20 large tawas (griddles) and can produce together about 70,000 chapatis per hour.





Grains are donated by local farmers at the time of harvest.





A global system of colour-coding designates the various parts of the milling process: Light blue equipment is where the grain is aspirated for cleaning through air suction. Dark blue designates equipment that runs automatically, powered by compressed air. Off-white is where wheat is kept, and pure white designates the wheat flour. Green-coloured equipment designates water – this is where general washing is done. Brown is for refraction – it is where the dirt that is expelled during the cleaning goes. Bins where whole unground corn and chick pea (gram) grains are kept are painted light yellow.



A peda (dough ball) making machine is used to make small individual-size dough balls. This greatly speeds up the chapati-making process and ensures that each chapati will be of a uniform size.







A chapati-making machine which actually rolls out and cooks the chapatis is used only during the busy designated weekends to help the sevadars who make chapatis the traditional way.





OPPOSITE: *Mechanized chapati-making*
ABOVE: *Making chapatis on the tawa*



Tandoori rotis at the bhojan bhandar



Coating chapatis with ghee

Once cooked, the chapatis are coated with ghee, stored in large wicker baskets, and covered with blankets to keep them warm. When chapatis are needed, they are placed in insulated tin trunks. The trunks are then placed in a lift, which automatically descends to the lower level where sevadars transport the chapatis.

In addition, cornmeal chapatis are prepared during the winter months and are generally served with saag (mustard, spinach or other greens).

Strict hygienic standards are followed. The long hair of the women sevadars is neatly tied under scarves. Before starting their seva, all sevadars wash their hands with soap and water and the hands of each sevadar are carefully inspected by the supervising sevadars.





Langar



Maharaj Charan Singh blessing the chapatis at the langar



Langar



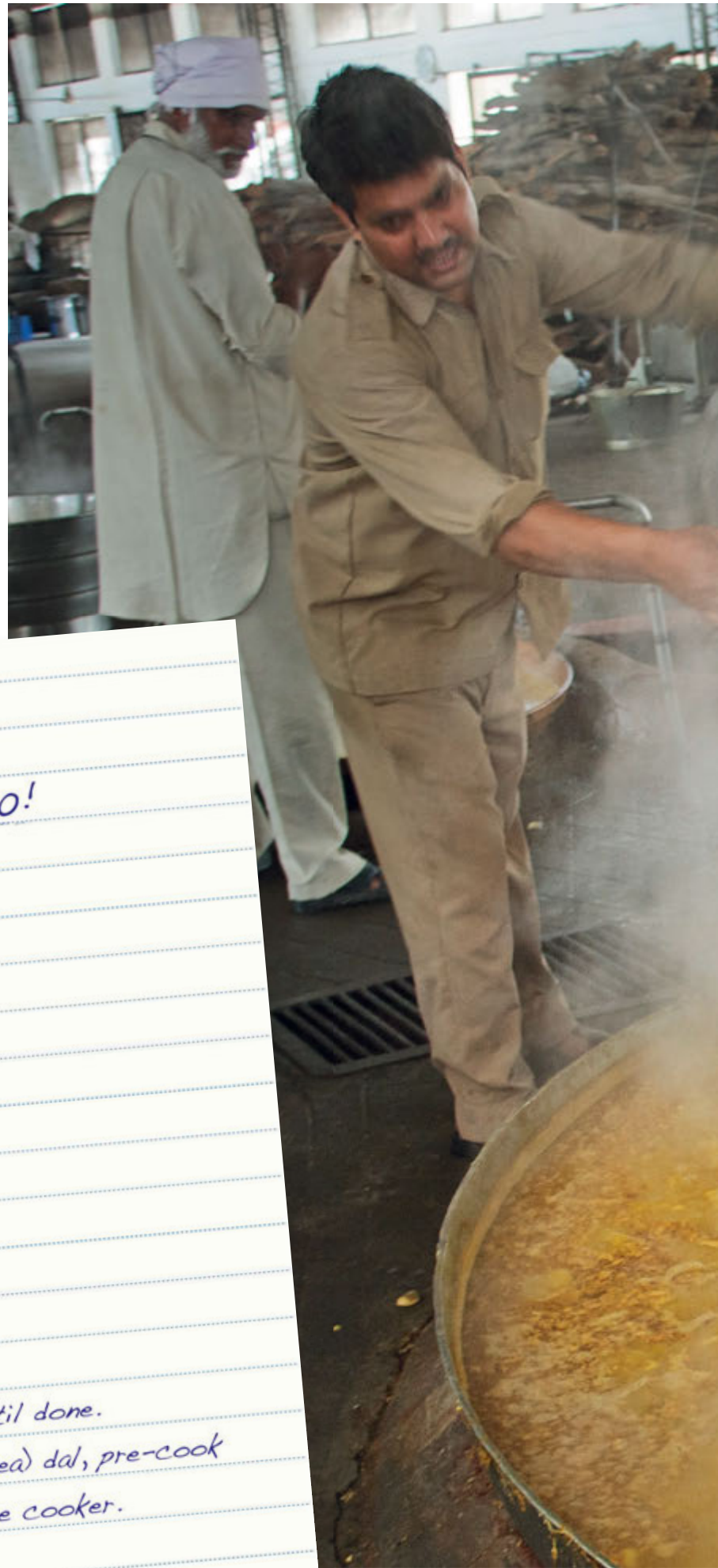
MAKING DAL

Along with chapatis, the langar serves dal, an Indian staple made of either whole or split lentils. The langar dal is also supplied to the bhojan bhandars. Generally a rich and robust dal is served at lunch and a lighter dal at dinner. The dal is cooked in eight wide, shallow wok-like vats called kadahis, in an open-sided cooking shed. A few of the vats make 2,000 litres of dal at a time while others cook from 800 to 1,200 litres. The cooking time is from 45 minutes to 3 hours, depending on the type of dal. Pressure cookers are used for the dal that requires a longer cooking time, to speed up the process. The sevadars can cook about 180,000 servings of dal every 1½ hours.

The chana dal shown here is drying before being ground to make chickpea flour. Ladies clean the dal before it is ground.







Langar's dal recipe - serves 2,800!

- 150 kilos of dal
- 650 kilos of water
- 7½ kilos of salt
- 5 kilos of ghee
- 1 kilo of turmeric
- 500 grams of cumin seeds
- 500 grams of ginger (winter only)
- 500 grams of garlic
- 300 grams of red chilli
- 1 kilo of garam masala

Cook dal in kadahi, stirring regularly until done.
If it is a kidney bean or chana (chickpea) dal, pre-cook
the beans for 30 minutes in a pressure cooker.





Pumping the dal through pipes to stainless steel tanks in preparation for distribution



The dal is pumped through a food-grade stainless steel pipe, 6 inches in diameter, from the cooking pots to stainless steel tanks on wheels, each with a capacity of 1½ tons. These tanks are pulled by tractors to where the sangat is seated, waiting to be served.

Sometimes rice is served as well. Two huge rice-cooking vessels can cook up to 200 kilograms of dry rice each (producing 600 kilos of cooked rice). These get heavy use especially when people come from certain regions in south India where they do not traditionally eat chapatis. Rice is often served when more people than expected show up, since it takes less time to cook than chapatis.



Cooking rice in the langar



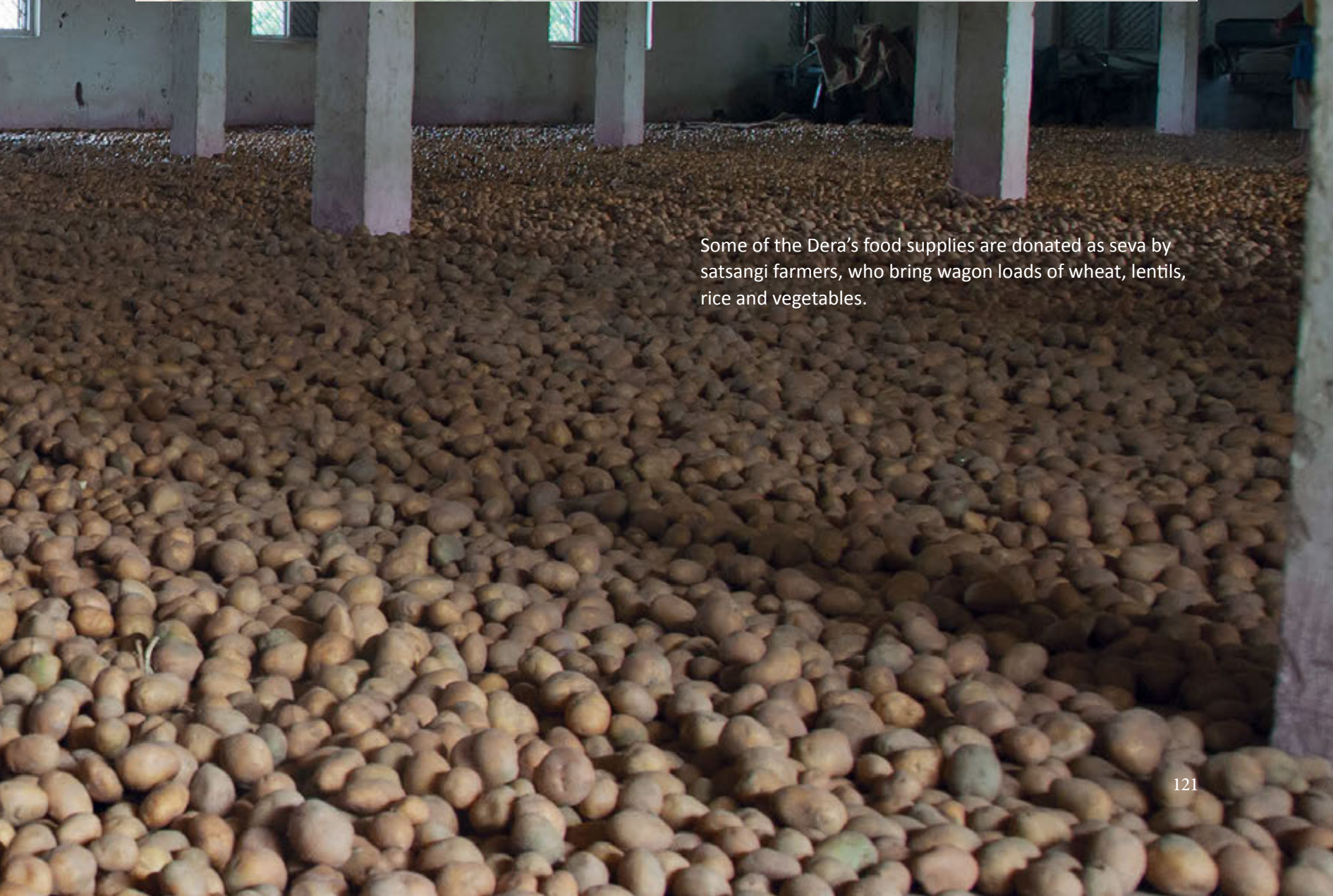
Langar

PREPARATION



Preparation of vegetables in the langar and bhojan bhandar





Some of the Dera's food supplies are donated as seva by satsangi farmers, who bring wagon loads of wheat, lentils, rice and vegetables.



Tins of various ingredients.



Traditional paneer (cheese) pakoras at Dera are made with tofu instead of cheese. The tofu – locally referred to as “soya paneer” – is made in one of the snack bars from organic soybeans, and is available at all Dera food outlets. In fact, all traditional paneer dishes at Dera are now made with tofu, as it is healthier and less costly than milk-based paneer. As much as 1,500 kilos of tofu can be made per day in this facility.





A mound of garlic



Turnips





Snacks and sweets prepared in the snack bars and canteens







OPPOSITE: *Making pakoras*

ABOVE: *Preparing samosas in the snack bar*



Thermal cooking has been introduced in the preparation of certain foods, such as the jalebis (*top*) and baturas (*above*). The Dera is always exploring eco-friendly and sustainable options for cooking. Thermal cooking uses a heated fluid, circulated through pipes surrounding the cooking vessel. The fluid can be heated by various methods. If economical and practical, solar energy will eventually be used to heat the thermal fluid.



Making dosas at the snack bar

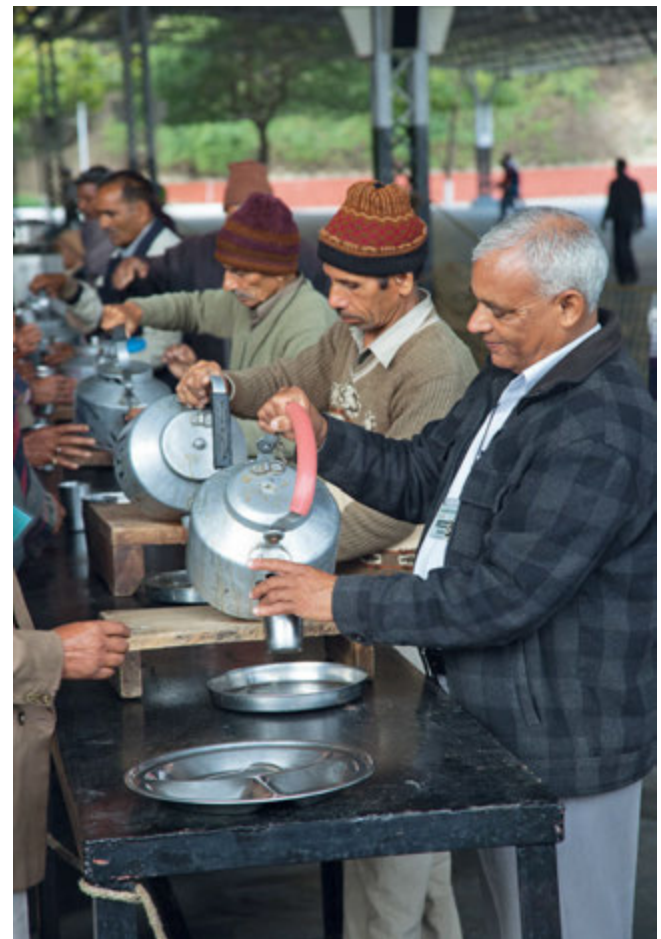
CHAI TIME

Throughout the day, the langar serves enormous quantities of chai – traditional Indian spiced tea with milk and lots of sugar. As with every other aspect of the langar, its tea-making operation is implemented on a grand scale. In a dedicated tea-making area of the cooking shed, the tea is boiled with sugar and spices in four large, food-grade stainless steel vessels, each with a capacity of about 1,200 litres. Milk is drawn from 8,000-litre coolers, heated in two large containers – each with a capacity of about 1,000 litres – and added to the tea mixture. To put this in perspective, in just one vessel, 240 litres of milk are combined with 840 litres of water, 7 kilos of tea leaves, 76 kilos of sugar, plus a mixture of spices for extra flavour. On a busy satsang day, nearly half a ton of tea leaves is used. Four large muslin bags filled with loose tea are used like giant tea bags for every 1,200-litre container of tea.

When a batch of chai is ready, it is strained and sent through insulated, stainless steel underground pipes to a service point, where the hot tea flows through taps into various insulated serving vessels. Chai is served in the langar from early morning till 5:00 p.m. and is also brought by trolley and truck to every corner of the Dera, wherever sevadars are working. On busy weekends, the tea is transferred to a 6,000-litre stainless steel storage tank so that sufficient quantity will be available as needed. The chai at Dera is always fresh, as it is not kept for more than 45 minutes. This means that there are always sevadars making tea. Hot chai fuels the sevadars and visitors alike throughout the day.



Stainless storage tank for chai







For convenience and quick service, coupons of different denominations can be purchased at various locations throughout the Dera and used at canteens and snack bars instead of cash.

RATE LIST OF CANTEEN NO: 1		
SR NO.	ITEM	RATE
1	TEA	3
2	MILK 200 ML	8
3	FRUIT JUICE	4
4	2PURI + SABJI	7
5	2PAV + SABJI	8
6	EXTRA SABJI	3
7	BURGER	12
8	PACK LUNCH	10
9	PAKORA	4
10	FRUIT TETRA	8
11	FRUIT BREAD	8
12	PLAIN BREAD	11
13	RISK 20 GM.	2
14	RISK 150 GM.	10
15	THALI	20
16	DHAI	7



ABOVE: Bhojan bhandar
BELOW: Snack bar



Snack bar

CLEANING UP



When people are finished eating at the langar, they wash their own utensils and dishes in nearby troughs with soap and clean running water from faucets. To ensure proper cleaning, sevadars supervise the process and redo the washing if required. In the bhojan bhandars, canteens and snack bars, sevadars wash all the utensils and dishes. After washing, the dishes are dried in the open sun, collected and taken in trolleys to the storage areas.









Dishes drying in the sun before storage

For as long as the Dera has existed, it has been building new accommodations for the increasing number of guests who seek the company of the master. Nowadays, accommodating visitors has evolved into a massive, computerized operation that sees to the needs of each guest. All visitors are welcome, and accommodation is free of charge.

Most guests book a room or a bed in advance, especially during designated satsang weekends. But even those who arrive without prior booking can find a clean, protected place to store their valuables, bathe and bed down for the night. At present there are three categories of guest accommodation: sheds, sarais and hostels.

A large portion of the huge crowd that arrives at Dera during the designated satsang weekends come from rural India, and are accustomed to travelling with their own bedrolls and staying in group accommodations. They simply arrive, without having booked a place to stay. The Dera has responded to this situation through the construction of fifteen sheds of various sizes, which are each able to accommodate between 6,500 and 13,500 visitors, who are happy to roll out their own bedding and sleep on the ground, on mats which are provided at each shed.

Despite the crowds, the sleeping sheds are safe and secure, equipped with places to store luggage and valuables, counters for depositing and exchanging cash for tokens (used for small purchases throughout the Dera), and with ample, clean bathing and toilet facilities nearby.

Most of the sheds have been constructed close to the mand pandal. They have been located here, away from the Dera's settled residential areas, so that the incoming flood of visitors on special weekends can easily get to satsang and the langar without greatly disrupting the lives of permanent residents, who live farther from the pandal. There will also be a new shopping complex close by to provide basic necessities.

Two of the Dera's sleeping sheds are designated for "jatha" sevadars. These are sevadars from outside the Dera who come to help during these special periods. They usually come in groups from various villages and regions throughout India to do a specific seva and stay together for the duration of their seva period. Each of these sheds can

sleep almost 16,000 sevadars. In total, there will be 15 sheds for the sangat and the jathas, providing a place to sleep for almost 150,000 people.

Whole families or villages also might come and stay together in the sheds. The atmosphere is one of reunion, celebration and fun. You might come upon entire clans or groups of villagers singing shabds together, as well as solitary figures wrapped in shawls meditating while bustle and chatter go on around them.

During inclement weather, all covered areas of the Dera that can provide shelter to the sangat are made available, including part of the large satsang shed, which can sleep 75,000 people.

For those not staying in the sheds but in the sarais or hostels, a computerized booking system has been created to perform the complex task of assigning rooms for guests staying from one night to four weeks. Visitors can book accommodations in one of three sarai complexes, which consist of several buildings with large halls and dormitory-style rooms with beds. Currently the sarais can accommodate about 13,000 people. Some of the large rooms are for women, some are for men and some are for extended families or for groups who visit as a community. There is a shopping complex for the three sarais and three of the sheds, which includes a general store, a stall selling fruit and cold drinks, a books-and-photos stall, a phone booth and a dispensary.

Indian guests may also book rooms in one of ten hostels, which together can house about 5,500 visitors in a total of 2,175 rooms. Most hostel rooms are shared by two or three people; there are also rooms large enough to accommodate entire families. All of the hostel rooms have private attached bathrooms, closets and ceiling fans. (Four more hostels, each containing 750 double rooms, will be built over the next few years.) These hostels also come equipped with canteens that supply tea, coffee and snacks; laundry and dry-cleaning services; telephones; and transport to and from the railway station. Indian-origin visitors from abroad (NRIs) book their rooms in these hostels several months in advance, using a Dera-created online booking service.



SHEDS







Checking luggage









In the midst of all the activity in the sheds, people still find a quiet moment to be alone in their meditation.

At the Dera, there are almost 6,000 showers and 9,000 toilets to serve the sarais and sheds.





ACCOMMODATION DEPARTMENT



The Accommodation Department handles bookings for Indian and NRI visitors who wish to stay in the sarais or hostels. For the sangat's convenience, the Railway Bookings office and the Post Office have been situated near the Accommodation Department. These departments share a large courtyard sheltered from rain and sun, and have an ample number of benches where people can wait.





SARAIS





Activity in sarai area



ABOVE: Registering for sarai accommodations





HOSTELS 10 – 11



Most NRI visitors are accommodated in these large hostels, which have 750 rooms each. In the coming years four similar hostels will be built. All rooms have en-suite bathrooms and there is a small canteen for light refreshments and snacks. Some Indian visitors from various parts of India also stay in these hostels.









Interiors of Hostels 10 – 11



ABOVE: *Guests often do laundry seva at Hostels 10 and 11*
BELOW: *Eating at the hostel canteen*



HOSTELS 1 – 5

Hostels 1 – 5 house NRI and Indian visitors. Rooms have en-suite bathrooms, and there is a small canteen and a large common area. These hostels are convenient to many Dera departments where guests do seva during their visits.









HOSTEL 6

Western guests from overseas stay in Hostel 6, located near the Dera's historic centre. It is a peaceful enclave consisting of gardens and lawns as well as several buildings that house not only guest rooms but offices, dining room, auditorium, lounge, medical dispensary and laundry facilities.

Up to 600 guests typically visit during one of four specific periods each year (from October to April) when the Dera is open to Western guests. While a small staff works in the dining hall and does basic administration, maintenance and housekeeping, the overseas visitors volunteer their services and help in the laundry, kitchen, dining room, dispensary and gardens. Some also assist with the Dera's English publications and others provide computer support.









ABOVE: Seva at Hostel 6
BELOW: Hostel 6 Auditorium

Above all, the Dera is a refuge, a place where people come to seek spiritual shelter with a living master. The colony takes seriously its responsibility to provide the sangat with proper shelter, allowing them to find respite from their worldly cares and absorb the teachings of the saints.





Meeting Every Need



“The sangat does not do all the seva with the expectation that they will be rewarded. They do it out of love. Seva is love; they never ask for anything in return. And whatever the inconvenience, they never complain. They are always contented, always happy to do the seva!”

Maharaj Charan Singh





The Dera runs on seva. The desire to give, with no thought of recompense, is what drives every single activity here, whether it's cooking in the langar, restoring old books, sweeping the streets, designing computer systems or breaking up bricks for new construction. Many different types of seva are available, whether people possess skills, education and special abilities or not, whether they are initiated or not. There is something for everyone, depending on their situation and capacity. All are happy to work side by side. A rare spirit of love, enthusiasm and compassion permeates the Dera. It fosters a sense of belonging – that's what keeps the institution running. As Maharaj Charan Singh once said: "We are all sevadars, we are all fellow travellers, we are all meant to help each other. We all belong to this institution, so we are all sevadars."

Among the most active sevadars are the approximately 1,500 residents who live at the Dera full time, either alone or with their families. Most of these residents are self-supporting; many have retired here to do seva. Those who are not financially self-sufficient receive small salaries. However, all residents receive free housing, free medical and dental care (including health insurance), free schooling for their children and free personalized care for the old and infirm. Residents are housed in comfortable flats or duplexes and have access to basic shopping (which is subsidized) within the Dera for most of their physical needs.





~

“When the Great Master announced plans to build the satsanghar, a wealthy contractor wanted to erect the whole building himself. The master refused his offer with these words: ‘I want every satsangi, even the poorest of the poor, to be given the opportunity to offer something in seva, even if it is only half a rupee. I would also like all satsangis, rich and poor, to participate in the construction, even if they carry only a handful of sand or a few bricks. Their smallest efforts are precious to me. Every drop of perspiration shed by them is valuable for me. This is seva of love and devotion.’”

Diwan Daryai Lal Kapur, Heaven on Earth



The Dera is well organized with a structure of specialized departments within which exist many different levels of sevadars and types of tasks. This not only ensures that everything gets done but also provides seva opportunities for different types of people.

Some people do what is called “open seva” in which they are not committed to a fixed schedule but agree to a certain number of hours per week. This might be suitable for a mother living at the Dera with school-age children, for example. Open seva could include a variety of tasks. Many departments rely on open sevadars to help with their routine work.

“Badge holders” are permanent sevadars who live outside Dera but come to perform designated tasks at certain times of the year.

Another category, and a large and crucial part of the Dera’s “floating population,” is the “jatha” sevadars. When work begins on some big project, such as black-topping roads or constructing a building, hundreds of sevadars from neighbouring towns or other states may come to the Dera to perform this seva. They arrive in small or large groups, and special accommodations are set aside for them.

Other examples of the seva they take on is operating heavy machinery and equipment, running the langar and working on the Dera farms: ploughing and planting, tending crops and harvesting. A specific farm is assigned to the jathas of a particular place, and it becomes their responsibility to tend to that farm. They come regularly, in rotation with other sevadars from their satsang centres, for this seva. Nearly half a million jatha sevadars contributed to Dera operations in 2011–12.

Some tasks are outsourced to satsang centres in nearby cities and towns – for example, dyeing shamianas, manufacturing certain building materials, and purchasing the vast amounts of supplies and staples (such as tea, oil, dal, jute matting, steel pipes and cement) at competitive rates.

In keeping with the progressive social vision of all the Beas masters, the current master actively promotes the empowerment of women. Women participate in seva equally, including building and road construction, computer-software development, writing books, architectural planning and design, and administration. Women hold key supervisory positions in many departments; they also deliver discourses to the sangat and serve as pathis who chant hymns.







OPPOSITE: A helping hand going to satsang
ABOVE: Cleaning the streets is a constant activity
BELOW: Rice husks used for fuel in the langar

Nearly half a million jatha sevadars contribute to Dera operations on a regular basis. The whole colony works on the jatha system; these sevadars essentially keep the Dera running throughout the year.





HOUSING

Resident sevadars are provided free housing of a type suitable for the size of their families. In keeping with the Dera's practical approach, most of the original one-storey homes have been taken down to make room for new, two-storey residences which are better designed and use land more efficiently. Whether flats or houses, Dera homes are spacious, modern and comfortable. Most of the new housing blocks are built as duplex flats with one residence upstairs and one downstairs. The consistent use of brick red and light cream paint for the exteriors and the similarity of architecture of all the housing contributes to a serene living environment.

As the number of resident sevadars is constantly increasing, so is the need for an infrastructure to support them. Residential blocks will eventually have their own shopping areas, minimizing the flow of traffic throughout the colony.









Types of residential housing

HEALTH CARE





A comprehensive medical and dental examination is provided each year for Dera sevadars and their families. Doctors and medical technicians come from all over India and abroad to volunteer their time to conduct exams and treat patients in the spirit of seva. Medical and dental services are available at no cost throughout the year for all Dera residents through the small, modern Dera Hospital, which has an operating room, laboratory, homeopathic and dental clinics, physiotherapy section and other basic facilities. When necessary, the Dera Hospital refers complicated cases to the much larger full-service Beas Hospital a few kilometres away. (Emergency medical care is also available for visitors.)



At the colony's Nature Cure Clinic, established in 1965, residents may obtain treatment through diet, exercise and naturopathic therapies. (The recently restored building, built in the style of the "old Dera," is part of the colony's heritage area.)

For those residents in need, the Dera provides hearing aids, personalized nursing and transportation to and from medical appointments. Sevadars organize activities and outings for the elderly to keep them active, entertained and as fit as possible.



OPPOSITE: *Dera Hospital and patient registration*

ABOVE: *Health checks and dental care*



Conceived of by Maharaj Charan Singh, the Beas Hospital (completed in 1986) supports the Dera's medical services and serves as a primary-care facility for the surrounding 25-kilometre area. It provides first-class medical treatment, free of charge, to anyone who comes – satsangi or non-satsangi – regardless of income level, caste or religion. Maharaj Ji purposely chose the 35-acre plot for the hospital outside of the Dera's grounds and far enough away (6 kilometres) so that people from neighbouring villages could come for free treatment without feeling obliged to visit the Dera or beholden to the master or to Sant Mat.





ABOVE: *Beas Hospital*

OPPOSITE: *Nature Cure Hospital*

BELOW: *Elder care*

EDUCATION AND RECREATION

The Pathseekers School is a recent project initiated by the present master. The school sits on a large campus and opened in April 2014 for students at the primary level; it will later expand through the secondary level. The school will eventually accommodate about 1,200 students – children of sevadars living at the Dera and of employees and sevadars working at the hospitals in Dera and Beas. The school is being professionally run and equipped with up-to-date laboratories and computers; it is staffed by paid, qualified teachers and administrators. (Until the school is completed, Dera residents will continue to be reimbursed for fees for local schools outside the colony.) The students will receive a well-rounded education – up to India's Certified Board Education standard – including athletics. The new school is conveniently located near the Dera's sports complex, complete with playing fields and a gymnasium. Special housing has also been built for the teachers and administrative staff.









Sports Complex

The Dera's sports complex includes a jogging track, football field and outdoor badminton, tennis and basketball courts. Youths participate in team sports such as soccer, cricket, basketball and badminton, and are provided with uniforms. An indoor gym with exercise equipment is also available for Dera residents.





LIBRARY

While the spiritual masters are primarily concerned with the needs of their disciples' souls through satsang and seva, they also supply food for their minds in the form of books and other publications. The Dera Library is a noteworthy example of this goal of supporting the sangat's intellectual growth. Airy, welcoming and centrally located, it is open to residents and visitors alike. In addition to its stacks, filled with books in Hindi, English and other languages, it includes a children's section, documents archives and a book-restoration unit. The library currently contains 70,000 books and has a capacity for 500,000. A large acquisitions program is ongoing in India and abroad. Qualified sevadars around the world are reviewing and selecting books on spirituality and world religions to add to the library's collections.



Dera library entrance











PUBLICATIONS

The Dera publishes books on Sant Mat as well as saints and mystics from other spiritual traditions. Its first book was Sar Bachan released in 1902, under the guidance of Baba Jaimal Singh, with a print run of just 500 copies. Books were published steadily after that, but the scope remained small: as of 1951, the Dera had issued five or six books in English and two in Punjabi. It wasn't until the mid-1970s that Maharaj Charan Singh established a formal Publications Department to ensure that books on Sant Mat were available in as many languages as possible. By the end of the 1970s, books were being published in just about every Indian language as well as in English. A large group of scholar-sevadars, living at Dera and elsewhere, write and edit in all the Indian languages and English. Translations of many of the books are also available in 25 African, Asian and European languages.

The Publications Department also produces audio CDs and DVDs of satsangs by Maharaj Charan Singh in Punjabi and Hindi, as well as selections from his English question-and-answer sessions with foreign visitors. The books, CDs and DVDs, as well as a small selection of photographs of the Beas masters, are sold at cost at the Dera and at satsang centres around the world.







GENERAL SERVICES



General store and produce stands



Shops provide basic amenities, food staples, fruits and vegetables. All these items are sold at either subsidized or below-market rates. There are laundry and dry-cleaning services, tailors, cobblers, a barber, newspaper delivery, and a post office. Three different Indian banks supply full-service banking, including ATMs.



Also on hand is a petrol station, a fully equipped fire department and an ambulance service. At the Central Motor Garage, sevadars wash, service and repair the large fleet of Dera vehicles, which range from bicycles, rickshaws and scooters to cars, buses, trucks and tractors. (Residents pay for the repair and servicing of their own vehicles.) As is true elsewhere in the colony, nothing goes to waste – entirely refurbished vehicles are made from the used parts of older models. The Motor Garage also manages the day-to-day booking of transport within the colony and keeps vehicle records.









LOST AND FOUND



A Lost and Found Department (well-used by residents and visitors) keeps meticulous records of every item turned in, complete with date and location of its finding.



RAILWAYS



For the convenience of the sangat, the Dera Railways Department interacts with Indian Railways to provide enhanced train services. The government has set up its own computerized reservation system at the Dera because of the large number of tickets issued there. In conjunction with the Indian Railways, the Dera has also greatly improved the facilities and amenities at the Beas station.



SANITATION





Residents are vigilant about keeping the Dera clean. There are dustbins in different colours throughout the Dera, to allow residents to dispose of biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes appropriately. Pick-up of trash and waste is continual, and trash is sorted and recycled for reuse or sale when possible. Biodegradable wastes are composted, and the rest is disposed of suitably. Teams of jatha sevadars – both young men and women – cruise the streets in garbage trucks picking up trash as if on a joy ride – their enthusiasm is infectious.

RECYCLING

Emphasis is also given to sustainability and environmentally friendly systems where possible. Many of Dera's agricultural products are grown locally, with extensive use of treated "grey" water for irrigation – waste water from sinks, drains, showers and so forth. Nothing goes to waste. Used bricks are broken up to be reused in new construction. Waste and litter is recycled. Biodegradable items such as organic solid waste from

the langar and vegetable and fruit stalls are thrown into garbage pits for converting into compost. Waste from the underground sewage lines are sent to the oxidation ponds for conversion into fertilizer. Non-biodegradable material, such as cans, glass, plastic and steel items, are sent to the Scrap Department, which recycles them when possible – for example, sending empty milk cans and boxes to the plant nursery for growing seedlings.





CREMATION



The Dera organizes cremations, immersion of ashes and bhog ceremonies for its deceased residents.





PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Beginning with Baba Jaimal Singh, who kept track of the bricks baked for the original well and the funds spent on construction, the masters at the Dera have always led the way in planning for the sangat's needs and have personally supervised every aspect of the Dera's growth and development,

Throughout Maharaj Charan Singh's years as master, the Dera expanded continually, acquiring nearby land when it became available, either through purchase or exchange. Residential housing, guest accommodations, general services and basic amenities – everything had to increase.



For its first 100 years, the Dera's growth mostly kept pace with the growing needs of the sangat. Larger crowds dictated larger satsang venues, more accommodations, greater capacity for feeding visitors and a reliable, sturdy but flexible infrastructure that could handle hundreds of thousands of people. Because the crowds swell and

recede according to the season, adaptability has always been key. Planning has become much more proactive and systematic in recent years, with a longer view toward future requirements. Now all planning is based on projected needs for the next 20 years.



In 1990, responding to a question about the tremendous growth spurt of the colony during the previous five years, Maharaj Charan Singh said: “We are still enlarging and have not reached the final boundary yet. I know the [Dera’s] farm is about 1,000 acres, most of it planted with trees, and about 350 to 400 acres with vegetables. Trees are the breathing lungs of man. They look wonderful and are beautiful, and give protection to the birds.”

The use of trees and landscaping has, in fact, grown along with the Dera’s infrastructure. In keeping with the core values of practicality and simplicity that underscore the Dera’s continuing development, most of its hundreds of thousands of plants are those suitable for the Punjab – strong enough to survive its climate and easy to plant, raise and maintain.

Another core principle is that facilities and infrastructure should be “multipurpose” whenever possible. For example, the landscaping provides places where people can relax and play, shade that enables people to walk long distances in relative comfort in hot weather, stabilization of slopes, and barriers and buffers for managing the circulation of crowds. Most of all, the greenery, plantings and flowers, which cover fully half of the Dera, provide an atmosphere of calm, grace and beauty.

The Dera has been built in stages in a very organic process, responding to the needs of the sangat as they arise. Like the landscaping, the buildings are simple in design and easy to build and maintain. When something has lost its functionality, it is either demolished or repurposed.



One good example of the Dera's organic development and the concept of repurposing is the hawagarh (open-air structure). It was originally intended as a shed for sleeping, but when planners realized there was too much congestion of people in that area, they changed the plan. Its roof was removed, a lush lawn was planted within the footprint of the original building, and the posts that support the frame of what was at first meant to be a roof have been covered with climbing ivy. Now the hawagarh is a human-scaled, shady and restful meeting place.

Another example of adaptability is the creative response to the growing influx of people on designated weekends. Planners changed the location of the satsang venue, and

then established accommodations near the new site as well as local entry points into the langar. Thus the crowds have no need to come up to the town centre, and the criss-crossing of large numbers of people is avoided. The result is a smoother flow of crowds and less dense masses of people at particular places.

It was the intention of Maharaj Charan Singh to create zones at the Dera to contain the temporary "floating" population, and to separate the huge influx of visitors from the areas where permanent residents have their homes. Under the direction of the present master, the engineers and planners have implemented these measures successfully.



Relaxing at the hawagarh

LAYOUT AND FLOW

The Dera's physical layout is also straightforward and simple. One urban designer has compared it to a traditional protected town, with an outer wall (typically brick or landscaped fence) and entry points at controlled gates. Outside the walls, cars are parked, security is ensured and farms and fields grow crops for much of the Dera's daily needs. Inside the walls people are housed, fed and attended to.

Buildings and roads are larger the farther one moves from the colony's small, original centre – the old Dera. While the original village had narrow roads and lanes, giving it a picturesque appearance, the newer areas are formed around grand boulevards and roundabouts. These wider, well-landscaped and articulated boulevards can handle both large crowds and a variety of vehicles safely.

The road network is also an important element of the overall open-space planning at the Dera. The roads are the physical and aesthetic links to the various "nodes" of open spaces that help make the Dera such a vibrant place. They allow people to move freely and efficiently. At night, in particular, the roads and open areas are alive with people – adults chatting in groups, youngsters running around with their friends – everyone enjoying the gentle, pleasant atmosphere.

Because so much of the Dera traffic is on foot, pavements are wide and have railings to prevent the flow of pedestrians from pouring into the streets in an unmanaged manner. And everywhere you see sevadars directing the traffic, showing people where to go, pleasantly but efficiently maintaining a sense of order. To avoid bottlenecks where pedestrians and vehicular traffic need to cross a roadway, a few pedestrian underpasses have been built to allow those on foot to move comfortably toward their destinations.





PLAN OF DERA 2014



KEY

1.  Mand Pandal
2.  Satsang Shed 1
3.  Accommodation Shed
4.  Accommodation Sarais
5.  Langar
6.  Bhojan Bhandar
7.  Canteen
8.  Snack Bar
9.  Hostels
10.  Library
11.  Administration Buildings & Banks
12.  Shopping
13.  Langar Kitchens
14.  Flour Mill & Grain Silos
15.  Hawaghar
16.  Satsanghar
17.  Heritage Square
18.  Railway & Accommodation Bookings,
Post Office and Security
19.  Seva Samiti and Lost & Found
20.  Toilets & Showers
21.  Gate Check, Baggage Scanning &
Control Room
22.  Dera Residences – Existing and Proposed
23.  School
24.  Recreation Facilities
25.  Proposed Shopping Centre
26.  Hospital
27.  Airport
28.  Oxidation Ponds
29.  Vehicle Parking
30.  Nursery
31.  Shopping Complex
32.  Brickworks
33.  Gates
34.  Cremation Ground
35.  Workshops
36.  Luggage (Bistera) Shed
37.  Cold Store
38.  Fire Station, Gas Station and
Vehicle Maintenance
39.  Central Store
40.  Immersion Point
41.  Utility Departments

DESIGN AND BUILD

The Dera has a distinctive, cohesive look. As was seen in earlier chapters, the low-profile architecture, with use of the same brick red and cream colours for the exteriors of Dera housing, hostels, sarais, sheds and administrative buildings, gives the Dera a harmonious look throughout.

Similarly, the somewhat “space age” look of the massive mand pandal is repeated in other structures designed to hold large numbers of people. The elegant, modern design is entirely functional: the space-frame construction of lightweight steel tubes helps maintain large spans, minimizing the need for support columns. It also provides a flexible structure to withstand seismic tremors in case of earthquake.

Outside of the heritage area, the buildings are utilitarian in their design. Their simplicity suits their use; form definitely follows function here – whether sleeping sheds for vast crowds, office buildings or the passively temperature-controlled research library and cold-storage facility.


Everything has a unified look, from floor tiles and concrete jalis (wall tiles with open-work designs) to comfortable benches placed wherever one would want to sit and rest a while. As such, aesthetics and functionality merge, enabling streamlined production of building materials and construction. In the context of building the Beas Hospital, Maharaj Charan Singh once articulated his philosophy of architecture – that the Dera buildings should be “simple and yet beautiful.” This remains a basic value of the Dera’s physical design to this day.

A chief engineer oversees a department in charge of architecture, landscape design, engineering and construction. This department is responsible for all the long-range and short-term planning and building at the Dera down to decisions as basic as choosing combinations of tile and mortar colours that will show the least discolouration over time.

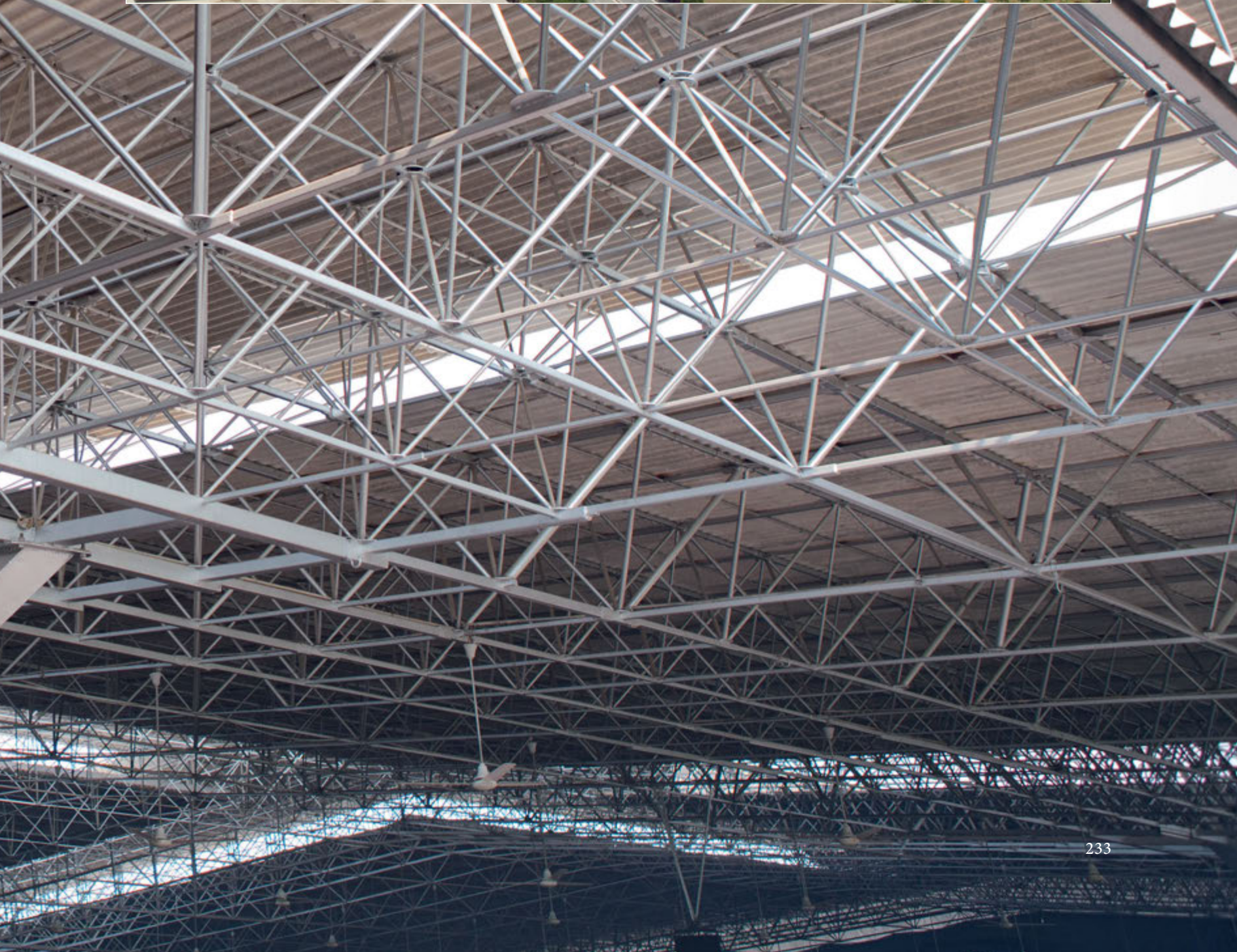




Building the mand pandal extension

The image shows the interior of a large industrial shed. The most prominent feature is the intricate metal space frame roof structure, which consists of a dense network of interconnected steel beams and trusses. The roof is covered with corrugated metal sheets. In the lower right foreground, a vertical steel column is visible, marked with the number '903' in black. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the metallic textures and the complex geometry of the structure.

The large sheds, constructed using a modern space-frame technology, are planned and designed at the Dera. The individual components of the space frame are fabricated by sevadars in a nearby city, then brought to the Dera, and the shed is assembled on site.





Assembling the metal roof at the mand pandal



Building the hangar at the airstrip

GENERAL CONSTRUCTION



The Dera is unique in so many ways, including the fact that many of the people it serves volunteer to participate in its construction. This seva is constant: there is never a time when building – roads, houses, offices, snack bars, airport landing strips – is not going on in the colony, supervised by qualified sevadars. Men and women of all ages work together. Dirty, hard labour, skilled and unskilled, is always available for those who want to join the fun – and they do have fun. Hauling, hammering, painting, pulverizing, bulldozing and breaking: sevadars create their Dera from beneath the ground up to the tallest water tower.



















BRICK BREAKING



When buildings are torn down to make way for new construction, sevadars break the discarded bricks, which are then used as a foundation for new roads and buildings.







WORKSHOPS

The Dera manufactures much of the building materials used in its own construction. A tile factory produces (via a hydraulic-press process) many types of both indoor and outdoor tile, in addition to structural and non-structural concrete posts, curbs, gutters, catch-basin covers, wall grills, wall tiles, and even prefabricated reinforced curved roof sections for the public toilet areas. The tile factory has also recently begun mixing the Dera's own primers and paints.





TILE WORKSHOP



ABOVE: *Jali making*

OPPOSITE: *Jali designs and wall made of jalis*







CARPENTRY AND METAL WORKSHOPS

A carpentry workshop does basic repairs and builds furniture and cabinets. Most of the metal items used at the Dera are also fabricated here, including fences, barriers, grills, small structural shapes, aluminium windows, and fasteners.





BRICK KILN

One important aspect of the Dera is that most of its buildings and infrastructure have been constructed with bricks that it manufactures in its own kilns. In other words, the Dera has been built from literally the ground on which it stands. During Baba Jaimal Singh's time in the late 19th century, a brick kiln was built to supply the bricks for the construction of the well. In those days, the kiln was an open-air mound of charcoal and wood shavings; because of the low heat, it would take six to eight weeks to bake bricks. That kiln continues to operate, at a new location, with a technically improved design and much greater capacity. The coal-fired brick kiln makes more than 10 million bricks per year. These bricks are used in the construction of buildings, footpaths and roads.





SHAMIANA DYEING



A dyeing and sewing workshop uses both modern and traditional machinery for production and is responsible for security netting, screen curtains and floor mats.



SUPPORT SERVICES

The Dera has many departments that provide administrative support for its activities. There are four main areas: support for the visiting sangat; support for the resident population; support for building and construction activities; overall support for the Dera itself as a township, similar to any community with financial and legal responsibilities.







PURCHASE AND CENTRAL STORES

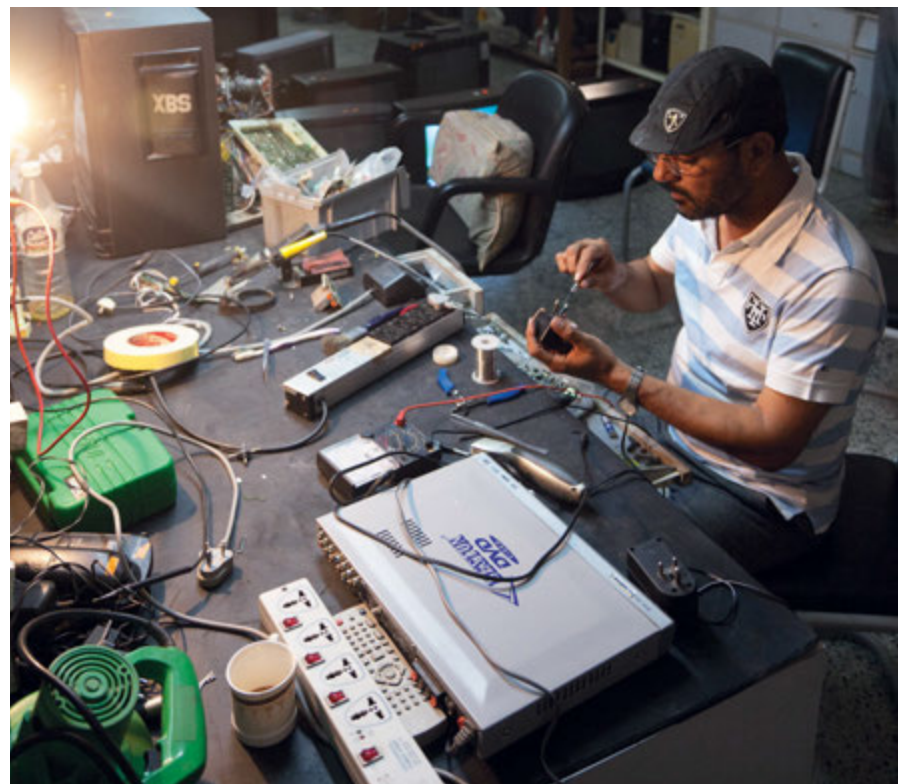
A large Purchase Department handles procurement for Dera departments as well as the purchase of appliances and other items for Dera residents (but residents pay for these themselves).

Central Stores is a consortium of warehouses and storage centres spread throughout the colony that store and supply materials, from food and beverages to furniture, office supplies, telecommunications equipment and machine parts.





ABOVE: Electrical generator. The Dera provides generator backup in addition to other electrical services.



ABOVE: Repairing a computer at DCC

AIRPORT

The Dera airport can accommodate small jets and other planes. Qualified sevadars staffing a sophisticated computerized control tower manage the arriving and departing planes.



TAC AND COMPUTER DEPARTMENTS

Television, Audio and Communications (TAC)

Telecommunications at the Dera includes standard telephone, Internet and limited cable television services for the residents. In the pandal, there are projectors with massive video screens and state-of-the-art speakers for the delivery of satsangs, as well as simultaneous-translation equipment, all of which must be maintained and upgraded as needed. Public telephones are plentiful throughout the Dera, since visitors must deposit their mobile phones on arrival.

Dera Computer Centre (DCC)

IT sevadars maintain the Dera computer network and develop specialized software to support the Dera's various departments and functions, including publications, online room reservations for visitors, centralized purchasing and financial accounts. All of the Dera's departments are interconnected through one Dera computer network.





Forty acres of photovoltaic panels have been installed on the roof of the mand pandal for the generation of electric power.



WATER AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

The cleanliness of Dera is one of its most distinctive features, especially given the hundreds of thousands of people who move throughout the colony. All water here, except that used for irrigation, is potable, pumped directly from underground tube wells up into 22 water towers. From the towers the water is piped by gravity to various locations within the immediate area of each tower. The water system is fully integrated so that if, for example, one tower becomes depleted, another can serve that tower's area. Potable water is available in every nook and cranny of the colony, and the same system serves every area equally. Landscape watering comes directly from well-heads scattered throughout the Dera. Storm water runs to the nearby Beas River.


Water tower and main electrical substation



ABOVE: *Laying water pipes*

BELOW LEFT: *Distributing clean drinking water*

BELOW RIGHT: *Cleaning streets*

An aerial photograph of a public toilet facility. The facility consists of several rows of white urinals mounted on a tiled wall. A person in a blue shirt and white shorts is standing on a raised platform, cleaning one of the urinals with a brush. The facility is surrounded by a paved area and some greenery. In the background, there are buildings with red-tiled roofs.

Toilets and bathing facilities are also everywhere, keeping the Dera clean and sanitary. Dera's sanitation is a high priority and is managed by civil engineers. The system is simple and easy to maintain, and legions of sevadars are assigned to its upkeep. Toilets, urinals, bathing areas and drinking points are cleaned daily. Sevadars are specially trained to clean the sewer lines. The two oxidation ponds provide biodegradable waste material for compost, which is later used on the Dera's farms.

Because of the efficient waste management system, not a single litre of polluted water is discharged into the Beas River, despite the fact that such large gatherings take place adjacent to its banks.

Since Dera's water supply comes from tube wells, it is essential to keep the underground water table high and clean. Ground water charging systems have been installed to keep the water table high. Rainwater from roof tops, drains and open areas is filtered into the underground water table through these systems.

Cleaning the urinals.

OPPOSITE: Cleaning the bathrooms and waste management



LANDSCAPING

Grounds maintenance is another of the Dera's wonders. Every morning and all during the day, swarms of sevadars move along the roadways, sidewalks, hedgerows, plazas, roundabouts and lawns, sweeping and picking up. It has been humorously estimated that the life span of a fallen leaf lying on the ground is a matter of hours – at most.

Throughout the year, jatha sevadars trim trees and hedges, water and mow the lawns. It is a never-ending seva to maintain the Dera's vibrant green areas.

The planted landscape of the Dera is one of its most endearing features. Most of the plants here are common, hardy and grown for utilitarian purposes. Grassy lawns prevent erosion and provide places where people can relax and children can play. Trees provide a shade canopy for people walking long distances to satsang, converting what could be an arduous hike to a pleasant ramble. Plantings stabilize slopes and provide barriers and buffers for crowd control; grasses and the seemingly ever-flowering shrubs and climbers serve the same purpose.

In the end, it is not so much the buildings one remembers at the Dera (aside, perhaps, from the majestic satsanghar), but the cooling shade, the freshly watered grass underfoot, the layers of leaf-canopies spreading out across the land and the bright colours of the bougainvilleas.



NURSERY







*“Flowers are your best friends, always smiling.
You can stand before them weeping and they will
still be smiling. They were made for that – so many
colours and shapes, different expressions and shades.
Nature wants us to enjoy these innocent pleasures.”*

Maharaj Charan Singh







Planting grass in green spaces

The hundreds of thousands of plants here originate from the tiny parcel of land that is the Dera's nursery. The nursery, like the farms, is professionally managed; however, the essential work of watering, seed gathering, plant transfer, drying, soil preparation and so forth is done by sevadars.

For all their practicality, the plantings at the Dera are no less beautiful. The profusion of trees, plants and flowers provide calm and comfort, softening the built environment and adding sweet fragrance and grace to what was once just a dusty outpost in Punjab.













Children's playground

FARMS

The Dera maintains farms – 1,250 acres – where many different types of vegetables are grown, as well as wheat, pulses and sugarcane, in addition to fruit orchards where bees also are kept and honey is harvested. Various agricultural techniques are used, including intercropping. The colony has even begun cultivating (on a small scale) medicinal plants, and trees are planted and felled regularly for firewood. Forestry on Dera land serves double-duty, as the roots of the trees arrest soil erosion.

Most of the fruits and vegetables sold at the Dera are grown on Dera farmlands, adding to the Dera's self-sufficiency. As much of that produce as practical is grown organically, without chemical fertilizers or pesticides. The plan is to minimize the use of chemical fertilizers as much as possible for all the Dera's major crops, including cereals and pulses. Experiments are also underway with vermiculture – preparation of the soil with earthworms.







Harvesting crops





The Dera has divided its farmlands into separate farms which are the responsibility of jatha sevadars who come from specific villages or communities – Amritsar, Gurdaspur, Ludhiana, Moga, Patiala and Haryana.



Stripping sugar cane in the field





OPPOSITE: *Harvesting and planting of various crops*
ABOVE: *Washing vegetables*



A cold-storage and ice-making factory includes a multilevel storage area filled with sacks of potatoes, apples and other perishables. A highlight is an ice-making room where the floor is comprised of rectangular canisters, about 2 feet by 3 feet by 4 feet deep, in which ice is made using a cold brine-water circulation technique. An overhead crane lifts the individual cells and places them on waiting transport as needed.





The Story Continues



*“The history of the Dera is, in fact,
the life story of the great saints
whose love and grace, diligence and
dedication, have developed this place –
once a wilderness – into a flourishing
centre of peace and beatitude.”*

Diwan Daryai Lal Kapur, Heaven on Earth



The Dera is a welcoming home not only for those who live here permanently but also for all who come to be with the master and offer him their service. As Maharaj Charan Singh used to say, no one is the host here and no one is a guest – the Dera belongs to all. It is also a place where people can express their love for the master and each other by serving one another. It is a striking example of what can be achieved in an atmosphere of love and harmony. No doubt this story will continue as long as there is a living master here.

The presence of the living master is the Dera's key ingredient, which explains how it is possible for so many people to work and live together so harmoniously. The atmosphere is entirely due to the five successive masters who have made this place their home, who have created a haven in a tempestuous world where their followers can work and learn and follow an honest, spiritual way of life.





You will not find anything lavish or unduly ornate here, no splashy decoration for the sake of appearance only. The Dera has its undeniable beauty, but it is a simple beauty that flows out of function. If a building has outlived its purpose, there is no hesitation to demolish it and build something new that fulfils a more practical need. At the same time, there is a profound sense of history and respect for the legacy of earlier masters.





The Dera continues to expand and adapt to the needs of the time. Its story may be one of growth and continual change, but the atmosphere of love, peace and harmony remains constant. Likewise, the teachings of all the masters who have walked here remain unchanged. The emphasis has always been and always will be on realizing the Lord within oneself through daily meditation, satsang and service. That is why all who enter the Dera's gates experience a rare inner equilibrium, through the practice of love.

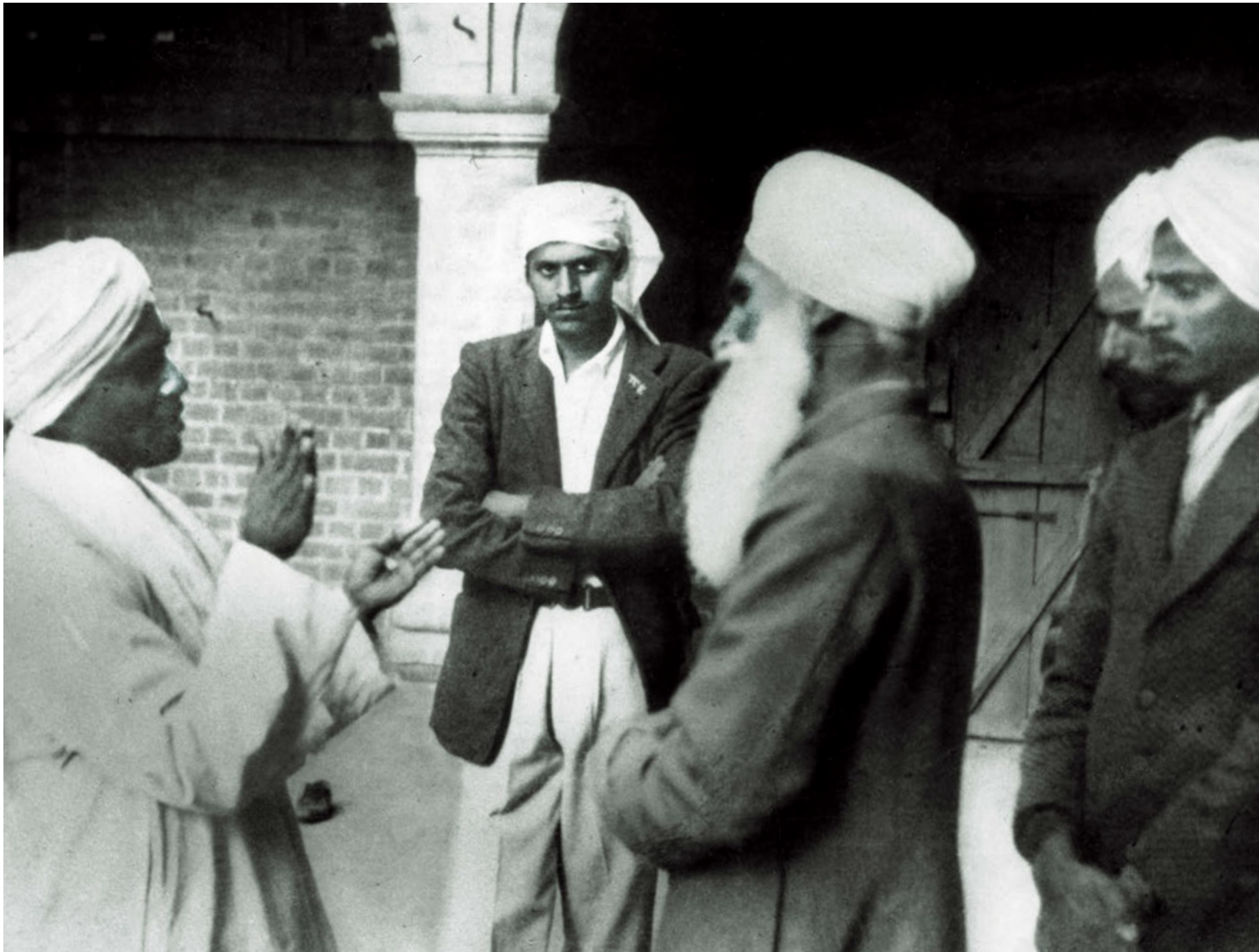




Maharaj Sawan Singh (above) and Maharaj Jagat Singh (opposite) with their disciples

*“A stone will keep cool,
at least protected from the sun's heat,
as long as it remains in water.”*

Maharaj Sawan Singh



“The Lord loves the humble and the low. Beware of injuring the heart of any man; God lives there. To such as break another’s heart, the gates of heaven shall ever remain closed. Always speak gently, lovingly and selflessly.”

Maharaj Jagat Singh



Maharaj Charan Singh

The Rose

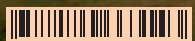
*“Well, you know Hazur loved roses. You are all his roses
and he gave me the seva of head gardener to
look after the garden and his roses.”*

Baba Gurinder Singh





The present master giving darshan to sevadars in the langar



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