



Spreading the message of love and service

GOVIND THUKRAL visits the Dera of the Radha Soami Satsang in Beas

Satsang in Beas

THEY sit huddled together, baking chapatis on iron ovens. They belong to all ages and all classes, but are mostly the rural poor. Divided into different langar halls spread over sprawling compounds, these hundreds of young and old men and women, who constantly chant in unison just one 'shabad', wait for the precise moment in a day when the Maharaj provides them with a glimpse. It happens everyday during the six congregations that take place each year at the sprawling 3,500 acres Radha Soami Satsang complex on the banks of the Beas river.

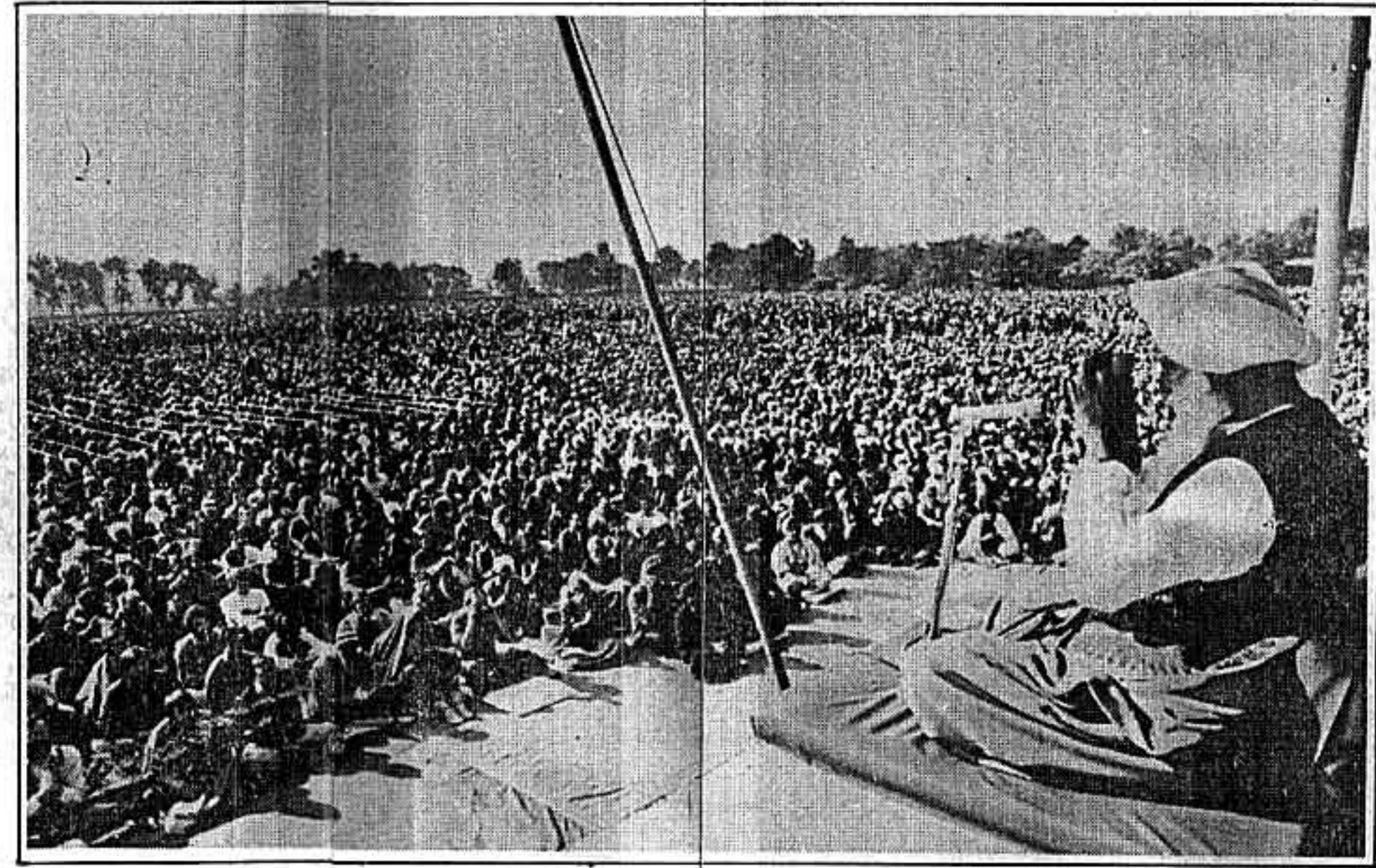
stops for while in each hall and moves on briskly, carrying his light frame, which at 77 looks at least 10 years younger with ease. **I**T is indeed a different world here in the thick of terrorist-infested Amritsar district. People from all faiths, Sikhs, Hindus, Christians and some Muslims come from all over the world, defying fears and threats. All they have to undergo is a security check. Over 5,000 trucks, hundreds of buses, cars and tractor trailers bring people from far and near. Since food is free no one brings any eatables.

sured voice. It is simple straight language. At no time during an hour-long discourse does he raise his voice. He quotes from all religions to hammer the point — all the Saints of the Bhakti Movement and the Buddha, Lord Krishna, Christ, Prophet Muhammed, Sufi Saints, and scores of other philosophers. He is against all rituals, idolotry and organised religion.

What is the message that the Saint from Beas delivers in the hotbed of violence. Punjab's Majha begins from here, the place called Dera Baba Jaimal Singh, founded in 1891, on the banks of the Beas. Once infested with snakes and wild animals today it is a neat complex. His is the message of love and service, of oneness of man. The Saint speaks the language of love, but does mince no words. "Man has divided himself into different religions, nations, linguistic groups, countries and in colours and has inflicted himself with all troubles. Man is one and his religion is one, the oneness is God", he tells the Sangat in his mea-

Quietly carrying on the tradition of Bhakti Movement which was launched by over a dozen saints in India and spread throughout the continent as Sufis joined in, he denounces violence and terrorism being practised in the guise of religion. It is a travesty of religion and man is only busy in destroying himself, he declares in his sure and quiet manner.

The Saint goes on, "The path of the Saints is the path of spiritual practice and experience. Irrespective of caste, creed or race, anyone can tread this path. Human life is a rare privilege. It provides the only opportunity to realise God. Even gods and goddesses pine for the human form. The Saints teach us the method of gaining spiritual experience during one lifetime. They show us the path of liberation here and now. They do not merely give assurances of salvation after



Maharaj Charan Singh addressing a congregation

death.

"It may be added that it is never the purpose of any saint to establish a new religion or to create a new sect. The philosophy of

saints has a universal appeal. It refuses to be bound in narrow grooves of caste, creed or nationality," he says.

KEEN as the present master

is to walk in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessors, the welfare of the Sangat and the development of the Dera, both in regard to spiritual learning and material well-being of the residents and visitors alike, receive his prime attention. Imbued with a missionary zeal, he has carried the Sant Mat (Bhakti Movement) torch to the remotest corners of India — Maharashtra, Madras, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and even as obscure a corner as Kalimpong in West Bengal. The number of such spiritual centres is now 322. His lucid and inimitably rational exposition of the Sant Mat philosophy is carrying conviction everywhere he goes and brings solace to thousands of distraught minds, disillusioned with the materialistic philosophy of the west and peeved at the irrationality of organised religion. There are more than 200 international satsang centres, where disciples and seekers,

our and nationality, meet. About 500 foreign disciples and seekers visit the Dera between April and September every year.

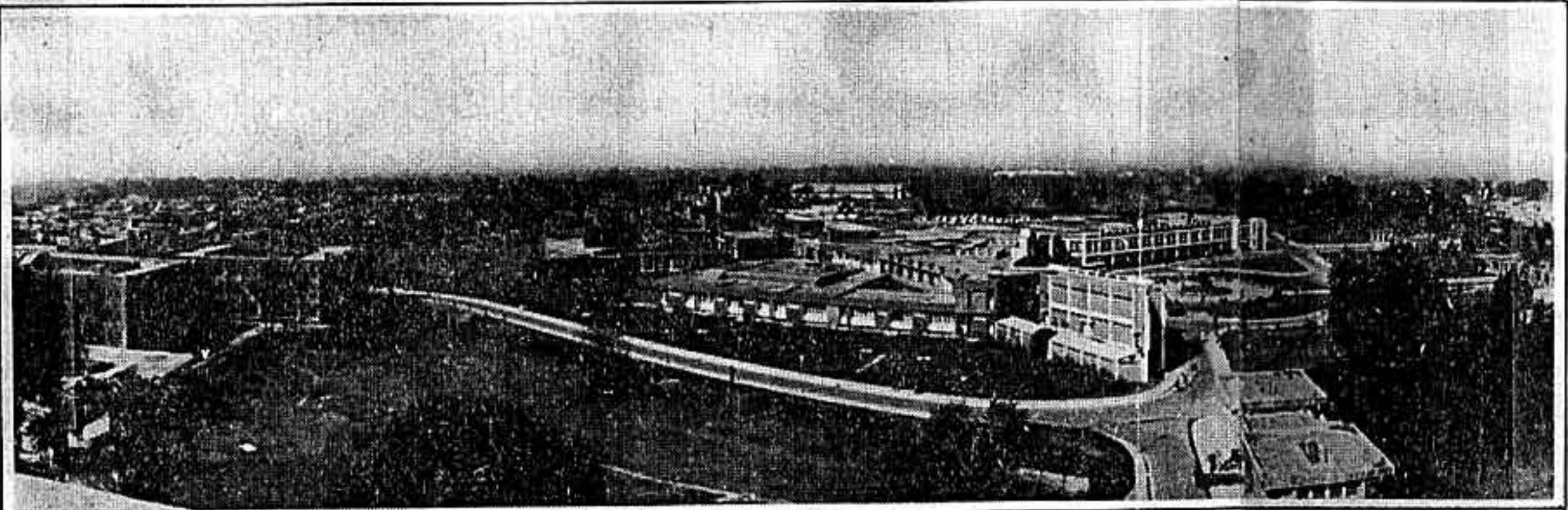
But it is not all just the preaching or the 'simran', the Saint here quotes repeatedly from the Guru Nanak saying — 'Work honestly, share your earning with the poor and remember your God.'

But it is the labour of love that inspires people most. There are over 20,000 volunteers managing each aspect of life here. Many senior civil and retired army officers as well as serving ones, come and work here. The Saint has also succeeded in establishing a modern hospital just on National Highway Number One. It is indeed the best-kept hospital anywhere, offering all facilities to patients free of cost. This single storey building was designed by two famous American architects known for hospital designs.

lakh patients every year. "The Punjab trouble has halted our work as many doctors got scared and did not join here. The ban on foreigners also impeded our research work. But we shall now use many offers from world famous hospitals in the USA and Europe to help us", the hospital administrator and former Punjab Chief Secretary K. S. Narang explains.

COME November, each year, a team of over 250 doctors, mostly specialists, descend on the large Dera. They are assisted by over 300 nurses and 6,000 other Sewadars in the eye camp that gets underway. The team is lead by doctors from Aligarh, Delhi and Amritsar. In the last camp nearly 4,400 operations were performed. Each patient stays here for a week, is provided clothes, medicine and food free of cost. Even spectacles are given free. No relation or an attendant is required to stay. Sewadars work round the clock as the doctors begin their day every morning at half-past seven, performing 550 operations in a day that ends at eight in the night. The whole complex takes the look of a big hospital and in the words of Dr J. M. Pahwa, Director Gandhi Eye Hospital Aligarh, "It is a seasonal eye hospital." The Saint visits the hospital each morning to speak words of love and compassion. "It is a favour the patients do by giving the Sangat an opportunity to render service. It is a matter of good fortune to get an opportunity to do service. There is no dearth of voluntary workers", the Saint says.

One may have differences over the approach to attain "moksha" and dispute the thesis of transmigration of soul, but no one can miss the message of love and service at a time when people are getting divided by narrow domestic walls of unreason and fear. As Tagore said, the bird of faith can feel the coming of the dawn much before the day breaks. In his unusual, but sure manner, the Saint of Beas, the fourth in time since 1891, carries home this only message.



Maharaj Sawan Singh charitable hospital at Beas