

Acceptance Speech at the Honorary Degree Ceremony UBC

May 22nd, 2019

Sadhu Binning

Thank you very much.

It is a huge honor for me to receive this degree from UBC. First of all, I would like to offer my sincere appreciation to good friends who recommended my name and to those who accepted their recommendation. I am truly honored and humbled. Thank you.

I would like to thank my beautiful wife Jagdish, sitting here in the audience. Without her help I wouldn't be standing here. Not only she looked after the family responsibilities, she also was an active partner in my literary and cultural activities especially the period of 15 years that we did community theatre in Vancouver. Both my children Preet and Priya and other family members especially my brother Paul has supported me in everything I did for Punjabi language and culture. Many friends also played an important role in my efforts and they all deserve big thanks.

This indeed is a special moment in my life and I want to remember those elders who came to this country in the beginning of last century and faced many hardships. I want to pay respect to the Komagata Maru passengers who were not allowed to enter. My sincere thanks to all those people from my community, though in small numbers, hugely contributed to make Canada a better place by continuously fighting against racist laws and social inequalities. Two ex students of UBC Dr. Sadhu Singh Dhami who attended in 1920s and Darshan Singh Sangha who was here in late 1930s both made significant contributions.

By some coincidence I started to read literary books at a very early age. From my readings I adopted a simple philosophy of life that 'I am because of the society'. Without the interaction with other humans I cannot be a human. I developed this sense that I must contribute to the society in some way to make it better for other humans as others have done before me. I also learned early in life that you cannot hope to find life's all answers from one book or just one source as is believed by millions around the world.

During the early 1970s while working full time and trying to earn a degree, I became part of many movements that were happening around me at the time such as opposition to the Vietnam War, struggle against apartheid in South Africa or at the local level the fight against racism, the exploitation of farmworkers and the struggle for equality in general.

Writing poetry, short fiction or plays about these issues and efforts became my main medium of contribution to the society. As a matter of fact I can say that I became a writer due to my concern for the society.

Punjabi is my mother tongue. I was the Punjabi language instructor here at UBC for 20 years and an activist for Punjabi language education much longer than that. Just to share what Punjabi sounds like I am going to read a short poem. First in Punjabi then I will read the English version.

At the end I want to offer my deepest congratulations to all of you who are finishing this part of your journey. I wish you all the success in whatever field you have chosen. Only word of advice that I can offer is that we need to pay serious attention to what is happening around us whether

it is the environment or social inequalities or the economic structure that is creating so many ills in the world. Do whatever you can to make this world a better place for yourself and for generations that will come after you.

Sadhu Binning

UBC, May 22nd, 2019