

Ohel David Synagogue Celebrates 150 yrs
Pune, November 2, 2014

The magnificent structure of the Lal Deval or Lal Deul (Red Temple) usually lies deserted, spellbinding the passersby on Ambedkar Road by its august beauty. But on Sunday evening, with all her pomp and ceremony, she elegantly welcomed close to 650 guests into her radiant filled premises and courtyards.

A grand reunion for the 100 or so local Jewish population, and for a large number of the Jewish community residing in Mumbai and outside India. The synagogue thronged to its limit, upper and lower galleries, with barely standing room available. Chief Guest presiding was the Honorable Governor of the State of Maharashtra - Mr. Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao. He addressed the India-Israel friendship and ties, but especially of the dearth of awareness and information of the Jews in India. The contribution of the Jewish community to Pune and India far exceeds its tiny size. "The work of philanthropists like David Sassoon is well known but yet we know very little about him. There should be a chapter on such Jews in the school curriculum in secondary classes." To which he received a warm applause.

Israel's Council General to India Mr. David Akov ardently referred to the synagogue as witness to the long-standing ties between the two countries. "This is the most beautiful synagogue I have ever seen. It is a symbol of roots that bond Jews in India and Israel."

The founder David Sassoon's sixth generation descendants Rabbi Yaaqob Manasseh and his sister Sarah Manasseh arrived from the USA and the UK respectively. Other dignitaries and guests present were the Mayor of Pune Mrs. Chanchala Kodre, Industrialist Dr. Cyrus Poonawala, Mr. Sam Marshall, Ms. Ruth Solomon, Lt. General Russell Mordechai (Retd) and his wife, and many other respectable guests.

Medals of Honor were bequeathed to members of the Indian Jewish Community and guests for their contribution to the community and the commemoration:

Mr. Chennamaneni Vidyasagar Rao	Governor of Maharashtra
Rabbi Yaaqob Menashe	Founder of Midrash Ben Ish Chai
Mr. David Akov	Consul General of Israel in India
Mr. Sumit Mullick	Additional Chief Secretary and Chief of Protocol, Govt. of Maharashtra
Dr. Cyrus Poonawalla	Director of Serum Institute
Prof. Dr.S.B.Mujumdar	Founder & President Symbiosis
Dr. Ajay Chandanwale	Dean of Sassoon Hospital, Pune
Mr. Sam Marshall	Elder Baghdad Community Member
Mr. Victor Macmull	Elder Baghdad Community Member
Mr. Sassoon Daniel	Elder Baghdad Community Member, Pune
Ms. Karen Cohen	Elder Baghdad Community Member, Pune
Mr. Joshua Pingle	Elder and Chazan, Pune Synagogue
Mr. Judah Samuel	Committee Member of the Ohel David Event
Mr. Ralphy Jhirad	Committee Member of the Ohel David Event
Mr. David Penkar	Committee Member of the Ohel David Event
Mr. Aden Penkar	Committee Member of the Ohel David Event
Mr. Zimra Israel	Committee Member of the Ohel David Event

Ohel David 150 yrs Commemoration Medal



Dinner was served in the gardens at around 8PM, and the evening drew to a close by 11.30PM.

Thanks are due to the elders of the community Mr. Solomon F. Sopher and his colleagues for a grandly organized commemoration. Special honor to Mr. Sopher who almost single handedly organized the function and contributed to the costs. Arrangements for the preparation of the synagogue – the paint job (internally and externally), electrical contractors and mandap decorators from Mumbai, and the catering were organized by Mr. Sopher. Mr. Sopher was significant in the invitation of the Governor of Maharashtra, Additional Chief Secretary Mr. Sumit Mullick and other respected dignitaries.

On occasion of the 150 yrs commemoration Mr. Sopher personally donated an Ambulance Van to the Cancer Patients Aid Association, the keys of which were handed by the Governor to the Honorary Secretary, Mrs. Silloo Jasdawala.

Mr. Sopher is the President of the three synagogues: The Ohel David - Pune, The Magen David and the Keneseth Eliyahoo in Mumbai. He is also the president of the Sir Jacob Sassoon Charity Trusts which are open to the entire Jewish community. Mr. Sopher honored the Governor at the function by garlanding him with the Commemoration Medal.

Among the many other contributions by the Sassoon family to the city of Pune are – the Sassoon Hospital, Lady Rachel Sassoon Dispensary, Mechanics Institute, a library, a convalescent home, and the David Sassoon Vriddha Ashram.

The wooden shutters shut anew. Lights dim at the "Lal Deval" – another "Arvit" (Evening Prayers) to a once thriving congregation.

"Shutters shut and open"and shut again.

Thanks to Ruth Solomon and Solomon Sofer for assisting with the review.



