

FREEMASONRY IN INDIA

HISTORY OF THE GRAND LODGE OF INDIA

In 1717 A.D. when an era of comparative peace and harmony dawned on the European scene, the United Grand Lodge of England and Scotland took shape at a meeting of the local Lodges of London, to elect a Grand Master. A United constitution was drawn up and recognized by all the Lodges. A democratic tradition in the election of the Worshipful Master of a Lodge was prescribed. The Worshipful Master was authorized to appoint his team of officers.

It is therefore of interest that within 12 years of the constitution of the Grand Lodge of England, constituted for the purpose of exercising supervision over the lodges in London, and its neighbouring areas, a petition was sent by a few Brethren in India to constitute a Provincial Grand Lodge in Calcutta. The Petition having been granted, a Provincial Grand Master was appointed to supervise Masonic activity in India and the Far East in 1728 A.D.

Full details regarding how the First Lodge was constituted in India, are preserved in the Minutes of the Grand Lodge in London. First a petition was presented on December 28, 1728 and at the end of the minutes of that meeting, the text of the "Deputation" from the Grand Master: "to Empower and Authorize our well beloved Brother Pomfret.... that he do, in our place and stead, constitute a regular Lodge, in due form at Fort William in Bengal in the East Indies...." This was signed and sealed "the 6th day of February 1728/9 and in the year of Masonry 5732 (which shows that Grand Lodge used Usher's Chronology in dating the Masonic era - as the Grand Lodge of Scotland still do).

The Lodge at Fort William -- that is, Calcutta -- appears in the Engraved List of 1730, as No. 72. It was to meet at Fort William in Calcutta. The coat of Arms was adopted from the East India Company a golden lion, rampant guardant, supporting between the forepaws a regal crown. In 1729, Captain Ralph Farwinter was appointed "Provisional Grand Master for East India in Bengal" and also James Dawson as "Provincial Grand Master" for East Indies.

The Provincial Grand Lodge of Madras was formed in 1752 and The Provincial Grand Lodge of Bombay was created in 1758. Although it appeared in the Roll of Grand Lodge there is no record of how it came into being.

The first Indian Mason was Omdat-ul-Omrah, Nawab Carnatic initiated in 1775. The doors to Hindu Masonry was flung wide-open might one say, by the unstoppable determination of one Mr. P.C. Dutt of Calcutta to become a member of the craft. After much opposition from the Provincial Grand Master (Hugh Sanderman) and nine years after he was proposed for initiation Mr. Dutt became Bro. Dutt in Anchor and Hope, No. 234, in 1872. Twenty-three years later, he was Deputy District Grand Master.

It was towards the end of October 1959 that the Most W. Grand Masters of England, Ireland and the Immediate Past Grand Master Mason of Scotland met in London to discuss the future of Freemasonry in India. The three Grand Masters considered that "an independent Grand Lodge of India is desirable and that its establishment should be gradually but actively pursued."

A representative Steering Committee was set up consisting exclusively of Indian Brethren in proportion to the number of Lodges under each of the three Constitutions, with R.W. Bro Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Williams, K.B.E., C.B., as Chairman, with the aim of establishing an independent Grand Lodge of India on the best possible foundations. The Steering Committee met at important centres of Masonic activities in the North, East, South and West of India and its report was unanimously signed early October 1960. On December 1, the three Grand Masters issued "Notes on the proposed Grand Lodge of India for the information and guidance of Lodges in India." Therein they reiterated their declared attitude towards an independent Grand Lodge of India, but left it to Lodges in India to decide whether to opt for or against joining such a body, adding that if the Brethren in India decided in favour of an independent Grand Lodge, they would accept the

decision and establish with it the closest fraternal relations and that Lodges not wishing to participate would continue to enjoy the existing rights under their respective Grand Lodges.

Out of a total of 277 individual Lodges in India (excluding Pakistan, Ceylon and Aden, which were excluded for the poll) 145 opted for the new Grand Lodge of India. This represented a little over 52 per cent.

The Grand Lodge of India was officially constituted at ten minutes to six o'clock on Friday the 24th November 1961 in the Ashoka Hotel, New Delhi. There were three delegations from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, Ireland and England in that order.

After the three delegations were received and greeted, the Grand Master Mason of Scotland proceeded with the Consecration. Thereafter, The Deputy Grand Master of Ireland officially constituted the new Grand Lodge saying "in the name of the Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland and by the command of their Grand Master, I constitute and form you, my good Brethren into the Sovereign Grand Lodge of India, you are empowered henceforth to exercise all the rights and privileges of a Grand Lodge according to the ancient usages and landmarks of the Craft. May the Grand Architect of the Universe prosper, direct and counsel you in all your proceedings."

After the Consecration and Constitution, the Deputy Grand Master of England assumed the Throne and installed Major General Dr. Sir Syed Raza Ali Khan, G.C.I.E., D.Litt. LL.D., His Highness The Nawab of Rampur, as the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of India. The Aprons, Collars, Gauntlets etc. for the new Lodge were provided jointly by the three parent Grand Lodges.

In addition to the three parent Grand Lodges the M.W. Grand Master of the Grand Lodges of the State of Israel, the M.W. Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta (Canada) and about 1,491 Brethren from all over India were present at this historic event.

FAQ ON INDIAN FREEMASONRY

Q). When did Freemasonry come to India?

A). The honor of receiving Freemasonry in India goes to Calcutta. In 1730 officers of the East Indian Company held their meetings in Fort William, Calcutta. The number given to the Lodge was 72.

Q). What was the first Lodge in Madras?

A). No. 222 EC, in 1752, and it does not appear to have received a name.

Q). What was the first Lodge in Bombay?

A). Bombay Lodge No. 234 EC in 1758.

Q). What was the first Lodge in Punjab?

A). Lodge No. 489 EC, in 1786.

Q). What effect did the existence of two competing Grand Lodges in England [Ancients and Moderns] have on Freemasonry in India?

A). In as much as numerous Lodges had been constituted in India by the Moderns while others had come into existence Ancient auspices, quite naturally much of the Ritualistic differences established themselves into the respective Lodges. This situation was complicated somewhat by the fact that there were also Lodges in India of Irish & Scottish origins.

However, it was in India, where both the warring groups joined together in harmony long before the formation of the Union of England. In 1785, the Atholl Lodge at Madras surrounded its powers and accepted the United Provincial Grand Lodge. The old Atholl Lodge was recorded as

lodge of Perfect Unanimity [later numbered as No. 150]. Madras had thus stolen a march of 27 years over the United Grand Lodge of England, which was formed in 1813.

Q). Who was the first Indian Mason?

A). Omdat-ul-Omrah, the Nawab of Carnatic. The second Indian Mason was M. Bandeh Ali Khan, initiated in Marine Lodge, Calcutta in 1812.

Q). Who was the first Hindu to be admitted into Freemasonry?

A). Bro. Ranganath Sastry in Lodge Perfect Unanimity No. 233, Madras in 1857.

Q). The earliest Sikh to be made a Mason?

A). Bro. Duleep Singh in Lodge Star in the East in 1861.

Q). Which Province had segregation preventing Indians from being admitted into Freemasonry?

A). In Bengal, where the bye-law No. 55 of the PGL (EC) prevented Indians from being admitted into Freemasonry. Ultimately the first Hindu to be admitted in Bengal was Bro. P C Dutt in 1872, that too after very many "black - balling" and nine years of persistent appeals.

Q). What were the foreign Constitutions whose Lodges functioned in India?

A). Dutch Constitution - Lodge Solomon was founded on April 7, 1758 at Tandelga near Chinsurah in Bengal by the commander of the merchant fleet of the Netherlands East India Company, Bro. Jacob Larwood Van Chevichaven.

French Constitution - Lodge Sincere Amite, Pondicherry was chartered in 1787. There were quite a few Naval Lodges. Though Naval Lodges were not recognized by the Grand Lodge of France, the members of the Naval Lodge in due course found their way to get affiliated to and remain under the protection of a stationary Lodge.

Scottish Constitution - Into the sub-continent the first Lodge under the Scottish Constitution was consecrated in 1801 in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). One Lodge Hope No. 334 SC, Karachi was chartered in 1767; in 1770 it was shifted to New Castle and in 1782 to New York. The date of its arrival in India cannot at present be stated. Lodge Hope was chartered by the PGM of Western India on April 25, 1842.

Danish Constitution - Introduced in Tranquebar (near Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu) in 1805. The Danish colony at Tranquebar was fairly numerously populated by Danes. Due to the efforts of one Bro. Ewald a warrant was granted for a Lodge at Tranquebar in 1807 by the National Grand Lodge of Denmark. The name of the Lodge was "De L'amour Fraternelle" (to Brotherly Love).

Irish Constitution - The Light of the North No. 357 at Kurnaul [now Karnal] in 1835. This Lodge survived for three years only. The next was Lodge Duke of Abercon No. 382 IC, in Calcutta in 1905.

Q). Name some of the prominent Indians who were Freemasons.

A). Swamy Vivekananda (initiated in 1884 under the name of Bro. Narendra Nath Dutt in Lodge Anchor & Hope, Calcutta). Motilal Nehru - Lodge Harmony, Kanpur (Father of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and grand father of Indhira Gandhi), C. Rajagopalachary (Governor General of India), Sir C P Ramaswamy Iyer (Divan of Travancore), Dr. P V Chery (Governor of Maharashtra), and Fakruddin Ali Ahmed (President of India).

Q). Which is the oldest building used as a Masonic Temple in India?

A). The Goshamahal Baradari, Hyderabad, built in 1682 by Sultan Abul Hassan Tanasha.

Q). When was the Grand Lodge of India formed?

A). November 24, 1961 in New Delhi.

Q). Name the parent Grand Lodges of Grand Lodge of India.

A). The Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland.

Q). Who were the principal officers at the consecration of the Grand Lodge of India?

A). Dy. GM of Grand Lodge of England, RW Bro Earl of Cadogon, Grand Master of Grand Lodge of Scotland, MW Bro. Archibald, and Dy. GM of Grand Lodge of Ireland, RW Bro George S Gamble.

Q). Who was the founder Grand Master of Grand Lodge of India?

A). MW Bro. H H Major General Syed Raza Ali Khan, Nawab of Rampur.

Q). How many Lodges opted to become the Founder Lodges of the Grand Lodge of India?

A). 145 Lodges with a total membership of 7466 opted to become the founder Lodges of the Grand Lodge of India.

MISCELLANEOUS INFO

1. Freemasonry is very, very strong in India and it is on the upward rise. As on date there are 347 lodges under the Grand Lodge of AF&AM of India. The degrees available are the Craft, Royal Arch Chapter, Mark Master Masonry and Royal Ark Mariner. Currently there are Lodges functioning under the English, Scottish and Irish constitutions. The relationship between the constitutions is very cordial and intervisitations are encouraged and practised.
2. In Indian Lodges the Altar is placed immediately in front of the Worshipful Master's Pedestal, so that no one can pass between the Altar and the Pedestal.
3. Indian Lodges keep five Volumes of Sacred Law on the Altar, namely, The Holy Bible [Christianity], Bhagvad Gita [Hinduism], Holy Koran [Islam], Guru Granth Sahib [Sikhism] and the Zenda Avastha [Zoroastrian] on the Altar. They are opened and placed separately and not piled up one upon the other. The Square and Compasses is ordinarily placed in position on that Book to which the Worshipful Master owes his allegiance, except on Installation Nights when they will be placed on that Book on which the Master Elect will take his Obligation. The candidates for Initiation, Passing and Raising take their Obligation on the Book of their faith.
4. There are four Regional Grand Lodges under the Grand Lodge of India, namely,
 - Regional Grand Lodge of Northern India, inaugurated on November 21, 1961.
 - Regional Grand Lodge of Eastern India, inaugurated on December 2, 1961.
 - Regional Grand Lodge of Western India, inaugurated on December 6, 1961.
 - Regional Grand Lodge of Southern India, inaugurated on December 9, 1961.

A Regional Grand Master appointed by the Grand Master rules each Regional Grand Lodge for a period of 3 years.

Due to the large number of Lodges and members in every Region and to facilitate better management and supervision each Regional Grand Lodge is further divided into topographical areas consisting of several lodges. An Assistant Regional Grand Master appointed by the Regional Grand Master every year at the Annual Investiture Meeting of the respective Regional Grand Lodge is in charge of each Area for that year.