Radha Soami Satsang which came into being in the second half of 19th century contained elements of Hinduism and Sikhism. Soami Shiv Dayal, the founder guru of this faith never claimed to propound any new philosophy. He and his family followed Tulsi Sahib, a Hindu saint of Hathras and the founder guru of Sahib Panthis and Adi Granth, holy book of the Sikhs. After deep meditation for 17 years, Shiv Dayal better known as Soami Ji laid the foundation of Radha Soami Satsang in 1861, the name to the faith was given by one of his disciples Salig Ram in the honour of Shiv Dayal’s wife Radha and Shiv Dayal called Soami Ji. Symbolically, Radha is described as human soul which aims to meet Soami, the God. Therefore the word ‘Radha Soami’ was accepted as one among the names of God. The philosophy of Radha Soami Satsang is called as Surat Shabd Yoga. Three important pillars have been suggested in Radha Soami Satsang to be followed to achieve spirituality, these are: satsang (true association), satguru (true spiritual Master or Mentor) and satnam (true name of God) or shabd (sound current of God). Soami Shiv Dayal condemned empty rituals prevailing in the society like keeping fasts, visits to pilgrimages, performing religious rites, worship stones and samadhs etc. In simple words, Radha Soamis preferred meditation of God which they preached as one’s main goal through the help of satguru. Six ganglions called chakras (guda, indri, nabhi, hriday, kanth and do-dal kanwal (kamal) and eight spiritual regions (sahasdal kamal (kanwal),trikuti, daswan dwar, sohang (soham), satlok, alakh lok, agam lok and Radha Soami Dham) are accepted as the main stages of spiritual journey while a practitioner called abyasi meditates. The purity of mind is considered as the integral part of the spiritual progress of a practitioner of Surat Shabd Yoga who is responsible to control the adversaries of mind (kam, kroth, lobh, moh and ahankar). Eating vegetarian food is an essential condition for a devotee of Radha Soami Satsang. Karma theory is followed, that is why, the devotees are suggested to do good karmas if they want to progress in meditation. Prayer called benti is believed to be necessary to obtain blessings and mercy of God. Its main concerns being meditation of God, Radha Soami Satsang is believed to be a part of nirgun bhakti.
During his life time, Soami Shiv Dayal could attract around four thousand followers. After his death in 1878, his successors took Radha Soami philosophy to different areas such as Beas, Delhi, Ghazipur besides Agra. Out of these, the centres at Agra and Beas emerged as most important. The first was Soami Shiv Dayal’s disciple Salig Ram continued at Agra and the second was founded at the right bank of Beas by one of his Sikh disciples Jaimal Singh. Three main centres of Radha Soami Satsang -Soami Bagh, Dayal Bagh and Peepal Mandi emerged at Agra under different Hindu Masters whereas the centre at Beas was led by Sikh Masters.

The Beas centre of Radha Soamis became popular as Dera Baba Jaimal Singh. Five spiritual Masters have presided over this centre such as Baba Jaimal Singh, Baba Sawan Singh, Baba Jagat Singh, Baba Charan Singh and Baba Gurinder Singh. All of them remained in the service of their previous Masters and got the position of Beas guru due to their spiritual longings and devotion. Interestingly, all Masters were educated except Baba Jaimal Singh, who could not receive formal education but had knowledge of Gurmukhi (Punjabi). Sawan Singh had done Engineering, Jagat Singh was M. Sc in Chemistry, Charan Singh was a law graduate whereas Gurinder Singh had got degree of commerce. Before installation as Beas gurus, all Masters had been in active service like Jaimal Singh and Sawan Singh were serving in Army, Jagat Singh was teaching in a college, Charan Singh was a lawyer and Gurinder Singh was a businessman in Spain.

At the time of their nominations as Dera Masters, they were of different age groups Sawan Singh was 45 years old, Jagat Singh was 62 years old. Charan Singh was 36 years old and Gurinder Singh was 35 years old. The interesting point is that all Dera Masters nominated successors through written wills except for Baba Jaimal Singh who left his verbal orders for Sawan Singh. It is pertinent to note that the successor in all cases was not a son but a disciple of the Dera Master.

The development of Dera Beas into a mini township within period of fifth years is a remarkable achievement and this could be achieved due to the continuous efforts of all Dera Masters. In 1891, Baba Jaimal Singh selected this place for meditation and started staying in a hut. After some time, he purchased 3 bighas of
land to accommodate the villagers who had started coming to attend his discourses. In his initial years, the number of visitors was less, it increased to 200 during his last years. The constructions at Beas place were started after Sawan Singh was initiated into Radha Soami philosophy by Baba Jaimal Singh in 1896. On the request of Sawan Singh, Baba Jaimal Singh permitted him undertake constructions facilitate the devotees. A permanent room for Baba Jaimal Singh, two satsang halls and an accommodation building having 9 rooms were constructed. In addition, a well called Soami Sagar was dug to provide water to visitors.

Sawan Singh is known as the real architect of Dera Beas. During his period, many buildings were constructed to accommodate visitors. He also allowed his close disciples to construct houses for themselves and to accommodate visitors during his monthly satsangs called bhandaras. Baba Jaimal Singh Hall (also known as Old Satsang Hall) of 40×120 feet was one of the remarkable constructions undertaken during period. Though, the langar (community kitchen) had been started by Baba Jaimal Singh, but it was Baba Sawan Singh who constructed a flour mill at Dera langar. Though, the third Master Baba Jagat Singh could not play any major role in the growth of Dera constructions due to his short tenure of only 3 ½ years, but the installation of a pump at Dera’s well and bus service from Beas station to Dera are his important contributions.

Baba Charan Singh played an important role in converting Dera Beas into a mini township. To accommodate visitors, he constructed more than 25 sheds called Janta Sheds, a Sadhu Ashram and two inns called Sawan Sarai and Jagat Sarai. He constructed a guest house for foreign devotees. To provide permanent quarters to sewadars at Dera Beas, he got constructed residential quarters for them. Four canteens, a bhojan bhandar (for those who want to take food by paying as opposite of the free langar) and snack bar in the Dera premises were also added. To provide food to the devotees, he extended the area of langar and enriched it with other facilities. After the construction of boundary wall in 1970, Baba Charan Singh had shaped it into a modern colony spread over an area of 3,500 acres.
Baba Gurinder Singh continued the work of constructions at Dera Beas as per the requirement of sangat. He constructed a big satsang pandal of 2800×1000 feet, 11 hostels having capacity of 700 people, 3 sarais having 20 halls of 400 capacity each, 10 sheds (the work is still continuing) having the capacity of 10,000 devotees. To provide eatables, he enlarged the area of Dera canteens, bhojan bhandars and snack bars. The unique feature first 20 years of Baba Gurinder Singh’s constructions is the uniformity in design and color of the buildings at Dera Beas and other satsang ghars.

Since the establishment of Dera Beas in 1891, the Dera Masters have attracted people from far and near places. A total of 30,15,864 devotees have been initiated into Radha Soami philosophy. Among them, Baba Jaimal Singh during his tenure of 12 years has initiated 2,343 devotees, Baba Sawan Singh 1,25,375 devotees and Baba Jagat Singh 18,111 followers in his tenure of 3½ years and Baba Charan Singh initiated 13, 14, 683 devotees whereas Baba Gurinder Singh has initiated a total of 15, 55, 352 devotees till date into Radha Soami philosophy. The noteworthy point is that till 1951, around 300 devotees from other countries persons had been initiated into Radha Soami philosophy by Baba Sawan Singh and Baba Jagat Singh, but under Baba Charan Singh, there were 21,000 foreigners. Similarly, Baba Gurinder Singh has initiated 25,000 foreigners till date.

The satsang tours of Beas Masters played significant role in attracting people towards Radha Soami philosophy. The founder of Radha Soami faith, Soami Shiv Dayal appointed Baba Jaimal Singh to preach this philosophy in Punjab. Baba Jaimal Singh visited villages in Amritsar, Ludhiana and some hilly areas. In fact, it was Baba Sawan Singh who took this philosophy to far off places. He undertook tours to places like Delhi, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh as well as Abbottabad, Gujranwala, Karachi, Lahore, Lyallpur, Multan, Peshawar and Rawalpindi etc. now in Pakistan. Baba Sawan Singh interacted with people of villages and small towns and attached them Radha Soami philosophy. It was at the age of 89, that he stopped undertaking satsang tours he died in 1948. To give a permanent platform to his followers, he started constructing permanent satsang ghars at different places. Baba Jagat Singh continued his tours like his Master Sawan Singh. From 1948-1951, he visited several places in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana
and Uttar Pradesh, but could not construct more satsang ghars. Taking a step forward, Baba Charan Singh changed his approach, he preferred major cities of different states. From 1951 to 1990, different cities of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir. Till his death in 1990, nearly one thousand satsang ghars had been constructed within India in Delhi, Jaipur, Ajmer and Sikanderpur in North, Bombay in West, Madras in South, Calcutta and Tatanagar in East, Nagpur, Indore, Sangli and Sidhpur in Central India. Interestingly, he was the first Master to have visited other countries to preach this philosophy as a result, 21, 000 persons adopted Radha Soami philosophy. During his earlier tours, Baba Charan Singh gave satsangs in hotels, gurudwaras and rented halls but later he constructed satsang centres of Beas in other countries as well, the number of these satsang centres reached to 200 till his death in 1990. The present Master Baba Gurinder Singh has added more than 40 countries to the list whereas the number of satsang centres has reached to 512 till date.

Baba Gurinder Singh continued his satsang tours within India. Like Baba Charan Singh, he visited major centres, the number of satsang ghars of Beas has reached to 3,835. At present, the major satsang ghars of Beas are at Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Bangalore (Karnataka), Calcutta (West Bengal), Delhi, Jaipur (Rajasthan), Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), Jammu, Mohali (Punjab), Paror (Himachal Pradesh), Mumbai and Nagpur (Maharashtra), Raipur (Chhatisgarh), Rudrapur (Uttarakhand) and Sikanderpur (Haryana) etc. Since the period of his installation as Dera Master, he is continuing with his foreign tours.

In the earlier period of Dera Beas, there was no administrative body to run administration as the number of people coming to Dera were less, a few sewadars were sufficient to manage everything. In 1947, Baba Sawan Singh formed three committees to run Dera administration: general committee, managing committee and administrative committee. Sawan Singh was the head of all these committees, he had appointed Jagat Singh, the vice president who later was nominating by him as his successor.
In 1957, Charan Singh brought a drastic change in Dera administration, he converted it into a registered society as Radha Soami Satsang Beas Society. He transferred his entire religious property in the name of Trust and preferred to work as a Trustee. Since then, Dera Beas has been registered in the government records as Radha Soami Satsang Beas Society. Dera Master works as the patron of Society, Baba Charan Singh became first patron, Baba Gurinder Singh is the second patron. The society is consisted of a general body of 17 members and an executive committee of 5 members. Since the days of Baba Sawan Singh, Dera Secretary has been holding next position after Dera Master. Now even after the formation of Dera Trust and Society, Dera secretary is the main person responsible to look after the affairs of Dera at Beas after its Patron who is the Dera Master.

To look after the Dera affairs, different departments are working such as langar ghar, accommodation, sanitation, sewa samiti, traffic control, fruit and vegetable department, provisional Store, books and audio video department (BAV), lost and found, information bureau, horticulture department, Dera library, publication department, engineering department, land sale and purchase department, information bureau, bistra sheds and electricity department.

Medical activities were undertaken by the centre for the first time during the period of Baba Sawan Singh in 1932. First clinic at Dera Beas was opened it was converted into Dera hospital during the time of Baba Charan Singh. To encourage other medical activities at Dera, Baba Charan Singh formed Maharaj Jagat Singh Medical Relief Society in 1978. This society is consisted of a general body having 17 members and an executive committee having 5 members. The secretaries of both the societies are responsible to maintain accounts. At present Baba Gurinder Singh is working as the patron of this society.

The administration of other national satsang ghars of Beas is looked after by the secretaries, there are local, area, district and zonal secretaries to keep check on the activities of all satsang centres, all work under the Dera secretary. About international centres of Beas, the representatives appointed by the centre have remained responsible since the period of Baba Sawan Singh. Baba Charan Singh formed boards having
different members to ease their work, this is still continuing. The Master himself is the chief inspector of the whole administration at Dera Beas and its satsang centres and keeps personally check. He is assisted by in the Dera administration by retirees from different jobs, Dera Beas has provided them accommodation and other amenities on low rates.

Though, the chief focus of the centre has been to preach spirituality, yet the Dera has remained involved in the social welfare activities since its inception. Through their teachings, Dera Masters have condemned empty rituals like idol worship, tomb and picture worship etc. All Dera Masters have emphasized the need to the end discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and have worked for equality.

Similarly to encourage women, Dera Masters have provided them opportunities to come forward by appointing them in different departments. During the period of Baba Jaimal Singh, his devotee Bibi Rukko was incharge of Dera administration. Similarly, some other women - Bibi Rakh, Bibi Lazzo and Bibi Ralli remained in the administration of Baba Sawan Singh. Some women became the members of Radha Soami Satsang Beas Society and different departments of Dera administration and its hospitals.

Among the social welfare works, the institution of langar has also played an important part since its inception. During the period of Baba Jaimal Singh, it had been providing food to 30 to 40 people, but at present, it is providing food to more than 2,50,000 devotees on bhandara days (scheduled satsangs of Dera Master). Free medical assistance has remained a chief feature of social welfare activities of Beas. Though Dera clinic was established in 1932 during the days of Baba Sawan Singh, later it was converted into a hospital by Baba Charan Singh with all modern facilities. About 2,000, 00 people were treated annually in the hospital. Besides, Nature Cure Hospital was opened by Baba Charan Singh’s wife Harjeet Kaur in 1967 which gave benefits to a number of people through naturopathy. Dera eye camps remained a great asset in the social welfare activities. Nearly 1, 50, 300 operations were performed in 35 Dera eye camps organised at Dera Beas from 1965 to 2002. Maharaj Jagat Singh Medical Relief Society formed by Baba Charan singh constructed three charitable
hospitals at Beas (near railway station) in Punjab, Sikanderpur (Haryana) and Bhota (Himachal Pradesh). Dera Beas also became shelter place for refugees during partition of India in 1947-48, during wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, militancy period at Punjab in 1980s. Dera Masters helped the people by providing relief measures during the floods of 1988, Bhuj earthquake at Gujarat in 2001 and the Leh disaster in 2010.

Literary activities remained prominent part of the growth of Dera Beas. All Beas Masters used publications as one of the means to preach Radha Soami philosophy. During the period of Baba Jaimal Singh, the writing of his guru Sar Bachan was published in two volumes in Punjabi for the first time. But at the time of Sawan Singh, the number of Punjabi books reached up to 6. In addition, the books were written in English by his foreign devotee Julian P. Johnson and others. The period of Baba Charan Singh was remarkable for literary activities of Dera Beas. To give a new turn to Dera publications, he established publication department in 1969. It started publishing Dera books in 11 Indian and 16 foreign languages. During the period of present Master Gurinder Singh, the centre has published 90 books in English, 75 books in Punjabi and 65 books in Hindi. These books throw light on different aspects of Radha Soami philosophy, Dera history, the biography of different Dera Masters, life of different mystics and subjects like vegetarianism, women empowerment and health books. Fortunately, Dera has a number of scholars from India as well as abroad retired from different Colleges and Universities, they give their free services to Dera Beas.

Thus one can see that how could a religious philosophy propagated by a Master, attract a large number of following in India and abroad within century of its inception and also became instrumental in the emergence and growth of an ‘autonomous’ township supervised by its Master and managed by sewadars and devotees who are nearly 30,00,000 in number at present.