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**COUNCIL MEMBER ADRIENNE ADAMS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS
UNVEIL “PANDIT RAMLALL WAY”**

Ramlall, a spiritual leader, community advocate, and scholar, founded the Phagwah Parade, Diwali Motorcade, and Arya Spiritual Center of New York

South Richmond Hill, NY – On June 27, 2021, Council Member Adrienne Adams joined local community organizations and leaders at the intersection of 133rd Street and Liberty Avenue to unveil “Pandit Ramlall Way.” The new street sign honors the life, legacy, and contributions of the late Dharmacharya Pandit Ramlall, a prominent spiritual leader, community advocate, scholar, and educator who founded the annual Phagwah (Holi) Parade, Diwali Motorcade, and the Arya Spiritual Center of New York. The street co-naming ceremony and celebration, which featured prayers, songs, and performances, took place at the Arya Spiritual Center Grounds, just 200 feet away from the site where “Pandit Ramlall Way” was unveiled.

“Pandit Ramlall lived an extraordinary life filled with purpose, learning, and love for his community. The new street sign honoring his legacy is a fitting tribute for a leader who contributed so much to the cultural, spiritual, and educational fabric of our City,” said **Council Member Adrienne Adams**. “It was my honor to celebrate Pandit Ramlall’s life with his family, friends, and community leaders. We will never forget the tremendous impact he had on the Guyanese community, Queens, and the entire City of New York.”

“As we celebrated the unveiling of Pandit Ramlall Way, the sun was as brilliant as our illustrious Nana (Grandfather). May his name and legacy forever inspire thinking minds and determined characters,” said **Nivedita Balgobin**, the granddaughter of Pandit Ramlall. “If you can learn anything from our Nana, it is that there is no rock bottom too deep to prevent your growth. Growth is a product of your own effort, not your circumstances. Enormous thanks to the government representatives, committee, and mandir for their support in this endeavor.”

“The unveiling of Pandit Ramlall Way on June 27 was a tremendous celebratory moment among the Guyanese population in Richmond Hill area in honor of a community advocate and religious icon, following the unveiling of Little Guyana Way on May 29, 2021. The event was well organized by the Pandit Ramlall Way Unveiling Committee with unwavering support of the staff of Council Member Adrienne Adams, who championed the application and supported the process throughout,” said **Ashook Ramsaran**, Chair of the Pandit Ramlall Way Unveiling Committee. “The event was an excellent mixture of prayers, songs, dance, tributes, recognition, and proclamations from officials, culminating in the unveiling of the Pandit Ramlall Way street sign amidst jubilation and cheers. We are grateful to CM Adams for her active engagement with the community and support for Pandit Ramlall Way, which brings a lot of pride to the community and the neighborhood.”

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues,” said **Patricia Jordon-Langford**, Co-Chair of the Pandit Ramlall Way Unveiling Committee, “but the parent of all others.”

Pandit Ramlall was born on February 28, 1928 in Guyana to Indian parents. By the time he was eight years old, both of his parents had passed away. However, Ramlall’s hard work, determination, and love of learning led him on a lifelong journey dedicated to education and spirituality. He was self-taught and ordained a priest at 19 years old and later received scholarships to study in India and Suriname. During his studies, he worked as a clerk and postal worker, and later hosted his own radio program.

Ramlall fought for Guyanese independence from British rule. He was imprisoned in Guyana and spent three years in Sibley Hall prison. While imprisoned, Ramlall, a Hindu, led hunger strikes because the prison did not offer vegetarian food. He was also denied the ability to perform rituals as a Hindu priest. However, due to his persistence, Ramlall's demands were eventually met.

Fearful of his family's safety, Ramlall migrated to the United States in 1974 and settled in Queens. He continued his studies and received both a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology and a Diploma in Education at Rochelle College. He worked for the New York City Health and Hospital Corporation in a leadership role, and served as a representative for Social Service Employees Union (SSEU) Local 371, a civil service union. Ramlall later served as a volunteer Chaplain of the New York City Transit Authority and Secretary of the Queens Interfaith Council.

Ramlall founded a mandir near his home in Briarwood, which became the Arya Spiritual Center of New York. He also led the purchasing of the lot in South Richmond Hill that eventually became the Arya Spiritual Center Grounds. Ramlall founded the Phagwah (Holi) Parade and the Diwali Motorcade, annual traditions and iconic events that are now part of the Queens cultural landscape. In recognition of his contributions to the borough, former Queens Borough President Helen Marshall declared March 23, 2003 as "Pandit Ramlall Day."

In addition to being a spiritual leader, Ramlall was a Vedic scholar who wrote several books, an educator, and a motivational speaker. In January 2005, he was honored by the India International Friendship Society with the "Bharat Gaurav" Award at a ceremony in Mumbai, India. He won several other awards in the United States, India, and Canada. Surrounded by immediate family, Ramlall passed away peacefully on January 26, 2019, at 90 years old. He is remembered as a learned yet humble man with noble ideals and selfless service to his community.

"Pandit Ramlall is very deserving of this street co-naming honor. He was well-loved in the Richmond Hill community and beyond, especially among Guyanese religious leaders and followers of Hinduism," said **State Senator James Sanders Jr.** "He has been recognized for his many contributions to Guyanese and Indo-Caribbean immigrants in Queens."

"As the first Hindu-American ever elected to New York State office, I am deeply moved by the historic naming of Pandit Ramlall Way after a revered Hindu faith leader. The Hindu values of karma yoga (selfless action) and Satyagraha (soul force) guided me to embrace this life of public service. These were the same values that Pandit Ramlall taught," said **Assembly Member Jenifer Rajkumar.** "I am humbled that a street in the heart of Richmond Hill has now been named after him, and I strive to carry on his legacy. Let us remember that Pandit Ramlall was the creator of the Phagwah Parade and the Diwali Parade. I am proud to have introduced state legislation to finally make Diwali a school holiday in New York City and look forward to this becoming a reality soon, as the Indo-Caribbean and South Asian communities reach even greater heights in New York."

"He was a unifying figure whose absence is felt even three years after he has passed," said **District Leader Richard David.** "I'm proud of his accomplishments on behalf of Indo-Caribbean people, Hindus, and residents of New York. This street co-naming represents the best of us."

"Councilwoman Adrienne Adams has done it again. She has piloted legislation to realize "Pandit Ramlall Way" and in doing so, honored a son of Guyana and the Caribbean who is a product of Hindu culture," said **Dr. Dhanpaul Narine,** a member of the Pandit Ramlall Way Unveiling Committee. "We thank the Councilwoman and her staff for a job that was well done."

"The unveiling of Pandit Ramlall Way was a historic event for the Guyanese community. Panditji continues to be the social justice warrior for this community," said **Dr. Sharla Madho-Khargi,** Director of Clinical/Community Services for the Indian Diaspora Council. "We thank our community and local political representatives for their interest and support of our community."

Council Member Adrienne Adams represents the New York City Council's 28th District, which includes Jamaica, Richmond Hill, Rochdale Village, and South Ozone Park. She serves as Chair of the Public Safety Committee and sits on five other committees: Finance, Land Use; Civil Service and Labor; Land Use; Rules, Privileges, and Elections; and the Subcommittee on Capital Budget and Finance. She also co-chairs the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus (BLAC).

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