



The Golden Temple in Amritsar, India is the largest pilgrimage site in the world which feeds 40,000 - 100,000 people of all faiths for free every day.

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President Darshan Singh Bagga**

In God We Trust

Many Faiths, One Message

There is one father; we are all His children. You are my Guide (Guru). Listen, friends: my soul is a sacrifice, a sacrifice to You; O Lord, reveal to me the Blessed Vision of Your Darshan. –
Sikhism (Guru Granth Sahib)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. --
Christianity (Bible)

May we all be protected.
May we all be nourished.
May we work together with great energy. May our intellect be sharpened. Let there be no animosity amongst us
--**Hinduism** (Tatteriya Upanishad)

O Mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you. --**Islam** (Quran)

All breathing, existing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain, nor treated with violence, nor abused, nor tormented, nor driven away. This is the pure, unchangeable, eternal law which the clever ones, who understand the world, have proclaimed.
--**Jainism** (Acaranga Sutra)

He that oppresses the poor blasphemes his maker, but he that is gracious to the poor honors God.
--**Judaism** (Old Testament)

American Ideals are Universal Ideas



From

The Declaration of Independence

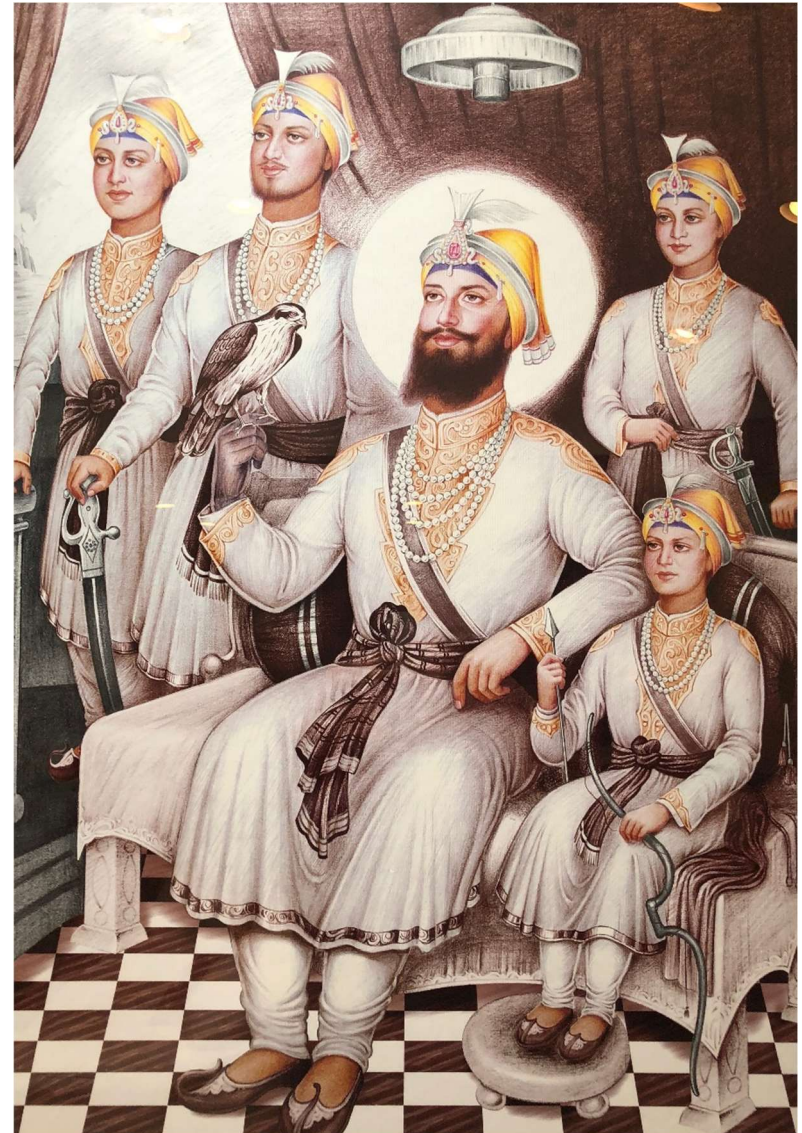
“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
Freedom of religion was declared in the Bill of Rights.



From

The preamble to the Constitution of the United States

We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.



*Sikhs 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji depicted with his four sons
(1666 – 1708)*

Guru Gobind Singh Ji

By Darshan Singh Bagga

Tribute on the 350th Anniversary of the Saint-Soldier who was the 10th Guru

First, God created the Light; then, by His Creative Power, He made all mortal beings. From the One Light, the entire universe welled up. So, who is good, and who is bad? The Creation is in the Creator, and the Creator is in the Creation, totally pervading and permeating all places. – Guru Nanak Dev Ji founder of Sikh religion

Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the tenth and last of the human form Gurus of Sikhism, the 5th largest religion in the world. A divine messenger, a warrior, a poet and philosopher, Guru Gobind Singh Ji will go down in history as the one who molded the Sikh religion, founded by Guru Nanak ji, into its present shape, with the institution of the Khalsa fraternity, and completion of the sacred scripture, the Guru Granth Sahi, in the final form that we find today.

He was born Gobind Rai in 1666 at Patna in Bihar state of India, but soon his family moved to the northwest part of India. At the tender age of 9 he succeeded his father, the ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, following his martyrdom in Delhi for the forcible conversion of religion from Hindu to Muslim.

Upon the sacrifice of his father, Guru Gobind Singh Ji felt compelled to organize the Sikhs into a community of saint-soldiers. During the spring

of 1699, at what turned out to be a pulse-pounding, dramatic event, he called his followers for a special gathering on the occasion of Vaisakhi festival. Arriving to address the massive audience with a sword in hand, the Guru asked the congregation if anyone would be willing to sacrifice their head for him. People were stunned into silence by this request. Yet, after a while, one brave man approached the Guru in full submission. The lone disciple was led into an enclosure by the Guru. After some time, the Guru emerged with a blood-stained sword and asked for another head. Overcome with shock, the audience could not believe what they were seeing; however, another devoted follower stood and offered his head to the Guru. Eventually, with the same outcome, three more devoted disciples offered their lives to the Guru. After the fifth devotee was led into the tent, to the surprise of the audience, the Guru emerged with the five followers fully clothed in the cloaks of the Khalsa, or Pure.

This made the Guru the sixth Khalsa, and his name changed from Guru Gobind Rai to Guru Gobind Singh Ji.

Guru Gobind Singh also initiated the Five K's tradition of the Khalsa: *Kesh - unshorn hair, Kangha - a wooden comb, Kara - an iron or steel bracelet worn on the wrist, Kirpan - a sword or dagger, and Kacchera - short breeches.*

The Guru thus revitalized the Sikh identity, ushering in a definitive evolution of the Sikh community into a community of saint-soldiers. After initiating the five "beloved ones" into the new order of the Khalsa, the Guru knelt before them and requested that they initiate him with specially prepared amrit (ambrosia). In the annals of human history, such a transformation into a distinct and solidified community, culminating in the baptism of the prophet by his followers, remains a unique and defining moment.

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The period following the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur was a period when the Mughal Empire under Aurangzeb was an increasingly hostile enemy of the Sikh people. The Sikhs resisted, led by Guru Gobind Singh, and the Mughal-Sikh conflicts peaked during this period. Aurangzeb had even issued an order to exterminate Guru Gobind Singh Ji and his family.



Guru Ji receiving amrit from the Punj Pyare

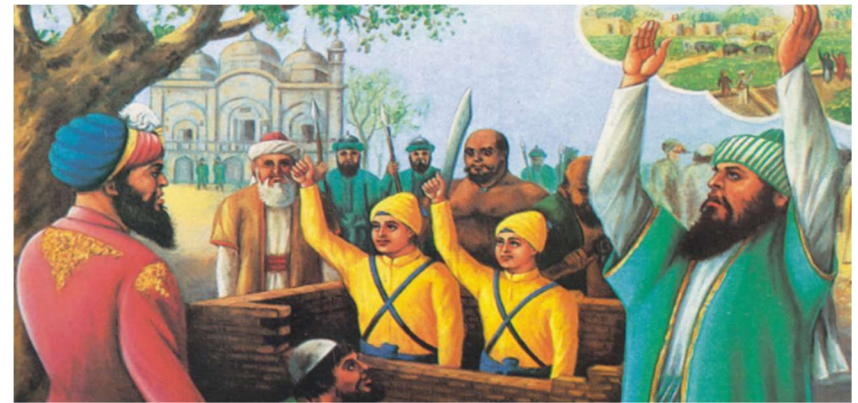
Guru Gobind Singh Ji believed in a Dharam Yudh (war in defence of righteousness), something that is fought as a last resort, neither out of a wish for revenge nor for greed nor for any destructive goals. To Guru Gobind Singh, one must be prepared to die to stop tyranny, end persecution and to defend one's own religious values. He wrote:

When all peaceful means of resolution have failed, it is righteous to draw the sword.

He led 13 wars with these objectives, but never took captives nor damaged anyone's place of worship. The Guru's family had to offer terrible sacrifices for the sake of the community and the nation.

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Guru's mother Mata Gujri and his two younger sons were captured by Wazir Khan, the Muslim governor of Sirhind. The sons, Zorawar Singh aged 8 and Fateh Singh aged 5, were executed by burying them alive into a wall after they refused to change their religion, and Mata Gujri collapsed on hearing her grandsons' death. His eldest sons, Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, aged 13 and 17, were also killed in the battle of December 1704 against the Mughal army.



Guru Ji's Sons being walled in alive for not abandoning their faith

Before his own death at the hands of an assailant in 1708, at a relatively young age of 42, the Guru added the writings of Guru Tegh Bahadur to the Sikh scriptures, thereby giving a final revision to its form. The Guru also declared the lineage of living Gurus finished, and requested his followers to seek spiritual guidance from the Guru Granth Sahib. In essence, the light of Nanak, the first Guru, was to be forever enshrined within the pages of the Guru Granth Sahib.

To illustrate his point that the Guru Granth Sahib was the final Guru of the Sikhs, and as a sign of humility, Guru Gobind Singh did not include his writings, over 1400 pages worth of literature, in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Bhai Kanhaiya – Precursor of Red Cross

By Darshan Singh Bagga

Bhai Kanhaiya (1648–1718) was a disciple of Guru Tegh Bahadur and was in the service of the last Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh. During the frequent skirmishes and battles between the Sikhs and the enemy, Bhai Kanhaiya was often seen carrying a mashak (leather pouch used to carry water) to serve water to anyone who was thirsty. In the battle of Anandpur Sahib in Punjab in 1704, he did this sewa, service with love and affection without any discrimination between the Guru's Sikh soldiers and the Mughal armies' soldiers. This stirred up stern criticism amongst his fellow Sikhs. On being summoned by Guru Gobind Singh, Bhai Kanhaiya explained, “I saw no Mughal or Sikh on the battlefield. I only saw human beings. And Guru Ji, they all have the same God's Spirit?”

Pleased, the Guru gave him medical balm and said, “From now on, you should also put this balm on the wounds of all who need it.”

This is spiritual version of the humanitarian organization, Red Cross, which was started in the late 19th century, which was founded to protect human life and health, provide emergency assistance, disaster relief, and disaster preparedness education in war and peace time.



A Tribute to Human Development Movements

Thoughts on July 4th and related Celebrations

By I.J. Singh

Social scientist tells us that humans are, at their core, fragile even though they are and can be extremely inventive and resourceful. The newborn human remains supremely vulnerable and unable to survive, much less thrive, without a viable social structure to render survival possible.

Humans need collectives to survive. Hence the development of families, clans, tribes, even nations. Such collectives, to do the most good, need a sense of communal ethics, a blueprint of what a life is and should be. Hence also the further sense of “us” and “them” even though such divisions rarely portend peace. Many such movements have existed over time; many still do, such as Communism and socialism etc.

Briefly then, I could argue that religions, too, at their core are human development initiatives that minimally serve the human primal need of survival. Both religious and non-religious movements become the glue that unite a people into a communal existence. Beware though that sometimes the glue sets to the consistency of Krazy Glue and then we have an existential crisis on our hands.

Such is human history; its lessons range from the almost awe inspiring to the awfully horrendous.

Human survival and progress deserve and need hope and opportunity – economic stability and hope, participatory self-governance and

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accountability, opportunity for progress, a sense of justice. Human societies need the foundational idea that tomorrow can and will be better than today, just as today is better than was yesterday. Our religions the also serve to knit our past (history) to where we are today, and how we design a future that is better and rosier even when it is challenging – how to deal with slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

I look at what I have just written and see that I am perhaps talking about the American dream. Think of its beginnings -- the idea that all power flows from the people. "We the People" it talks about and what did they knit together? A magic carpet that promises us Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. Remember that here Life and Liberty are inherent and the roots of human dignity; the idea of Happiness exists as its pursuit by human endeavor. I mean here the supporting ideology of social equality, self-governance and related issues that I noted earlier.

But I must complete this vision by joining it with another that came to us from a religious movement – Sikhism or Sikhi. Founded by Guru Nanak in 15th century India, it flowered under the guidance of ten Gurus, achieved final form in 1699 in Punjab. Today, about 25 million Sikhs exist worldwide, in India and every country and continent of this world.

If I was to summarize its core teaching literally in two words, it would have to be – Ik Oankaar that opens the Sikh scripture. Guru Nanak invented this alphanumeric around 550 years ago. It combines the first numeral, "one" with "Oankar", a word that stands for Creator or Doer. Thus, it postulates One God - not a partisan Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh God, but one that embraces all creation. Sikhism tells us that to discover unity in the diversity of creation

If I can see the oneness in the creator and creation, there is then absolutely no room left for distinctions in race, caste, creed, gender, color or national origin. Differences between "them" and "us" vanish. Equality, liberty, fraternity and justice are inherent in that oneness.

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Come to think aren't these the fundamental values of American society which starts most powerfully with "We the People?" Both societies – Sikh and American, share concerns of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness" as the basis of a progressive society in which equality, self-governance, justice, and accountability are prized.

This speaks of discovering, nurturing and celebrating unity in diversity, not violently hammering the many into one. This is how I see the meaning of "E Pluribus Unum" that is our motto, and our way to a more perfect union.

Fear of the stranger is universal. In America, these fears have, at times, produced discriminatory laws. Some people fear our becoming a "balkanized" nation. Yet, clearly, American society is constantly being re-made in ways not imagined before. As FDR told us in a different context, "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." Emerson reminds us, "A nation, like a tree, does not thrive well till it is engrafted with a foreign stock".

The idea here is integration, not assimilation beyond recognition and definitely - definitely not pockets of isolation either.

Are we a Christian nation? Yes, the nation, in its current form was founded by Christians, and derives its values from Christian teaching and tradition. It need not, should not, and does not diminish a non-Christian, or even an agnostic or an atheist. Hence cultural and religious diversity have a prized place in it. Such were the values of Thomas Jefferson, clearly enunciated by him and by other like-minded founding fathers of this nation.

The First Amendment pointedly has two clauses: First, that the state shall not establish a church; secondly, that it must ensure free exercise of religion. Jefferson also reminds us: It does me no harm if my neighbor thinks there are twenty gods or that there is none.

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Ergo, much as it is possible to be a good Christian and a good American, or a good Jew and a good American, or even an atheist and a good American, similarly it is possible to be a good Sikh and a good American. These are not mutually exclusive ideas. This is the meaning of an equal place at the table.

To me religion is not a diversity issue and should not be a consideration in the workplace.

This may surprise you since Sikhs wear turbans and unshorn hair - markers of our faith. However, I wish to be hired and judged not by the turban on my head but my ability to do the job, just as a woman candidate must not be judged by her gender but only by her qualification and ability. The best acceptance of diversity is to go through life such that irrelevant traits such as color, gender, caste, creed, religion or national origin do not enter the equation.

Let me recount a brief story: It was just a day or two after 9/11 and I was one of the few people walking about wearing a turban in New York City. I fell into conversation with a bright, educated 'white' American. And well-to-do - his brief case was better than mine and his suit more expensive. We talked a while about Sikhs in America.

"Tell me," finally, he said "your people have been here a hundred years. Why did they not leave their religion back home when they came here?"

I was a bit flustered but recovered and he wanted a short answer. So, I said: "Your people have likely been here over 200 years. Tell me, when they came here, why did they not leave their religion back home. For I see no native Americans here between you and me."

It was his turn to be thoughtfully silent a moment. Then he said - "You have a point. Let's have a cup of coffee."

We did and remain friends now, so many years later.

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To understand the meaning of diversity, we need to see "us" in "them" and "them" in "us". I cannot think of a better formulation of the concept of "E Pluribus Unum" than the awesome poetry of Sikh scriptural writing. It goes thus - in translation:

“As out of a single fire, millions of sparks arise;
But fall back in the fire, to come together again.

.....

.....

As out of a single stream, countless waves arise;
And then return to the water.
So from God's form, emerges all creation;
To return to the One again.”

The founder of this initiative today is Darshan Singh Bagga, who came here about 40 years ago. He recognizes that everyone of us owes gratitude to this society that has given us unequalled opportunities for success. And this is payback time.

About the Author

I(nder) J(it) Singh was born in Gujranwala (now in Pakistan) before the partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947. He was educated at Simla and Amritsar in India.

In 1960, I.J. Singh came to the United States on a Murry & Leonie Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. He was awarded a PhD in Anatomical Sciences from the University of Oregon Medical School (now known as the Oregon Health Sciences University). He also earned a DDS from Columbia University.

He is now Professor Emeritus of Anatomical Sciences at New York University.

I.J. Singh serves as the Overseas Editor at The Sikh Review and as the Editorial Director of Nishaan.

He is regular commentator on SikhNet and other sites. A prolific writer and speaker on his journey as a Sikh in America, I.J. Singh is the author of five collations of essays on Sikhs and Sikhi.

100 Years of Indians in America

By Inder Singh

Immigrants from Punjab started coming to the United States of America at the beginning of the twentieth century. They worked at menial jobs and lived in crumbling structures. For several years, they lived in a free country without freedom. Only in 1946, after a long struggle, they got the right to US citizenship. Thereafter, they could buy property, get a job commensurate with their qualifications, marry a person of their choice, and were free to travel and visit India, the country of their birth.

Beginning of Indian Immigration

In 1897, Queen Victoria of England and the Empress of India, included a Sikh regiment from the Indian Army in her diamond jubilee celebrations. On the return journey, the soldiers were sent back to India via Canada. Most of these soldiers were originally farmers and were fascinated with the potential for farming opportunities. They dreamed of returning to Canada after retirement. And some of them did return. Several Indians came to the US after they had been in Canada for some time.

On April 5, 1899, four Punjabis who had worked in the British Royal Artillery in Hong Kong, landed in San Francisco and were allowed to stay in the United States by the US Immigration Service. The grant of permission for them was an encouraging signal for others to follow those

four pioneers. The Indians in the United States and Canada were commonly called “Hindus”. From 1899-1907, Indians legally admitted to the United States numbered only 1967. But, concentration of Indians in a few small communities in the Pacific Coast states, particularly those with turbans, drew high level of visibility of their presence and provoked hostility from the Asiatic Exclusion League which carried propaganda against the “The Tide of Turbans” and “Hindu Invasion of America”. There was violence against the community in 1907 in Bellingham, near Seattle, driving them away. Similar assaults also took place in some other cities in California where the immigrants had settled.

Gadarites’ mission to end British Rule in India

Higher education in American universities was a powerful magnet for young people even during that time. America provided them opportunity to “earn and learn” and so Indian students were attracted to seek admission in the US universities. However, several students upon graduation were not able to get jobs commensurate with their qualifications. The Indian students attributed the racial prejudice and discrimination to their being nationals of a subjugated country and thus wanted India to be free from the British slavery. Many formed organizations to collectively assert their birthright to independence for India and explored ways and means to attain self-rule. Taraknath Das, a student, started publishing a magazine Free Hindustan in 1907 in Seattle, advocating armed rebellion against the British rule as a means for achieving independence. G.D. Kumar started a Punjabi paper SwadeshSewak in Vancouver. HarDyal started BandeMataram in 1909 for communicating his revolutionary ideas to the students and the Punjabi settlers who were already facing racial prejudice and discrimination.

Har Dyal who had come from England after relinquishing his scholarship and studies at Oxford University was identified with nationalist activities

in the United States. He had been a faculty member at Stanford University for about two years. University of California at Berkeley and channelized the pro-Indian, anti-British sentiment of the students for independence of India. Two of his many student followers, Katar Singh Sarabha and Vishnu Govind Pingle later on played very prominent roles in the Gadar movement.

Dyal's fervor for India's freedom spread beyond the university campuses to Punjabi farmers and laborers who had already been victim of racial attacks, discrimination and repression from the host community. A meeting of some patriotic and enlightened Indians was called in May, 1913, in Astoria, Oregon, where Har Dyal, Bhai Parmanand and others passionately spoke for throwing the British out of India and securing liberation by all means at their disposal. It was at this meeting that Hindustan Association of the Pacific Coast was formed with a major objective to liberate India with the force of arms from British colonialism. The headquarters of the association was established in San Francisco where a building was purchased. The association launched Gadar magazine to promote the aims, objectives and activities of the organization. Gadar literally means revolt or mutiny and its contents were aimed at exposing the British imperialism. The Gadar magazine became very popular and the association itself became known as the Gadar Party.

The Gadar movement became the symbol of political consciousness of the overseas Indians. The influence of the movement was so powerful that when called upon, over 6,000 overseas Indians, mostly Punjabis, returned to India to fight for India's freedom.

The British government got alarmed at the popularity of the Gadar movement and free accessibility and availability of the 'seditious' literature. They used every means to stop its circulation, particularly in

India. At the behest of the British, the American government arrested Har Dyal in March 1914, but later released him on bail. Har Dyal jumped the bail and left for Switzerland and from there, he went to Germany.

World War I broke out in August 1914, in which Germany fought against England. The Germans offered the Indian Nationalists (Gadarites) financial aid to buy arms and ammunitions to expel the British from India. The Gadarites started an energetic campaign to mobilize overseas Indians in Singapore, Burma, Egypt, Turkey and Afghanistan and particularly Punjabis in Canada and the United States, and to inspire them to go to India to launch a revolution. They drew plans to infiltrate the Indian army and excite the soldiers to fight – not for but against the British Empire – and free India from the shackles of British imperialism. The irony of that valiant effort was that the Indian leadership openly and willingly co-operated with the British, thereby prolonging India's serfdom. The traitors of the Gadar movement leaked out the secret plans to British spies. Many Gadarites were taken captives upon reaching India. In the United States too, several Gadarites and their German supporters were prosecuted in the San Francisco Hindu German Conspiracy Trial (1917-18).

Struggle for US Citizenship

The United States citizenship conferred many rights and privileges but only "free white men" were eligible to apply. Many anthropologists used "Caucasian" as a general term for "white" in the absence of any precise definition of the word "white." Indian nationals from the north of the Indian Sub-Continent and people from some Middle East countries were also considered Caucasian. Thus, several Indians were granted US citizenship in different states.

Bhagat Singh Thind, who had joined the US army, also applied for citizenship in the state of Washington. He received his citizenship in 1918

wearing a military uniform. However, the immigration service revoked his citizenship because he was not a “free white man.” Thind persisted and his case reached the Supreme Court, which decided in 1923 that since the “common man’s definition of “white” did not correspond to “Caucasian”, Indians could not be naturalized. Meanwhile the 1917 Immigration Act virtually barred all Asians from entering the US legally. It also imposed English literacy restrictions. Thus the new legal immigration from India was completely stopped.

In 1943, Chinese obtained right of naturalization, so there was a possibility for a legislative solution for Indians too. Indian community activists like J.J. Singh, Dr. Anup Singh, Syud Hossain, Krishanalal Shridharani, Haridas Muzumdar, Mubarak Ali Khan, Taraknath Das relentlessly lobbied with the elected representatives of the American people for the grant of civil rights to the nationals of India who were already in the US. Dalip Singh Saund raised funds from the California Sikh farming community for the lobbying effort. J.J. Singh, president of India League of America, persuaded two congressmen to jointly introduce a bill for US citizenship for Indian nationals. The bill was backed by some major newspapers as also by some prominent Americans including well known author and Noble Laureate Pearl S. Buck.

Fortunately, President Truman took special interest in the passage of Luce-Cellar bill which was finally approved by both Houses of Congress restoring rights of citizenship of Indian nationals in the United States. On July 2, 1946, he signed the bill in the presence of Sardar J.J. Singh and Anup Singh, allowing 100 Indians to become naturalized citizens and another 100 Indians to immigrate every year.

Between 1948 and 1965, many Indian residents of America acquired US citizenship including Dalip Singh Saund. Active for some time in the

Democratic Party, Saund successfully ran for US Congress, becoming the first Indian/Asian to get elected to a major political office in North America. He served in Congress for three terms. J.J. Singh, Dr. Anup Singh and Syud Hossain had gone back to live in free India.

India’s Independence Movement

A new generation of Indian activists in USA eschewed the Gadarites sword and wielded the power of the pen.

A prominent Indian leader, Lala Lajpat Rai, came to the US in 1914 to elicit American support for the freedom movement. He founded the Indian Home Rule League in 1917 in New York and in 1918 started publishing Young India. He also wrote for the American media, cultivated contacts with intellectuals and gained the support of wide audience of Americans sympathetic towards the cause of India’s freedom. Unfortunately, he left for India in 1920.

Dalip Singh Saund, a Ph.D. in mathematics from Berkley, continued lobbying efforts in Washington, DC for India and Indian causes. Anup Singh, Ph.D in Political Science from Harvard, started the National Committee for India’s Freedom in Washington and published a magazine Voice of India. J. J. Singh was a member of the Indian National Congress before coming to the United States in 1926. An importer of Indian goods, in 1940 he became president of India League of America. He also expanded its membership base to welcome Americans, including Nobel Prize winning author Pearl S. Buck. He convinced significant sections of the American public, including members of the US Congress that the time had come for India to be liberated. Returning to India, Dr. Anup Singh became a member of Rajya Sabha. Syud Hossain became ambassador of India to Egypt. Taraknath Das taught in Columbia University in New York.

After India’s Independence

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After India's independence, United States became the preferred destination for students interested in higher education. Indian students started seeking admission for the master's or Ph.D. programs in American universities. After obtaining higher degrees, many were offered jobs in research or teaching at the universities and an opportunity for US green Card, considered lifetime achievement trophy then. However, prior to the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, the number of Indian immigrants stayed very small.

The liberalized law increased the per country quota to 20,000 people per year and Indians started coming here in thousands in search of educational and employment opportunities. The increased quota resulted in the exponential growth in the number of Indian immigrants.

The 1965 Immigration Act provided a "Family preference" quota under which immigrants and citizens could sponsor their close relatives. With the arrival of relatives from 1980s onward, the demographics of Indian community began to change from solely professionals to include semi-skilled and less qualified immigrants.

The 1984 Operation Bluestar at the Golden Temple in Amritsar spurred an exodus of young Sikhs from India, many landing in the USA. Several applied for political asylum or found other ways to obtain legal status.

Over a period of time, many Indian immigrants have worked their way up the ladder in their chosen occupation or profession. Many have generated vast fortunes. They have made laudable contributions in various ways to their adopted country while also contributing significantly to the resurgence of India. Indian Americans make up less than 1% of the US population, but far beyond their numbers they have

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made an indelible impression on the professional and business landscape of America.

The large growth in the Indian American community has spread across many parts of the country, in particular the New York tri-state area, greater Los Angeles, Silicon Valley in Northern California, Boston and Chicago.

The achievements and affluence of Indian Americans attracted the Indian political and religious leaders who started making frequent visits here to try to solicit money, knowledge and skills as well as the political clout of Indians settled in the US. India's leading political parties started their overseas units in the US: Indian National Overseas Congress while Bharatiya Janata Party has Overseas Friends of BJP.

Political empowerment

Every American President makes several appointments of people on the basis of their support for the President's goals and policies. In 1987, an Indian community activist, Dr. Joy Cherian was appointed the US Commissioner of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. It was the first high ranking appointment of an Asian by a US President. Later came Dr. RajenAnand (Executive Director of Center for Nutrition Policy), Bobby Jindal (Assistant Secretary of Health) and many others in high official positions.

Indian Americans do not form a significant "voting bloc" but they started taking an active role in both Democrat and Republican political parties. They began organizing fund raising events for political candidates at city, county, state and federal levels. Some ambitious Indian Americans proactively engaged themselves in the political process of their adopted country. They had no constituency in any part of the country where only Indians could elect one of their own. But they had a role model in Dalip.

Singh Saund who in 1956 was elected to the U.S. Congress from a congressional district with a negligible number of Indian American votes. In 2004, Oxford-educated Bobby Jindal who was born of Punjabi immigrant parents in the USA, was elected United States Congressman from Louisiana. In 2007, he was elected as first Indian American Governor of a state. Nikki Randhawa Haley, a Sikh businesswoman was elected as member of South Carolina State Assembly in 2004. She was elected governor of the state in 2010. President Donald Trump chose her as the US ambassador to the UN with a cabinet level position.

These profile of the Indian ethnic community has been rising. The Indian American lobby on the Capitol Hill is also increasingly becoming effective and showed measurable result at the passage of Indo-US Nuclear Deal by the US Congress during President George W. Bush's time.

Retaining religious and cultural traditions

In almost all parts of the globe where Indians have gone and settled, they have taken Indian culture with them. Thus, there is awareness of India's culture, be it in the form of yoga, meditation, movies, music, fashion, or food, it is widely known and accepted.

For Sikhs particularly, religious beliefs are an integral part of their lives. In the beginning, the settlers in California practiced their culture, religion, and traditions privately in the absence of a common place like a gurdwara. But in 1912 the first Sikh temple in the country was established in Stockton, CA, coinciding with the 426th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, founder of the Sikh faith. In 1948, a second gurdwara came up 500 miles away in El Centro, CA. Today, Sikhs have built gurdwaras in almost every part of the US, including New York and New Jersey, and hold congregations on a regular basis.

There are many religious festivals celebrated with great enthusiasm by different ethnic groups from India. Diwali, the festival of lights, is the best known of them in the United States. In 2003, President George W. Bush agreed to the long-standing demand by the Indian community and celebrated Diwali at the White House in the presence of several invited Indian community leaders. In 2009, Barack Obama became the first sitting US President to light a "diya" in a White House Diwali ceremony for the festival of lights. In communicating his warm greetings at the occasion, he remarked that Diwali marked the return of the Lord Ram from exile when small lamps lit his way home. In Jainism, the occasion celebrates the attainment of Nirvana by Lord Mahavir while in Sikhism, Diwali is a celebration of freedom for Guru HarGobind, the religion's sixth guru.

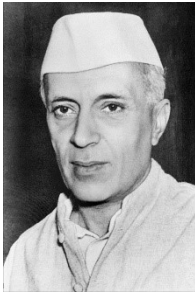
Vaisakhi, like Diwali, is celebrated with equal fervor both as a religious function and as a harvest festival in many cities. Some cities, particularly Los Angeles and New York, organize Vaisakhi Sikh parades along with religious celebrations attended by thousands of people.

About the author

Inder Singh regularly writes and speaks on Indian Diaspora. He is the author of The Gadar Heroics – life sketches of over 50 Gadar heroes. He is the former Chairman of Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO). He was president of GOPIO from 2004-2009, president of National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) from 1988-92 and chairman from 1992-96. He was founding president of Federation of Indian Associations (FIA) in Southern California. He can be reached at indersingh-usa@hotmail.com

Indian Leaders after Independence

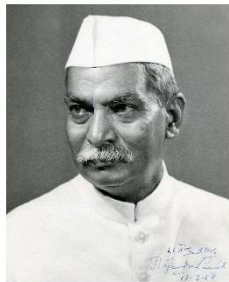
India's First Prime Minister: Jawaharlal Nehru



Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), was the first prime minister of independent India and stayed in office from the establishment of the country as an independent nation in 1947 until his death in 1964. of 1947 to 64. He is considered to be the architect of the modern Indian nation-state: a sovereign, socialist, secular, and democratic republic. In foreign affairs, he became noted for his nonaligned policies, keeping India equidistant from the US and Soviet blocs. He was also one of the principal leaders of India's freedom movement in the 1930s and '40s and the right-hand man of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation. Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi and grandson Rajiv Gandhi also rose to become prime ministers later, and both were assassinated.

First President: Rajendra Prasad

Pt Rajendra Prasad (1884–1963) was the first President of India, in office from 1950 to 1962. A political leader, and lawyer by profession, Prasad joined the Indian National Congress during the Indian Independence Movement and became a major leader from the region of Bihar. Upon independence in 1947, Prasad was elected as President of the Constituent Assembly of India, which prepared the Constitution of India and served as its provisional parliament. As President of the country, Prasad established a tradition of non-partisanship and independence for the office-bearer and retired from Congress party politics. Although a ceremonial head of state, he encouraged the development of education in India and advised the Nehru government on several occasions.



Manmohan Singh: PM who opened Indian economy

Manmohan Singh (1932-) is an Indian economist and politician who served as the Prime Minister of India from 2004 to 2014. The first Sikh in office, he was also the first prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru to be re-elected after completing a full five-year term. A doctorate in economics from Oxford, Singh worked for the UN during 1966–69. In 1991, he was made Finance Minister by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and carried out structural reforms that liberalized India's economy. In 2004, when the Congress-led UPA came to power, Singh assumed the PM post, executing several key legislations and projects, including the Rural Health Mission, Unique Identification Authority, Rural Employment Guarantee scheme and Right to Information Act.



Narendra Modi: Current Prime Minister



Narendra Modi (1950-) is serving as the 14th and current Prime Minister of India since 2014. He was the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 to 2014. Since taking office, Modi's administration has tried to raise FDI in the Indian economy, increased spending on infrastructure, and attempted to improve efficiency in the bureaucracy. He has also been noted for frequent foreign travels to improve relations with various countries.

Navtej Singh Sarna has been India's envoy to the United States since November 2016 and has been instrumental in strengthening India-US relationship and increasing bilateral trade. He has also served as India's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. He has also written non-fiction and fiction books



Darshan Singh Bagga

Donald J. Trump of the Indian Community

Mr. Darshan Singh Bagga has been involved with several prominent religious and community organizations as founder and donor, but he has left his stamp – literally his name -- on a few buildings in New York and Long Island. He had built for himself 300,000 square feet in New York City and Long Island. Honorable Congressman Joe Crowley honored him as the “Donald J. Trump of the Indian American Community”.

Bagga Tower, Rego Park: In 1986, he acquired a single story shopping center in Rego Park, NY. While building the 10-floor Bagga Tower, he had an amendment passed to New York law, allowing tax exemption for further building on an existing structure. The amendment has since benefitted thousands of people.



Bagga Plaza I, Syosset:

Before he took over what is now Bagga Plaza I in Woodbury-Syosset area in 2002, it was a property lying fallow. He more than doubled the built up area of the 6-acre mall and rented out a large portion to a Marshalls and Petco, putting a shine on the mall.



Bagga Plaza II in Hicksville, NY: The land was bought in 2002, with a dream to make Hicksville as the heart of Little India. This space was vacant for more than 14 years as a dumping yard. It is now a beautiful space with plants and flowers



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