

## **GRATITUDE & CAVEAT**

This article by Mr. Darshan Singh Tatla on Baba Teja Singh Ji Maharaj, *Mastuana Sahib Wale*, is part of a book first published in 2005. The uploading of this article on *Mastuana Wale* on Scribd is the result of strenuous efforts of a young faithful devotee Darwesh Singh, for wider circulation among the Sikh and other faithful community. We are thankful to Mr. Tatla for this informative piece on part of Baba Ji's life and spiritual journey before he left for Sachkhand to reside eternally at the Lotus Feet of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji Maharaj.

The readers however, should read the article with a caveat. That is, Mr. Tatla's unfortunate misunderstanding that a Saint of the stature of Baba Teja Singh Ji Maharaj, a blessed soul by Baba Attar Singh Ji Maharaj Ji *Mastuana Sahib Wale*, will say "highly inflated" or "unbelievable" facts (*See* footnotes 9 and 26). Here Mr. Tatla missed fundamental understanding of Baba Teja Singh Ji Maharaj. May be that was not his intention. It is absolutely impossible to know any Prophet, Guru, Saint or any enlightened human being with intellectual capabilities of a mind. Similarly, Mr. Tatla's understanding of Baba Teja Singh Ji Maharaj was off. Mr. Tatla may have multiple and different purposes for writing this article, but we are still thankful to him. The caveat is not intended in any way to raise controversies about this article.

Daas,

gurdhyan singh  
June 2009

I have done this *seva* because I felt that the faithful community should be aware of the greatness of Saints and *Mahapurakhs* like Baba Teja Singh Ji Maharaj *Mastuana Wale*. I hope the people who read this article will feel blessed.

Sevadaar,  
darwesh singh,  
8<sup>th</sup> grader, 2009-10,  
Nova Classical Academy,  
St. Paul, MN, USA

mc  
04

# FIVE CENTURIES OF SIKH TRADITION

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Ideology, Society, Politics and Culture

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ESSAYS FOR INDU BANGA

*Edited by*

REETA GREWAL & SHEENA PALL



MANOHAR  
2005

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## Mission Abroad: Sant Teja Singh in the Western World

DARSHAN S. TATLA

Despite the establishment and proliferation of saintly traditions among the Sikhs abroad, few Sikh *sants* have managed to match the contribution of Teja Singh in nurturing and defending overseas Sikhs' faith and interests. As an advocate of racial justice for Canadian Sikhs, Teja Singh played a crucial role in articulating their grievances while establishing several institutions to nurture their faith. Though he is well known as the founder of the first Sikh Gurdwara in Britain, his overseas activities have remained largely undocumented. This paper describes and assesses his pioneering role among the Sikhs overseas.

### I

By and large, the contribution of Sikh *sants* remains a neglected field of Punjab historical and social studies. Apart from much slandering of Sant Bhindranwale's role in the tragedy of 1984,<sup>1</sup> there are few analytical or historical studies of various *sants* of the Sikh Panth, despite the fact that in the twentieth century Sikh *sants* became a predominant force within the community: Randhir Singh, Fateh Singh, Harchand Singh Longowal, Atar Singh Reruwale, Atar Singh Mastuana, Ishar Singh Rarewal, Nand Singh Nanaksar, Chanan Singh, Wazir Singh Harkhowal, among others. In most cases, only some hagiographic accounts

are available, usually written by a devout follower of a particular *sant*.<sup>2</sup>

Teja Singh was obviously a product of Western style education which affected largely the urban Sikh population, but he came under the influence of a rural Sikh *sant*, Atar Singh, and spent much of his life following his mission. Atar Singh in turn was one of several Sikh *sants* who roamed rural Punjab, presenting a close parallel with the Singh Sabha movement among the urban Sikhs. Two other enduring traditions of Nirankari and Namdhari movements were also established by *sants* prior to the Singh Sabha era. It may be reasonable to assume that the twentieth century Sikh *sant* traditions were largely popular among rural peasantry from which had sprung most of the Sikh *sants* in the previous century.<sup>3</sup>

Teja Singh (1877-1967) was born in a Mehta Khatri family at Balowali (now in Pakistan) on 14 May 1877. His parents belonged to a petty trading class. Though *sahajdhari* Sikhs, they named their child Niranjan Singh. His grandfather, Nanak Chand, was a shopkeeper in this ancient village; his grandmother, Chand Kaur, came from a lineage of Sikh ancestors, one of them being a scribe of the holy scripture. Niranjan's mother Sadda Kaur was nurtured as a staunch Sikh, while his father Ralla Singh was an educated person with a diploma in public health. The household was rather small with just two children, Niranjan and his sister, Narain Devi.

With a diploma titled H.M.H. from Lahore Medical College, Ralla Singh held a government post. Due to frequent transfers, his young son's education followed his postings in different towns. Halfway in his middle school education at Fazilka Municipal Board School, his father was transferred to Lahore central jail; Niranjan joined the D.A.V. School there. Before completing his middle school education, he was married to Bishan Kaur. He then went to Gujranwala Mission School. After High School examination, he obtained the B.A. degree in 1896, gaining distinction in chemistry. In 1900 he obtained the LL.B. degree and was licensed by the Punjab Chief Court to practise as a lawyer. Diligent and keen on higher education, Niranjan Singh added an M.A. degree to his qualifications in 1901.

Niranjan Singh started his legal practice in Gujranwala in partnership with an advocate, Lala Kishan Lal. Within a month, however, he felt disillusioned with his profession. Having passed the Northern Indian Salt Revenue Official Grade Examination, he accepted the post of Assistant Superintendent in the Salt Department at Sambar; he was later shifted to Rajanpur in Agra Division. But his restless mind was still looking for a more satisfying profession. He wrote a letter to Sardar Sundar Singh Majithia, asking for a suitable post for someone who had M.A. and LL.B. degree to his credit. Majithia immediately offered him the post of Vice-Principal of Khalsa College, Amritsar. Teja Singh's English boss, Assistant Commissioner F.M. Buckley, granted him leave without pay, making it easy for him to leave the government post.

Teja Singh took over as Vice-Principal of Khalsa College, Amritsar, in 1904. Soon he became its Acting Principal when the English Principal left for Britain for a year. At religious gatherings and congregations in Amritsar, Niranjan Singh met many Sikh and other denominational *sants*. Through one such *sant*, Sham Singh, he eventually attended a congregation of Atar Singh who became a beacon for all his later life.

Sant Atar Singh (1865-1927) had enlisted as a soldier in a Sikh regiment to be released after a brief period. Due to his intense religious convictions, he adopted the life of a roving missionary and began touring the countryside, visiting newly established Sikh schools and colleges. In one such itinerary, he visited Khalsa College, Amritsar, and had a meeting with Niranjan Singh. Immediately they were drawn together and a life-long rapport grew between the two. In 1906, Niranjan Singh was baptized by Atar Singh and given a new name Teja Singh. With this transformation started his career of lifelong service as a roving Singh missionary.

## II

As an ex-soldier-turned-*sant*, Atar Singh valued education and visualised a future for Sikhs through Western educated leaders and intellectuals.<sup>4</sup> He persuaded Teja Singh to go abroad for higher education. Besides moral support, he gave him Rs. 125 for

the journey and asked him to observe four rules: (a) keep the five Ks,<sup>5</sup> (b) establish Gurdwaras abroad, (c) prefer spiritual life to worldly goods, (d) and not to meddle or argue unnecessarily with others.<sup>6</sup> Teja Singh was accompanied by his wife and two young children on his overseas voyage, which was quite an uncommon practice among emigrating Sikhs at the time. Three other Sikhs joined him for foreign education; Amar Singh, Dharma Anant Singh, and Hari Singh Basra. On 6 August 1906, they boarded a ship from Bombay and landed at Marseilles. They boarded a train to Bologne and crossed the English Channel to reach Folkestone on 24 August. Their first stop was East London where they rented rooms for temporary accommodation.

Teja Singh was enrolled for a science degree at the University of London, simultaneously attending lectures for a teacher training course. His companions enrolled in other courses. Hari Singh Basra joined Edinburgh University for M.A., Dharma Anant Singh enrolled for electricity training course in a London college, and Amar Singh went to Manchester for a textile and clothing course. All of them resolved to keep their hair intact despite all difficulties.

In his autobiography, Teja Singh narrates that another Sikh student taunted him, saying that 'Sikh students with turbans' could not study at the Cambridge University as cap and gown were the custom there. Whether or not this was meant as a mere provocation by a fellow student, it prompted Teja Singh to apply to Cambridge. He met a tutor surnamed Jackson at Downing College who heard Teja Singh's strange story and offered him a place on Science Tripos, reminding him to wear the black gown with his turban: 'this was the first occasion when a Sikh was seen around Cambridge with his turban'.<sup>7</sup> More Sikh students joined Cambridge, leading to the formation of the Khalsa Jatha of British Isles under Teja Singh's inspiration. The news was duly published in the *Khalsa Samachar*, edited by Bhai Vir Singh at Amritsar.<sup>8</sup>

The lure of America constantly nagged Teja Singh. He applied to Columbia University's Teachers Education course and was pleasantly surprised with the response of admission and a scholarship of \$150. He decided to join Columbia without completing his Cambridge course. First, he wrote to Sant Atar Singh, seeking permission for the American voyage and mentioning that in America he might help his Sikh brethren whose

plight was attracting some notice in the Punjab newspapers. While the Sant consented, Sundar Singh Majithia cautioned him against meddling with the political affairs of the Sikhs overseas.

In 1908, Teja Singh enrolled at Columbia University for a teachers' training course. Sailing from Portsmouth, he reached New York in seven days and observed the 'strange city' with houses over twenty storeys high; the 'turban almost fell as one looked up'. He found Columbia 'pleasantly situated' on the Hudson river. He took residence in the university hostel and called his wife and children from Cambridge. He took up 'education for young children', 'school administration', and a course in literature on the 'prominent poets under Queen Victoria's reign'. During a lecture on Kipling's humour, Teja Singh had a discussion with a visiting professor from Dalhousie University, Canada, who suggested to Teja Singh to deliver a lecture on contemporary India. Teja Singh delivered two lectures; the second lecture was on Guru Nanak. It was well attended, and noted by the local and national press.<sup>9</sup> As a result, some Americans expressed interest in Teja Singh's eastern philosophy and asked him to form a local group for meetings. The news of this lecture spread to some Canadian Sikhs via Tarknath Das – an educated Bengali exile who had extensive contacts with the British Columbia Sikhs.<sup>10</sup> Balwant Singh, a *granthi* at Vancouver Gurdwara, was actively searching for an educated Sikh to assist the Sikhs in their representation to the Canadian Government. Within three weeks, Balwant Singh contacted Teja Singh and requested him to come over.

On receiving the fare from Balwant Singh, Teja Singh travelled by train through Montreal, Ottawa and Winnipeg to Vancouver. Describing his journey from New York to Vancouver he praises America's excellent railway service which included 'provision for clean bedding for one dollar'. In Vancouver, Teja Singh was duly impressed by the Gurdwara, a wooden structure of two storeys, with a spatial hall measuring 35 by 60 feet. On the following Sunday, many Sikhs called on the new visitor, including Bhag Singh, an ex-soldier, and Wariam Singh, a Sikh from Shanghai, who was well known for hymn-singing. They worked some 8 miles away at Millside factory as baptized Sikhs and had contributed substantially to the building of the Gurdwara. On

Sundays, be it rain or storm, the two would sing hymns beating *dholak* (drum) through bazaars, attracting considerable curiosity from the white people.

Teja Singh took the opportunity to visit some Sikh workers' residential camps and was duly impressed by their collective living, cooking and sharing of *langar*. Near the Gurdwara, Badan Singh Mahiwal was well known for organizing workers' free *langar*. Teja Singh also visited some factories of Port Moody and extolled Millside workers who strictly observed the *rahit* and recited *nitnem* as *taksali* (staunch) Sikhs. Gaining such positive impression of the British Columbia Sikhs, Teja Singh returned to New York via Seattle, Portland, San Francisco and Chicago after four weeks.

In New York, American disciples were waiting for him. Among them was C. Crawford who had adopted Sikh meditation in earnest. Teja Singh named him Himmat Das and met him almost everyday. One morning, Crawford narrated the story of an impending misfortune about his shares in Jackson Ville gold mine. His partner wanted to knock him out and he desperately needed \$50,000 to keep his partnership. In return for raising cash, he was willing to donate a quarter of million dollars' worth of shares for the Sikh community. Teja Singh remarked jokingly that his wealth stood at just 5 cents. Crawford took his cap off and 'placed it at his feet'. Teja Singh assured him that he would enquire from his newly found Canadian Sikhs if they could help. Crawford deposited 25 pounds for Teja Singh's railway fare to Vancouver and placed a promissory note of 2,50,000 shares in the gold mine in return for raising \$50,000 cash. On the following day, Teja Singh boarded the Canadian Pacific Railways for Vancouver. On the train, a Canadian passenger told Teja Singh how his Sikh brothers in British Columbia were in dire trouble; there were plans to send them to Honduras where there was unemployment, and the work conditions and wages were poor. They would not be able to earn the return fare, and there was yellow fever. Teja Singh arrived at the local Gurdwara in Vancouver and every one was surprised at his sudden appearance. After saying prayer in the main hall he met Wariam Singh, Bhag Singh, Badan Singh Mahiwal, Badan Singh Kahri and Balwant Singh, the *granthi*, who apprised him of the misfortunes of the



British Columbia Sikhs and how the media were maligning them as 'idle and dirty'.<sup>11</sup> They emphasized that the reality was quite different. The chief difficulty was their inability to convey their viewpoint to the white people. They told him how the community, within the last three or four years, had built a Gurdwara at the cost of \$15,000. There was hardly any unemployment amongst Sikh workers who earned around \$1.5 or \$2 per day. Many Sikh workers lived together in camps, cooked together, and they were God-fearing and clean people. Teja Singh was also told how a government commissioner from Ottawa had taken Satnagar Singh and Sham Singh Dogra to British Honduras with a proposal to settle Sikh immigrants there. Hearing their woes Teja Singh could only reiterate that the Guru would protect them and justice would prevail. He told them that his immediate mission was about a financial deal offered by Crawford and suggested that a mining company should be registered by some leading Sikhs and some land acquired for the community's collective use.

The group approved of the plan, and Teja Singh's training in legal matters came in handy. On the day following, he contacted a legal firm, drafted articles and rules for the company and registered it as Guru Nanak Mining Company within a week.<sup>12</sup> Then he took stock of the media's propaganda against the Sikhs. He hired a large hall and delivered two forceful lectures, defending the Sikhs and their viewpoint. He spoke like a man who believed that he had a sacred mission to perform. The *Daily Province* published a full front page article on the 'mystery and power of Teja Singh', regarded by his people as 'Demi-God'.<sup>13</sup> As a result of this publicity, Sikhs gained a few Canadian sympathizers. Some white Canadians became interested in Sikhism, and some of them became friendly with local Sikhs. The local media also mellowed somewhat. Knapp, who was a real estate dealer, was deputed to acquire suitable land by the sea, measuring about 250 acres. He came up with an offer of land at Eagle Harbour. This was duly inspected and after approval bought for \$25,000, with \$10,000 paid in advance. A 10-acre plot was also bought and earmarked for a Gurdwara with provision for a sacred pool. \$15,000 were sent to Crawford and shares were acquired in his company.

After concluding these deals, Teja Singh called a conference to

counter the media propaganda against the Sikh workers. For this gathering, he invited not only the Sikh workers but also many prominent white people. Citing figures about Sikhs' employment, wages and their general prosperity, Teja Singh delivered public lectures, questioning the media's portrayal of Sikhs as poor and unclean. He informed his audience that Sikhs had just bought a large tract of land, acquired shares in a mining company, and in the last few years built an elegant Gurdwara at the cost of \$15,000. He also laid emphasis on Sikhism as a young and dynamic faith with a noble mission. He further warned that forcing the Sikhs to British Honduras would be a gross act of injustice. This lecture received considerable publicity and eventually gained some sympathy among the white people.

Satnagar Singh and Sham Singh returned from the British Honduras, and Teja Singh requested them to report their findings to the congregation in the Gurdwara on the following Sunday. Many Sikhs were aware of a scheme to send them to the British Honduras. Over a thousand of them turned up in the Gurdwara to hear the fact-finding mission's report. The gist of what Satnagar Singh and Sham Singh told the congregation was: 'British Honduras was a poor country where the already settled Hindustanis were suffering because of poor wages, lack of facilities and a common disease of yellow fever.' A consensus emerged immediately in the congregation to refuse the government's proposal, and these deliberations were reported by the local paper on the following day. The government's move stood effectively pre-empted and rejected. By now Teja Singh was fully involved in the British Columbia Sikh affairs. He abandoned the idea of education and asked his family from New York to join him. He arranged a short tour to meet his family at the US border with Canada and arranged their transfer on to a Canadian railway to Vancouver.

Teja Singh received a letter from the authorities, complaining about the pre-emptory discussion of the Sikhs about the British Honduras proposal without hearing a detailed report. Teja Singh replied that Sikhs were willing to discuss the commissioner's report, and suggested possible dates on the following Sundays. The commissioner arrived at the Gurdwara, but on the advice of Hopkinson, a covert police officer, and Wright, a priest, he had



arguments regarding the appropriate form for discussion with the gathered Sikhs, and left amidst confusion without reading his report. The Federal Government then sent for Brigadier General Swayne, Governor of British Honduras, who had experience of India and could speak Hindustani. On his visit to Vancouver, he sent a message to persuade the Sikhs regarding their good prospects in British Honduras, but drew a negative response. In his report to Ottawa, the governor blamed Teja Singh for his overblown reaction and language, but conceded that he was substantially right about Sikhs' unwillingness to settle in the colony. He also underlined that if forced the reaction of the Sikhs in the British Indian army could be adverse.<sup>14</sup> With the governor's statement, the Canadian Government shelved the proposal and the Canadian Sikhs' worry concerning British Honduras was laid to rest.<sup>15</sup>

With a major issue amicably settled, Teja Singh undertook his missionary work in earnest. Forming a *jatha* of five devout Sikhs, consisting of Balwant Singh, Wariam (Sundar) Singh, Hari Singh and Wariam Singh, a programme was chalked out to visit the Sikh workers' camps across the Pacific Coast. They wanted to persuade the Sikhs to become baptized by taking *amrit*. After sailing on a ship to Victoria, Balwant Singh guided the *jatha* to a nearby camp. Although most workers were drunk, the *jatha* was cordially received, given food and lodging. In the morning, the *jatha* sang hymns and meditation was arranged. On Teja Singh's passionate appeal, almost twenty were baptized on the same morning. They also agreed to offer one month's wages for building a Gurdwara at Victoria. A committee was formed for the project with Teja Singh as its leader, and within months land was purchased through Robert William Clark, an estate agent, whose wife had become interested in Sikhism. On her initiative, Teja Singh delivered a lecture at the Victoria Hall and Mrs Clark published his pamphlets on the Sikh faith.

From Victoria, the *jatha* arrived in Seattle after obtaining the required passports and travel permits. Teja Singh gave a lecture at Washington University, attended by many Hindustani students, including Swami Satdev. The *jatha* then left for Portland where many saw mills employed Sikh workers. Usually these Sikh workers lived like a 'commune', sharing food and living in one

large communal hall. Here they had also kept a copy of a small-sized *Guru Granth* for worship. Many agreed to be baptized. The *jatha* then met Giani Partap Singh, working on a railway line, who was later appointed Jathedar of Keshgarh Sahib. The *jatha* managed to baptize a number of Sikhs. On their way back to Vancouver, they came to know of Doaba Sikh farm workers. Only a few of them agreed to be baptized. As they reached the Vancouver station, a Sikh named Harnam Singh thrashed Balwant Singh and Teja Singh for some reason. Balwant Singh wanted to hit back, but eventually both forgave the offending man. On the following Sunday, Balwant Singh read a report on their mission to various Sikh workers' camps at the Gurdwara.

The Canadian Sikhs had already formed the Khalsa Diwan Society in Vancouver in October 1907. Teja Singh formalized this through registration on 13 March 1909. Within weeks of the *jatha's* return to Vancouver, a letter came from Plesantan Sikhs in California to baptize them. Teja Singh led the *jatha* to Portland and reached Plesantan where Sikh workers felt very excited by their arrival and many were baptized.

### III

Feeling that his mission among the Canadian Sikhs was over, Teja Singh took a trip to London, accompanied by his young son Hari Singh. Renting a room in Hampstead Heath, he sent letters to well known Sikhs in England and Scotland as also to many London students with a proposal for a Gurdwara in London. Before he could hold a meeting, he received an urgent call and fare from Bhag Singh, asking him to return to Vancouver immediately. Teja Singh took out a berth on Mauritanian to New York, then a train to Chicago. There he met Rev. Jenkins Lloyd Jones in the main city cathedral who invited Teja Singh to a world religions conference being organized in Germany. Teja Singh also met Henry Ford, proprietor of the Ford cars in the Utah State. He presented his card to Ford's secretary and was allowed to meet him. Teja Singh enquired from Henry Ford about his wealth and asked whether it had brought him real satisfaction. He advised him to donate part of his wealth for good causes and blessed him with a *simarna* (rosary) for mental peace.

In Vancouver, Teja Singh discovered that he was implicated in some irregularities in Guru Nanak Mining Company by the auditor's report. Raja Singh, secretary of the trust, also levelled charges through the chairman. A meeting was summoned to scrutinize the accounts in the presence of the trustees and the auditor, and a detailed account sheet was prepared in English and Punjabi. The meeting ended with a heated exchange between Bhag Singh and Raja Singh. Due to difference of opinion among the trustees, a decision was taken to dispose of the properties. Consequently, Jackson Ville gold mine shares were sold and \$19,000 recovered from Crawford. The land at Eagle Harbour was sold despite Teja Singh's advice that its value would appreciate in future.

Teja Singh arrived in London after a short stop in Chicago where Rev. Jones confirmed dates for the Berlin Conference and invited him as a delegate. He went to the conference from London. On the way he met L. Vasvani, a prominent Brahmo Samaj activist and some Buddhist delegates at Cologne. After a tour of the Rhine Valley, the delegates were taken to Berlin. Teja Singh's lecture on Sikhism impressed many participants. Returning from the conference, he called a meeting of Sikhs in London. He planned to offer baptism at the meeting, but he could find only four baptized Sikhs for the initiating rites. Also, Teja Singh was short of money. Both the problems found resolution 'through providence's kindness' when Tara Singh from the Malaya States Guides, who had arrived in London and called on his wife in his absence, offered 20 pounds cash and became the fifth *amritdhari* Sikh for the baptizing *jatha*. As the Sikhs gathered on the fixed day, Teja Singh made a strong appeal for establishing a Gurdwara in London by buying freehold property. Others felt that it would be an arduous task to raise 2,500 pounds. Teja Singh attributed such negative attitude to half-believing Sikhs' worldly wisdom. In any case, the 'Khalsa was deprived of the honour of having a permanent religious shrine in London'. At the baptism ceremony, Dharma Anant Singh and Narain Singh were baptized; the latter was nominated as secretary of a committee formed for the proposed Gurdwara. Narain Singh promised to collect donations from India and, after making an appeal through the *Khalsa Samachar* and at the Sikh Educational Conference, he raised

about Rs. 30,000.<sup>16</sup> The biggest benefactor was the Maharaja of Patiala, Bhupinder Singh, who promised Rs. 1,25,000 and offered 1,000 pounds immediately.<sup>17</sup> At another meeting of the Gurdwara committee, a 60 years leasehold property near Shepherd Bush was bought and a Gurdwara was established in this house.

Teja Singh now remembered his original purpose of obtaining higher education. He dashed to Cambridge and met Jackson at Downing College in the hope that the college would allow him to take one more term to complete the requirements for a degree. But Jackson rejected him, saying that the university had 'a full report of your work among Canadian Hindus especially of your role in lobbying against the British Honduras option', and that the senate had 'decided not to award you any degree even if all requirements were fulfilled'. Teja Singh decided to return to America, borrowing forty pounds from Muhammad Qasim, an old friend.<sup>18</sup> Accompanied by Tara Singh on the ship to New York, he met the president of Columbia Teachers' College and requested him to allow him to complete his unfinished course. Here again, the president refused, saying that he was not a student and that a report from Vancouver had reached the college; he could not be admitted for the degree.

Teja Singh now thought of his admission to Harvard. But he had only 15 dollars left with him. Still, he took a flight to Boston, rented a house for the family and enquired at the university office. The university offered him admission, asking for 150 dollars as fees payable in two instalments, the first 90 dollars immediately and the rest in the second term. Teja Singh bought some cloth from the market and his wife set to make cushion covers. Selling it in the market for 9 dollars, Teja Singh paid the house rent and bought more cloth for 5 dollars. This household economy enabled them to survive while some financial support came via his New York connections. He was given 25 dollars for a lecture, while a woman admirer posted him 50 dollars. He got through the first term. Payment of the second instalment proved difficult. A letter from the university arrived, banning him from further lectures until the fees were paid. Teja Singh asked his wife if she had entertained any 'greedy' ideas about his future after education. She had, dreaming of a plum job on their return to the Punjab. Now 'they both offered a prayer and asked for forgiveness'

promising that his career 'will be for the service of the community and the *sant*'. They returned home, hoping to ask a white woman for loan of sixty dollars. They had just entered the house when someone knocked at the door. It was his English literature teacher, Bliso Perry, who had heard about his financial difficulty and offered him 60 dollars, saying that 'when you can afford it, help another student'.<sup>19</sup> Teja Singh managed to obtain M.A. degree from Harvard in March 1911.

Preparing to leave for the Punjab, Teja Singh asked his wife to leave ahead for the Far East with a mission to preach. She left for California with the younger son Hari Singh. She was asked by Jawala Singh to stay at his Holtsville farmland, as it was unwise for a woman to travel alone. With his elder son, Teja Singh boarded the train from Boston by pawning the gold watch given to him by his Maharashtrain friend, D.G. Panse. After paying for the ticket, they had 50 cents to sustain themselves during travel for the next six days. They 'survived on bread and water alone'. Stepping down at Stockton, they joined the family on Jawala Singh's ranch.

Jawala Singh and Wasakha Singh led a traditional Sikh life in their California homes. At the farm, *langar* was prepared and shared by all. After the evening prayer on Teja Singh's suggestion, a proposal to build a Gurdwara was considered. Next morning, Teja Singh drafted a letter, calling upon all Sikh workers for a gathering at the farm. At this meeting, a committee was set up for the proposed Gurdwara at Stockton, besides baptizing some 25 people, including a reluctant Tara Singh, who had become clean shaven. Wasakha Singh, Jawala Singh, Tara Singh, Bawa Singh and Teja Singh were members of the committee and the latter three then went to collect funds from the other Sikh workers. Within days, a farm with an existing building and a wind operated water pump was bought for \$3,400. Eventually, some \$20,000 were raised for the building. The Gurdwara was to be formally opened on 27 May 1912 in Stockton to become a resting place for the roaming Sikh workers in the Californian valleys.

Jawala Singh offered employment to some workers on his Holtsville farm and many Indian students worked there during holidays. In consultation with Teja Singh, Tarknath Das and Har Dayal paid several visits to the farm in 1912. There was a serious



talk of raising funds for the education of Indians. Jawala Singh offered some money for Guru Gobind Singh scholarships for Indian students at the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>20</sup> A committee comprising of the above three and Dr Arthus Pope of the university selected the first batch of scholars, which included Darisi Chenchiah from Nellore (Mardas), Nand Singh Sihra (Bombay), and Gobind Behari Lal (Delhi), a cousin of Har Dayal's wife. Even Teja Singh briefly enrolled at the university for a Doctor of Literature degree but soon abandoned it.

By this time the issue of families' re-union had become most pressing. Only Teja Singh and Sundar Singh had their families with them while others desperately wanted to bring their families to Canada. Teja Singh was a part of the lobby at Berkeley when Balwant Singh and Bhag Singh arrived with their families at the San Francisco port along with Wariam Singh. Despite strenuous lobbying by Californian Sikhs, they were deported to Shanghai.

Teja Singh conferred with the leading Sikhs of Vancouver, and soon a large meeting was held in the Gurdwara and funds were raised for the representation of the Sikhs' case to the Federal Government. It was agreed that the best course was to take a petition to Ottawa. The delegation to Ottawa consisted of Teja Singh, Sundar Singh, Raja Singh and Rev. L.W. Hall who prepared a comprehensive memorandum with many statistics to argue its case with the Federal Government. The Sikh delegation met the Interior Minister, Robert Rogers, of the newly elected Conservative Government in November 1911.<sup>21</sup> A carefully worded memorandum was presented to him:

We the delegates of the United India League and Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver, B.C. instructed by them make the following representations to your honourable government for all Hindustanis domiciled in Canada or who may be domiciled. ...

Our first claim for consideration at the hands of your honourable government is that we are British subjects, of proven loyalty. More than 90 per cent of these Hindustanis in Canada are Sikhs. With the name Sikh is linked up fidelity and heroic loyalty to the Empire. The Sikhs have always been ready in the past to give willing service to the Empire. A large number of these men now in Canada have seen active service and many among them have medals for special bravery. The questions

involved are not local, as being purely Canadian they are in their very nature Empire questions, and hence must be dealt with from this broad standpoint.

While the minister turned down the delegation's major proposal to withdraw the 'continuous passage' legislation,<sup>22</sup> he showed some sympathy regarding restrictions on the families and children of the Sikhs. The delegation was disappointed in its aim of getting the legislation reversed, or getting concrete concessions for men stranded without families.

Teja Singh was able to establish the second Canadian Gurdwara at Victoria, the provincial capital, which was a major achievement of the community. The land had already been purchased in 1909; Teja Singh got the design prepared, with estimates of cost. Many Sikh workers donated part of their wages for several months and a contractor started work on the site. When Teja Singh's *jatha* returned from California after three months, the Gurdwara building was ready. He made an elaborate plan for its inauguration by organizing a huge procession of Sikhs through the capital. For the opening day, almost four thousand Sikhs lined up, forming a regimental order of four persons in a row, all dressed up in their colourful costumes, some retired soldiers in full regimental gears. A six-wheeler horse drawn carriage with the *Guru Granth Sahib* was in front. Teja Singh joined the carriage with an unsheathed sword and it took five hours for the procession to pass through the city. Canadian spectators were impressed by the gala scene and the event attracted wide coverage in the local media. In the evening, Teja Singh read the accounts relating to the newly constructed Gurdwara which had cost \$25,000. As he announced the shortfall, the assembled Sikhs offered more money to make up the deficit.

The bitter contest over the immigration of families of Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh had changed the atmosphere at the Gurdwara and within the community. They had started from Hong Kong on the understanding that the Minister had agreed to let the families in. Although Teja Singh had told the congregation that the Minister's assurances were ambiguous, many Sikhs assumed that he had failed them. The mission cost \$1,599. As Bhag Singh and Balwant Singh arrived with their families on the

ship, their wives and children were deported and then released on \$2,000 bail pending an appeal to the Minister. The issue was seen as a blatant discrimination to split the families. But the Sikhs had even fewer sympathizers this time.<sup>23</sup>

Teja Singh noted that there were sharp differences on how to tackle the worsening situation. The United India League led by Tarnath Das and Guru Dutt Kumar offered radical solutions in terms of liberation of India, and they were joined by some Sikh workers led by Balwant Singh, the *granthi*, who had a bitter experience at the hands of immigration officials. However, there was hope of getting concession through deputations and representations and the Khalsa Diwan Society thought it wise to send a deputation to London and to India. It consisted of Balwant Singh, Narain Singh and Nand Singh Sihra. Teja Singh prepared the necessary papers for talks. He gave these to Nand Singh Sihra with the advice that no word should be changed, seeking an 'assurance in the presence of *Guru Granth*'.<sup>24</sup>

The changed environment within the community, new managers of Gurdwaras, and perhaps a dwindling circle of admirers who sheltered and supported Teja Singh and his family must have contributed to his decision to leave for the Punjab. In his autobiography he confounds this rational motive by stating that this move was prompted by his younger son, Hari Singh, who had a vision of Sant Atar Singh insisting that the family should leave Canada as soon as possible. Soon an appeal was made for the family's sea fare. From this collection, Teja Singh bought four intermediate class cabin seats on Canadian Pacific Company's ship *Monteagle*, leaving for Yokohama, Japan. After a prayer at the Gurdwara, the family sailed, accompanied by another Sikh passenger, Tarlok (Ishar) Singh.

After clearing all outstanding financial dealings with Canadian Sikhs, Teja Singh had just 40 dollars to spare as the family left Vancouver in December 1912. They were expecting to contact a *jatha* in Yokohama to assist the family's onward travel. But the *jatha* had disbanded, leaving no money for travel. Teja Singh booked a train for Kobe where the *Monteagle* was to stop for 24 hours before leaving for Shanghai. The family reached the port at the last minute. The ship stewards thought they were re-joining



the ship after a visit to the city and allowed them aboard. As the ticket collector arrived later, Teja Singh was summoned by the captain. Teja Singh assured full payment before disembarking and asked the captain to wire the Gurdwara managers in Shanghai.<sup>25</sup> When they disembarked at Shanghai, the family was greeted by two *granthis* who had brought enough cash to pay for the family's fare. To the crew's surprise, several hundred Sikhs stood at the port to greet the family.<sup>26</sup> Teja Singh preached in Shanghai for two weeks. He was given cash and silk cloth used later as *chanani* (ceremonial cloth) for the *Guru Granth* at Mastuana Gurdwara.

Teja Singh left Shanghai after a warm farewell and reached Hong Kong where he delivered sermons. After a week, the family left for Singapore and onwards to Teiping by train. At Teiping he was greeted with enthusiasm by the Sikhs from the Malaya State Guides. Then the family travelled to Ipu and onwards to Penang. His fellow passengers included Gurdit Singh, the veteran of Komagata Maru. Finally, they arrived at Calcutta. When their train reached Ambala, they stepped down to visit Sant Atar Singh, and to offer him presents from the overseas Sikhs.

#### IV

After his return to the Punjab in 1913, education and religion remained the major concerns of Teja Singh. The Akal College at Mastuana was now established as an important institution, with Teja Singh as its founder-principal. He collected donations for the college from the ruling chiefs of the Malwa and the Sikh *sangats* of Burma. He came to be associated with the school established by Babu Teja Singh, known for his advocacy of radical reform in Sikhism, for the education of girls at Bhasaur.<sup>27</sup> During the Gurdwara Reform movement, Teja Singh remained associated with the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee. For some time, he acted as *jathedar* of the Akal Takht. He came to be associated with Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha, which was not appreciated by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.<sup>28</sup> However, Teja Singh's interest in politics remained subordinate to his interest in religion and education. In the 1950s he toured East Africa and South East Asia, giving lectures on Sikhism; he

participated in the World Conference of Religions in Japan in 1956.<sup>29</sup> At this time he revisited North America where he was honoured by the Sikhs for the work he had done for the community in the early twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Before his death in 1965, Teja Singh had founded a school at Barhu in Himachal Pradesh as a model school for Sikh education, and written a biography of Sant Atar Singh.<sup>31</sup>

The career of Teja Singh illustrates some aspects of Sikh renaissance at the beginning of the twentieth century. A product of the newly established Western education in the Punjab, Teja Singh was among several Sikh reformers who played a prominent part in fermenting a new consciousness among the Sikhs. As a highly educated intellectual, he was a participant in and witness to many crucial developments. With a firm belief he saw himself as a missionary for the propagation of Sikhism. During his mission abroad he was able to establish two Gurdwaras in America and one in UK, which was a remarkable achievement in those days. His work among the Sikhs of Vancouver showed him as a sophisticated interpreter of the Sikh viewpoint; he rallied Sikhs around their common cause, and effectively countered the media stereotype of Sikhs as ignorant, rural peasants. With enterprising skills, he was able to project a good image of the Sikhs in the media, and he forced the Canadian politicians and officials to take South Asian concerns seriously. His sojourn abroad unveils a unique picture of the mental and spiritual world of the overseas Sikhs in the first decade of the twentieth century.

## NOTES

1. On the life of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale there are several publications, roughly divided into negative accounts by Hindu journalists and laudatory by Sikhs. See the listings in Darshan Singh Tatla and Ian Talbot, *Punjab*, Oxford: Cilo, 1997.
2. Sant Visakha Singh, *Malwa Itihas*, 4 vols., Kishangarh: published by the author, 1970.
3. The introduction of written media led to the launching of community newspapers and the English press necessitated a re-interpretation of the past heritage of the Punjabis. This began to take the form of religious revivalism. An urgent issue was the challenge thrown up by Christian missionaries who converted some lower class Punjabis to their faith. The

Punjabi elite responded by establishing schools and colleges leading to religious fervour. Punjabi Hindus were much swayed by Swami Dayanand who established the Arya Samaj, while Muslims established their Anjumans. In each community, many reformers emerged to propagate their respective faiths. Baba Ram Singh led the Namdhari sect into a virtual rebellion against the British rule, and he was deported. Singh Sabhas were established in Amritsar and Lahore before the 1890s. Parallel to the Singh Sabha movement, which was more or less an urban phenomenon, there arose many saintly lineages in the rural Punjab. Preaching to the Sikh peasantry, the most prominent *sants* of this period included Atar Singh Reruwale, Atar Singh Mastuana, Nand Singh Kaleran (which later proliferated into many other branches), Ishar Singh Rarewale and others.

4. For the life of Atar Singh, see Teja Singh, *Jivan Kahani, Raj Yogi Sant Atar Singh Ji Maharaj de vrosae sewak Sant Teja Singh ji di apni kalm ton likhi hoi*, 2 vols., Barhu Sahib: Kalgidhar Trust, 2000.
5. Kesh, Kangha, Kara, Kachh, and Kirpan were prescribed for a baptized Sikh.
6. If Sant Atar Singh told Teja Singh that as an educated person he should not unnecessarily get into arguments with others it makes sense. But the Punjabi version literally translates as 'lecture if you wish but do not if you do not wish'.
7. Teja Singh's residence was at 33 Montague Road, Cambridge.
8. For the news on Khalsa Jatha of British Isles and its constitution, *Khalsa Samachar*, 27 October 1910, vol. 10, no. 46, p. 7.
9. Teja Singh mentions a crowd of ten thousand listeners, which seems highly inflated.
10. On Tarknath Das' Sikh connections, see James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-1917*, Calcutta, 1973 (rpt.; 1st pub. in 1917).
11. Doreen Indra, 'The portrayal of South Asians in the Vancouver Press, 1905-1976', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (1979), pp. 164-87.
12. *Khalsa Samachar*, 7 July 1910, p. 6. Guru Nanak Mining and Trust Co. Ltd. resolution by Bhag Singh, Bhan, Ratan, Hakam and Hari. Teja Singh was still the trustee of the company.
13. *The Daily Province* (Vancouver), 12 December 1908, p. 1.
14. In an interview to the *The World* (Vancouver), 14 December 1908, Swayne stated: 'Should the Sikhs waver in their loyalty, it would require 100,000 white troops to cope successfully with the situation'.
15. Nihal Singh termed it as 'The triumph of the Indians in Canada', in *Modern Review*, August 1909, pp. 99-108.
16. *Khalsa Samachar* (December 1909, p. 4) reported on Teja Singh's discourse on the full-moon Katak celebrations in London. It also reported that Narain Singh and Gurbakhsh Singh were appointed

secretaries of the Gurdwara for the next year. *Khalsa Samachar* (6/10/1910, vol. 11, no. 43, p. 6) reported *amrit parchar* in London. Tara Singh *granthi* from Malaya States Guides appealed to Narain Singh for vigorous movement towards baptism. Dharma Anant Singh, who had accompanied Teja Singh to London, eventually wrote a number of books on Sikh mysticism and contributed to Bhai Kahn Singh's monumental *Mahan Kosh*.

17. *Khalsa Samachar* (3/8/1911, p. 2) carried an editorial on the London Gurdwara, appreciating the Patiala Maharajah's offer of Rs. 1,25,000 as donation. *Khalsa Samachar* (3/8/1911, p. 2) has news item from Teja Singh who described how the Maharaja of Patiala inaugurated the London Gurdwara on 2 August and took a seat by *Guru Granth*. *Khalsa Samachar* also carried an appeal for funds from Narain Singh; in another issue there is a moving poem on the building for Sikh *dharmsala* in London.
18. Qasim became an engineer and remained a life long friend of Teja Singh. He was later called to prepare a design of Cheema Gurdwara being built in the memory of Atar Singh. Qasim came down to Cheema and completed this project, while Teja Singh went out to seek donations for the building.
19. Teja Singh, *Jivan Kahani*. The teacher said, 'Mr Singh, I have been a student in Germany. Students face many problems in overseas countries. I have heard only today about the letter from the university regarding your non-payment of fees'. He also gave 50 dollars cheque for university library deposit returnable after the completion of the course.
20. *Khalsa Samachar* (vol. 3, no. 20, p. 7) reported that Jawala Singh from Moorland, California, had provided three Guru Gobind Singh scholarships to encourage higher education for Hindustani students. *Khalsa Samachar* (vol. 14, no. 8, 15/10/1912, pp. 5-6) also carried a news item about a Sikh procession from Holt to Stockton which was led by *Guru Granth* mounted on a four-horse drawn buggy.
21. Memorandum of Khalsa Diwan Society and Indian United League, 1911. *Khalsa Samachar*, 20 October 1910, vol. 11, no. 45, p. 7. Hari Singh (M.A. Edinburgh) and Raja Singh met Canada's minister Sir William Wilfred Laurier in Vancouver who asked them to make a list of their problems in the form of a memorandum. Report by Bhag Singh *granthi*.
22. Norman Buchignani, Doreen M. Indra and Ram Srivastava, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada*, Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1985. These years were very hard for Punjabis in Canada. Of the 6,000 pioneers, only 2,342 were enumerated in the Census of 1911. While 490 were settled in Vancouver, 85 were in Victoria. Most of the rest were scattered throughout the Fraser Valley. Less than 50 were outside British Colombia. Many had migrated to

the United States across the border. Many had returned to the Punjab, while those left behind were facing increasing hostility from the white population. Reports on the problems of the Canadian Sikhs find increasing space in *Khalsa Samachar* in 1912-13. See *Khalsa Samachar*, vol. 14, no. 25, p. 7; no. 26, p. 2; no. 34, pp. 4-5; no. 38, p. 3; no. 39, pp. 4-5 (report of Lahore gathering by Canadian delegation); no. 44, pp. 3, 5; no. 45, p. 3; no. 47, p. 2 (Canadian Sikhs' delegation to Punjab).

There is information about a pamphlet in Punjabi on 'Mistreatment of Hindustanis in Canada', in *Khalsa Samachar*, 3 February 1910, vol. 11, no. 10, p. 7. Bhag Singh, secretary of Vancouver Gurdwara, reported that glasses of the Gurdwara were broken by some Americans on 4 October night. The police arrived late and Bhag Singh lamented, 'although they call us black men but law ought to treat everyone equally. Our view is that because they treat us as foreigners and slaves, our nation is facing serious issues and problems all over the places. And we are handicapped by our lack of education, cooperation and thoughts.' *Khalsa Samachar*, 10 January 1910, vol. 11, no. 8, p. 4. Balwant Singh from Vancouver came as a delegate to the Sikh Educational Conference in the Punjab. A letter from Hari Singh informed that the Khalsa Diwan paid for his fare and he was on a preaching mission.

23. Johnston states that even the Women's National Council claiming to represent 400 local women and the Ministerial Association of Vancouver opposed the admission of Indian women. It was the much hated Hopkinson who recommended to the Minister that the families should be allowed in with the understanding that no further entry would be permitted.
24. The deputation left for England on 17 March 1913. Hopkinson preceded them to brief British officials regarding the 'real' motive of the delegation. The Secretary of State refused to meet them on the ground that they did not represent the Government of Canada. The delegation could only secure an informal interview with Sir John Anderson, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies. In India the delegates were warned by O'Dwyer about making political propaganda and as they went to see the Viceroy, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab had already sent a note about the delegation's likely 'seditionist' motives. See O'Dwyer's *India as I knew it*, and Buchignani, Indra and Srivastava, *Continuous Journey*.
25. *Khalsa Samachar* (vol. 14, no. 30, p. 5) carried a report of Professor Teja Singh's activities in Shanghai. *Khalsa Samachar* (vol. 14, no. 31, p. 6), for news from Stockton.
26. Teja Singh mentions 35,000 Sikhs, a rather unbelievable figure.
27. Babu Teja Singh had developed differences with Teja Singh and the

latter had to resign from the college. The differences arose mainly over the scriptures compiled by Babu Teja Singh.

28. Teja Singh, *Jivan Kahani*, pp. 135-54, 157.
29. The full text of his lecture to the Congress is given in *Jivan Kahani*, pp. 221-35.
30. Dr Khem Singh Gill, a former Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab Agricultural University, and President of Akal Academy, has established a new school at Barhu.
31. Teja Singh, *Jivan Kahani*, pt. 2, p. 328.



ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ ॥

ਜਨਮ ਮਰਣ ਦੁਹਰੂ ਮਹਿ ਨਾਹੀ ਜਨ ਪਰਉਪਕਾਰੀ ਆਏ ॥  
ਜੀਅ ਦਾਨੁ ਦੇ ਭਗਤੀ ਲਾਇਨਿ ਹਰਿ ਸਿਉ ਲੈਨਿ ਮਿਲਾਏ ॥

ਸੰਪੂਰਣ ਜੀਵਨ ਕਥਾ

ਬ੍ਰਹਮ ਗਿਆਨੀ

**ਸੰਤ ਅਤਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਮਹਾਰਾਜ**

ਮਸਤੂਆਣਾ

ਲੇਖਕ

ਡਾਕਟਰ ਭਾਈ ਅਮਰ ਸਿੰਘ 'ਖਾਲਸਾ'

ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ਕ



**ਡਾ.ਚਤਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀਵਨ ਸਿੰਘ**

ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਸਰ





ਸ਼੍ਰੀਮਾਨ ਸੰਤ ਤੇਜਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਜੀ ਡਬਲ ਐਮ. ਏ. (ਪ੍ਰਚਾਰ ਕਰਦਿਆਂ ਆਪ ਵੈਨਕੋਵਰ  
ਕੈਨੇਡਾ ਵਿਚ ਬੈਠੇ ਹਨ। ਆਪ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਸੁਪੱਤਨੀ ਬਿਸ਼ਨ ਕੌਰ ਜੀ ਤੇ ਆਪ ਦੇ ਦੋਵੇਂ ਲੜਕੇ  
ਤੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਕੈਨੇਡਾ ਦੇ ਗੁਰਸਿੱਖ ਬੈਠੇ ਹੋਏ ਹਨ।



