

SINGAPORE'S EARLY SIKH PIONEERS

Origins, Settlement, Contributions and Institutions

RISHPAL SINGH SIDHU



CENTRAL SIKH GURDWARA BOARD SINGAPORE

Singapore's Early Sikh Pioneers: Origins, Settlement, Contributions and Institutions

Rishpal Singh Sidhu
Compiler & Editor



CENTRAL SIKH GURDWARA BOARD SINGAPORE

Front Cover Photo:

A collage of the seven Sikh Gurdwaras and Singapore Khalsa Association in Singapore

Back Cover Photo:

A collage of some of Singapore's Early Sikh Pioneers

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ISBN: 978-981-09-4437-7

Printed by: Khalsa Printers Pte Ltd, Singapore

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Sikh youth in Singapore
in the fervent belief they will build on
the achievements and contributions of their forebears
for a better and brighter tomorrow.

OUR SPONSOR

Central Sikh Gurdwara Board would like to express their heartfelt thanks to our Patron, S. Naranjan Singh Brahmura for sponsoring the cost of publishing this book.



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CONTENTS

Foreword	6
Preface	7
Acknowledgements	8
Fast forward	9
1 Introduction	11
2 Singapore's first Sikh	15
3 Sikh migration to Singapore: Phases and patterns	21
4 Early Sikh settlers in Singapore	31
5 Sikhs in the British Naval Base	39
6 Establishment of Gurdwaras, Sikh Advisory Board and other Sikh institutions	43
7 Sikh soldiers involvement in the defense of Singapore in World War II and civilian life during the Japanese Occupation	97
8 Early Sikh pioneers and their contributions to nation building	109
9 Colonial Singapore's first Sikh politician	155
10. Conclusion	158
Appendices	
I Translation of a letter written by Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji while imprisoned in Singapore	160
II Glossary of terms and abbreviations	162
Endnotes	168
References	170

FOREWORD

Since the arrival of the first batch of 200 Sikh policemen to Singapore in 1879, Sikhs have contributed immensely to Singapore under the colonial rule and the Republic thereafter. Sikh history in India is closely interlinked with that of Malaya and Singapore since mid-nineteenth century with the arrival of a pious revolutionary Bhai Maharaj Singh ji, a political prisoner. From the early twentieth century onwards, many Sikhs have made Singapore their home and contributed to diverse sectors of Singapore public life in general.

Despite being a small community, the contribution of the Sikh community goes beyond the mundane and reflects their courageous and dedicated efforts in defending Singapore and maintaining the law and order for many generations. Their pioneering role in building businesses and institutions as well progressing in professions such as law, finance, medicine, engineering, education, politics, government and sports is commendable as well. This has been documented to an extent in the Indian Heritage Centre located on Campbell lane in Little India since 2015. Many inspiring biographical notes in this book reveal how many of them dedicated their lives to serve their profession, religion and nation. The community's aspiration to inspire the younger generation through such publications is very timely and apt considering the continuity of tradition and rising to the present challenges is truly in the hands of the youth.

I congratulate Mr. Rishpal Singh Sidhu for compiling and editing a very comprehensive and well documented book on *Singapore's Early Sikh Pioneers: Origins, Settlement, Contributions and Institutions*. I truly appreciate the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board for commissioning this book and releasing it on Vesakhi of 2017 in Singapore. It will serve as a good resource for researchers and students besides documenting the contribution of several Sikh community members and organisations in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Such initiatives by community and religious organisations are commendable and I hope more such publications that document their links within the region will ensue. It is by preserving memories and documents closely intertwined with the founding and development of Singapore from colony to nation for posterity that the good work of the pioneering generations can be taken forward.

Dr. Gauri Krishnan

Inaugural Centre Director, Indian Heritage Centre

Director, Fellowship & Research, National Heritage Board

PREFACE

This publication has its genesis in the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board's desire to chronicle the Sikh community's contribution to Singapore. It begins with an account of Singapore's first Sikh resident who arrived here in 1850 as a prisoner of British India and died in prison in 1856.

Phases and patterns of Sikh migration to Singapore are described, together with brief accounts of the lives and activities of these early settlers. It also traces the establishment of gurdwaras (Sikh temples) as focal points of community gatherings and involvement.

Sikh presence as sepoy (policemen) in the Singapore Police Force, Singapore Harbour Board Police, and the Naval Base Police was very much a part of civil administration in Singapore's early history, and the advent of the Second World War saw Sikh soldiers actively involved in the defence of Singapore.

The concluding chapters of this book are a narration of Sikh settlers and pioneers who made Singapore their home. It recounts their noteworthy contributions to Singapore's development in diverse fields of endeavor from its early years through to the 1990s. While no effort has been spared to inclusively record these contributions, the compiler and editor accepts full responsibility for any unintentional omissions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The compiler and editor owes an immense debt of gratitude to the many individuals and institutions who have, in one way or another, given generously of their time and historical knowledge, and freely shared old and precious family photographs and other memorabilia in contributing to the compilation of this book. It is a pleasure and privilege to formally express my sincere thanks and deep appreciation to all these individuals and institutions.

- The President and Council Members of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) Singapore for the confidence placed in me to take on and complete this project.
- The writings of the late retired Justice Choor Singh Sidhu and Master Surjan Singh as initial sources of information and lead pointers to other external information resources.
- Master Surjan Singh and Param Ajeet Singh Bal for their generosity of spirit in freely sharing information from unpublished articles they had earlier written and/or edited.
- CSGB Secretary Manmohan Singh Malla for his expert assistance in retaking some better quality photographs, his listening ear and always making himself available to provide sage advice, assistance, and guidance whenever it was needed.
- Dilbagh Singh and Karpal Singh Melhi for their interest and support in this project and for my constant reliance on their collective memories relating to past personalities and events in Singapore's early Sikh history.
- Gurdip Singh Usma for his invaluable editorial assistance, technical advice and willingly sharing photos and soft copies of earlier written articles on gurdwaras in Singapore.
- Staff of the National Library Board Singapore for their willing and ready assistance whenever I needed it.
- Finally, my family for their understanding, interest, and support in this project.

March 2017

FAST FORWARD

The Sikh community in Singapore can be justifiably proud of its contributions to the development of this city-state. The English poet William Wordsworth observed that *“life is divided into three terms – that which was, which is, and which will be”*. Let us therefore learn from the past, profit by the present, and from the present, aim to live and aspire for a better future.

Post-independence, Singapore Government Ministers and its successive Presidents have, over the years, always responded positively in terms of accepting invitations to attend community functions such as religious festivals and birthday celebrations of Sikh Gurus and other heritage events, thereby generating welcome media publicity for the Sikh community. The following sampling of statements by our past and present political leaders clearly demonstrate that these contributions have not gone unrecognised. The best is yet to come. Delivering the opening address at a one-day Seminar on *Sikh Youth and Nation Building* organised by the Sikh Advisory Board on 19 March 1989, the then Minister for Home Affairs, Professor S. Jayakumar said *“Sikhs in Singapore have contributed to the nation’s development and progress, despite the fact that they are a very small minority”*.¹

Addressing the *International Conference cum Exhibition on Punjabi/Sikh Heritage* held in Singapore from 5-7 June 1992, BG Lee Hsien Loong, who was then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Industry noted that *“in Singapore, the Sikhs and Punjabis form one of the smallest communities in our multi-racial society. You are few, but have contributed to our society out of proportion to your numbers. You have done well in many areas. You have preserved your distinctive identity in the multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious environment, because you realize the importance of transmitting your heritage to the younger generation”*.²

In his 2006 message to the second edition of Professor Tan Tai Yong’s book on *The Singapore Khalsa Association*, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong observed that *“The Sikh community, while small in number, is one of the most recognizable in Singapore, and has made significant achievements and contributions in many areas...I am confident that the Sikhs of Singapore will continue to be a vibrant community and make many more contributions to our nation”*.³

On the occasion of the opening of the Bhai Maharaj Singh Memorial on Saturday, 3 July 2010, the late Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew noted *“Your community’s contributions to the nation have been significant. Sikhs have done well under our meritocratic system, in the uniformed services, the judiciary, like Justice Choor Singh, in the civil service and other professions. We have two Sikh MPs. Sikhs are also successful entrepreneurs and businessmen.... You have also set up the Sikh Welfare Council in 1995 to work with various government agencies to help the needy in your community. The Sikh community has extended its welfare to other Singaporeans I congratulate the Sikh community for its achievements and contributions to Singapore”*.

1

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this compendium is to trace and narrate the Sikh community's contribution to Singapore's early development in the colonial period from the 1820s to the 1950s, the post-colonial period from the 1960s to Singapore's establishment as an independent city-state in 1965, and a little beyond to the 1990s. It makes no pretense to be an academic treatise. Rather, it is an attempt to concisely collate, in one central place, information from a diverse number of information sources on the socio-historical development of the Sikh community in Singapore.

According to the *Census of Population 2010* (the 5th census carried out in Singapore) the Sikh resident population numbered 12,952 and constituted 0.4% of the total resident population of 3,230,719. Notably, 39.32% of the resident Sikh population had post-secondary educational qualifications. Singapore's population today stands at 5.47 million (*Straits Times*, 25 September 2014).

From its early days to the present, Singapore's political leadership has openly and publicly acknowledged that the Sikh community, while small in number, is one of the most recognizable in Singapore, and has made significant achievements and contributions in many areas.

Past research studies have clearly shown that, unlike the South Indians who came as indentured labor, the early Sikhs came as sepoys (policemen) loyally serving their colonial British masters in the enforcement of internal law and order. The preservation of peace, law and order in Singapore's early history fell entirely on the shoulders of these sepoys. These Sikhs were later followed by voluntary emigrants seeking better opportunities outside of their homeland. They served in other occupations as watchmen, caretakers, dairy farmers, itinerant hawkers and clothes peddlers, petty entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, and traders. The more educated among them who came from the Punjab in the early part of the 20th century served as clerks, interpreters, and storekeepers. The progenies of these early migrants who then chose to stay on in Singapore rather

than return to India studied in local schools and progressed further in more diverse occupational fields, serving as teachers, accountants, lawyers, businessmen, and in the local police and armed forces.

Singapore did indeed serve as the British Government of India's penal settlement in the mid-nineteenth century. Some prisoners were sent here to serve long terms of imprisonment. Some of these prisoners are believed to have been Sikhs, but no records are available to verify their names or their number.⁴ It is however clear that the first Sikh who came to Singapore certainly did not come of his own volition. Rather, spiritual leader Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji came as a political prisoner from India to Singapore on 9 July 1850 on board the ship *Mahomed Shah* specially chartered at a cost of 2,000 Rupees, together with his loyal companion Khurruck Singh. He was escorted on board the ship by an all European guard of one sergeant, one corporal and six privates. On arrival here, he was immediately taken to and locked up in one of the upper rooms of the new Outram Road Prison where he was kept in solitary confinement and died almost six years later. Despite having no contact whatsoever with the Sikh community in Singapore he is nevertheless revered as the true epitome of a saint-soldier and the next chapter will attempt to answer the question why.

This compilation also attempts to identify Sikh identities and personalities who, individually and collectively, were intimately involved in fashioning the development not only of their own community but also actively and significantly contributed to Singapore's social, economic, and political development, including fostering interracial and religious harmony, leading to its maturity as an independent city-state in 1965 and beyond this period.

The early establishment of gurdwaras (Sikh temples) and the roles they played as focal points of community gatherings and activities is explored, as is the development of the Sikh Advisory Board (SAB), Singapore Khalsa Association (SKA), and related Sikh community organisations.

The concluding chapter ends on a positive and upbeat note that sees young Singaporean Sikhs ardently seeking to understand the lineage and contributions of their ancestors and the stepping stones they have cast, in order to consolidate and further build upon these achievements and contributions to stridently enhance even more, Singapore's world standing as a premiere global city-state.

Noted astronomer Dr. Cal Sagan once said “*you have to know the past to understand the present*”. In similar vein, Confucius opined “study the past if you would define the future”. The future of the Sikh community in Singapore rightly lies in the hands of our younger generation, who in understanding and appreciating our past history and contributions, can be ably guided by the present cohort of Sikh leaders as mentors for an even brighter and better tomorrow.



Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji in his Darbar

Source: Usma, Gurdip Singh & Singh, Dilbagh, compilers and editors.

Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji & Gurdwara Sahib

*Silat Road: A historical journey, revised 2nd ed. Singapore,
Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 2015.*

2

SINGAPORE'S FIRST SIKH

It is an undisputed fact that Bhai Maharaj Singh was the first Sikh to arrive in Singapore, but it was not of his own volition. Following his arrest in India, he was exiled to Singapore as a political prisoner by the British in July 1850. He was a much feared and admired freedom fighter for his anti-British revolutionary activities.

He spent his entire time in Singapore in solitary confinement in a 40 feet by 15 feet cell with the windows walled up and rendered dark, dingy and absolutely unhealthy, literally converting the cell into a dark dungeon in Outram Prison, and resulting in making him practically blind. This inhumane treatment was contrary to Governor-General Lord Dalhousie's instructions that the two State prisoners should not be treated with unnecessary rigour, were apparently ignored by the British authorities in Singapore. In his book *Bhai Maharaj Singh; Saint-Soldier, Martyr of the Sikh faith*, Choor Singh notes that examination of the correspondence between the Governor of the Straits Settlements and the Governor-General in Calcutta showed that the conduct of Bhai Maharaj Singh was unexceptional but that of Khurruck Singh evinced a little of untoward demeanour. Khurruck Singh had often given vent to his temper by refusing food, tearing the clothes off his back and throwing things at the ground.

With no contact with the outside world, it is instructive to ponder on his significance and contribution to the Sikh community in Singapore? To satisfactorily answer this question, it is first necessary to briefly recount Bhai Maharaj Singh's earlier life and times, especially his anti-resistance activities against the British in the Punjab. Bhai Maharaj Singh's birth name was Nihal and he was born in Rabbon in Ludhiana district to a Sikh Grewal family. He was deeply pious from a very early age, showed great interest in religion and spirituality, and was totally immersed in Naam Simran (Meditation) and Sewa (Community Service), and this led him to join Bhai Bir Singh's dera (dwelling or encampment) in Naurangabad at a very young age. On receiving Amrit (baptism), he took on the name Bhagvan Singh. *"During his stay there, legends record his power to work miracles"*.⁵ According to some accounts, he was born in 1770, and he would therefore have been close to eighty years of age by the time of

his arrival in Singapore. In serving the sangat (congregation) at the dera he would address each one as Maharaj Ji, and this is how he became known as Bhai Maharaj Singh amongst them.

Bhai Bir Singh was a retired soldier turned ascetic and his dera also served as a military base with a volunteer army comprising close to 1,200 musket men and 3,000 horsemen. It served as a resistance point against the Dogras rule and dominance in Punjab following the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839, offering refuge to all those persecuted by them. Following Bhai Bir Singh's death in a military clash with the Dogras, Bhagvan Singh took on the mantle of leadership of this dera, leaving shortly afterwards to create his own dera in Amritsar.

The First Anglo-Sikh War in 1845-1846 and the Second Anglo Sikh War in 1848-1849 were a series of conflicts between the British East India Company and the Sikh Empire. *"In 1847, tensions arose between Maharani Jindan Kaur and the British who wanted to deprive her of her power. This resulted in the so-called Prema plot which envisaged the murder of Henry Lawrence, the British envoy. But the plot and Bhagvan Singh's role in it was uncovered and the British had his property confiscated and declared him an outlaw. The British Governor-General Lord Dalhousie put a bounty of ten thousand Rupees on his head. Bhagvan Singh went underground together with 600 of his followers, who called him Bhai Maharaj Singh as he became known as a holy warrior against the British".*⁶ Bhai Maharaj Singh moved among and inspired the soldiers to fight with courage and determination and to resist British attempts to annexe the Sikh Kingdom. He was a strategic planner and attempted to spirit away Maharani Jindan and her son Dalip Singh from a Lahore palace to a safe haven. During the Anglo-Sikh Wars, Bhai Maharaj Singh took upon himself the impossible task of saving the Sikh Kingdom from extinction. In the true tradition of a Saint-Soldier, he felt compelled to take up arms, and kept up this struggle even after the Punjab was annexed in March 1849.

*"Etymologically, the word bhai means brother, but within early Sikh tradition this word was also used as an honorific for the holy men of the Panth (the word Panth, from Sanskrit patha, pathin, or pantham, literally means a way, passage or path and, figuratively, a way of life, religious creed or cult. In Sikh terminology, the word Panth stands for the Sikh faith as well as for the Sikh people as a whole). To qualify for this title of Bhai, a person had to demonstrate a capacity to interpret the Adi Granth (Sikh holy scripture), communicate the wisdom of the Gurus it enshrined, and be publicly recognized for his piety. If, in addition he could work miracles, heal the sick and give succor to the distressed, he was sure to occupy a position of considerable reverence and influence within the community".*⁷

Bhai Maharaj Singh's most ardent wish was to free India from British rule and this led to his association and involvement with like-minded allies in a number of military skirmishes with the British forces. He escaped arrest on many occasions and the British started calling him Karnivala (possessor of special powers) to account for their own failures and lack of success in arresting him. He was however finally arrested on 28 December 1849 together with 21 of his companions all of whom were unarmed.

Following his arrest in the winter of 1849, the Deputy Commissioner of Jalandhar sent a report to his superiors. He commented that *"the Goroo (Bhai Maharaj Singh) is not an ordinary man. He is to the natives what Jesus Christ is to the most zealous of Christians. His miracles were seen by tens of thousands and are more implicitly relied on, than those worked by the ancient prophets"*.⁸ However, Oberoi clearly points out that *"he himself never explicitly claimed this power, but it was granted to by others ...miracles ascribed to him gave credence to his prophetic status"*.⁹ It is pertinent to note here that the Sikh Gurus never performed miracles to convince others about their faith, spiritual superiority or occult powers or to save themselves from calamities or penalties. Guru Nanak himself pointed out that he could do nothing against the laws of nature. It is only He who can perform a miracle. For him, the Naam (True Name) is the miracle and he knew of no other miracle.

Books written by the late Retired Justice Choor Singh on Bhai Maharaj Singh recount the shabby treatment that Bhai Maharaj Singh received at the hands of his captors in Singapore and the rapid deterioration of his health. His eyesight was failing and in letters written in prison in 1854 addressed to his friend Bhai Jusrut Singh of Naurangabad, Bhai Maharaj Singh expressed his wish to return home (an extract of one of his letters is included in Appendix I). On his death on 5 July 1856, he was cremated somewhere outside the prison grounds by his steadfast companion Khurruck Singh. It is not really known what happened to his ashes. Khurruck Singh is considered to be the second Sikh in Singapore. He was released not long after in January 1857 but his freedom was short-lived. Events in the Straits Settlements, as well as the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny in May that year made European residents fearful of Indian convicts. Khurruck Singh had acquired a reputation as a "Rajah" among the convicts, and was rumoured to have hatched a plot to kill all the Europeans. When this plot was discovered, he was swiftly re-arrested, and transferred by boat to Penang in August 1857. He was incarcerated at Fort Cornwallis, and then briefly in its jail, before his final release in Penang sometime after March 1860. According to Naidu (2015), he thereafter disappears from historical record.



Interior view of Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji Memorial Gurdwara at Silat Road

There are many narratives on its history and origins, and popular belief that an unmarked samadh (tombstone) erected in the grounds of the Singapore General Hospital belonged to a Sikh sant (saint) imprisoned by the British in the 19th century.¹⁰ The word samadh in Punjabi is used to describe a cenotaph or structure commemorating the dead, akin to a tombstone but without the mortal remains. It appears that this samadh was first erected on vacant land outside the Outram Road Prison and later moved to the Singapore General Hospital grounds. Apparently, the name Baba Karam Singh was also ascribed to Bhai Maharaj Singh. However, there is no evidence or records of any religious person by the name of Baba Karam Singh in Singapore. It is a mystery as to how this name, Baba Karam Singh, came to be associated with this shrine. Non-Sikhs, Chinese, Muslim and North Indian devotees started visiting and praying at the site of the tombstone to seek his intercession, and in the belief that their prayers had been answered, started donating money and jewellery. The samadh took on a different identity when the Sikh devotees appropriated the site, installed the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy scripture) and held regular prayer sessions and religious functions at this site. An elderly lady by the name of Ram Kaur used to reside there and do sewa (selfless service).

Plans to expand the Singapore General Hospital combined with the fact that the hospital grounds were considered an inappropriate site for religious worship, led to its relocation to the grounds of the Silat Road Gurdwara on 12 October 1966. It is important to note that belief in Bhai Maharaj Singh's benevolence and supernatural powers and worship at his samadh goes against the basic tenets and beliefs of Sikhism, which is the main reason why the Bhai Maharaj Singh Memorial Gurdwara was built next to the main Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road building in the early 1990s and construction completed in October 1995.

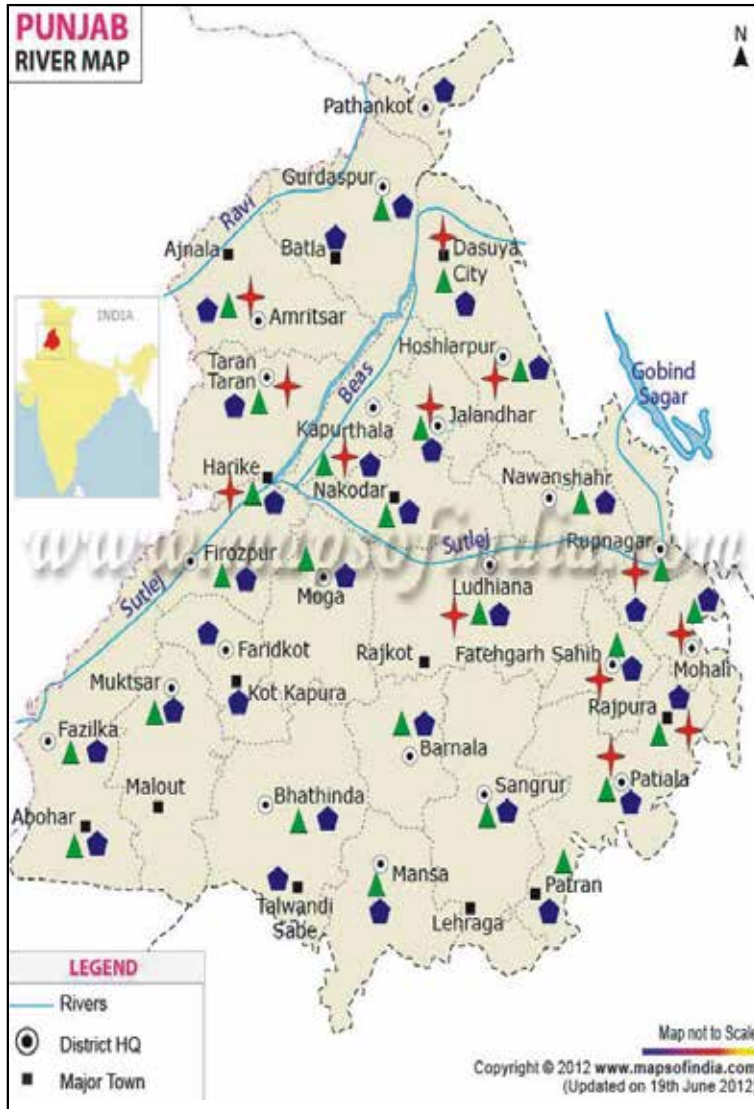
Bhai Maharaj Singh was a spiritual descendant of Guru Gobind Singh and epitomized all the true qualities of a great Sant-Sipahi (Saint-Soldier) of the Khalsa Panth, displaying qualities of piety, fortitude and heroism as a great revolutionary and freedom fighter against British rule. Accounts of his life and exploits would most certainly have been recounted about him by later Sikh migrants to Singapore. He is revered by the Sikh community in Singapore as a Shaheed (Martyr) and historical icon. He served as a rallying point and unifying influence for the early Sikh community in Singapore which was then drawn and marked by caste and regional differences, and this reverence for Bhai Maharaj Singh continues to grow till today. As Senior Counsel and former MP Davinder Singh aptly put it, *“he is proclaimed as a shaheed (martyr) who died trying to save the Sikh kingdom from the imperialistic ambitions of the British. His heroic and saintly deeds have left an indelible impression on the hearts and minds of Singapore Sikhs. Bhai Maharaj Singh is particularly special to us because of his brief residence in this country”*.¹¹

Editor's Note: *The early life and times of Bhai Maharaj Singh have been well documented in two books published by the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board Singapore and listed below.*

Singh, Choor. *Bhai Maharaj Singh; Saint-Soldier, Martyr of the Sikh faith*. Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 1999.

Usma, Gurdip Singh & Singh, Dilbagh, compilers and editors. *Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji & Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road: A historical journey, revised 2nd ed.* Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 2015.

Key Origin Towns Of Sikh Immigrants



Source: www.mapsofindia.com

3

SIKH MIGRATION TO SINGAPORE: Phases And Patterns

In his seminal research publication on Indians in Malaya: *Some aspects of their immigration and settlement (1786-1957)* Professor Kernail Singh Sandhu provides a scholarly historical analysis of the different periods when Sikhs emigrated to Southeast Asia and their typology during each of these periods.

The Anglo-Sikh wars fought in 1845 and 1848 led the British to hold the military capabilities of the Sikhs in high esteem. The early Sikhs that came to Singapore were recruited in India by the British colonial rulers and were employed as soldiers and sepoy (policemen) in the colonial security forces.

There was a clearly expressed preference for Jat Sikhs from the Malwa and Majha regions over the Doaba region in Punjab. The Malwa region is the region of Punjab south of the Sutlej River, whereas the Majha region is the region of Punjab bound by the right banks of the Beas and Sutlej Rivers and extending up to the River Jhelum at its northernmost point. The Doaba region is the region between the Beas and Sutlej Rivers and is today also called the Non-Resident Indian (NRI) hub of Punjab as a consequence of the migration of a significant percentage of Doabias to many foreign lands.

Prospective recruits had to meet strict requirements for enlistment into the local security forces, including being baptized Sikhs having undergone the khande di pahul (Sikh ceremony of initiation or baptism). This ceremony was first introduced in 1699 by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs using a double-edged sword and the term Khalsa also acquired a specific connotation after the introduction of this ceremony. Since then, all those thus initiated have been collectively designated as the Khalsa panth, and this term today refers to the worldwide community of baptized Sikhs.

The ideal Sikh recruit had to be younger than 25 years old with a minimum height of 5ft 6in (around 1.68m) and a minimum chest measurement of 33 inches (about 84cm).

*“Employed as soldiers and policemen in the colonial security forces, Sikhs came to play an important role in the policing of the Straits Settlements (which included Singapore) in the first half of the nineteenth century”.*¹² Singapore was a part of British India till 1867. The Straits Settlements comprising Penang, Malacca and Singapore was incorporated in 1826 and its capital shifted from Penang to Singapore in 1932. The enforcement of internal law and order underlined the importance of political stability for defending British colonial, political, and economic interests and development in Singapore.

Local recruitment of Sikhs who found their own way to Singapore commenced in the 1890s and the interviewing panel comprised the officer-in-charge, subedar (subedar is a historical rank in the Indian Army as well as in the Pakistani Army, ranking below British commissioned officers and above non-commissioned officers. The rank was otherwise equivalent to a British lieutenant), sergeant-major, and a police clerk. Confirmation of recruitment took place pending satisfactory feedback of security checks from Punjab.

Those Sikhs who arrived on their own and failed to meet the strict requirements for enlistment into the local security forces voluntarily took on jobs as watchmen, private security guards at banks and jewellery shops, caretakers, bullock cart drivers, dairy farmers, petty traders and shopkeepers. Some served as personal security guards for wealthy Chinese towkays (businessmen), guarding their businesses, shops, warehouses, and homes. Over time, these guards represented a sense of security and loyalty to these towkays who employed them. This explains why quite a few notable graves in the Bukit Brown cemetery have statues of these Sikhs standing guard by them.

Others were involved in policing the godowns (warehouses, especially ones at a dockside), banks, and other important buildings and institutions in Singapore, especially in the Central Business District areas of Robinson Road, Fullerton Building, Raffles Place, Battery Road, and Clarke Quay. Frugal living was the norm for watchmen and many took to moneylending and driving taxis during their off duty hours. Meagre written records if any were kept in moneylending and interest was charged at \$2 for every \$10 that was lent. This accounts for the Malay term *“sepuluh dua”*.

In 1881, the Sikh Police Contingent (SPC) was established in Singapore and played an important role in nation building. The creation of the SPC was the result of an 1879 Commission of Enquiry into the state of the police force. The Commission recommended



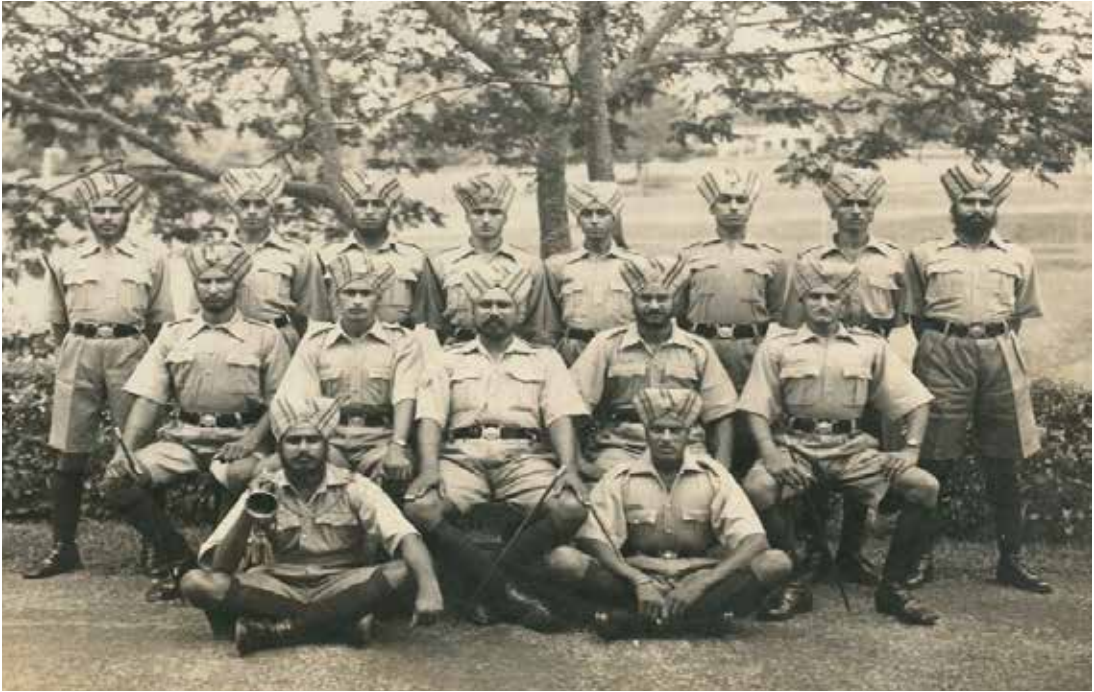
Statue of Sikh guard standing by a grave at the Bukit Brown Cemetery

Source: univ3rsalif3.wordpress.com

that a Sikh contingent be formed in the local police force. The first batch of 54 Sikh recruits for the SPC arrived from Punjab on 26 March 1881 led by Assistant Superintendent Stevens. In August 1881, 46 more Sikhs arrived from Punjab, increasing the strength to 100 men. The strength increased again to 207 men towards the end of 1883 and 300 men by 1898. The SPC was highly regarded by the British and were deployed to various states in Malaya to help quell uprisings and revolts. The SPC was disbanded at the end of World War II in 1945.

Sikhs were recruited into the Tanjong Pagar Dock Police Force (formed by the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company) to perform guard duties for the security of the docks and harbours as well as the godowns. With the passage of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Ordinance in 1905, these Sikhs became employees of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Board. There was to be a further change when the Singapore Harbour Board was formed eight years later in 1913, and they then became Singapore Harbour Board employees. By the 1930s, there was a Sikh police force at the Naval Base in Sembawang and the Royal Air Force Base in Seletar.

Sikh soldiers were renowned for their fearlessness, bravery, loyalty and devotion to duty, and from earlier reports, it would appear that they were already present in Singapore by the mid-1850s. In 1857, there was a Chinese uprising started in the gold mining town of Bau, which is about 33 km from the town of Kuching. Sir James Brooke, the first white Rajah of Sarawak, fled to Singapore where he took refuge with the Governor of the Straits Settlements. He subsequently recruited personnel for the Sarawak Police Force from Singapore. The batch of 13 Sikhs led by Dewa Singh Akhara, were brought to Kuching. (Source: www.worldgurudwaras.com/sarawak/gurudwara-sahib-kuching-sarawak). These Sikhs played an important role in bringing peace, law and order to this area. “Social anthropologist Sarjit Singh Gill records that Rajah Sir James Brooke of Sarawak (Malaysia) recruited a number of Sikh soldiers from Singapore in 1857 to quell a Chinese uprising in the territory”.¹³



Sikh Police Contingent, 1937 photo. Courtesy Bihara Singh family

Completed in 1934, the lower and upper barracks at Pearl's Hill were first used to house the Sikh sepoy. The married sepoy were accommodated at the upper barracks while the unmarried ones stayed at the lower barracks along Eu Tong Sen Street. The present Police Operational Headquarters relocated in 2001 to a new building, the Police Cantonment Complex, and both the lower and upper barracks were gazetted for conservation in 2008. The wall of its entrance still bears the crest of the Straits Settlements Police which was later disbanded in 1946.

In declaring open the Sikh Bachelors' Barracks and Sikh HQ Offices at Pearl's Hill, Singapore, on 19 December 1934, the Governor of the Straits Settlements Sir Shenton Thomas gave clear indication of the stuff the Sikhs were made of in the past, both in the police and the military. He said *"It may be of interest to recall shortly, the history of the Sikh Contingent, whose barracks I am about to open. Up to 1879, the rank and file of the force (Straits Settlement Police) was composed of Malays, South Indians and Chinese. As a result of recommendations by the Inspector-General, Colonel Dunlop,*



Present building on the site of the Pearl's Hill Barracks.
Note the crest of the Straits Settlements Police



Straits Settlements Police crest

the Sikh Contingent was authorized and in March 1881, the first company of 54 men arrived in Singapore under the charge of an Assistant Superintendent from the Punjab. Additions in August and November 1881, brought the Contingent to its full strength of 165 men, distributed between Singapore and Penang. In 1883, a further increase enabled the Inspector-General to post a small platoon in Malacca. It was not however until the year 1887 that a senior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) was appointed to take charge of the company in Singapore, while Penang had to wait until 1894. European officers with the requisite qualifications were not found until many years later. For reasons into which I need not enter, it has been found impracticable to absorb the Sikhs into the general body of the police rank and file, and to this day they remain a special or "class" contingent, separately housed and trained, furnishing guards and escorts and performing miscellaneous duties of a semi-military nature. It may also be regarded in some measure as a reserve of shock force of well-disciplined troops, available to take the brunt of any emergency.

This confidence has not been misplaced and in the very serious emergency of 1915, the Sikh Contingent proved its loyalty and reliability. The strength of the Contingent has increased from time to time to meet the growth of Singapore and Penang. Thirty years ago, its members had risen to just short of 400 men. Today, the strength is 536 of whom 31 are in Christmas Island, 36 in Malacca, 110 in Penang and 359 in Singapore. I have much pleasure in coming here today to open the barracks and to meet the Sikh Contingent. I hope they will be happy and comfortable here, and I would assure them that I have every confidence in their continued loyalty to the Government".¹⁴

The very serious emergency of 1915 referred to by Sir Shenton Thomas in his address above is the 1915 Indian Sepoy Mutiny in Singapore which arose following rumours that the Indian-Muslim soldiers of the 5th Light Infantry stationed in Singapore (main garrison guarding Singapore) might be sent to the Western war front to fight against fellow Muslim soldiers. Sikh soldiers did not take part in this mutiny which was quickly quelled, resulting in executions of some of the mutiny's participants. Unconnected as it was with Indian nationalist sentiments which only emerged around the time of the Second World War, it nevertheless remains a significant event in Singapore's history as one involving the Indian community.

Sikhs with some degree of education and knowledge of English started arriving in Singapore on their own in the early 1900s, and took up positions as clerks, storekeepers, court interpreters and teachers, but it was not until the late 1920s

and early 1930s that Sikh commercial immigrants started to arrive in Singapore. The majority of the Sikhs who voluntarily came to Singapore came from the Majha, Malwa and Doaba regions, and some of them tended to stay on after the tightening of immigration laws in the 1950s. Non-Jat Sikhs also came as tailors and set up shops in New Bridge Road, Jalan Besar, Cecil Street and Serangoon Road.

It is also of interest to note that Baba Gurdit Singh from Sarhali (not to be mistaken with Gurdit Singh Jawanda from Haripur Khalsa, a 1906 Indo-Canadian immigration pioneer), an influential Sikh businessman was already resident in Singapore in the early 1900s when he chartered the Japanese steamship *Komagata Maru* in April 1914 to transport 376 passengers (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims and 12 Hindus) from Calcutta to Vancouver in Canada, most of whom were British subjects and ex-soldiers from Hong Kong. Excepting 24 passengers who were admitted to Canada, the Canadian authorities refused to allow the remaining passengers to disembark, ostensibly owing to its race-based exclusion immigration policies designed to keep out immigrants of only Asian origin. The ship returned to Singapore on 16 September 1914 on its way back to India. When the ship reached Budge Budge Harbour in Bengal (now Bangladesh), the police went out to meet the ship and arrest Gurdit Singh and the 19 or 20 other men they saw as leaders. Shots were fired in the melee that ensued and 19 passengers were killed. Gurdit Singh managed to escape arrest and lived in hiding until 1922. On Mahatma Gandhi's urging, he gave himself up as a true patriot and was imprisoned for five years.



Baba Gurdit Singh of Komagata Maru fame

Early Sikh migrants to Singapore tended to define and organize themselves according to caste and regional identities rather than a collective Sikh identity defined by nationality and ethnic background and, to some degree, this practice tended to undermine their unity as a Sikh community. The early gurdwaras were established mainly along regional lines, and they played a significant role as social and religious institutions and as focal points for community gatherings and activities, and the establishment and transmission of a Sikh identity and heritage.

*“The history of the early migration of the Sikh business community remains patchy due to the paucity of colonial records”.*¹⁵ Rajesh Rai notes that *“unlike policemen, those Sikhs engaged in commerce tended to emigrate from urban centres in Punjab and most were either Hindu Brahmins and Baniyas or Sikh Khattris....and their arrival in Singapore was usually an extension of their commercial operations in Rangoon or Bangkok, where they had initially set up shops retailing Indian textiles....From the 1920s, the Punjabi presence in the commercial life of Singapore was accentuated by those who ventured into the money lending business, although on a smaller scale when compared to the Chettiars”.*¹⁶

The Great Depression of 1929-1932 affected all sectors of the Indian society in Singapore and smaller scale Sikh money lenders were not spared.¹⁷ Arora and Khatri Sikhs also relocated to Malaya, Thailand, and Singapore as refugees following the 1947 partition. Many members of the Sikh business community established themselves in the High Street Plaza in the early post-colonial period and were notably successful. Migration to Singapore in the post 1950s slowed down with the tightening of immigration laws in 1953 and 1959, and consisted mainly of spouses from the Punjab and a sprinkling of middle class professionals here for the short term on business or employment contracts.

Those Sikhs that chose to remain in Singapore after the Second World War and in the 1950s and 1960s subsequently made the decision to take up Singapore citizenship. It was also during this period that they started to involve themselves in participation in local political issues and economic advancement. Increasingly, they and their locally born children had access to the local educational system and scholarship opportunities overseas. *“While Sikhs in Singapore and Malaysia are concerned with positioning themselves as part of the transnational Sikh Panth, they are also keenly aware of the need to align their interests and identities with their respective nation states”.*¹⁸

Many young English educated Sikhs also moved to Singapore from Malaya after the Second World War in search of employment. Some of them stayed at the Silat Road Gurdwara in rented rooms at \$5 a month until they found employment and more permanent accommodation. Some joined the teaching service, others became civil servants, and still others joined the military forces and the Singapore Police Force.

Clearly, there was already a transition taking place from being providers of security and defense to active involvement in many and varied spheres of occupational activities, and the post-colonial period saw an increase in middle class, Singapore-born and English-educated Sikh professionals taking on leadership roles within the community. In her book on *The Sikhs in Singapore*, Arunajeet Kaur avers that “*the sense of rootlessness experienced by earlier generations of Sikhs was to give way to an embedded sense of identity in being Singaporean for successive generations, especially those who were engaged in the challenges of the post-colonial nation building project of their chosen land of domicile*”.¹⁹ It also saw younger and more progressive segments of the Sikh community viewing regional and caste differences as an impediment to the unity and collective progress of the Sikhs.

The Sikh community was among the forefront of minority communities in Singapore in expressing support for the proposed merger between Singapore and Malaya. It invited Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew to a function at the Central Sikh Temple (CST) in 1963 and donated \$1,100 to the National Patriotic Fund and assured the Prime Minister of their “*fullest cooperation for the realization of Malaysia and are prepared to participate wholeheartedly in the defence of Malaysia*”.²⁰ One year later, the Sikh community donated an ambulance worth \$10,000 to the Singapore General Hospital.²¹

Brief profiles of early Sikh settlers are covered in the next chapter, and the contributions of early Sikh pioneers to nation building are addressed in a later chapter.



Mall Singh (standing third from left), Jawala Singh Dhothar (seated second from left) and his son Niranjan Singh Dhothar (standing fourth from left).

Courtesy Niranjan Singh Dhothar family.

4

EARLY SIKH SETTLERS IN SINGAPORE

The first priorities of the early Sikh settlers who came on their own was finding employment and a suitable place to stay. It is a measure of immense pride to note their selfless approach in helping those compatriots who came after them, providing sustenance and temporary accommodation until they too could stand on their own feet. These early settlers worked together for the benefit of their community, and this “gotong royong” (concept of reciprocity or mutual aid) spirit proved beneficial in the early establishment and management of gurdwaras and the building of a sense of cultural identity among these early settlers.

These early Sikh settlers travelled long distances from Punjab to Calcutta and sometimes had to wait a few months before they were able to secure a deck ticket on tramp steamers headed to Rangoon, Penang, Klang and Singapore. Meals were not provided on deck and passengers usually had to cook their own food on board these tramp steamers, and make do with condensed milk for drinking tea, a novel experience for them!

The following list of early Sikh settlers is, with a few exceptions, generally in arrival order date. It is by no means exhaustive, and has been collated from oral and published sources of information including those written by Sardar Choor Singh, Surjan Singh, and Seva Singh Gandharab.

Sunder Singh, elder brother of Bhanga Singh (father of Choor Singh) came to Singapore in 1885 and found employment on a sugar cane plantation owned by James Balestier. Sunder Singh’s son Bishan Singh arrived in Singapore in 1900 and started life as a policeman with the Dock Police.

Hari Singh Choney, (father of the accomplished kirtan singer the late Seva Singh Gandharab) also arrived in 1885. He worked as a watchman at the Lim Hoe Chiang factory at Tanjong Pagar (at the junction of Wallich and Peck Seah Streets), and kept three cows on a vacant piece of land next to the factory to supplement his income. Not long after,



Hari Singh Choney

Source: Early Sikh pioneers of Singapore by Seva Singh Gandharab



Choor Singh

*Raffles Institution student.
Courtesy: Choor Singh family*

cattle farming became a full-time business for him and his family. His younger brother **Jaimall Singh** joined him from India a few years later and took on a position as an Additional Police Constable. He was involved in guarding the government run opium shop, which was then legal in Singapore.

Roor Singh Pennu arrived in Singapore in 1888 and served as a constable with the Tanjong Pagar Dock Police. His son Mehar Singh was a clerk with the Singapore Harbour Board, and his grandson Randhir Singh retired from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Bhai Teti (Brother thirty-three) Surain Singh arrived in Singapore in 1890 and joined the Sikh Police Contingent. Following his retirement from the force, he opened a provision shop selling atta (wheat flour), ghee (clarified butter) and lentils in Japan Street, later renamed Boon Tat Street after the Second World War.

Pargat Singh (father of Tara Singh and grandfather of Param Ajeet Singh Bal) arrived in Singapore in 1901, and after a brief stint in dairy farming, established a textile business, opening shops at Armenian Street, Bras Basah Road and Queen Street. His son Tara Singh was only three when he arrived in Singapore in 1906. He served as an apprentice engineer with the Singapore Harbour Board and was later offered a position as Fifth Engineer with the Straits Steamship Company. He declined this offer and chose to join his father in the textile business. **Sardar Tara Singh** owned textile shops in Tanglin and Changi Village, became a leading contractor for the British Armed Forces in Singapore, and was also a philanthropist who played a key role in the establishment of three Sikh institutions, namely the Singapore Khalsa Association, the Sikh Partinidh Sabha serving as its President, and the Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha in Katong. He served



Baboo Bagga Singh
Courtesy: Baboo Bagga
Singh family

as President of the Singapore Khalsa Association in 1947 and was its patron from 1948 until his death in 1985.

Veer Singh Tandoor Walla arrived in Singapore in 1902 and started an eatery in Anson Road. It was popular with the early Sikh settlers as it served favourite Punjabi dishes and also doubled as a meeting point to gather and exchange news from their homeland.

Inder Singh (maternal grandfather of the late Kernail Singh Khosa and late Jarnail Singh Khosa) arrived in Singapore in 1903.

Baba Gurdit Singh originally came from Amritsar and while the date of his arrival in Singapore is not exactly known, he set up successful building construction companies in Singapore and Malaya, and travelled extensively in the region. He chartered the ill-fated Japanese tramp steamer *Komagata Maru* in Hong Kong in 1914 to take 340 Sikhs to Vancouver. They were refused entry by the Canadian immigration authorities and the tramp steamer returned to Calcutta.

Wasawa Singh (father of the late school principal Bakshish Singh) arrived in 1908 and joined the Sikh Police Contingent. He played a prominent role in raising funds for the construction of the Silat Road Gurdwara and was given leave from his official duties to embark on a fund raising campaign which took him to Malaya, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Ganessa Singh Malli arrived in Singapore in 1909, and following a brief stint as a security officer at the Europe Hotel, started a daily bus service from the City to Woodlands. There were quite a few arrivals in 1915. **Bhanga Singh** (father of Choor Singh) came to Singapore in 1915 and was employed by Topham, Jones and Railton,

a British firm of contractors building a naval base in the Seletar-Sembawang area. **Jawala Singh Dhothar** (father of Niranjan Singh, MBE, and grandfather of retired school principal Dilbagh Singh) came to Singapore in April 1914 and joined the Singapore Harbour Board as a clerk. Two years later, he served as Secretary of the Sikh Advisory Board. **Sundar Singh Wasan** (father of the late educationist Master Wazir Singh and grandfather of recently retired Sikh Advisory Board Chairman Surjit Singh Wasan) also arrived in 1915 and opened a sports goods shop in North Bridge Road. The Singapore Khalsa Association was formally registered in May 1931 with businessman S. Sundar Singh Wasan as President, his son Wazir Singh as Secretary, and Choor Singh as Sports Secretary. Coincidentally, S. Sundar Singh Wasan was later to serve as the first Chairman of the re-constituted Sikh Advisory Board in 1949. Santa Singh Saidukey and Sewa Singh Saidukey both arrived in 1915. **Santa Singh Saidukey** took active roles in the affairs of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha. **Sewa Singh Saidukey** kept cows and buffaloes at Wallich Street. His eldest son, the late **Dewan Singh Randhawa** started publishing a Punjabi newspaper *Navjwan Punjabi News* in 1951, five years after he resigned from the police force in 1946.

Sunder Singh Ramgarh and **Hira Singh Brar** arrived in 1915 and 1920 respectively and joined the Sikh Police Contingent.

Sardar Choor Singh arrived in Singapore in 1917 when he was six years old, accompanied by his mother, sister, and two of his maternal uncles. Another 1917 arrival was **Santa Singh Sarhali**. His eldest son Kirpal Singh has his own law practice and his second son the late Maha Singh was with the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board. **Ranjit Singh Bedi** arrived in 1919 and started the well-known sports goods shop Rose & Company.

Baboo Bagga Singh (father of Prof. Kuldip Singh, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore) arrived in Singapore in 1919 and joined as a clerk with the Police Department. He kept a milking cow near his home to supplement his income, and his then young son Rishpal Singh Sidhu, now 71, recalls delivering milk bottles to nearby customers in the May and Towner Road areas. Baboo Bagga Singh passed away in 1971.

Jiva Singh was a prominent cattle dealer in the early 1900s. His son **Mall Singh** (father of retired Colonel Gurcharan Singh) and his brother **Hari Singh** (father of the late Karam Singh Phallewal) both arrived in 1921 and started a dairy farm in the Serangoon/Kolam Ayer area. Mall Singh later moved on to become a successful moneylender, and together with another moneylender Ajit Singh, conducted their moneylending activities from the premises



Baboo Gulzar Singh Maddoke
as a young man. *Courtesy: Baboo Gulzar
Singh family*

of a tyre repair shop at 245 Serangoon Road called *Malaya Patch Quick*, operated by Sarban Singh who passed away in 1959. Mall Singh passed away in 1970.

Ram Singh Ramgarh (father of general physician Dr Sorinder Singh who practises at Drs Singh & Partners, Raffles City Medical Centre) arrived in 1925 and joined the Sikh Contingent, transferring later to the Malay Indian Regiment. On retirement, he ran a successful business as a ship chandler. He passed away in 2001.

Baboo Gulzar Singh Maddoke (father of retired Principal Nursing Officer Ranjit Singh, PBM, and cardiologist Dr Baldev Singh) also came to Singapore in 1925 and worked as a clerk with the Police Department. He played an active role in setting up the Sikh Missionary Society and the Sikh Partinidh Sabha. He passed away in 2004.

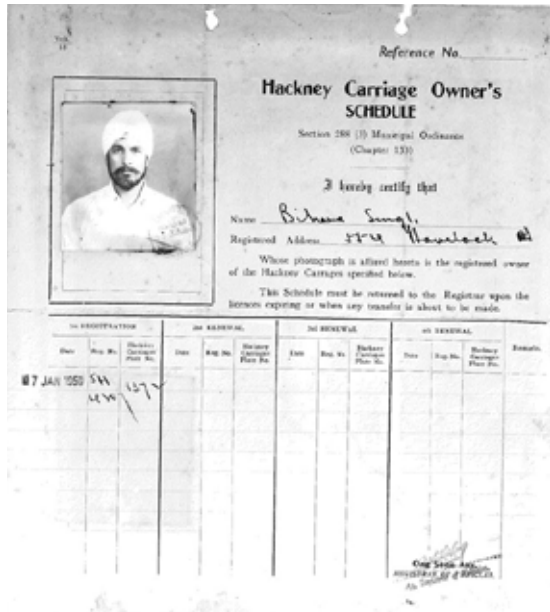
Inder Singh Toomberbhan arrived in Singapore in the 1930s and served as head watchman of the Sikh community in Tiong Bahru at the Singapore Improvement Trust flats at Block 55 which still exists today, His son **Pritam Singh Toomberbhan** arrived in Singapore in 1939 at the age of 21 and joined the Sikh Police Contingent. He participated in live operations against the communists in Malaya. He was at one point instructed to bury beheaded communists. The police station to which he was assigned took heavy fire from the communists for an entire night and he managed to survive the attacks. On leaving the SPC as a sergeant, he was a prominent



Pritam Singh Toomberbhan, SPC 1941. Courtesy Pritam Singh Toomberbhan family

member of the Sikh taxi driver community, and served as a committee member of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Gurdwara Management committee in 1966. He passed away in 2013.

Bihara Singh was one of the later settlers, arriving in Singapore via Malaya in 1935. He joined the Sikh Police Contingent (SPC) in 1936 and stayed at the Sepoy Lines Pearl’s Hill Barracks where he also doubled as a granthi (ceremonial reader of the Guru Granth Sahib Sikh holy scripture). He was a sergeant when he left the SPC in 1946 soon after the war ended and worked as a lorry driver for the next 12 years before acquiring a hackney carriage (taxi driver’s) licence in 1959. He retired from taxi driving in 1986 and passed away in 1993.



Bihara Singh’s taxi licence
Courtesy Bihara Singh family



Massa Singh as a young Singapore Harbour Board policeman.

Courtesy: Massa Singh family

Harbaksh Singh was one of the later arrivals. Born in 1923, he came to Malaya in 1952 and worked at the Khalsa School in Ipoh before moving to Singapore in 1954, where he started a bilingual Punjabi/Urdu weekly newspaper called *Samaj Weekly*. He was a Punjabi School teacher in Singapore in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and also served as the first Manager of the Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha in 1978. When asked what wealth and assets he had amassed, he replied “*My children are my assets*”. He passed away in 1990.

Massa Singh arrived from Kuala Lumpur in 1951 and was one of the pioneer members of the Singapore Harbour Board Police (SHBP) which took over the responsibility of the then Auxillary Police Force and were specifically given the task of looking after the port in Singapore. It was eventually renamed as the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) Police. Massa Singh saw the evolution of the port from being a small transshipment centre to one of the most significant ports in the world. The 1950s and 1960s were tumultuous years marked by

workers’ strikes, Indonesian Confrontasi, communist insurgency and the racial riots. One of the most difficult periods for Massa Singh was in 1954 when two of his colleagues were gunned down in cold blood while doing their sentry duty at the port gate near Prima Flour Mills. Massa Singh was one of the five Sikh members of the pioneer cohort. The others included Balwant Singh, Kher Singh, Puran Singh and Kirpal Singh. With the exception of Massa Singh, all of the pioneer batch of Sikhs left SHBP at a very early stage of their careers. Massa Singh however went on to serve PSA Police until his retirement in 1982.



Naval Base Police in the 1930's. Inspector Jangeer Singh is seated in the foreground.

Courtesy Jangeer Singh family.

5

SIKHS IN THE BRITISH NAVAL BASE

In the early 1920s, the colonial authorities engaged a British firm of contractors, Messrs Topham, Jones and Railton to build a naval base in the northern part of Singapore then known as the Seletar-Sembawang area. While the majority of the labor force for the project came from South India, it did include about 40 Sikhs. Sikhs were also employed as security guards, then known as watchmen, and there were 55 of them. All these workers were accommodated in long wooden housing blocks with attap roofs (named after the attap palm tree *Nypa fruticans*). The leaves of this palm tree are dried, folded over a rod, stitched together in place, and used as thatched roofs for wooden huts. Until the nineteenth century, even significant public buildings such as temples in Singapore were built in this manner. The Sikh labourers were accommodated separately, but close to the blocks accommodating the Sikh watchmen.

When the build-up of the Naval Base increased in 1928/29, it became the largest naval base east of Suez. More workmen were employed and security for the area was also enhanced. The number of Sikh watchmen was increased to 120. New buildings for the accommodation of naval and civilian staff were put up in the Naval Base area known as Mata Gate, 15th milestone, Sembawang Road. The accommodation blocks for the Sikh watchmen were built inside the base at 14th milestone, Semarang Road. It was here that the Sikh watchmen established their first Gurdwara in a large room in a wooden block with an attap roof.

When the dockyard was more than three-quarters completed in 1934, the watchmen were supplied with police uniforms and designated as Additional Police Constables (APCs). Recruitment of these APCs was mainly carried out through the Sikh Contingent of the Straits Settlements Police Force. The manpower strength of the APCs was also increased to 250 men. In 1938, a Naval Police Force was created by the British government and all the APCs were absorbed into this new force, which was formed to take over all police duties in the entire Naval Base area.

In 1939, the Naval Base Police Force was gazetted by Order-in-Council by the Governor of the Straits Settlements and given the same powers as the Straits Settlements Police within the confines of the Naval Base area. The chief of the Naval Base Police Force was an officer seconded from the Straits Settlements Police with the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police. The Force was enlarged and divided into three Divisions. The Sikh Division of 450 men had Inspector Jangeer Singh as officer-in-charge, the Punjabi-Muslim Division of 110 men had Inspector Shah Alam as officer-in-charge, and the Marine Police of 55 Malays had Inspector Abu Adam as officer-in-charge.

The Sikh Division had more men because there were many highly restricted areas where smoking was banned and Sikhs were preferred as they were non-smokers. The restricted areas included the Ammunition Depot, known as RAND, at Attap Valley Road (with 1 Sub-Inspector, 3 Sergeants and 200 other ranks); the oil installations at Kranji (with 2 Sergeants and 50 men); the Normanton oil installations (with 1 Sergeant and 36 men); and the Mount Faber oil installations (with 1 Sergeant and 12 men). The Naval Base Fire Brigade was manned entirely by Sikhs. There were 32 Sikhs manning the fire engines in eight-hour shifts with 2 Sikh Sergeants in-charge.

In early 1940, the manpower strength of the Naval Base Police Force was further increased to 530 Sikhs, 180 Punjabi-Muslims and 70 Malays. The Sikh Gurdwara at the 14th milestone Sembawang Road was shifted to Block 88, Canberra Road, but still within the precincts of the Naval Base. In the same year, there were also other additions to the Sikh population at the Naval Base. 45 Sikh motor-transport (MT) drivers, 6 motor mechanics, 2 timekeepers, 6 clerks at Naval Base offices, 5 storekeepers, and 35 electricians. Boilermakers and some other miscellaneous Sikh workers were also recruited.

When the Japanese started their war in the Far East in December 1941 and until the evacuation of the Naval Base on 31 January 1942, 7 Sikh policemen and 3 Sikh MT drivers lost their lives. During the Japanese occupation of Singapore, about 25 Sikhs worked with the Japanese police in the Naval Base. When the war ended with the Japanese surrender in September 1945, the Naval Base Police Force was again re-organized by the British government. The same officers organized their respective Divisions. When the re-organization was completed in January 1946, it was found that the Sikh strength of the Force was not enough to police all the restricted areas. Inspector Jangeer Singh with 3 men went to Malaysia in October 1947 to recruit Sikhs for the Naval Base Police Force. He managed to recruit only 45 personnel.

In 1948, Inspector Jangeer Singh was sent to Punjab to recruit about 200 Sikhs to build up the Sikh Naval Force to its required manpower establishment. He came back with only 150 personnel. In 1949, the strength of the Sikh Division was 450 men. In 1952, Inspector Jangeer Singh was promoted to the rank of Assistant Superintendent of Police, the only Sikh ever to attain this rank in the Sikh Naval Police. Subsequently, 2 Sikhs were promoted as Inspectors and 4 Sikhs were promoted as Sub-Inspectors.

In 1953 there were 47 Sikh drivers in the Naval Transport Section, 2 timekeepers and 9 mechanics. In the Naval Base workshops, there were 4 storekeepers, 10 electricians and wiremen, 4 boilermakers and 2 messengers. In the Naval Base offices there were 8 Sikh clerks.

The Naval Base Police Force also had their own hockey team and most of the players were Sikhs. Inspector Jangeer Singh often acted as umpire in friendly matches until his retirement in 1961.

The Naval Base Fire Brigade was also manned by Sikhs from 1936 to 1940. After the conclusion of the war in 1945, Fire Officer Jagtar Singh re-organized the Fire Brigade with 24 Sikhs. This service was expanded later with the recruitment of Malays into the service. In 1950, Jagtar Singh was promoted to the rank of Senior Assistant Fire Officer and he retired in 1971.

The Sikhs continued to serve in the Naval Base Police Force until its disbandment in 1971 when the British troops pulled out of Singapore. A total of 110 Sikh families migrated to the United Kingdom, 75 families returned to India, and the rest found work in Singapore. About 20 Sikhs joined the Security Force of Sembawang Shipyard which took over the Naval Base and converted it into a commercial shipyard.

Editor's Note: The information in this chapter has been initially drawn and further edited by the compiler from an unpublished article originally written by Sardar Darshan Singh, who had earlier worked as a Chief Clerk at the Naval Base. Grateful thanks are due to Sardar Surjan Singh, PBM, PBS, BA (Lond) for providing me with his edited copy of this article.

CURRENT SIKH INSTITUTIONS IN SINGAPORE

Statutory Board

Sikh Advisory Board

Gurdwaras

Central Sikh Gurdwara Board

Central Sikh Temple

Silat Road Sikh Temple

Sikh Centre

Gurdwara Sahib Yishun

Khalsa Dharmak Sabha

Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan

Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha

Sri Guru Singh Sabha

Social, Education & Welfare Sikh Institutions

Singapore Khalsa Association

Singapore Sikh Education Foundation

Sikh Welfare Council

Sikh Youth Organisations

Sikh Sewaks Singapore

Young Sikh Association (Singapore)

Naam Ras Singapore Ltd

Other Sikh Institutions

Isteri Satsang Sabha

Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha

Sikh Business Association

Sikh Missionary Society Singapore

Sikh Sports Club

6

ESTABLISHMENT OF GURDWARAS, SIKH ADVISORY BOARD AND OTHER SIKH INSTITUTIONS

Early establishment of gurdwaras in Singapore

Gurdwaras have always held a special place in the religious and spiritual life of the Sikh community. Not only do they serve as social meeting places, they are also places for worship and meditation, and hold special congregations to mark important anniversaries in the Sikh calendar. They serve as places for birth ceremonies, birthdays, weddings, funeral prayer services, and other Sikh festivals. Since the founding of the Sikh community, langgar or community kitchen has come to be an important part of Sikh religious life. For Sikhs, eating together in a gurdwara expresses equality and oneness of all humankind. The concept of langgar assails the inner core of inequality and symbolizes a Sikh's personal rejection of prejudice towards others.

It is therefore not surprising that gurdwaras were established from the very early days of the Sikh presence in Singapore, and formed an integral part of the Sikh community. The Silat Road Gurdwara and the Central Sikh Temple in particular played an important role in community building among early Sikh immigrants, catering to the religious and social needs of new immigrants, and providing them with a social network. They also played a significant and galvanizing role not only in forging Sikh identities and communities, but also later on in fostering wider assimilation into their newly adopted homelands.

Regional loyalties which originated from India played an important role in the early gurdwaras that were established in Singapore along regional lines. However, in present times, the Silat Road Gurdwara and the Central Sikh Temple are no longer seen to represent any particular regional or caste interests. They are now important historical gurdwaras in the religious and cultural landscape of the Sikh community in modern day Singapore.

Sikhs recruited from the Punjab for the Sikh Police Contingent in Singapore in 1881 were accommodated in bachelors' quarters at the Pearl's Hill Barracks which had a number



Tanjong Pagar Dock Police station, 1890. *Courtesy National Archives Singapore*

of halls, a kitchen, and long bathrooms. It also had a single storey zinc roofed gurdwara within its grounds, and was later modified and improved upon when the families of married men arrived and started living in the barracks from the 1930s. The gurdwara had a granthi and a senior Sikh police officer delegated to serve as President. Young children of Sikh policemen learnt Gurmukhi and about the Sikh religion from the Granthi. Sikh civilian staff were allowed access to worship at this gurdwara. In his memoirs, the late Retired Justice Choor Singh recalled learning Punjabi at the Pearl's Hill Sepoy Lines Gurdwara from 1921 to about 1925. The Sikh Police Contingent gurdwara closed down in 1945 with the disbandment of the contingent.

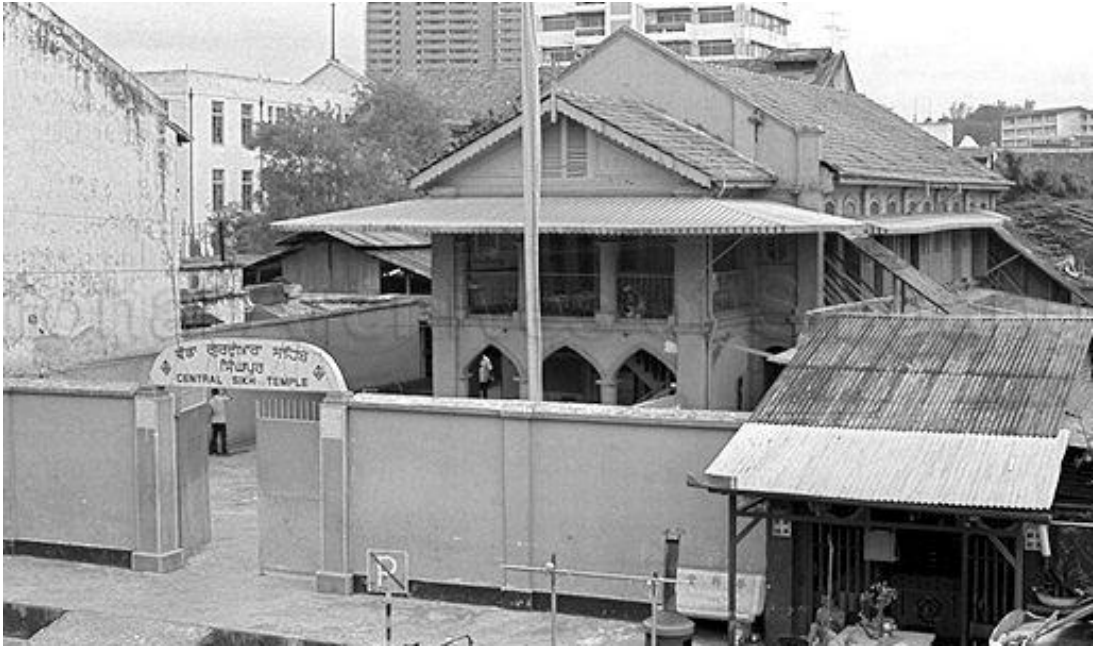
Sikh policemen working for the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company had their own gurdwara in their barracks at Anson Road. These barracks and the gurdwara ceased to exist when the Singapore Harbour Board was established and took control of the Tanjong Pagar Dock Company.

Establishment of the Central Sikh Temple

The increase in the civilian Sikh population in Singapore was the 'push factor' in the establishment of the Central Sikh Temple in 1912 in a single storey brick bungalow at 175 Queen Street. Sindhi merchant Wassiamul Assomul, a leading partner of Wassiamul Assomul & Company with a large shop in High Street generously donated funds for the purchase of this bungalow from one Haji Beedin at a cost of \$6,500. In his research, Retired Justice Choor Singh sighted the original title deed and affirmed it was purchased by merchant Dhoolomal Nanoomall Assomull, Sergeant-Major Punjab Singh and Corporal Ganda Singh of the Singapore Police Force as joint tenants for use as a Gurdwara.

Reconstruction of this gurdwara took place in 1921. Before too long, the gurdwara management committee was plagued by Majha-Malwa regional rivalry, and the Government subsequently placed the management of the Central Sikh Temple under the control of the Muhammadan and Hindu Endowment Board. This displeased the Sikhs and they responded by forming the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara in 1918 as a registered society.

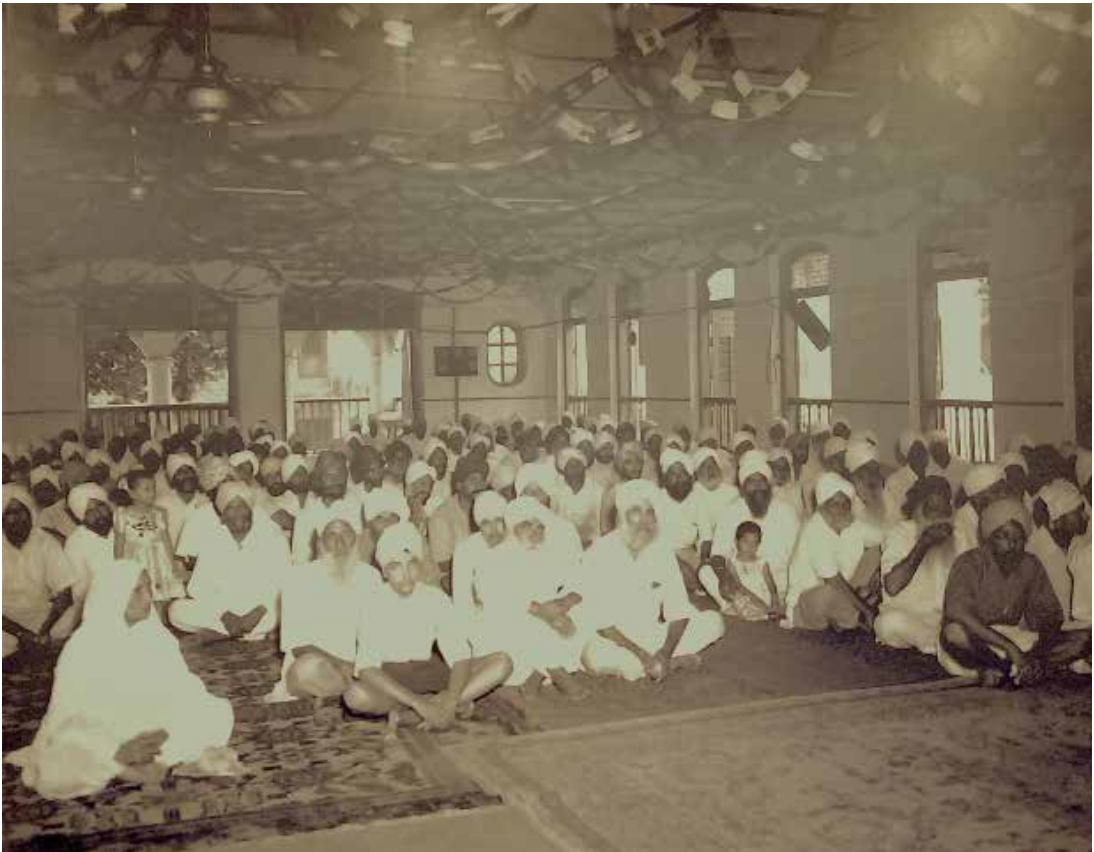
Meanwhile, the Queen Street Gurdwara continued to function, but it was not until 1 November 1940 that the Government finally acceded to representations from the Sikh community and established the *Queen Street Ordinance*. This was not an entirely satisfactory outcome either as the government laid down certain conditions for the constitution of the Board which had to include representatives from the Majha, Malwa and Doaba regions



Above: Early photo of Central Sikh Temple in the 1920s

Below: Early photo of Central Sikh Temple





Sangat at the original Central Sikh Temple at 175 Queen Street

and that the positions of President, Secretary and Treasurer were to be held in turn by representatives from these regional groups. More importantly, members from the Sikh police forces could only be appointed by the governor.

When consciousness dawned that the promulgation of this Ordinance would only further propagate these regional groupings, the *Central Sikh Gurdwara Board Ordinance* 1961 was passed to merge the Queen Street Board and Silat Road Gurdwara Board. Such a move would help in cost sharing and maintenance because of falling attendance at the Silat Road Gurdwara. However, this Ordinance was not enforced because of objections from the Sikh community, and it was not until 1981 that the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board formally took over control and management of the Central Sikh Temple and Silat Road Sikh Temple.



HDB Blk. 269-B Queen Street, Cheng Yan Court now stands at the site of the old Central Sikh Temple

*“The Sikh Advisory Board whose members are drawn from all the major Sikh denominations (read regional groups) gave its wholehearted support to the introduction of the Bill in Parliament. Under the provisions of the Act, the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) will be representative of the entire Sikh community in Singapore”.*²²

A building committee representative of all regional groups was established in 1955 to plan for a new Central Sikh Temple away from Queen Street to a new site in Newton. Disagreements again emerged within the building committee as there were groups in the congregation that preferred to remain in Queen Street. An adjoining plot of land with nine houses on it was purchased for \$100,000. Plans were then drawn up for a new temple in Queen Street and approved by the Government in 1963. Internal disagreement emerged yet again and this plot of land was acquired by the Urban Renewal Authority in 1976. The land on which the temple stood was acquired a year later in 1977. Representatives from the Central Sikh Temple Board of Trustees appealed against the proposed demolition of the temple and

met with the Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew at the Istana on 17 May 1978 to discuss this matter. Following this meeting, a decision was taken to demolish the temple. It was then vacated in December 1979, and initially moved to temporary premises at Towner Road. A Housing and Development Board block (HDB Blk. 269-B Queen Street) named Cheng Yan Court now stands at the site of the old Queen Street temple, and a National Heritage Board marker was unveiled at this site on 8 May 1999 by Retired Justice Choor Singh.



Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew meeting with the Central Sikh Temple Board of Trustees at the Istana on 17 May 1978.

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission

Sant Baba Sohan Singh Ji of Malacca visited the Central Sikh Temple at Queen Street in 1965 and during his short time here, gave some kathas at both the Central Sikh Temple and Khalsa Dharmak Sabha. A group photograph was taken at a nearby photo studio to commemorate this visit. The well known and respected Khalsa Dharmak Sabha granthi at that time was Giani Gurbaksh Singh, popularly known as “Khande Wala” and he can be seen in this photo standing in the last row second from right.



Sant Baba Sohan Singh Ji Malacca, and Sant Baba Fateh Singh Ji India, visit to Singapore

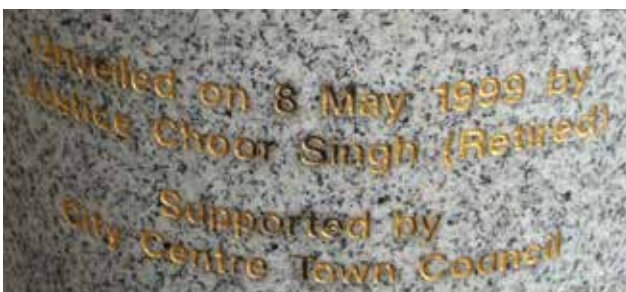
Following the decision to build a more permanent structure at Towner Road, DPA Architects Gan Eng Oon, Vikas Gore and Manop Pakinsri visited 10 temples in Delhi and Punjab to study the characteristic features of some impressive Sikh temples before finalizing plans to suit the constrained space in the Singapore context. A technical committee headed by Mr. Surinder Singh, a senior lecturer with the university’s Building Department was responsible for overseeing the building project. Other team members included SAF engineer Colonel Gurcharan Singh, Dr. H. S. Parmar, director of a firm of private engineering consultants, and architect Madam Kamaljeet Kaur. Central Sikh Gurdwara Board representatives included its then President Mr. Jeswant Singh Bandal, Secretary Mr. Jaswant Singh Brar, Treasurer Mr. Jagjeet Singh Sehgal, and Central Sikh Temple President Mr Ujagar Singh Gill, an engineer with the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation. Other members of the building committee included Mr Karam Singh and Mr Mota Singh, a retired clerk of works in the former British Military establishment. When the building plans were finalized in 1983 and construction ready to commence, the temple moved to the former Bukit Ho Swee Community Centre at Seng Poh Road.



Current National Heritage Board marker at 175 Queen Street



Original National Heritage Board marker at 175 Queen Street

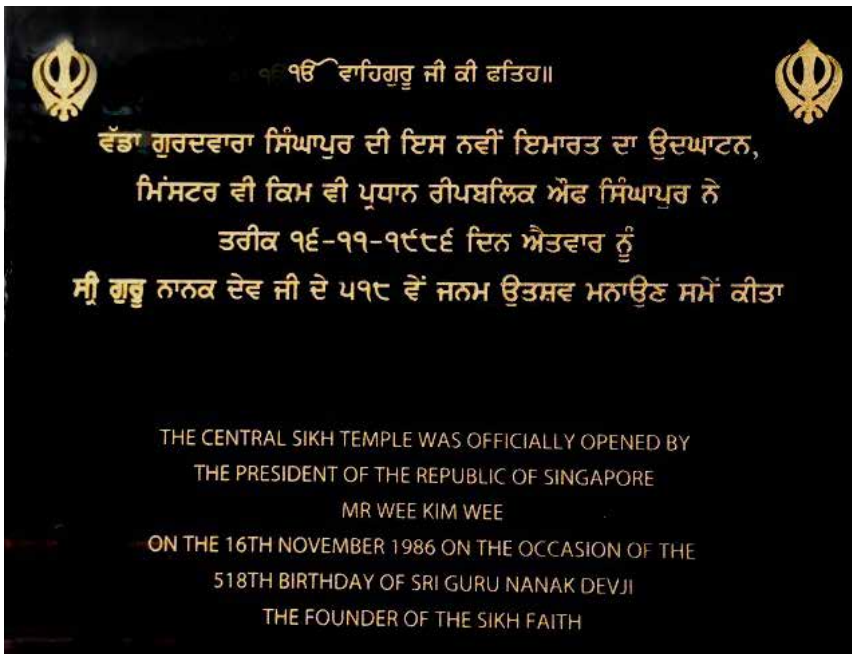


Original Central Sikh Temple Heritage marker inscription

Sant Baba Nahar Singh Ji Sunehranwale from Punjab performed the ground breaking ceremony on 2 April 1983 and construction of the new 41,000 square feet temple at No. 2 Towner Road began in earnest in 1984. The completion of the building in 1986 coincided with the 518th anniversary of the birth of Guru Nanak. Striking features of the temple are its marble floors, the absence of pillars in the prayer hall which comfortably seats 1,000 worshippers, and the inside of the 12.5 metres high dome that sits over the prayer hall and is covered with white and gold tiles.

Various events including a walkathon were organized to meet the temple building's \$6.5 million cost and most of the donations came from friends and well wishers. The Singapore Sikh Sewaks spearheaded a "Sponsor a Brick" fund raising campaign. The Istri Sat Sang Sabha committee headed by its then president Madam Kartar Kaur, affectionately called "Mami" by the sangat, raised \$100,000 towards the building fund.

At the time of its completion and official opening by Singapore President Wee Kim Wee on 16 November 1986, the Central Sikh Temple was believed to be the largest gurdwara in Asia outside of India.



Official opening plaque laid by President Wee Kim Wee

Central Sikh Temple at Towner Road

While the Central Sikh Temple has served the community well in fulfilling its religious roles over the last 25 years, new and upgraded facilities were urgently required to meet changing community needs. The building underwent extensive upgrading and renovation at a cost of \$4.5 million and it was officially reopened on 23 December 2011 by Singapore President, Dr. Tony Tan Keng Yam. It is a glowing tribute to the Sikh community and its donors for having raised and borne the entire cost of upgrading and renovation. To commemorate this auspicious event, the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board organized a signature Anhad Kirtan program (singing of devotional hymns from the Sikh religious scripture) featuring renowned overseas singers, and a travelling Photographic Exhibition on Sikh Heritage by well-known photo journalist Sondeep Shankar.

The upgraded and renovated premises have features that are friendly to community elders such as anti-slip tiles, ramps and larger elevators. The brilliant white renovated building is eco-friendly with many new energy saving features such as LED lights and auto cut-off taps. It has larger and brighter meeting, prayer, and dining areas, in addition to being equipped with the latest in information and communication technologies and meeting classroom facilities for teaching, youth promotion and a wide range of other community services and activities.



Official opening plaque laid by President Tony Tan Keng Yam



Central Sikh Temple



Central Sikh Temple entrance in 2016

Istri Sat Sang

Not long after the end of the Second World War, the Istri Sat Sang was established at the Central Sikh Temple at 175 Queen Street on 26 March 1946, and **Mrs Rattan Kaur** (wife of Police Inspector Dalip Singh and mother of Dr Bhagwant Singh now resident in Adelaide, Australia) was its first President. However, it was not formally registered with the Registrar of Societies until 2 March 1964. Mrs Rattan Kaur would probably have been one of the few if not the first Sikh lady in Singapore to have owned a driving licence in the early years of Singapore's Sikh history, and she used to drive a green colored Morris Minor.

When the Istri Sat Sang was formally registered in 1964, the ten member Management Committee comprised the following individuals:

President: Mrs Dyal Kaur	Committee Members:
Vice-President: Mrs Gurbachan Kaur	Mrs Amrit Kaur
Secretary: Mrs Kartar Kaur	Mrs Gurcharan Kaur
Vice-Secretary: Mrs Harbans Kaur	Mrs Sohinder Kaur
Treasurer: Mrs Sawaran Kaur	Mrs Sinder Kaur
	Mrs Mahinder Kaur

The entrance fee for membership was \$1, the annual subscription was \$3, and the Management Committee was required to hold annual general meetings in February each year.

Over the years, other Sikh gurdwaras in Singapore have since established their own internal Istri Sat Sang units. The Istri Sat Sang at the Central Sikh Temple however remains the only formally registered society, and it has been particularly active in fund raising efforts through its various programs and activities. It has made generous donations in support of gurpurab (Sikh religious anniversaries) celebrations and building renovation initiatives at CST and other gurdwaras in Singapore.

Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara

The Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara was founded as a registered society in 1918 by Baba Karam Singh Hothi following some Sikhs displeasure at placing the control and management of the Central Sikh Temple under the Muhammadan and Hindu Endowment Board. It was initially located at rented premises close to the Central Sikh Temple in Queen Street. A little later they rented a two-storey shop house, also in Queen Street, close to Bras Basah Road, almost opposite St Joseph's Institution. Its original membership at founding

was non-denominational until 1924 when the Malwa Sikhs broke away and decided to form its own gurdwara. In 1932 Sri Guru Singh Sabha moved to Wilkie Road after purchasing in 1931 a two-storey bungalow at 90 Wilkie Road for \$10,875 and converting it into a Gurdwara after the necessary alterations.

In 1957, they purchased the adjoining plot of land for \$36,000. Nothing was done with this land for almost 15 years and in 1973, a Building Committee was formed to build the new Gurdwara using this adjoining land plus the langgar hall area of the gurdwara. The Building Committee comprised:

- President: S. Kapoor Singh Bhamri
- Secretary: S. Khushal Singh Tharoo
- Asst. Secretary: S. Chanan Singh Khanowal
- Treasurer: S. Doola Singh Chamba
- Asst Treasurer: S. Tarlok Singh Lauke



Plaques on the Old Gurdwara Building of the original acquisition in 1932 and opening of the renovated premises in 2014.

Actual construction for for the gurdwara started in 1978 and was completed in 1981 at a cost of \$1 million, when the President of the gurdwara was Boor Singh Usma. The new building officially declared open by Minister Ong Teng Cheong in 1984.

The old Gurdwara building was retained and used as a “Janj Ghar” during weddings and as classrooms for extra Punjabi classes for a few years. It then lay vacant for many years before it was completely refurbished at a cost of around \$1.1 million and reopened in 2014 with the upper floor serving as an additional Darbar Hall and the ground floor rented out for use by a Pre-school operator.



Recognition of the contribution of the New Gurdwara Building Committee members (from right: S. Khushal Singh Tharoo, S. Chanan Singh Khanowal and S. Kapoor Singh Bhamri) by the then Gurdwara President, S. Boor Singh Usma

Sri Guru Singh Sabha has played an active role and given full support to the promotion of the Punjabi language and the Sikh religion among the Sikhs in Singapore. During the

1950s and 1960s the Sabha made an annual contribution of \$600 to the Partinidh Sabha to defray the cost of running the English and Punjabi schools. It allowed its premises to be used for over 25 years from the 1940s to the 1960s to run Punjabi classes for Sikh children.

Khalsa Punjabi School (full-time regular Punjabi school) was also run in the Gurdwara's premises in the 1950s and 1960s to cater for the children of Sikh migrants who were from conservative families who did not want to send their daughters to English schools. Over time, as more children started attending regular schools, this demand reduced and the school was finally closed.

A comprehensive list of key office bearers of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara from 1945 to 1997 can be found in *Appendix N* of the late Retired Justice Choor Singh's book *The Sikh community's contribution to the development of Singapore: A collection of essays and personal reminiscences*.



Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara today

Gurdwara Khalsa Dharmak Sabha

The Khalsa Dharmak Club (later renamed the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha) was formed by the Malwa Sikhs who broke away from the Sri Guru Singh Sabha on 17 January 1924. Its temporary office address was initially at 85 Kampong Bahru Road while its members held their religious programs at the Queen Street Gurdwara Sahib. After a relatively short period the club's office shifted to rented premises at 126 Cecil Street on 5 April 1924. Following installation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib at the Cecil Street rented premises on 24 April 1926, it was renamed the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, Panch Khalsa Hethkari Jatha, Singapore.

A further move took place on 10 January 1927 with the renting of a double storey bungalow at Handy Road and the installation of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib on 18 January 1927. Bhai Chanan Singh Mandali was appointed the first Granthi of this Gurdwara Sahib on 13 February 1927. Its 15 management committee members widely represented Malwa Sikhs from all occupational sectors including the police, watchmen, taxi drivers and sangat. The committee members included Arjan Singh Bhekha, Pandit Nand Singh Smalsar, Mall Singh Phallewal, Basant Singh Gholia, and Sergeant Major Kehar Singh of the Harbour Dock Police.



S Narain Singh Khai, one of the first five Trustees of Khalsa Dharmak Sabha

Source: 'Ithas Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Singapore, 1924-1983'. Singapore, Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, 1985

In May 1933, the Executive Committee decided to purchase a more permanent location for the Sabha and, through fund raising efforts, had collected \$10,000 by 1936. Following an extraordinary general meeting held on 12 April 1936, a decision was taken to purchase a 14,716 square feet plot with a double storey house at 18 Niven Road for \$16,000. The sangat authorized some Sabha leaders as Trustees, namely Pandit Nand Singh Smalsar, Narian Singh Khai, Budh Singh Dhothar, Bhan Singh s/o Jwala Singh and Jiun Singh Raiser, to borrow \$3,000 from Hansraj Singh s/o Tilaram using the property purchased as security for the loan. The remaining \$3,000 shortfall was met by personal loans from Pandit Nand Singh Smalsar, Narian Singh Khai and Bhan Singh Bhekha. Donations were sought from the sangat and full



Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Management Committee 1964.

Source: 'Ithas Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Singapore, 1924-1983'.

Singapore, Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, 1985.



Plaque commemorating Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew opening the renovated hall, 1966

payment for this purchase was made on 15 June 1936. The Sri Guru Granth Sahib was installed in the renovated Gurdwara Sahib in early 1938. In the same year, the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha took the initiative to set up a library through acquiring suitable books from Punjab on the Sikh religion, history and culture. Several improvements were carried out in the intervening years, and major renovations and extensions carried out in 1965 at a cost of \$71,000.

The Sabha had several progressive presidents, such as Babu Thaman Singh (1938-39), Narian Singh Khai (1964), Mukhtiar Singh Matta (1965-68, 1977, 1990-94) and Kehar Singh Ransihke (1994-98).



Above: The original Khalsa Dharmak Sabha premises

Below: Khalsa Dharmak Sabha today



The Khalsa Dharmak Sabha provided yeoman service during the Japanese occupation of Singapore in catering to the Sikh community by providing a vehicle free of charge as well as firewood to convey the bodies of deceased Sikhs to the crematorium. Nearly 50 Sikh widows and children residing at the Widows Ashram in Silat Road received provisions, basic necessities, and even cash from the Sabha when necessary.

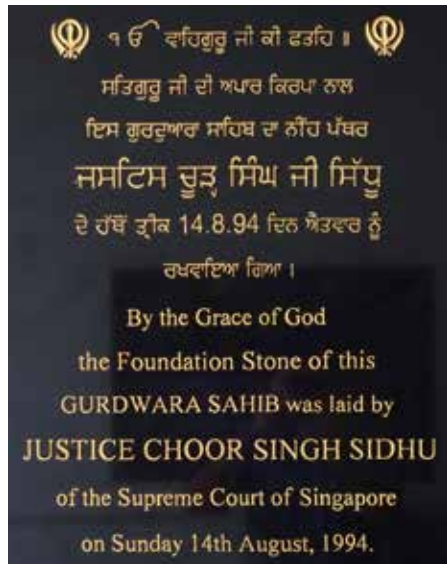
In February 1962, the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha decided to offer scholarships to needy Malwa Sikh children for further studies. A sub-committee was formed to scrutinize all relevant applications and make recommendations on scholarship awards. These scholarships were discontinued in March 1968.

The Khalsa Dharmak Sabha hosted some prominent visitors in the mid-1950s to mid-1960s. Master Tara Singh, leader of the Akalis in Punjab visited Singapore in August 1954 and the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha presented him with a siropa of M\$5,100. In July 1964, Sant Baba Sohan Singh visited the gurdwara en route to a visit to the Punjab and was presented with a siropa of S\$525. In August 1966, Sant Fateh Singh who led the Punjabi Suba Morcha in the Punjab stayed at the Sabha premises and was also presented with a siropa of \$5,100.

In 1990, a decision was taken to demolish the two storey building and replace it with a structure that looked more like a Gurdwara with modern design and facilities. This task was assigned to a 12 member Building Committee.

The late Justice Choor Singh Sidhu laid the foundation stone for the new building on 14 August 1994 and the opening ceremony (Akhand Path Bhog) took place two years later on 9 August 1996.

Editor's Note: Sardar Tara Singh Hitashi Gujarwalia has written a detailed account in Gurmukhi of the establishment of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha and subsequent developments. It is entitled 'Ithas Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Singapore, 1924-1983'. Singapore, Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, 1985.



Ground-breaking and Foundation Stone ceremonies of new Khalsa Dharmak Sabha building

Silat Road Sikh Temple

There were only two gurdwaras in Singapore in the early 1920s, namely the gurdwara in Queen Street for civilian Sikhs and the gurdwara on Pearl's Hill for members of the Sikh Police Contingent. Meanwhile, the gurdwara on Pearl's Hill was proving to be too small and inadequate as the Police Contingent had grown in numbers.

In December 1922, land in Silat Road was leased to the Sikh Police Contingent for the construction of a gurdwara that would not only meet the religious and social needs of the Sikh police, but also provide interim lodging arrangements for newcomers to Singapore, including police personnel and their families who were going on leave or posting to Hong Kong, Shanghai, British North Borneo and Sarawak. The foundation stone of the Silat Road Gurdwara was laid by Captain A. R. Chancellor, Inspector-General of the Straits Settlements Police on 18 December 1922 in the presence of other British and local dignitaries. The Sikh Police Contingent played a proactive role in raising funds for the construction of the gurdwara and many members pledged a month's salary to the project which was completed in 1924 at a total cost of \$54,000 Straits Settlements dollars. Bhai Wasawa Singh Thoorkot (father of primary school principal the late Bakshish Singh), a member of the Sikh Police



Subedar Sundar Singh, Silat Road Gurdwara's first President at its official opening in 1924.

Contingent, played a prominent role in raising funds for the construction of this gurdwara and was given leave from his official duties to embark on a fund raising campaign which took him to Malaya, Hong Kong and Shanghai. The gurdwara was officially declared open by the then Inspector General of Police Mr. A. E. Dunlop, with Subedar Sunder Singh serving as the gurdwara's first President. Governance of the gurdwara rested in the Silat Road Gurdwara Ordinance and the requirement that the President of the Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road must be a Sikh police officer continued until 1981. The late Retired Justice Choor Singh recalled being present at its official opening in 1924 and he was then a 13 years old student at Outram Road School.

The first granthi of this gurdwara was Giani Nand Singh, a graduate of Mahindra College in Patiala, and he was specially recruited from India. He belonged to the Panch Khalsa Diwan, a reformist movement based in Bhasaur Village in Patiala State and was the father of the late Sardar Mehervan Singh, who was later to qualify as the first Sikh public accountant in Singapore.

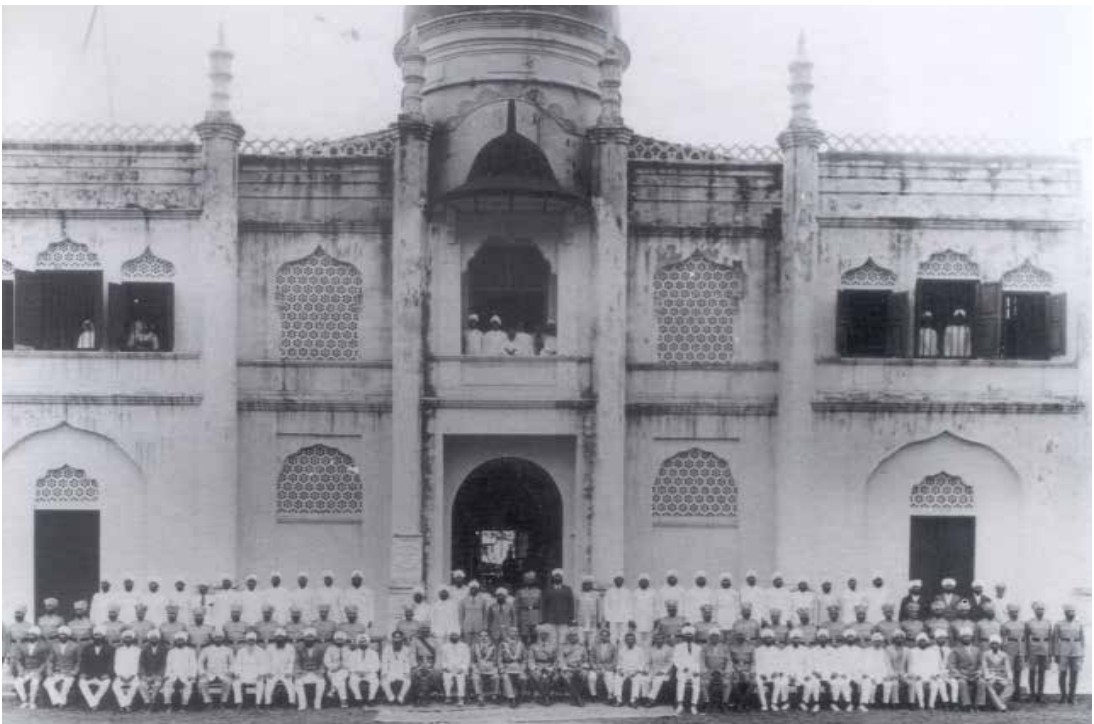
On 7 April 1938, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Straits Settlements, Sir Thomas Shenton Whitelegge Thomas gave a statutory land grant of 23,744 square feet to the Silat Road Gurdwara Board of Trustees (Incorporated) on payment of an annual rent of \$1 till 31 December 1944. There is no recorded evidence to indicate if this peppercorn rent was ever collected and paid to the Straits Settlements Government of the day. The tenure of the land on which the Silat Road Gurdwara, the Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji Memorial Gurdwara, and the Sikh Centre building complex now stands is an estate in perpetuity, that is, forever or freehold.

In the early years following its establishment, the Silat Road Gurdwara was not kept in good repair and other gurdwaras started being established along regional and caste based lines. There was however a Silat Road Gurdwara Board of Trustees in place in 1937

comprising representatives from the Majha, Malwa and Doaba factions and a representative from the Sikh police force. This gurdwara served an important function in providing shelter and accommodation to war widows and orphans during the war years from 1942 to 1945.

The late 1950s to 1960s saw falling attendance and the gurdwara fell into a state of disrepair. To bolster revenue, the Gurdwara Management Committee leased its ground floor to a High Street Sindhi merchant as a storage area for the company's electronic goods.

The Silat Road Gurdwara faced renewed interest in its proper upkeep and revival in congregation attendance when the samadh of Bhai Maharaj Singh was shifted from the Singapore General Hospital grounds to its new location within the precincts of the Silat Road Gurdwara on 12 October 1966. It was extensively renovated and rebuilt in the mid 1990s at a cost of \$4 million. It was officially declared open on 23 October 1995 by philanthropist S. Kartar Singh Thakral. The Thakral family has donated generously towards both the building of



Silat Road Gurdwara in 1931. Photo courtesy of Karam Singh Phallewal family.

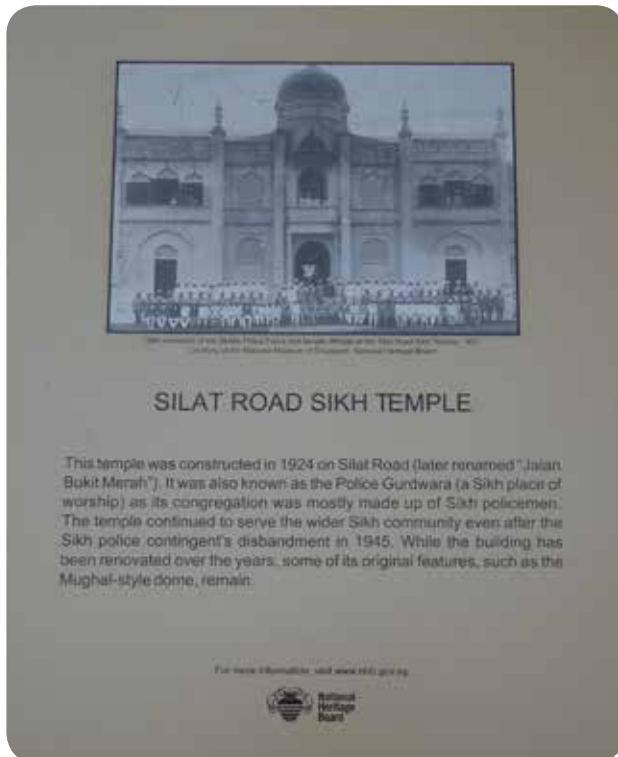
Source: Early Sikh pioneers of Singapore by Seva Singh Gandharab



Silat Road Sikh Temple today with the Sikh Centre complex in the background

the Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road and the Sikh Centre building annexe. Many individuals have done selfless seva at both the the Memorial Gurdwara and the Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road. Notable amongst them are S. Kartar Singh Dalamnangal, Mata Udham Kaur, S. Jagjeet Singh Seghal, S. Ujager Singh Malla and S. Naranjan Singh Phaphre Bhai Ke.

The Silat Road Gurdwara was designated a historic site by the National Heritage Board on 14 November 1999 and the Heritage Plaque was declared open by S. Inderjit Singh, MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC.



The Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road today is a hive of incessant activity with growing attendance from Sikhs and non Sikhs. Tourists and tour operators, schools, community and grassroots organizations make regular visits to learn about Sikhism and the Sikh way of life.

Silat Road Sikh Temple
Heritage marker

Gurdwara Silat Road Sikh Centre

The seven storeys Sikh Centre building costing \$5.2 million was completed in 1998, refurbishment accomplished by 2000, and officially declared open by Singapore President S. R. Nathan on 30 July 2006 in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji. It has a fully equipped 160 seat auditorium, Mini Darbar, Children's Gurdwara and play area, library, classrooms, gym, elders lounge, Gurmat Parchar Academy, and a Gurmat Sangeet Academy.

It plays a significant role in augmenting the Gurdwara's function in propagating an understanding of Sikhism and offers the congregation a unique Sikhi learning experience that reaches out to all age groups in the community through a variety of activities including regular courses and workshops on Sikh studies and scripture. It has been instrumental in raising the awareness of Sikhism among Singapore's multi-racial society through hosting talks, seminars, conferences and hosting various inter-religious organization visits throughout the year.

The Centre actively participates in many national campaigns aimed at educating the community at large on health issues, financial planning, and computer literacy. Community service is an important hallmark of the Sikh Centre and regular visits are organized to the secular Moral Welfare Home and the Mei Ling Street Home for the Aged as part of its outreach program. The Centre organizes regular donation drives as well as an annual day of celebration with the residents of these homes. Besides bringing joy to the lives of these residents, it offers an opportunity for Sikhs to learn the meaning of compassion and selfless service at first hand.

Editor's Note: A comprehensive account of the Gurdwara Silat Road Sikh Centre and its activities can be found in Chapter VII of the publication listed below.

Usma, Gurdip Singh & Singh, Dilbagh, compilers and editors. *Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji & Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road: A historical journey*, revised 2nd ed. Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 2015.

Gurdwara Sahib Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Sabha



The split between the Majha and Malwa Sikhs did not leave the Doaba Sikhs unaffected and they in turn formed an association and formally registered themselves as the Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Sabha on 11 August 1926 and the pro-tem committee consisted of seven members. They initially operated from rented premises at No. 24 Queen Street not far from the Central Sikh Temple. On 4 April 1931, the Diwan moved to 63B Queen Street which was converted into a Gurdwara Sahib with Giani Bhagat Singh as the first Granthi. The move to their own premises at No. 2 Kirk Terrace took place on 11 May 1934. The adjoining property at No. 3 Kirk Terrace was acquired in 1950 to meet the needs of its growing sangat. Work

Early photo of Gurdwara Sahib
Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Sabha

Courtesy: National Archives Singapore

commenced on the construction of a gurdwara building and the Right Honourable Malcolm Macdonald, Commissioner-General for the United Kingdom in Southeast Asia officiated at the opening ceremony of this Gurdwara Sahib on 12 November 1952.



Commissioner-General Malcolm MacDonald opening the new Sikh Temple, Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan at Kirk Terrace on 12 November 1952.

Source: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission.

A third adjoining property at Kirk Terrace was acquired in 1959 and later on, a fourth adjoining property was also acquired. All these properties were subsequently acquired by the Government in 1979 under its Urban Development program. Compensation monies received were used to purchase two bungalows in Norfolk Road for the construction of a gurdwara sahib. These plans fell through as the land was again acquired by the Government for redevelopment. This gurdwara finally relocated to Lorong 29 in Geylang in 1991 and now occupies two storeys of a seven storeys building.



Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha

In the early days, the Mazhbi Sikhs were not spared discrimination by other Sikh castes and their utensils were kept and maintained separately at the Central Sikh Temple. The Queen Street Ordinance of 1940 did not include representatives from the Mazhbi and Khatri/Arora castes.

They formed their own gurdwara, the Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha, at shophouse premises at Kerbau Road in Little India in 1939. Its first name was Ad Dharam Khalsa Mandal, and it was registered as a society in 1931. The Government later acquired the premises for urban re-development, and this gurdwara is now no longer in existence.

Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha

Sri Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha

The Khatri and Arora Sikhs registered the Gurdwara Sri Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha (Katong) on 26 June 1953. The driving force behind the establishment of this gurdwara included prominent businessman and community leader Sardar Hardial Singh Bajaj (partner Gian Singh & Company), Sardar Surjit Singh Bajaj, Sardar Inder Singh Bajaj, Sardar Sardul Singh Narula, Seth Narain Singh Narula and a few like-minded others.

The following were appointed Trustees:

- S. Inder Singh Bajaj
- S. Pritam Singh Bajaj
- S. Mahn Singh Bajaj
- S. Amir Singh
- S. Kartar Singh Thakral



Other founder members included Sardar Mangal Singh, Seth Jamna Das, Sardar Tara Singh, Sardar Wazir Singh, Mahasha Mohan Lal, Sardar Choor Singh Sidhu, Bhai Asumul, Seth W. Hassaram, Shree Harbans Lal, and a few others. Sardar Hardial Singh Bajaj was appointed as its first President, S. D. Labh Singh as its first Secretary and S. Amir Singh as Treasurer. Giani Gurcharan Singh was appointed the first Granthi of this Sabha's Gurdwara Sahib.

The Sabha originally operated from the homes or business premises of its members and it was not until 1962 that one of its members acting on his own initiative, purchased an old bungalow at 17 Wilkinson Road. An adjoining bungalow was later purchased at 11 Wilkinson Road. Construction of a new double-storey gurdwara began in 1969 and was completed in 1972 at a cost of \$600,000.

The sangat is well represented on the gurdwara's management committee with Sindhis and Sahejdhari Sikhs

Sardar Hardial Singh Bajaj,
First President of Sri Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha



Labh Singh,
First Secretary of Sri Guru Nanak
Satsang Sabha

holding important positions. The congregation attracts many Punjabi Hindus and Sindhis who are staunch believers of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

The Sabha's former secretary S. Amir Singh was very active in devoting his time producing Gurbani Kirtan and Katha audio tapes of well-known ragis (musicians) and parcharaks (preachers) for sale to the public at subsidized prices. The Katong Gurdwara Sahib also runs an active Dharam Parchar Centre importing and selling Sri Guru Granth Sahib Birs, Gutkas, English and Punjabi books on Sikh religion, Sikh Gurus, and Sikh history. Most if not all items are sold at subsidized rates or at cost price.



Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha, popularly known as the Gurdwara Katong

S. Harbaksh Singh MA was employed as the Sabha's manager in 1978 and was a scholar of Gurmukhi, Urdu and Persian and was very knowledgeable in Gurbani and Sikh history. Long before high speed photocopiers became common place, he would send out cyclostyled pamphlets in Gurmukhi and English to local members of this Gurdwara Sahib and to Sikhs overseas. Giani Gurcharan Singh and S. Harbaksh Singh both retired in 1983 and received a gratuity and lifelong monthly pension of \$300. Giani Bikar Singh then took over as Head Granthi of this Gurdwara Sahib.

The Sri Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha has always been generous in contributing to community causes in Singapore. It donated two ambulances to the Singapore General Hospital, the first in 1967 on the occasion of Guru Gobind Singh's 300th birthday celebrations and the second in 1969 on Guru Nanak's 500th birthday celebrations.



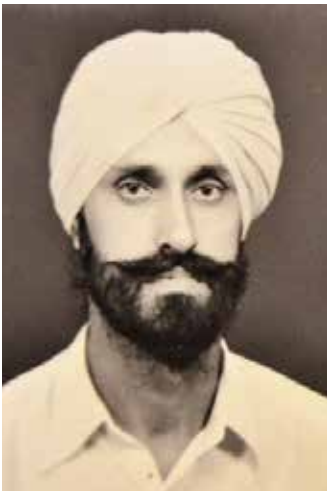
S. Harbaksh Singh family photo

Gurdwara Sahib Yishun

The origins of the Gurdwara Sahib built in Yishun New Town in 1995 date back to early 1925 when Sikh security guards employed by the British contractor M/s Topham Jones and John Jackson engaged in building the Naval Base at Seletar, decided to establish a small gurdwara within its precincts. It was essentially a large room in their wooden block living quarters with an attap roof. Following an increase in the security workforce (known as Additional Police Constables), the gurdwara subsequently shifted to and occupied an entire wooden block at 14 milestone Sembawang Road, still within the Naval Base precincts, and became known as the Police Gurdwara. It has had an eventful history of several moves. When proper concrete blocks of living quarters were built, the Police Gurdwara shifted to Block 88 in Canberra Road, yet again within Naval Base precincts. This gurdwara closed when the Base was evacuated on 31 January 1942 and reopened in 1945 when the Naval Police Force was reorganised. In 1950, it again relocated to a wooden block near the Armament Depot close to the accommodation quarters of most of the Sikh staff. Inspector Jangeer Singh (later promoted to Assistant Superintendent) was the most senior Sikh officer of the Naval



The original Sembawang Sikh Temple buildings



Sardar Darshan Singh
in his younger days
*Courtesy: Darshan Singh
family*

Base Police Force and ipso facto served as President of the Police Gurdwara. Parallel with Sikh Police accommodation shifting to a new building in View Road in 1960, the Police Gurdwara again relocated and remained in this location until its closure in 1971 when the Naval Police Force was disbanded following the British pull-out from Singapore. Its effects were then taken to the Gurdwara Sahib Guru Khalsa Sabha, Sembawang.

Because of tight security and access difficulties within the Naval Base area, civilian Sikh employees led by pioneers Messrs Hira Singh, Kishan Singh, Kajan Singh, Santa Singh and Tara Singh, decided to establish their own gurdwara outside the Naval Base in Sembawang Road in 1936 and called it Guru Khalsa Sabha. This gurdwara continued to function from an attap house in Sum Wah Chee Drive off Sembawang Road during the Japanese Occupation. Sardar Hira Singh served as its President till 1940, Sardar Kishan Singh till 1943, and Sardar Santa Singh till 1946. This gurdwara was enlarged



Sardar Darshan Singh family photo. *Courtesy: Darshan Singh family*

in 1947 and rebuilt in 1953 with plank walls sitting on a 3 feet concrete wall with a zinc roof, and able to accommodate a sangat of 200 persons. Following approval from the Registrar of Societies, it was renamed to Sembawang Sikh Temple (Gurdwara Sahib Sembawang) in 1973 and served Sikhs living in the Sembawang, Woodlands, Nee Soon and Ang Mo Kio catchment areas. Sardars Darshan Singh and Satwant Singh deserve special mention as two stalwarts who took an active interest and contributed much to the success of this gurdwara, the former served as its president over many periods and the latter played a leading role in teaching Punjabi and kirtan to Sikh children living in the area. Over the years, this gurdwara also earned an enviable record of doing social service among non-Sikhs.

The Government expressed its intention in 1984 to acquire the land on which the Sembawang Gurdwara stood. At its Annual General Meeting held on 18 November 1987, the Sembawang Sikh Temple set up a Building Committee comprising Sardar Joginder Singh Khaira as Chairman, Sardar Darshan Singh as Secretary, and Sardar Sukhjinder Singh

Grewal and Dr. Kewal Singh Bansi as members. It was not till 1 May 1990 that the Jalan Kayu Gurdwara and the Sembawang Sikh Temple accepted the Government's resettlement offer to jointly build a new gurdwara at Yishun Ring Road. The Gurdwara Sahib Jalan Kayu was originally set up by Hari Singh, Puren Singh and Bood Singh in the village just outside the air base after the war in 1947 when the Police Force was disbanded. Its trustees were police inspector Hardyal Singh, Ranjit Singh and Maha Singh.



Current Gurdwara Sahib Yishun Building

They were allocated a 1,317 square feet plot of land near the Khatib MRT Station in Yishun Ring Road on a 30 year lease. The Gurdwara Sahib Jalan Kayu traces its origins to the Sikh community which came to the area to serve in the RAF Seletar Police Force who set up a temple in their barracks in the 1930s. The Gurdwara Sahib Jalan Kayu was set up by Hari Singh, Puren Singh and Bood Singh in the village just outside the air base after the war in 1947 when the Police Force was disbanded. Its Associate Professor Ho Peng Kee, Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Home Affairs and Member of Parliament for Sembawang laid the foundation stone of the new temple on 17 October 1993. Construction of the \$2.5

million building began in 1993 and was completed in 1995. Sardar Jagjeet Singh Seghal rendered invaluable help in collecting handsome donations for the Gurdwara Building Fund. Sardar Kartar Singh Thakral officiated at the opening ceremony of the Gurdwara Sahib on 27 August 1995. It is a modest yet functional and economically planned two-storey building. The ground floor comprises the langgar hall, kitchen, and accommodation facilities for the granthis. The prayer hall, library-cum-meeting room and an office are on the first floor.

Other gurdwaras (now defunct)

The late Retired Justice Choor Singh recalled accompanying his father in 1922 to visit a small gurdwara on Pulau Brani established by the Sikh security guards employed at the Straits Trading Company Ltd tin smelting works. Some years later in 1931 he visited a gurdwara at Pulau Samboe in company with his schoolmates Wazir Singh and Bhag Singh. This gurdwara was maintained by the Sikh security guards of the Shell Petroleum Company.

Sikh Advisory Board

The Sikh Advisory Board was established by the British colonial authorities as early as 1915 to advise the government of the day on all matters relating to the Sikh religion and customs and general welfare of the Sikh community, and it continues today to serve as an important link between the Government and the Sikh community. At the time of its initial establishment, it comprised five members nominated by the colonial authorities and was chaired by the Chief Police Officer, an Englishman. It is interesting to note that meeting proceedings were initially conducted in Malay. This presupposes that both, the Chairman and Sikh members were reasonably fluent in the Malay language. Records of the early history of the Board are patchy. However, it is interesting to note that early Chairmen of the Board were drawn from among the ranks of English and Sikh police officers.

Sergeant-Major Gurmukh Singh was the first Sikh to be appointed Chairman of the Sikh Advisory Board in 1917, and sent an address to King George V assuring him of the loyalty of the Sikhs, to which he received the following reply from the Straits Settlements Inspector-General of Police A.R. Chancellor. *“I am directed to inform you that His Excellency the Governor in forwarding to the Secretary of State for the Colonies the address of the Sikhs of the Colony and Federated Malay States presented to me on February 4, 1917, remarked that the address gave expression to a loyalty which His Excellency felt sure was entirely genuine and characteristic of the Sikh community of this Colony. The address has been submitted to His Majesty the King who through the Secretary of State commands that his*

*high appreciation of their loyal address be conveyed to the Sikhs of the Straits Settlements. I am to ask you to take the necessary measures for the fulfilment of His Majesty's Command, by causing the above to be made known to the Sikhs of the Colony and Federated Malay States who signed the address".*²³ Sergeant-Major Gurmukh Singh was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the King's birthday honours, a very high honour indeed.

The composition of the Board in 1917 makes interesting reading.²⁴

Chairman: Sergeant-Major Gurmukh Singh

Secretary: Jawala Singh, Clerk, Singapore Harbour Board

Members: Bishan Singh, Watchman

Narain Singh, Censor's Office

Chanda Singh, Watchman, Klang Road

Veer Singh, Collector, Ellenborough Market

Bhagat Singh, Milk Seller, Tanjong Katong

Bishan Singh, Sergeant-Major, Topham, Jones and Railton

Issar Singh, Watchman, Messrs The Borneo Co. Ltd.

Sundar Singh

Jawala Singh was already a member of the Board in 1916 when he was appointed its Secretary the following year. He put in many years of service on the Board, including as Secretary in 1922, 1923 and 1939, while concurrently holding his position as Senior Clerk with the Singapore Harbour Board. In 1918, Bhagat Singh from Tanjong Katong was appointed Chairman, and the membership included Rallia Singh, cattle dealer. The Secretary was Sowdagar Singh, Student, Medical School, King Edward VII Medical School.²⁵ It is unclear whether Sowdagar Singh graduated as a doctor and his subsequent whereabouts after this period are not known or recorded.

The Board was re-constituted in 1949 and Master Sundar Singh Wasan was elected Chairman, and Sardar Choor Singh was elected Secretary. The Board now had 12 members, 9 nominated by the then 5 gurdwaras, and 3 nominated by the Government. The 5 gurdwaras were Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, Khalsa Jiwan Sudhar Sabha, Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan, Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha, and Sri Guru Singh Sabha. Meeting proceedings were now conducted in Punjabi. At the first meeting of the newly re-constituted Board held at the Singapore Council Chamber, the Colonial Secretary, Mr P.A.B. McKerron expressed the hope that the Board would assist and advise the Government in matters affecting the Sikh community. Mr McKerron said he had high respect for Sikh customs and their way of life. He recalled his stay in Ferozepore during World War I when



Master Sundar Singh Wasan

*Source: Early Sikh
pioneers of Singapore by
Seva Singh Gandharab*

he served in a Sikh regiment. He hoped the Sikhs would continue to observe their customs and remain the useful law-abiding citizens they have always been.²⁶

Master Wazir Singh Wasan was appointed a board member in 1950. Sardar Choor Singh was appointed Chairman of the Board in 1952 on the retirement of Sundar Singh Wasan, and sent a message of condolence to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr Oliver Lyttleton on behalf of the Sikh community in Singapore expressing their deep sorrow on the death of King George VI.²⁷ As Chairman of the Sikh Advisory Board he was instrumental in getting permission from the Government in 1955 to use 2 Government schools in Waterloo Street on Saturday mornings for the teaching of the Punjabi language to Sikh children. Around 500 Sikh children were taught Punjabi by 17 teachers. All expenses were borne by the Sikh community. These classes continued until 1959 when they were shifted to Khalsa Dharmak Sabha and Sri Guru Singh Sabha.

Central Sikh Gurdwara Board

The passing of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board Ordinance on 4 May 1961 was a significant piece of legislation that led to the amalgamation and incorporation of the Queen Street Gurdwara and Silat Road Gurdwara. Information on the initial appointees to this Board does not appear to have been listed on the historical record.

Two decades would pass before the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board Act 1981 would be passed by Parliament on 2 October 1981 to replace the aforementioned Ordinance. Under this Act, all 25 members of the Board would be appointed by the Government. Jeswant Singh Bandal was elected the first President of the Board on 15 October 1981. The amendment of the Act in 1987 saw a major shift whereby all 25 Board members would be elected by the members from amongst themselves so long as they are members whose names are listed on the Board's current membership register. These 25 elected members would then elect and form the committees listed below to manage the overall operations of the Board and its Units.

- i Executive Committee responsible for overseeing the overall operation of the Board and its various units. This Committee comprises the key office bearers of the Board and the Chairmen of its operating units, namely the Central Sikh Temple, the Silat Road Sikh Temple and the Sikh Centre.
- ii Central Sikh Temple Management Committee, which manages the operation and activities of the Central Sikh Temple.
- iii Silat Road Sikh Temple Management Committee which manages the operations and activities of the Silat Road Sikh Temple.
- iv Sikh Centre Management Committee which manages the operation and activities of the Sikh Centre.

Editor's Note: The following publication provides a more detailed account of the Boards's establishment and its antecedent legislation.

Singh, Choor. *Central Sikh Gurdwara Board: Its history, constitution and functions*. Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, n.d.

Sikh Missionary Society Singapore

The Sikh Missionary Society Singapore (originally named Singapore Sikh Missionary Tract Society in 1940, then renamed Sikh Missionary Society Malaya in 1946) was founded on 9 March 1940 with its office at 175 Queen Street, by an English schoolteacher and later school principal Master Bhag Singh and fellow Sikhs Sadhu Singh Khaira, Sohan Singh Panj Garain, Ujagar Singh, Teja Singh, Khushal Singh, Seva Singh, Mohinder Singh, Dewan Singh, Tara Singh and Gulzar Singh. Giani Phuman Singh, then well known in India for his support of the Singh Sabha and Akali Movements joined this group and travelled all over Malaya giving lectures at Sikh temples there.

The late Master Bhag Singh studied Sikh music in the 1930s in Kuala Lumpur and later moved to Singapore where he developed a strong interest in kirtan (singing of religious hymns). He studied under Ustad Jeevan Khan from 1937 to 1939. Ustad Ji belonged to the Patiala Gharana of music. Master Bhag Singh's first student was Ram Singh Gulzar. Seva Singh Gandharab joined Master Bhag Singh's group during the Japanese Occupation and initially studied under him. Later Seva Singh Gandharab increased his knowledge from various other sources in India and Pakistan. Master Bhag Singh's group was the first local born Sikh



Founding Members of Sikh Missionary Society Malaya

youth musical group in Singapore and was of comparable skills to many established groups in India.

The Sikh Missionary Society did meritorious service in promoting a wider understanding of the Sikh faith and religion through publishing tracts in Gurmukhi, English, Malay, Tamil and Chinese for free distribution to communities in Singapore and Malaya, and occasionally beyond these territories.

Amongst its other activities and achievements, the Society also set up a library of books in English and Punjabi, donated books on Sikhism to the National Library and University of Singapore. It also launched a scholarship fund to help needy Sikh students pursue university studies. Early recipients included Gorbux Singh who later became a school principal, Harbans Singh who graduated as a lawyer, and Nachatar Singh.

The untimely death of founder Master Bhag Singh in 1960 saw a decline in the Society's activities. There has since been a revival in recent years and the Society works in close

unison with its Malaysian counterpart and the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board in Singapore in promoting Sikhi Parchar. With the separation of Singapore and Malaysia, the Society's name has been duly changed to remove the word "Malaya" and it is now just Sikh Missionary Society.

In the 1980s, it redeveloped its premises at 88 Sophia Road, Singapore 228188 from an old bungalow into a 5 storey building comprising 8 apartments and the Society owns 5 of these units to provide rental income to fund its activities. The other 3 units were given to the contractor as payment for construction cost of project.

Singapore Sikh Partinidh Sabha

Baboo Gulzar Singh Maddoke, who was then Secretary of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha was the driving force behind the establishment and formal registration of the Singapore Sikh Partinidh Sabha on 15 March 1947 with the commendable objective of seeking to amalgamate all Sikh gurdwaras in Singapore, and act as an overall council for coordinating all religious, educational, and social affairs of the Sikh community in Singapore.

Businessman Sardar Tara Singh (father of Param Ajeet Singh Bal) was the Society's President, Baboo Gulzar Singh served as its Secretary, and Master Charanjit Singh as its Treasurer. Prominent supporters of the Society were S. Amar Singh (father of Pritam Singh Brar), S. Niranjjan Singh Dhothar, and S. Charanjit Singh of Amber Road.



Tara Singh Bal (on the left) and Baboo Gulzar Singh

Source: *Early Sikh pioneers of Singapore* by Seva Singh Gandharab

While the proposed amalgamation scheme never really got off the ground owing to internal dissension within the different factions of the regional based gurdwaras, the Society however had greater success in establishing the Khalsa Punjabi School for Sikh girls in Wilkie Road in 1947, and the Khalsa English School in Niven Road in 1948. S. Niranjan Singh Dhothar served as Chairman of the Khalsa English School Management Committee in the 1950s until its closure in 1962. The latter school had a Chinese headmistress and it catered for overaged students whose studies had been disrupted by the intervening war years and it included many non-Sikh students. The Khalsa Punjabi School for girls initially received Government aid from 1958. This aid was discontinued in December 1961 on the grounds that Punjabi was not one of the four official languages recognized by the Government. With growing numbers of Sikh students joining government schools and dying prejudice against Sikh girls attending government English-medium schools, the Khalsa English School ceased to exist by the end of 1962.

There was however a continuing need for Sikh children to learn Punjabi and attend classes on a part-time basis. These classes for Sikh boys were then held at the premises of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha and for Sikh girls at the Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Wilkie Road. As the premises at these two gurdwaras were not entirely satisfactory for classroom teaching,



Khalsa English School Management Committee, 1948

Source: *'Ithas Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Singapore, 1924-1983'*.
Singapore, Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, 1985.

these classes were subsequently transferred to and held at the premises of Waterloo Primary School and Raffles Institution.

The Partinidh Sabha later approached the Singapore Khalsa Association for permission to build a school on one side of the Association's sports field at Jalan Bahagia. Sardar Choor Singh who was then President of the Singapore Khalsa Association readily agreed to this proposal and building plans were drawn up for a three-storey building. This scheme fell through when the Government acquired the field for development and assigned a new site in Tessensohn Road. This building was completed in 1970 and had teaching classrooms. The Partinidh Sabha then wound up and transferred all its assets to the Singapore Khalsa Association.

Singapore Khalsa Association

The founding of the Singapore Khalsa Association (SKA) and its subsequent development has been well documented in the second edition of Professor Tan Tai Yong's book *Singapore Khalsa Association* published in 1988 on the occasion of the Association's 75th anniversary.

Its forerunner was the Singapore Sikhs Cricket Club formed in 1927 by Sohan Singh, then a Standard VII student at Raffles Institution and six other fellow students – Choor Singh, Wazir Singh, Jasmer Singh, Mahan Singh, Bhag Singh and Chanan Singh. Boys from other schools later joined the club and were able to form and field soccer and hockey teams.

The founder members had finished their secondary school studies towards the end of 1930 and begun working, and it was not until May 1931 that this informal club was formally registered as the Singapore Khalsa Association with businessman S. Sundar Singh Wasan as President, his son Wazir Singh as Secretary, and Choor Singh as Sports Secretary. Sardar Sunder Singh Sawhny (father of Kirpal Singh Sahni) served as President and Patron of the SKA in 1932, and took an active role in the affairs of the Sikhs as a community leader. Coincidentally, S. Sundar Singh Wasan was later to serve as the first Chairman of the re-constituted Sikh Advisory Board in 1949.

In the early years following its founding, the SKA's activities centred on soccer, cricket and hockey games. With financial help and support from well-wishers, the SKA obtained permission from the Land Office to use a playing field in Jalan Bahagia and erected a small wooden shed with two rooms and a verandah. One room served as a changing-cum-storeroom, while the other was given over to the groundsman who also served as caretaker and lived there with his family.



SKA clubhouse at Jalan Bahagia

Source: *Early Sikh pioneers of Singapore by Seva Singh Gandharab*



Singapore Khalsa Association Building Committee.

Seated from left: S. MuKhtiar Singh Matta, S. Sahoo Singh Khaira, Mr Justice Choor Singh, Lt. Col. Jaswant Singh Gill, S. Chanan Singh Jahangir, S. Khushal Singh Tharoo.

Standing from left: S. Dewan Singh Randhawa, S. Ujagar Singh Malla, S. Sardara Singh Gill, S. Lachman Singh, S Tharam Singh, S. Doola Singh Chamba.

As early as 1934, the SKA organized friendly competitions, initially with the Selangor Sports Union, and later with other states in Malaya. However, it was not till 1939 that plans were mooted for a bigger pavilion to be built. The then SKA President S. Tara Singh set up a building committee to raise funds, and the new building was completed in 1941. It had six rooms, including an office, library and committee room, a bar, storeroom, a locker and dressing room. Jaswant Singh Gill served as caretaker of the grounds and pavilion until the Japanese forces took over the premises.

The SKA went into abeyance during the period of the Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945. Its furniture and equipment was looted and its wooden planks stripped off for use as firewood. Despite budget constraints, the club was quickly rehabilitated largely due to the valiant efforts of Choor Singh and Wazir Singh.

The post-war years saw an increase in the number of young Sikh hockey players, and the SKA produced some outstanding players like Ajit Singh Gill, Kartar Singh, Baldiraj Singh, Avtar Singh, B.S. Soin, Mohinder Singh, Harbhajan Singh Loomba, Mehar Singh, and Veer Singh all of whom made it to the State team. It was particularly pleasing to note that Ajit Singh Gill was chosen to represent Singapore's hockey team at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. Singapore was a part of Malaysia when Kartar Singh was selected for the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. Cricketers like Choor Singh, Wazir Singh, M.B. Singh, and Tharam Singh were in the forefront, inspiring enthusiasm in younger players like Ajit Singh Gill, Mohinder Singh and Harnam Singh who joined the club.

In 1949, SKA sought and obtained affiliation to the Singapore Hockey Association and Singapore Cricket Association, and in 1950 to the Singapore Badminton Association. The holding of the first Singapore Sikhs Sports meet on 25 September 1955 marked a milestone for two important reasons, namely interest and involvement in other sports and games, and that 35 events were organized including a kabaddi exhibition.

The SKA acquired premises at Prinsep Street in 1952 that were not entirely satisfactory and they were later sold at a good price in 1958 for \$38,000. At the SKA's 26th AGM, Choor Singh, Kartar Singh (Assistant Controller of Posts), and Jaswant Singh Gill were appointed Trustees and charged with the responsibility of improving and consolidating the SKA's financial position through safe and wise investments. At the SKA's 29th AGM, they were given further discretion to invest in stocks and shares of public limited companies listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange.



Above: Original Singapore Khalsa Association Building, Tessensohn Road
Below: Upgraded Singapore Khalsa Association Building, 2017



In February 1960, SKA Trustee Jaswant Singh Gill proposed that \$5,000 be set aside for a new building fund and life membership be granted to members for a one-time payment of \$250. By 1964, life members accounted for 80% of the SKA's membership. Meanwhile, SKA's scope of activities now extended beyond sports to include highly successful Punjabi melas that saw increasing attendances with each successive year.

A new clubhouse was built in Jalan Bahagia and officially opened on 14 May 1965, and its enlarged scope now included sporting, social, cultural and religious activities. Unfortunately, the Government served notice one year later for requisitioning of the clubhouse grounds at Jalan Bahagia.

A new Building Committee was set up on 1 May 1968 with Justice Choor Singh as its Chairman. Through his efforts and influential connections in both the public and private sectors, a total sum of \$647,099.44 was raised by the end of 1970. Tribute must also be paid to the indefatigable efforts of the *agrahi* (fundraising/collection) teams comprising well respected Sikh elders including Jaswant Singh Gill, Tharam Singh, Sadhu Singh Khaira, Khushal Singh, Sardara Singh, Dewan Singh Randhawa, Bersakha Singh, Ujagar Singh Malla (Chakravaty) and Mukhtiar Singh Matta who so willingly sacrificed precious weekends and time away from their families visiting Sikh homes to help raise funds. Their efforts were amply matched and well rewarded by the generosity of Sikh families in opening their hearts and coffers to making the new SKA building a reality.

The Government granted an acre of land at the corner of Balestier and Tessensohn Roads on a 30 year lease with an option for renewal for another 30 years. S. Tara Singh, Patron of the SKA, performed the ground breaking ceremony on 8 January 1969 and the building was completed by the end of 1970.

The SKA leadership displayed great foresight in having its iconic Tessensohn Road building situated in the Balestier Plains sporting hub. It performs multiple roles and is today very well used for events and gatherings by both Sikh and non-Sikh communities alike. Justice Choor Singh aptly observed *“that such an elaborate clubhouse could be put up was also a testimony to the generosity and economic advancement of the Sikh community, without whose support the SKA would not be what it is today”*.²⁸

Singapore Sikh Education Foundation (SSEF)

Bilingual education has been an integral part of Singapore's education policy since the mid-1950s and was given special emphasis following its independence in August 1965. English is the language of instruction in all public schools and all students study at least 2 languages. Chinese, Malay and Tamil were the official mother tongue languages offered in Singapore schools, and after 1989, the Ministry of Education offered five additional languages that students could choose from with Punjabi language being one of them.

This development gave new opportunities and added impetus to the Sikh community to formally establish the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation (SSEF) on 30 December 1990 to provide and promote Punjabi language education based on the *Examination syllabus guidelines* provided by the Ministry of Education, Singapore. Prior to this, Punjabi language was taught in gurdwaras, and also at a Waterloo Street Centre and at the Singapore Khalsa Association.

Four teaching centres were initially established to serve the community at different locations in Singapore, namely the Si Ling Centre in the north, Bedok Centre in the east, Clementi Centre in the west and Teck Ghee Centre to serve the central and southern communities. The Khalsa Punjabi School at the Singapore Khalsa Association which had been running Punjabi classes in the past continued to serve as a fifth centre. The SKA devolved the management of its Punjabi School to the SSEF in 1996 and it was renamed as the Khalsa Centre. The Si Ling Centre moved to Yishun in 1998 and functioned as the Yishun Centre. The Teck Ghee Centre and Khalsa Centre merged in 2002 and functioned at Beatty Secondary School as the Khalsa Centre. Further reorganisation in 2003 led to the Yishun Centre being merged with the Khalsa Centre and it began operating at First Toa Payoh Primary School as the Khalsa Centre. A further change took place in early 2014 and the Khalsa Centre has since been functioning at Yio Chu Kang Secondary School.

Under the able stewardship of its inaugural Chairman Bhajan Singh and the guidance of its Trustees, Sardar Kartar Singh Thakral, Sardar Naranjan Singh Brahmputra, Sardar Deep Singh, and Dr. Sorinder Singh, the SSEF identified and acquired suitable teaching materials for students studying the language in an international setting. To supplement available materials, the Foundation embarked upon the writing of Punjabi language textbooks and workbooks from pre-primary to pre-university levels to serve the educational needs of students. Student enrolment grew from 300 in 1990 to almost 2,000 at its peak.

Rigorous reviews have since led to restructuring of the Punjabi language curriculum based on the latest developments in information technology, present day language teaching and learning strategies, and the contemporary needs of the Punjabi language. Santokh Singh Grewal took over from Bhajan Singh and served as Chairman of the SSEF from October 2014 to December 2015, and continued to serve as an Advisor until his untimely death in June 2016. Gurdial Kaur is the current SSEF Chairperson.

Sikh Welfare Council Singapore

The Sikh Welfare Council (SIWEC) was established in 1996 with the objective of formulating, managing, and implementing welfare schemes in the form of relief, financial assistance, health, education, housing or any other help (collectively referred to as “welfare”) for those requiring assistance within the Singapore Community. Sardars Kartar Singh Thakral, Mohinder Singh Thakral, Jagjit Singh Sekhon, Jagjeet Singh Seghal, Kartar Singh Dalamnangal, Daljeet Singh Randhawa, Mahn Singh Bajaj, Gurcharan Singh Narula and Naranjan Singh Brahmpura were the founding SIWEC Trustees. It is an approved charity and was accorded the Institution of Public Character (IPC) status on 5th November 2009 and has also been a full member of the National Council of Social Services (NCSS) since 2014.

SIWEC works closely with government and non-government agencies on welfare-related matters and relies heavily on donations and volunteers in meeting its objectives through a diverse range of programs and initiatives listed below:

- Financial Assistance and Food on the Table Program, providing support to Singaporean families in need of financial or other type of assistance.
- Bereavement Services Program, providing bereaved families with social, emotional, spiritual and financial support by assisting individuals/families during bereavement.
- Rehabilitation and Aftercare programs, providing counselling and rehabilitation of drug addicts and prison inmates to assist them to integrate back into society.
- Healthcare Ambassador Program, providing for the support and care of patients in hospitals. This is achieved by SIWEC volunteers making regular visits to patients in hospitals.
- Eldercare Programs, promoting active ageing and volunteerism amongst elderly Sikh women.

- Home Visits Support Program, providing material, emotional and other support.
- Education Support Program, focusing on the educational needs of children of families on SIWEC's assistance scheme/MOE Financial Assistance Scheme (FAS).
- Volunteer Recruitment Program. Volunteers are the life blood of any non-profit organisation. The success of many of SIWEC's ongoing programs depends on the dedication of volunteers who have taken time out of their busy schedules to make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate. The aim is to build a large pool of volunteers who can enable SIWEC to run its many programs.

SIWEC was initiated by Dr Sorinder Singh, who served as its Chairman from 1996 to 2008, when Jagjit Singh Sekhon took over and served till 2013 and handed over to Amarjit Singh Wasan. The current Chairman of SIWEC is Gurdip Singh Usma.

Young Sikh Association

The Young Sikh Association (YSA) was founded in August 2003 with a mission to fulfil the aspirations of young Singaporeans, reaching out to inculcate these aspirations into Singapore society, so as to enhance mutual understanding on issues of common concern and foster friendship across all ethnic groups in Singapore, the region and the world. Its Management Committee includes members from different professions with wide ranging expertise and interests to oversee its activities.

Its diverse programs and events include dialogue sessions, seminars and professional development workshops, cultural shows, dhol and bhangra competitions, and sports activities, giving young Singaporeans many opportunities to choose their avenues of aspiration and contribution.

Fostering community spirit and service at home and abroad is an important objective. Khwaish is its signature annual community service project which sees 20 to 25 young Sikhs and non-Sikhs travelling each year to village schools in Punjab, bringing books and computers to upgrade school infrastructure and libraries, including painting school walls, library, staff and student rooms. To date, 16 teams have been sent to India since 2003.

Conferences, seminars, workshops and lectures are also regular events to promote intellectual and professional development. Its Khwaish lecture series have featured prominent Singaporean personalities giving lectures on topical issues. The YSA hosts an annual Sikh

Graduates Tea Reception to felicitate and promote networking and community service among young Sikhs embarking on their chosen careers.

Another laudable objective is strengthening inter-racial friendship and harmony by organising and actively participating in inter-community activities and building networks with local and international youth groups so as to foster a national identity and global mindset among young Sikhs.

Sikh Sewaks Singapore

Sikh Sewaks Singapore is a non-profit organisation registered under the Societies Act on 31 May 1979, with the vision of building confident, knowledgeable and capable Sikh youth who will serve to inspire future generations through its three pillars of *Seva* (selfless dedication), *Simran* (contemplation) and *Satsang* (teamwork) as the keys to achieving all-round excellence. Its foundation however dates back a year earlier to a pioneering team comprising Bhagwant Singh Bal, Gurcharan Singh Kesail, Prem Singh Dhotian, Sarvinder Kaur Padri, Shinder Kaur, Sarjit Kaur, and Tarlochan Singh.

Its key flagship activities included a *Weekly Youth Satsang* (religious discourse session) which was the original impetus and inspiration for the formation of the Sikh Sewaks, Raen Sabae Kirtans held twice a year on New Year's eve and in June to celebrate the anniversary of its founding, *Khalsa Week* (Vesakhi celebrations), and *Samelans* (Youth camps). It also published a newsletter called *The Sewak* to propagate the message of the Gurus.

Its objectives at its founding almost four decades ago are still valid today, namely to

- Promote an understanding and practice of the Sikh religion among its youth
- Encourage the study of Sikh history with the objective of providing teaching and learning facilities for the Punjabi language, paath (prayer) and kirtan
- Encourage the practice of voluntary service to the community in accordance with the teaching of the Guru Granth Sahib
- Inculcate greater self-respect, self-confidence and social responsibility among Sikh youth
- Promote an appreciation of Sikh tradition, culture and music with the objective of providing cultural support for the youth, and
- Provide an avenue for the development of constructive leadership

Its many and varied programs today include organising annual *Samelans* (Youth camps) with the aim of conveying knowledge through precept and practice, and separate Bahadur Bachey camps for young children. The Bahadur Bachey camps for young children have been highly successful and popular, filled as they are with exciting and fun-filled learning activities.

The Mighty Khalsa is a group of enthusiastic and dedicated parents with young children between 4 to 12 years of age who hold regular darbars bimonthly in which children experientially learn about Sikhi and the Sikh way of life.

Other activities include Sundays with my Guruji, talks, paath, Youth Kirtan Darbar, and Kirtan by the beach. Sundays with my Guruji is a weekly program whereby Sikh youth come together to do Simran, learn how to do paath and the meaning behind Gurbani under the tutelage of local Gurbani teachers. The overall aim of this program is to motivate Sikh youth to come to the gurdwara, and find peace of mind and relaxation via a youth-centred Sikhi parchar program that is conducted in both English and Punjabi. All these activities collectively provide a platform for Singapore Sikh youth to forge friendships and support groups that will last throughout their youthful years and beyond into adulthood.

It is committed to identifying key challenges faced by Sikh youth today and implementing sustainable programs that facilitate discovery and their development potential through faith-based confidence, including grooming them to take up leadership roles in gurdwaras.

Singapore Sikh Moneylenders Association

(now known as the Sikh Business Association)

Some of the voluntary Sikh emigrants who arrived in Singapore after the 1890s to seek employment took to moneylending during their off-duty hours to supplement their meager incomes.

Moneylending activities were hitherto largely unregulated until the government of the day proposed a code of conduct and it was not till 12 August 1932 that the Association was officially registered with the Registry of Societies as the Singapore Sikh Moneylenders Association. Its objective in registering was to assist them to organize their moneylending activities in accordance with the law as well as looking after their social, community, and welfare needs. Since the 1980s and 1990s, with the reduction of moneylending activities by the Sikhs, the association started to include other Sikh businessmen as members and changed its name to Sikh Moneylenders and Businessmen

Association and eventually changed its name to its current name; being Sikh Business Association.

The 25 founding members of the Sikh Moneylenders Association were Moola Singh Kot Dhandal, Nand Singh Samalsar (Pandit Nand Ram), Bela Singh Kot Kalan, Sundar Singh Karmuvala, Sardara Singh Nangal, Jagat Singh Marhi, Banta Singh Litarh, Bhagat Singh Pandori Ganga Singh, Fauja Singh Marhi, Lashman Singh Daulo Nangal, Mal Singh Daulo Dangal, Narain Singh Khaee, Nikka Singh Maleana, Naranjan Singh Kamaalpur, Samund Singh Baryar, Suba Singh Daulonangal, Sajan Singh Jorhe, Sohan Singh Panj Garai, Fauja Singh Chhajjalvandi, Mohan Singh Brahmura, Teja Singh Varhaich, Ganesha Singh Malli, Dalip Singh Daulo Nangal, Partap Singh Mehna, and Kartar Singh Ganji Gulab Singh Wala.

Founder member Sardar Sundar Singh (also known as Racha Singh) was the first president of the Singapore Sikh Moneylenders Association. He first began business in Singapore in 1894. He returned to India on retirement from the business and passed away in 1951 at the age of 80, coincidentally the same year that his son Hardit Singh was elected president of the Association.

Mohan Singh Brahmura together with his brothers Bachan Singh (father of Central Sikh Gurdwara Board and Singapore Khalsa Association Patron Naranjan Singh Brahmura) and Bhola Singh arrived from the Punjab's majha region to start a moneylending business in Singapore in the 1920s.

Members of the Association performed a useful service in providing seed money as loans for small business start-ups, and also to others, including some government servants who sometimes either indulged in gambling or lived beyond their means. According to newspaper reports, it was not unknown for some Englishmen to also approach Sikh moneylenders for loans to repay their gambling debts. Small loans required debtors to sign promissory notes and property title deeds were handed over as surety against larger loans. When the debtors were unable to repay their large loans, Association members sought the assistance of lawyers to mortgage their properties.

The Japanese Occupation of Singapore saw a significant decline in Sikh moneylending activities.

In its early years, the Association operated from the old Central Sikh Temple premises at 175 Queen Street. In 1954 that the Association created a building fund and decided to

purchase its own premises. A sum of \$26,400 was accumulated by 13 November 1954 and 124 Sophia Road was bought for \$11,000 under the name of 3 Trustees, Sardar Ratan Singh Chakrala, Sardar Suba Singh Daulonangal, and Sardar Durga Singh Samalsar (Pandit Durga Ram). This property was sold in 2010 as part of an enbloc sale for \$3.75 million.

Over the years, letters started appearing in the press calling for better control over the activities of certain moneylenders. However, it was not until October 1956 by which time the Association had 200 members, that this sporadic agitation had a salutary effect. The Singapore Sikh Moneylenders Association voluntarily laid down a code of conduct for its members, and indicated that transgression would result in the offending member being ostracized by his colleagues. The Association adopted four golden rules of conduct at a members meeting held on 16 October 1956. One is that they would stop haunting offices and pestering clients who were short of money. The other three rules were that members would keep all accounts properly so that the Bankruptcy Office and Courts would have a clear picture of loans; loans should be made repayable in instalments so that it would be easier for the borrower to repay his debts; and receipts should be issued whenever they are asked for. The then President of the Association, Sardar Sadhoo Singh, commented that moneylenders objected to being referred to as Shylocks in the English press, and further added that moneylenders were an essential cog in the credit system on which the financial set-up of the colony was based. Mindful of its corporate social responsibility, the Association contributed \$250 to the National Theatre Fund in December 1959.

There continued to be public comment that a code of conduct was no substitute for legislation, as a code without teeth would not deter the unscrupulous moneylender from his malpractices. Despite the agitation for stricter control, it was not till 2008 that the Moneylenders Act 31 of 2008 (Chapter 188) was finally passed, with a revised edition on 31 March 2010.

7

SIKH SOLDIERS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE IN WORLD WAR II AND CIVILIAN LIFE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

According to Sir John Maynard, the contribution of Sikhs to the British Indian Army in men and material (for World Wars I & II) was ten times that of the other Indian communities. Sikh soldiers were renowned for their fearlessness, bravery, loyalty and devotion to duty.²⁹ By 1914, Sikh regiments were deployed as part of the British Indian Army for operations in World War I. The Regiment served in all theatres of operations and earned 28 battle honors. Over one million Indian troops served overseas during World War I, of whom 62,000 died and another 67,000 were wounded. In total at least 74,187 Indian soldiers died during the war. The Indian Army during World War II was one of the largest Allied forces contingents which took part in the North and East African Campaigns, Western Desert and the Italian Campaigns. At the height of the World War, more than 2.5 million Indian troops were fighting Axis forces around the globe.³⁰ In the last two World Wars, 83,005 turban wearing Sikh soldiers were killed and 109,045 were wounded. They all died or were wounded for the freedom of Britain and the world, and during shell fire, with no other protection but the turban, the symbol of their faith.³¹ After the end of World War II, India emerged as the world's fourth largest industrial power and its increased political, economic and military influence paved the way for its independence from the United Kingdom in 1947.³²

Wherever they have served, Sikh soldiers have historically used the battle cry "*Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal*", meaning "*He who cries God is Truth is forever blessed*". Till today, this battle cry is still used by the soldiers of the Indian Army's Sikh, Sikh Light Infantry and Punjab Regiments.

Japanese attack on Singapore

When the Japanese attacked Malaya on 7 December 1941 on the same date as they launched the air attack on Pearl Harbour, “the total strength of the defense forces was 87,000 men, 50% of whom were Indian soldiers, 25% British, 17% Australian, and the rest recruited locally”.³³ Sikhs formed a significant proportion of the British Indian troops based in Singapore. The first air raids on Singapore were launched on 8 December 1941 and were mainly targeted against the airfields, docks and naval base areas.³⁴ Two British battleships, the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* and an escort of four destroyers sailed into Singapore on 2 December 1941. Eight days later on 10 December 1942, Japanese torpedo-bombers torpedoed and sunk both, these battleships and their escort of four destroyers in the South China Sea.

The first Japanese forces landed in Singapore on 8 to 9 February 1942. The Allied forces were clearly outnumbered and in the fierce fighting that ensued, many soldiers lost their lives. Less than a week later, the Allied forces under the command of Lt. General Percival surrendered to Lt. General Yamashita on 15 February 1942.

Indian Independence League (IIL) and Indian National Army (INA)

The Congress Party and the Ghaddar Party in India labored under the mistaken belief that the Germans and the Japanese would help them in getting independence for India. The Indian Independence League (IIL) was founded in 1928 by Indian nationalists based in various parts of Southeast Asia, and operated from the 1920s to the 1940s to organize those living outside India to enlist their support to remove the British from India. It was both a nationalist movement and a political organization in India that established



Bihara Singh Indian Independence League membership card. Courtesy Bihara Singh family

branch organizations in Singapore and Malaya to draw on local Indian support for Indian independence. Jawaharlal Nehru first visited Singapore in May 1937 to garner support from the local Indian population. The IIL was active in conducting propaganda and intelligence work for the Japanese Army during the Second World War.

In late December 1941, Captain Mohan Singh was the highest ranking Indian officer in the British Indian Army to be captured by advancing Japanese troops coming down from Singgora and crossing the land borders at Yala into Malaya. He played a key role and was designated a Founding General in the establishment of the Indian National Army (INA), an armed force formed by Indian nationalists in 1942 in Southeast Asia during World War II. Their main aim was to overthrow the British Raj in colonial India with Japanese assistance.

Following the surrender of the Allied forces in Singapore, some 65,000 Indian prisoners of war and 600 Malay Regiment soldiers assembled at the old Race Course at Farrer Park and were addressed by Captain Mohan Singh and Major Fujiwara from the Japanese Army.³⁵ Captain Mohan Singh had earlier been officially appointed Commander-in-Chief and Founding General of the INA which included 400 British Indian Army officers who genuinely sympathized with Indian nationalism. He urged them to join the Indian National Army and assured the gathering that the INA was to be used only for the struggle for Indian independence.

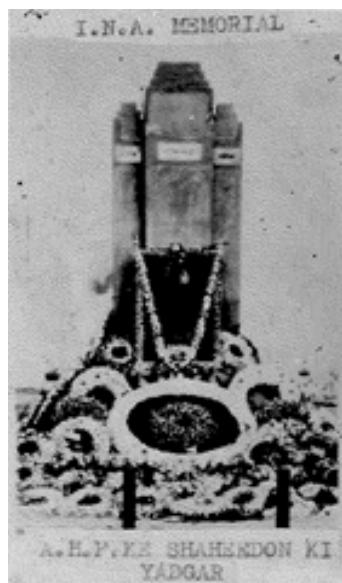
At the Farrer Park meeting, some Sikh soldiers joined the INA genuinely believing that the Japanese would help them in liberating India from the British. By September 1942, 42,000 Indian soldiers had pledged their allegiance to General Mohan Singh and the INA. The INA under the command of General Mohan Singh soon came to the realization that the Japanese agenda was not Indian independence and the INA was disbanded at the end of 1942. Mohan Singh was arrested on 29 December 1942 and exiled to Pulau Ubin. Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore on 2 July 1943 and was the real galvanizing force when he swiftly took over as President of the Indian Independence League and then as Commander-in-Chief of the re-formed INA now called *Azad Hind Fauj*. Some of the Indian and Sikh soldiers joined as they could avail themselves of travel passes, food and rations. Many Indians in Malaya and Singapore pledged money, gold jewellery, clothing, foodstuffs and other supplies for Bose's army. Some civilian Sikhs also joined the INA and helped in propaganda work at the INA headquarters in Singapore. Many of the Indian soldiers who switched their allegiance subsequently died fighting alongside the Japanese against the British in Burma during the war. It is widely believed that Bose

Chapter 7 SIKHS SOLDIERS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE IN WORLD WAR II AND CIVILIAN LIFE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

died in a plane crash on 18 August 1945 en route to Manchuria and Russia to enlist support in the struggle for Indian independence.

Just two months before the Japanese surrender in Singapore on 12 September 1945, Subhas Chandra Bose (“Netaji”) laid the foundation stone at the Esplanade on 8 July 1945 of a memorial dedicated to the “Unknown Warrior” of the Indian National Army. This monument was erected within a month by the Japanese. The construction of this monument was proposed by Bose, the co-founder of the INA and Head of State of the Provisional Government of Free India. The words inscribed on the memorial were the motto of the INA: Unity (*Ittefaq*), Faith (*Etmad*) and Sacrifice (*Kurbani*).

Following the Japanese Surrender, the British commander Lord Louis Mountbatten ordered the memorial to be demolished in order to remove all traces of rebellion against British Imperial authority. In 1995 the National Heritage Board marked the place as a historical site and, subsequently with financial donations from the Indian community in Singapore, a new monument commemorating the previous one was erected on this spot.



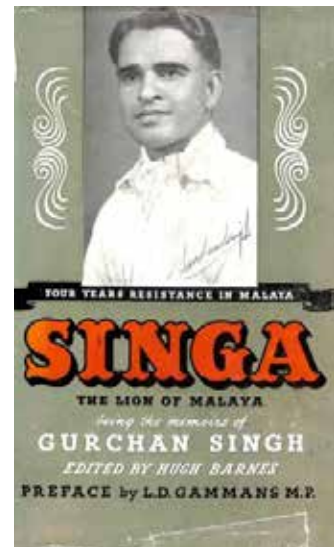
Sketch of original INA Memorial



New INA monument at the Esplanade

Gurchan Singh, Singa, the Lion of Malaya

No account of the propaganda and psychological warfare against the occupying Japanese forces in Malaya and Singapore would be complete without discussing the role played by Gurchan Singh, dubbed *Singa, the Lion of Malaya*. Gurchan Singh worked as a detective constable with the Malayan Police. He and his two brothers Gurbachan Singh and Gurdial Singh, created and organized the Malayan Resistance Movement. They carried out daring acts of sabotage, but his main contribution was in the field of propaganda and psychological warfare. He personally wrote and produced and regularly distributed leaflets that were so effective in telling the civilian population of Malaya some of the true facts about the war and the occupation that eventually led the Japanese to place a price of \$100,000 on the head of the resistance they only knew as Singa.



On one occasion, Gurchan Singh posed as a journalist from Kuala Lumpur and actually attended a Japanese press conference in Singapore. Following his attendance, subsequent references in his newsletter to the proceedings of this conference led to further intensification of efforts by the Kempetei (Japanese Secret Police) and its stooges to capture him. He was eventually arrested by the Kempetei but managed to escape from captivity, hiding out in Moulmein, and returning to his family in Kuala Lumpur only when the war ended.

He was an Assistant Superintendent of Police when he was appointed Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman's Personal Security Officer in June 1957. He was on his way to Singapore to look into security measures for the Tunku's visit to Singapore when his car went off the road and he died in the car accident on 6 March 1965 at the age of 51.

The Fate of Sikh Prisoners of War

At the Farrer Park meeting with Captain Mohan Singh on 17 February 1942, some 20,000 British Army Indian soldiers did switch sides and joined the INA in the (now mistaken) belief that the Japanese would help them in liberating India from the British. Many of these soldiers died fighting alongside the Japanese against the British in Burma during the war. It is not known how many among the 20,000 Indian soldiers were Sikhs. Suffice to say, the majority of the Sikh soldiers and policemen remained loyal and did fight and die alongside the British defending Singapore and Malaya.

During the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, some Sikh soldiers and policemen who had switched their allegiance and enlisted in the INA continued to be employed as policemen, guards and sentries at Japanese checkpoints and POW camps of mainly white prisoners. They found themselves placed in an invidious position in having to follow orders if this was ordered and expected of them by their Japanese masters, and were sometimes used by the Japanese forces to dish out cruel acts of punishment. Such cases were however in the minority and this unfairly led to some white POWs perceiving them as mercenaries. *"The abusive Sikh guards comprised not more than two percent of the entire Force".*³⁶ On the contrary, *"there were many Sikh guards who refused to mistreat and abuse the British POWs even on the specific orders of the Japanese military men. As a consequence of such refusals, the Japanese in turn abused the Sikh guards. In some cases, the Japanese tortured some Sikhs whom they considered loyal to the British, and in a few cases there were deaths."*³⁷



Hari Singh Phallewal
Courtesy: Phallewal family.

In one particular instance, Corporal Hari Singh of the Sikh Police Contingent (father of the late Karam Singh Phallewal) was sent to Maxwell Prison for two years to guard senior British officers. He was later posted to Outram Prison which was run by the Kempetei, the Japanese Military Police. In 1944, he was ordered to hang a Chinese woman in Outram Road Prison. Corporal Hari Singh refused on the grounds that she was pregnant. Consequently, he was severely beaten up, his jaw broken, and he was hospitalized for nine months. Upon recovery, he was himself thrown into Outram Road Prison. Later, some Chinese rescued him along with some other Chinese prisoners.³⁸

Some Sikh soldiers and policemen who remained loyal to the British were interned and detained as prisoners of war in Singapore. *“Some of them were later blindfolded and a target mark was placed hanging over their chests, and they were shot mercilessly. Many of the prisoners in the prison camps died of illness and malnutrition. Some perished on Japanese transports which were “sunk while being carried into forced labor. Many were employed by the Japanese in the construction of the infamous Thailand to Burma Railway along with other allied prisoners. Of the 7,000 men sent from Singapore to Thailand in April 1943, 25% were dead by the end of August 1943 and 90% of the remainder were seriously ill. The number of men belonging to the Allied Forces who died and were not given a decent burial or cremation was estimated at 24,000”.*³⁹ About 10,000 Sikh soldiers were rounded up from Singapore and Malaya and sent to Papua New Guinea.⁴⁰

In his book *They died for all free men*, Surjan Singh lists the names of 3,138 Sikh soldiers whose names are inscribed on cold marble slabs on the columns at the Kranji War Memorial. These soldiers have no known graves and as such were not given their last rites according to the Sikh faith. *“In addition, there are 223 Sikh soldiers commemorated at the Singapore Cremation Memorial, and they were committed to fire according to the Sikh*

Chapter 7 SIKHS SOLDIERS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE
IN WORLD WAR II AND CIVILIAN LIFE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION



This photograph was found among Japanese records when the British troops re-entered Singapore. This picture shows the inhumane brutality practised by the Japanese on Sikh prisoners.

Courtesy Surjan Singh

religion. Their names are also engraved on marble slabs which are situated immediately behind the Singapore Memorial".⁴¹ This Cremation Memorial is dedicated to almost 800 casualties, mostly from undivided India who were cremated as part of their religious beliefs.

Surjan Singh succinctly puts it when he said *"one only needs to glance at the names of the fallen at Kranji Memorial in Singapore to appreciate how many Sikhs left the safety and comforts of their homes in Punjab, and died in British uniforms to defend distant places"*.⁴²

Chapter 7 SIKHS SOLDIERS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE IN WORLD WAR II AND CIVILIAN LIFE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

19TH HYDERABAD REGIMENT		THE FORCES A JAGATHI STRY		INDIAN STATES FORCES KAPURTHALA JAGATHI INFANTRY	
SEPOY DALIP SINGH DANI SINGH DAN SINGH DAR AB SINGH DARWAN SINGH	SEPOY KALU RAM KANCHAN SINGH KARAM SINGH KARIM DAD KASI SINGH	SEPOY PARTAP SINGH 2656	SEPOY SUDEH SINGH SURAVAN SINGH	SEPOY UJAGAR SINGH 2717	
DASTURATI CHAND DAULAT SINGH DEB SINGH DHAN SINGH DHARAM RAM	KHUSHAL SINGH KHUSHI RAM KISHAN SINGH 7416 KISHAN SINGH 9876	PARTAP SINGH 2588 PIR MUHAMMAD PRITAM SINGH 3265 PRITAM SINGH 3288 PRITAM SINGH 3333	SUBAYAN SINGH 3186 SUBJAN SINGH 2753 SUBJAN SINGH 3522 TARA SINGH	UJAGAR SINGH 2963 UJAGAR SINGH 3015 UJAGAR SINGH 3492 UJAGAR SINGH 3645	
ROYAL INDIAN AIR FORCE					
FLYING OFFICER MAN MOHAN SINGH	SERGEANT H. KAMESHWAR DHORA	PRITAM SINGH 3433	TARA SINGH 3062	ULHAM SINGH WALI MUHAMMAD	
18TH ROYAL GARHWAL RIFLES		1ST PATIALA INFANTRY (RAJINDRA SIKHS)			
RIFLEMAN PANCHAM SINGH PARTAP SINGH MUSANI	RIFLEMAN RATAN SINGH NEGI REBAT SINGH SIHWAL BIJANDARI	SOHAN SINGH 3630 SOHAN SINGH 3634 SUBA SINGH	SEPOY JAGIR SINGH	SEPOY MOHAN LAL	
11TH SIKH REGIMENT		17TH DOGRA REGIMENT			
SEPOY SOHAN SINGH SUCHA SINGH 8135 SUCHA SINGH 15883	NON-COMBATANT BAGGA KHAN BARU SINGH CHANAN SINGH FAZL AHMAD GHULAM	SEPOY RATAN SINGH 5913 RATAN SINGH 7801 RATAN SINGH	SEPOY SOHAN SINGH SOMA SINGH SUBH RAM SUKH RAM SUNDAR	SEPOY SADHU SINGH 3674 SANTA SINGH 2754 SANTA SINGH 2930 SANTA SINGH 3560 SARBULAND SARDARA SINGH SHAH MUHAMMAD SHAM SINGH	
KARAM SINGH 3351 KARNAIL SINGH KISHAN SINGH	BIKRAMA SINGH BURA BUR SINGH BUTA SINGH 2774	JAGAT SINGH 2944 JAGAT SINGH 2961 JAGAT SINGH 3081 JAGAT SINGH 3109 JAGAT SINGH 3364 JAGAT SINGH 3434	MOHAN SINGH 3027 MOHAN SINGH 3136 MOHAN SINGH 3274 MOHINDAR SINGH MUBARAK ALI MUHAMMAD ALI MUHAMMAD	SANTA SINGH 2754 SANTA SINGH 2930 SANTA SINGH 3560 SARBULAND SARDARA SINGH SHAH MUHAMMAD SHAM SINGH	
MASA SINGH NIR ANJAN SINGH 3243 NIR ANJAN SINGH 3255 SADHU SINGH SARDAR KHAN SHAM SINGH	CHANAN SINGH 3561 CHANAN SINGH 3388 CHANAN SINGH 3514 CHANAN SINGH 3525 CHANAN SINGH 3536	JAI SINGH JAMAL DIN JAWAHIR JAWAND SINGH JIT SINGH 2857 JIT SINGH 2966 JOGINDAR SINGH KABUL SINGH	BAKHSI MUHAMMAD ISMAIL MUHAMMAD YAQUB MUNSHA SINGH 2737 MUNSHA SINGH	SHER MUHAMMAD SHINGARA SINGH 3360 SHINGARA SINGH 3465 SIKANDAR ALI SOBHA SINGH SOHAN SINGH	
SOHAN SINGH 3264 SOHAN SINGH 3391 SUR JAN SINGH TALIB ALI SEPOY ABDUL HAMID ACHHAR SINGH	CHANAN SINGH 3561 CHANAN SINGH 3388 CHANAN SINGH 3514 CHANAN SINGH 3525 CHANAN SINGH 3536	JAI SINGH JAMAL DIN JAWAHIR JAWAND SINGH JIT SINGH 2857 JIT SINGH 2966 JOGINDAR SINGH KABUL SINGH	BAKHSI MUHAMMAD ISMAIL MUHAMMAD YAQUB MUNSHA SINGH 2737 MUNSHA SINGH	SHER MUHAMMAD SHINGARA SINGH 3360 SHINGARA SINGH 3465 SIKANDAR ALI SOBHA SINGH SOHAN SINGH	
ALL MUHAMMAD 3635 ALL MUHAMMAD 3685 ALLAH DITTA AMAR SINGH 3286 AMAR SINGH 3436 AMAR SINGH	CHANAN SINGH 3616 CHARAN SINGH CHIRAGH MUHAMMAD 3090 CHIRAGH MUHAMMAD 3337 DALIP SINGH DAL SINGH	KARAM SINGH 2997 KARAM SINGH 3156 KARAM SINGH 3559 KAR AM SINGH 3467 KARTAR SINGH 2962	NAND SINGH NAZIR SINGH 3295 NAZIR SINGH 3592 NIR ANJAN SINGH 3313 NIR ANJAN SINGH 3316	SOHAN SINGH 3287 SOHAN SINGH 3437 SOHAN SINGH 3478 SOHAN SINGH 3485 SOHAN SINGH	

Kranji War Cemetery, names of Singhs who sacrificed their lives.

The life of Sikhs civilians during the Japanese Occupation

The Japanese Occupation was indeed a turning point for Singapore's society of Sikh immigrants in helping them to ultimately define and determine both, their loyalties and meaning of home. For reasons of personal safety and security, and in anticipation of food shortages and survival difficulties, some Sikhs were fortunate enough to send their wives and children back to the Punjab. Others sent their families to stay with relatives in Malaya. Civilian Sikhs who signed up as members of the Indian Independence League fared a little better in terms of access to food rations. Mohinder Singh who served as editor of the Indian Independence League newsletter at its headquarters in Singapore said *"our rations were quite substantial because our supplier was Mr Hardial Singh of Gian Singh and Company. He used to bring all sorts of things. I don't know how he used to bring from Thailand, Indochina, and other places. Because he was supplier of rations to the INA, the same things will come to us"*⁴³

Times were hard for all races in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation. The Chinese in particular were treated the worst among the other races. The "Sook Ching" operation was introduced to get rid of those who were anti-Japanese. Chinese who were anti-Japanese and contributed to China's war efforts were beheaded or shot. Some basic necessities such as food and clothing were scarce. People suffered food shortages and made substitutes out of whatever little resources they could get hold of, for example, tapioca, sweet potato, yam, bananas, coconuts, pineapple and rice. Beri-beri (disease caused by vitamin B deficiency) was rife owing to malnutrition. Food was often stolen from storage facilities. Looting and the black market was rampant. No one was controlling the black market and the Japanese forces themselves were indulging in it, and payment was often made by valued goods and Straits dollars. Medical supplies were also short.

Most Sikh civilians in the employment of the British colonial administration as clerks and interpreters continued working in their positions, this time under Japanese masters. Some Sikhs reared cows, goats, and buffaloes for milk, and planted small vegetable patches of local greens such as kangkong and bayam, sugar cane, ragi, and tapioca. Corn flour and ragi was commonly used as a substitute for wheat flour. Red palm oil and coconut oil was used as a substitute for ghee (clarified butter).

Sikh soldiers and policemen and other civilian Sikhs kept the gurdwaras going and they continued to prepare deggh and provide langgar on Sundays. Deggh or Karah Parshad is a type of semolina halva made with equal portions of whole wheat flour, butter,

Chapter 7 SIKHS SOLDIERS INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEFENSE OF SINGAPORE IN WORLD WAR II AND CIVILIAN LIFE DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION



Ration Card. Courtesy: Bihara Singh family

and sugar. It is offered to all visitors to the Darbar Sahib (Prayer Hall) in a Gurdwara. It is regarded as food blessed by the Guru. Red palm oil or coconut oil was used in place of ghee, maize flour mixed with rice flour was used in place of wheat flour, and brown sugar replaced white sugar. Gurdwaras surreptitiously used to supply food to POWs. Holes were made under barbed wire fences to smuggle food into the POW camps.

During the Japanese Occupation, the Silat Road Gurdwara served as a refuge for war widows and orphans. As a gesture of gratitude, the widows would assist the gurdwara in the preparation of the langgar. When the war was over, the widows and their children were repatriated to India without delay with the help of local Sikhs. Well-known moneylender Sadhu Singh Khaira was in charge of repatriating and performed humanitarian service in this area.

“Once Upon A Time in Little India”



The Sikh section of a 14 metre hand painted mural in Indian Heritage Centre, Singapore on “Once Upon a Time in Little India” featuring present and yesteryear Sikhs.

8

EARLY SIKH PIONEERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATION BUILDING

Generational changes in Sikh community settlement in Singapore

In general, we think of a generation as being about 25 years from the birth of a parent to the birth of a child. We generally accept that the length of a generation in earlier periods of history was closer to 20 years when human beings mated earlier and life expectancies were shorter. The second and third generation of Sikh migrants and settlers were clearly better educated and aspired involvement in occupations beyond policing, watchmen and security guard roles. The fourth and fifth generations of the Sikh community in Singapore have indeed ventured much further afield and exceeded all expectations through their roles in other important fields of endeavor thereby making invaluable contributions to nation building.

Sikh Police Contingent

The initial recruitment of 165 Sikhs in 1881 to form the Sikh Contingent of the Straits Settlements Police Force was the forerunner of the establishment of the Sikh community in Singapore. Retired Justice Choor Singh correctly observed “it is no exaggeration to say that the task of preserving peace, law and order in the early years of Singapore fell almost entirely on the shoulders of the Sikh community. The Sikhs were obviously a trusted community.

The security provided by the Sikh community created an environment in which business and trade flourished and the young Colony prospered. Other ethnic communities benefitted and prospered. Sikhs today can therefore be legitimately proud of the significant historical role their ancestors played in the security and stability of early Singapore under the British colonial administration”⁴⁴

The Sikh Police Contingent was undoubtedly held in high regard by its colonial masters in Singapore, and it is illuminating to reproduce in full below, a valedictory address to **Subedar Chanan Singh** on the eve of his retirement as head of the Sikh Police Contingent on 21 December 1931.

“Dear Sir,

In token of the high esteem in which we hold you, we have great pleasure in welcoming you as our honoured guest on the eve of your retirement after long and meritorious service in the Colony. The fact of your rising from the lowest post of an unclassified Police Constable in the year 1899 to the rank of Subedar today when you are the head of the Sikh Contingent is a convincing proof of the unremitting toil with which you have discharged your duties in the Police Force.

To have borne a clean conduct sheet over a period of 33 years is an illustrious record of which every one of us is envious. Your great devotion to duty, impartiality and fairness governed by a frank nature, has won for you the deep respect of both your seniors and your subordinates. We are reminded of the troublesome times of the 1915 mutiny during which you rendered most valuable assistance in Penang, as well as in Singapore. You have in no way been lacking in religious and social services to the Sikh faith. The Sikh Temple at Malacca of which you laid the foundation stone owes its existence to your zeal and devotion to the Sikh religion. You have been instrumental in raising funds for the Silat Road Sikh Temple, and have acted as a Trustee of the Penang Sikh Temple and have served on the Sikh Advisory Boards of all the three Settlements.

Born in the year 1874 and still going strong despite the tiresome duties which a Police Officer has to perform, is the example that you are leaving behind for your successors enviously to follow.

In your personal association with us in the past, your amiable qualities, coupled with your sympathetic nature have so endeared you to us that we have always longed to see you as the head of the Sikh Contingent, the rank that you hold today.

In conclusion, we congratulate you for attaining the standard of merit that you have achieved, both as a member of the Police Force and as a sincere and loyal Sikh and wish you to enjoy for a very long time to come that happy retirement and pension which you have so meritoriously earned.

We are your friends, members of the Straits Settlements Police Force”

Legal Service

The life, times, and contributions of the late retired **Justice Choor Singh Sidhu**, a self-made man who passed away on 31 March 2009 at the ripe old age of 98 stand out as a beacon of hope and inspiration for young Sikhs in Singapore today on what can be achieved through hard work and perseverance.

Arriving in Singapore in 1917 at the age of six, this son of a poor security guard received his education at Pearl's Hill Primary School and Raffles Institution where David Marshall was his classmate. On completing his 'O' levels, he worked as a solicitor's clerk in Mallal and Namazie before joining the Official Assignee's Office as a court clerk. His interest during the Japanese Occupation turned to studying law under difficult personal circumstances, and he passed the Overseas Bar Final Examination held in Kuala Lumpur in April 1949.



Choor Singh in England, 1953.

Courtesy: Choor Singh family

He was not only the first Sikh but also the first Indian to be appointed a magistrate in colonial Malaya in 1949. He was called to the English Bar in 1955, and subsequently appointed as a Senior District Judge and Head of the Subordinate Courts. In 1963, he was appointed a Supreme Court Judge, a position he held for 17 years before retiring in 1980.

Justice Choor Singh also served on the Court of Criminal Appeal, and the record reveals that no judgment of the Court of Criminal Appeal delivered by him was ever overturned by the Privy Council. While they were the best of friends outside the court and had high regard for each other, noted criminal lawyer David Marshall was not able to obtain a single acquittal in a capital punishment case before Justice Choor Singh. It is a little known fact that the late retired Dr Choor Singh Sidhu was also an acknowledged expert on gaming and wrote two books *Gaming in*

Malaya; a commentary on the Common Gaming Houses Ordinance, Cap.114, and of the State of Singapore, 1960 (with a foreword by the then Chief Justice Sir Alan Rose). This work was published in the *Malayan Law Journal* in 1960. He also wrote *The law relating to moneylenders*, published in 1963.

It is believed that the jury system was abolished by the Singapore Government in 1969 as a result of a famous '*Body in the box*' case tried by Justice Choor Singh with Francis Seow prosecuting. The then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew sought Justice Choor Singh's opinion and a Bill was subsequently passed in Parliament in 1969 abolishing the jury system in Singapore.

Justice Choor Singh exercised considerable influential and consultative roles with the government of the day on the establishment of the Sikh Advisory Board, Punjabi schools and education, and many other matters affecting the Sikh community. An active sportsman in his younger days, he was a founder member of the Singapore Khalsa Association. He served as Chairman of the Sikh Advisory Board, Vice-Chairman of the National Kidney Foundation for many years, Chairman of the Probation Committee which supervised the work of Probation Officers, member of the Presidential Council for Minority Rights, and Chairman of the Detainees Board until his retirement. He also served as Patron of the Singapore Indian Association, Trustee of the Sikh Education Foundation, the Sikh Welfare Council, and the Singapore Khalsa Association. Well respected across the Indian community, he was for many years also Vice-Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Tamil Language Society. The highest honour bestowed on him was when he was asked by the Sikh community to lay the foundation stone of the newly renovated Khalsa Dharmak Sabha on Sunday 14 August 1994.

It is a well-known fact that he kept himself busy after retirement writing books on Sikh history and religion. List of books written by the late Justice Choor Singh Sidhu

- *Gaming in Malaya: A Commentary on the Common Gaming Houses Ordinance, 1953, of the Federation of Malaya, and the Common Gaming Houses Ordinance, Cap. 114, of the State of Singapore.* Singapore, Malayan Law Journal, 1960.
- *Bhai Maharaj Singh: Saint-soldier of the Sikh Faith.* Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 1991. A later edition was published as *Bhai Maharaj Singh: Saint-soldier Martyr of the Sikh Faith.* Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 1999.
- *The Sikh Gurus.* Singapore, Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha, 1991.
- *Understanding Sikhism: The Gospel of the Gurus.* Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, 1994. A later edition was published as *Sikhs and Sikhism: Understanding Sikhism (the Gospel of the Gurus): A Precise Account of the Religious History of the Sikhs, their Political Heritage and their Aspirations for the Future.* Singapore, Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (reproduced on the website of the Sikh Missionary Society UK), 2001.
- *Amar Shaheed Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale: Martyr of the Sikh Faith.* Harpenden, Hertfordshire: European Institute of Sikh Studies, 1997.
- *Memoirs of Mr Justice Choor Singh of the Supreme Court of Singapore.* Singapore, Family of Choor Singh, 2003.

- *Who is a Sikh? Singapore, 2007.*
- *Who is a Sikh and other essays on several other non-Sikh Punjabi Religious Societies other than Hindus and Muslims. Singapore, Choor Singh Sidhu, n.d.*
- *The Sikh community's contribution to the development of Singapore: A collection of essays and personal reminisces, 2007.*

His self-written epitaph speaks for itself.

*I came here by His Grace
After toiling in many lower lives
I have done my duty to my State
To my community and my Faith
I leave now as ordained by my fate
To meet Him and sit at His Lotus feet*⁴⁵

Amarjeet Singh came to Singapore from Kuala Lumpur in 1956 to study law at the University of Malaya in Singapore, and after graduating in 1961, started his career in the Singapore Legal Service, holding various appointments as Magistrate, District Judge, and Legal Officer with the Official Assignee and Public Trustee, before going into private practice. The highlight of his 46 years career would have been serving as an ad litem Judge with the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal for the Balkans at The Hague from 2001 to 2005.

Republic of Singapore Navy



Jaswant Singh Gill

From school teacher to first Commander of the Singapore Navy is a remarkable achievement of Retired Navy Commander (Lieutenant Colonel) **Jaswant Singh Gill** that does the Sikh community proud, and is now pictorially recorded at the Singapore Navy Museum.

Jaswant Singh Gill arrived in Singapore in 1923 at the age of six to join his uncle Thaman Singh who was serving as a Police Clerk. He was educated at Radin Mas Primary School and at Raffles Institution. He later completed his London Chamber of Commerce examinations in 1940 with eight distinctions.

Like his uncle before him, he too served as a Police Clerk during the Japanese Occupation, and transferred to the Education Department in 1948, becoming a primary school teacher, including teaching commercial subjects part-time in the evenings. He was appointed a shorthand examiner by the Public Service Board and also served as a member on the Vocational Examination Panel of the Adult Education Board. In 1957, he was appointed principal of the Pearl Bank Primary School.

Gill joined the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (MRNVR) as a rating in 1949 and was promoted to Sub-Lieutenant in 1951. He was the only Sikh and second Asian officer among 100 British Officers and 900 sailors and recalls scrubbing decks and cleaning toilets just before being commissioned as an acting Sub-Lieutenant in 1951. After passing all his naval examinations with excellent results and having served a period as Training Officer (Officers), he was commissioned as a Lieutenant Commander in 1962. His part-time service in the MRNVR took him to Malaysian ports and to Trincomalee, Manila and Hong Kong, including short attachments in the Indian and British navies.

He was also active in the Singapore Teachers' Union (STU) and served as its Secretary from 1959 to 1963, Vice-President from 1963 to 1964, and President of the Head Teachers' Branch from 1963 to 1964. He recalls playing an active role in preventing the STU from falling into the hands of the Barisan Socialis, a communist inspired organization out to capture political power in Singapore.⁴⁶



Jaswant Singh Gill
family photo.

Courtesy:
J. S. Gill family

When Singapore became independent and set up its own armed forces in 1965, Jaswant Singh Gill was mobilized for full-time service and appointed Commanding Officer of the Pulau Blakang Mati Camp. He was appointed Head, Training Department, General Staff Division of the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) in 1968, Commander of the Tengah Air Base in February 1971, and Commander of Changi Air Base in December 1971. He retired from the SAF in 1972 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Not one to retreat into retirement, he taught commercial subjects at the United World College for the next eight years.

From his early student days, Jaswant Singh Gill was active in the SKA and was its Jalan Bahagia clubhouse caretaker during the Japanese Occupation. He served as SKA Secretary in 1952 and 1953 and again from 1958 to 1962, and President from 1966 to 1981. He was in the forefront of efforts and led the Agrahi (seeking and soliciting donations for community purposes) Building Committee in collecting donations for the SKA's new clubhouse, first at Jalan Bahagia and later at Tessensohn Road.

Where imbibing a sundowner after hours is a norm for most military officers, Jaswant Singh Gill has remained a teetotaler, making do with a plain soda or ginger ale, thereby earning understanding and respect from his fellow officers for his faith, truly a role model par excellence!

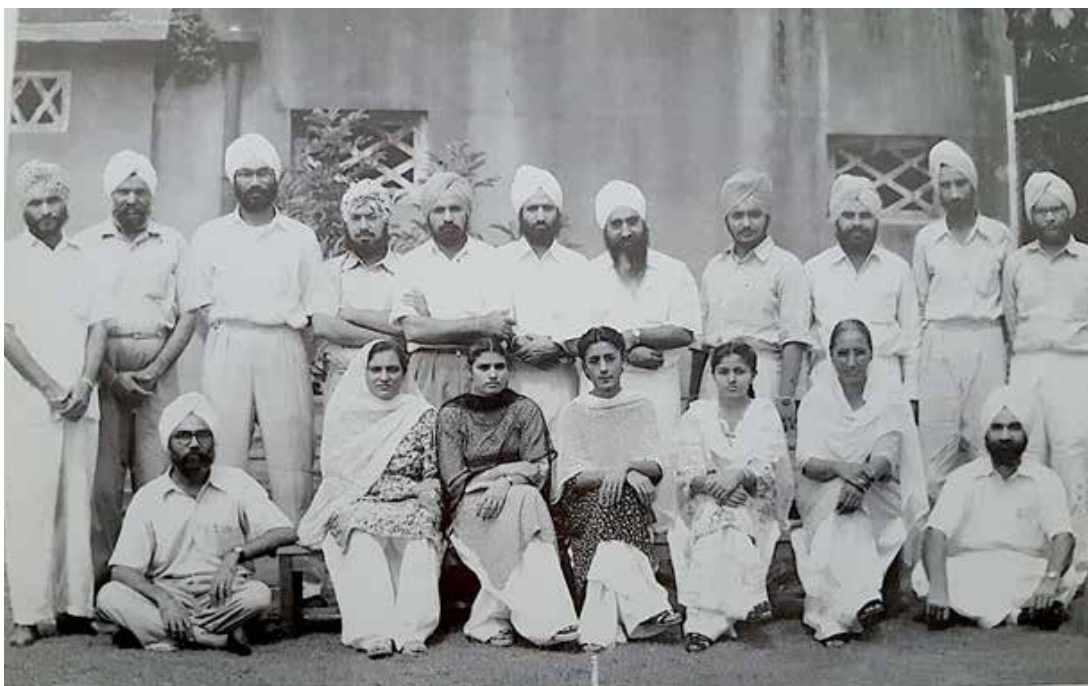
Educational services

Born in Amritsar in 1911 on Vesakhi Day, **Master Wazir Singh Wasan** arrived in Singapore in 1928 and joined Raffles Institution at the age of 17, passing the Senior Cambridge 'O' level examination the following year. Bhag Singh, Mahan Singh and Choor Singh were his contemporaries at Raffles Institution, and with the exception of Choor Singh, all three gentlemen progressed in their teaching careers to become school principals. Wazir Singh's father, Master Sundar Singh had arrived earlier in Singapore in 1924 to manage the family firm Rose & Company Ltd.

Wazir Singh had an abiding love for Gurbani Kirtan while a student at Khalsa College Amritsar and could recite Asa-di-Var so well that he was granted a music scholarship of 4 Rupees per month. On completing his 'O' levels in Singapore, Wazir Singh attended Teachers Training College from 1930 to 1933. After qualifying as a normal trained teacher he taught at Telok Kurau English School, and at Raffles Institution after the end of the Second World War. He was appointed Principal of Park Road School in 1954, and promoted to Inspector of Schools in 1960, coincidentally retiring as a Staff Officer on his birthday on 13 April 1966.

Together with Choor Singh, he took the initiative of founding the Singapore Khalsa Association in May 1931. The name Singapore Khalsa Association was jointly suggested by Wazir Singh and another founder member Jasmer Singh Gill. His father Sardar Sundar Singh was the Association's first President, Wazir Singh served as General Secretary and Choor Singh as Sports Secretary. Wazir Singh excelled at sports, playing cricket and hockey for the Singapore Indian Association and Singapore Khalsa Association. His fellow players regarded him as an aggressive batsman and a great wicket keeper.

Wazir Singh's most notable contribution was in taking charge of Punjabi education of Sikh children in 1955. He volunteered to organize and supervise Punjabi classes in the Waterloo Street schools. The Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha financed the project and 550



1955 - Vacation Punjabi Classes Staff

Seated in the front row are: Mehervan Singh, Rattan Kaur, Surjit Kaur, Harmahinder Kaur, Surjeet Kaur, Kartar Kaur, Jaswant Singh Gill.

Standing in the back row are: Harbakhsh Singh, Ranjit Singh Pabhan, Sardara Singh Gill, Bhag Singh, Ujagar Singh Malla, Giani Gurcharan Singh, Giani Raghbir Singh, Harjinder Singh, Jaswant Singh Bandal, Gian Singh, Wazir Singh.



Master Wazir Singh Wasan family photo. Courtesy: Wasir Singh Wasan family

Sikh children were taught Punjabi by 17 volunteer teachers. With the introduction of the six-day week in all English schools in 1959, these classes for boys were shifted to the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha and for girls to the Sri Guru Singh Sabha. His other community services included serving as President of the Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha, and as a Trustee of the Sikh Education Foundation and Sikh Welfare Council.

On Teachers Day in 1997, Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large Professor Tommy Koh paid a glowing tribute to his mentor. He said *"I wish to salute my old teacher Mr Wazir Singh and through him all my teachers in primary and secondary school. Mr Wazir Singh was my form master in Secondary 1. I will always be grateful to him because he had confidence in me and encouraged me to aim high. He taught me to work hard and to enjoy learning. He also taught me the virtue of honesty and compassion. Everyone was treated fairly – he had no favourites and no scapegoats. Mr. Wazir Singh is an example of the many good teachers I had. Good parents and good teachers produce good children. Good children grow up to be good citizens. If we want Singapore to succeed and to be a morally wholesome society, we must have good teachers. This is why it is important for us to respect the teaching profession and hold up outstanding teachers such as Mr. Wazir Singh as a role model for others to emulate."*⁴⁷ *"The fact that he is a Sikh and a Punjabi and a good man is fortuitous. It helped*

me to overcome the virus of racial and religious prejudice. I have learned from him to judge a person, not by the colour of his skin or his religious faith, but by the quality of his heart and mind".⁴⁸ Master Wazir Singh Wasan passed away in 1999.

Master Tharam Singh, Beatty Secondary School Principal in the early 1960s, was also a Sikh community leader who served as President of the Singapore Khalsa Association in 1958/59 and again in 1964. He later wrote a book *The story of the Sikhs; Covering the lives of the Sikh Gurus*, published by Pan Asian Publications in 1975.



Surjan Singh family photo.
Courtesy: Surjan Singh family

Masters Surjan Singh and Himmat Singh Gill are both retired teachers who taught at Raffles Institution. In addition to holding a Certificate in Education, Master Surjan Singh completed his BA degree from London externally and is also a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society (FRGS). He has served as the Honorary Secretary of the Sikh Missionary Society Malaya, and has compiled and edited a number of tracts on Sikh religion for members of the Society. Santokh Singh Grewal, who was President of the Singapore Sikh Education Foundation (SSEF) at the time of his untimely death in 2016, was a correspondent at Singapore Press Holdings and expressed pleasant surprise at the high honour of being approached by Master Surjan Singh to write the foreword to his

book *They died for all free men*. In part he said *"there is no doubt that my parents, siblings and relatives played a key role in my upbringing. But if there were any other mortals who made an impact on my value system as a Sikh, you certainly have your place. Among other things, you taught me the basics and the way to approach the General Paper at pre-university level and was my hockey master. But there was something else that you and Sardar Himmat Singh Gill, the other teacher at Raffles Institution, taught me by way of your personal conduct and the "Sabat Surat, Dastar Sira". I was unfortunate to lose my father when I was only a child but you and Sardar Himmat Singh Gill were father-figures to me. There has been a number of occasions when friends and strangers have come up to me to congratulate me on my steadfastness in loving my faith and leading a Gursikh life. And on each and every occasion, I have never failed to draw a parallelism to the wonderful individuals who have helped my love for Sikhism to grow and grow."*⁴⁹

Master Surjan Singh did not rest on his laurels while teaching, and even after retirement, he served as a volunteer social worker with the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) and was awarded SANA's Medal of Honour (Bronze) on 13 November 1990. He was Vice Chairman of the Singapore Indian Development Association's (SINDA) Case Review Panel and was presented a Platinum Award by SINDA in April 2013 for 20 years of service. For his probation work with wayward youths, he was awarded the prestigious PBM (Pingat Bakti Masyarakat, Public Service Medal) in 1994, and has contributed over 40 years of outstanding service to the Probation and Aftercare Service. Master Surjan Singh was also a Grade 1 Timekeeper and was presented with a plaque on 9 September 2014 by Sports Singapore MCCY SG50 for his pioneering contribution to sports. Truly a life well spent in devoted service to the Singapore community.

Mention must also be made of other educationists like **Jeswant Singh Bandal, Harbans Singh s/o Puran Singh, Sardara Singh Gill, Naranjan Singh, Ajit Singh Gill, Avtar Singh, Ram Singh and Sarwan Singh Sidhu.**



Jeswant Singh Bandal
Courtesy: J S Bandal family

Jeswant Singh Bandal was born in Taiping, Perak, Malaysia on Christmas Day in 1929. He came to Singapore in the early 1940s when his father took up a position as Granthi at the Central Sikh Temple. Bandal was a top student in Japanese language and culture at the Japanese School in Queen Street during the Japanese Occupation. At the tender age of 14 in 1942, he was assigned to the Japanese Police Inspector-General as his official interpreter. Meanwhile, he continued his Japanese language studies and, together with former Singapore President S. R. Nathan, was among only two Singaporeans who passed the Tokkiyu Highest Special Grade examination. He completed his primary schooling at Rangoon Road Primary School, then joined the British Ordinance Depot (BOD) as a Grade 3 clerk in 1944, and was quickly promoted to Grade 2 clerk on a monthly salary of \$180, which was more than his Granthi father's monthly salary of \$125. To further improve his career prospects, he enrolled in Raffles Institution and completed his Senior Cambridge Examination, and was

accepted for admission to Raffles College in 1947. Two months into his studies at Raffles College, he left to return to India with his father to settle urgent family land matters. On his return to Singapore, Bandal joined the Teachers Training College in Cairnhill Road and completed the three years Normal Training Course over 1948 to 1951. He was a mathematics teacher at Outram Secondary School before he took up an appointment as Police Education Officer at the Singapore Police Force from 1959 to 1963.

He was principal at Charlton Primary School when he was awarded a Public Service Commission scholarship to go overseas and completed a two years Modern Mathematics Education course at the Institute of Education, University of Kingston at Hull in Yorkshire. On his return, he was appointed Assistant Inspector of Schools (Mathematics) at the Ministry of Education and retired as Inspector of Schools in 1989. Bandal served as the first President of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (CSGB) when it was formalised through the enactment of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board Act of the Singapore Parliament which incorporated the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board (Chapter 357, Act 17 of 1981).

Post-retirement, Bandal served as a part-time lecturer for 8 years at the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board (PSB). He has all along been active in Sikh community affairs and assisted in initiating the teaching of Punjabi language during the 1950s to 1970s. He served as Chairman of the Sikh Advisory Board from 1975 to 1979. In recognition of his many contributions to community affairs, he received the PBM (Pingat Bakti Masyarakat, Public Service Medal) in 2006, the PBS (Pingat Bakti Setia, Long Service Award) in 2009, the BBM (Bintang Bakti Masyarakat, Public Service Star) in 2014, and also the PB (Pingat Berkebolehan, Efficiency Medal)

Harbans Singh s/o Puran Singh was born in Malaya in 1930, arrived in Singapore on 1 June 1950, attended Teachers Training College and gained a Certificate in Education in 1953. This was later followed by specialist training at the Singapore Polytechnic in 1960 as a Technical Teacher, Metalwork. He also served as President of the Singapore Polytechnic Students' Union in 1959. In 1966, he was the recipient of an Economic Development Board (EDB) Study Award in Belgium for Technical Teacher Training and later a Colombo Plan Fellowship in 1970 for inspection of technical schools and colleges in Australia. He has held a number of specialist positions throughout his teaching career and retired from the Ministry of Education as Senior Education Officer, Grade 1, in 1985. Apart from his teaching career, he was also a commissioned officer in the National Cadet Corps (Air) from 1956 to 1976, served as Singapore's Representative on the International Cricket Council (London) and Asian Cricket Council (Delhi) from 1983 to 1994. Such was his indefatigable energies

that he also found time to serve in executive positions with the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, other Sikh institutions, and the Inter-Religious Organisation in Singapore. He was awarded the Public Service Medal (PBM) in the 1989 National Day Honours.

Sardara Singh Gill served as a Specialist Lecturer with the Teachers Training College in the days before it was renamed the Institute of Education. He was active in Sikh community affairs and served a number of terms as SKA Treasurer. Naranjan Singh started life as a teacher and ended up as an Assistant Director of Education. By dint of determination and private study, he acquired three university degrees, and practised as an advocate and solicitor following his retirement from the Education Service. Ajit Singh Gill came to Singapore from Malaya, was a very keen sportsman, and played hockey and cricket for Selangor State when Singapore was part of Malaysia in 1964. He is also a keen golfer and has won a number of trophies. He served as Senior Assistant at Queenstown Secondary School from 1963 to 1985. He and his brother Himmat Singh Gill both retired from the teaching service in 1985. Avtar Singh was born in Batu Gajah, Malaya, in 1927 and came to Singapore in 1949. After completing his teacher training in 1952, he taught in a number of primary and secondary schools before being appointed as Principal of Queenstown Primary School in 1964, a position he held until his retirement in 1982. Like Ajit Singh Gill, he was an avid cricket and hockey player with SKA in his younger days and was appointed an international hockey umpire to the Singapore Hockey Association in 1952.

Ram Singh (son of provisions shop owner the late Sardar Amar Singh and brother of retired ASP Pritam Singh Brar) is another educationist who has put in many years of dedicated teaching service. He attended the Teachers Training College in Singapore from 1951 to 1953, and began his teaching career in 1954. He taught at Queenstown Secondary School from 1954 to 1964, and later served as Principal of Jurong Primary School from 1964 to 1979. He retired in 1980 and was re-employed until 1987.

Sarwan Singh Sidhu arrived from Kuala Lumpur in 1952 and completed his Teachers Training College in Singapore in 1955. He has taught at a number of schools in Singapore and served as Principal of Anderson Secondary School from 1980 to 1984. While teaching, he acquired two external degrees from the University of London, B.Sc (Econ) in 1971 and B.A. in 1975. Following his retirement in 1988, he was re-employed in 1991 as a tutor and supervisor of graduate trainee teachers at the National Institute of Education. He was Chairman of the Singapore Khalsa Association Education Committee in 1991, Founder Member and Chairman of the Singapore Khalsa Association Kindergarten in 1992, and also served as General Secretary of the Singapore Khalsa Association in 1999-2000.

Academia



Professor Kernial Singh Sandhu
Courtesy: Institute of Southeast
Asian Studies

Professor Kernial Singh Sandhu (1929-1992) was a graduate of the University of Malaya in Singapore and a historical geographer by training. He did postgraduate studies and taught at the Universities of British Columbia and London, and was Associate Professor in the Geography Department at the University of British Columbia prior to his appointment in 1972 as Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore. He was its fourth and longest serving director until his untimely death from a heart attack in 1992.

During his tenure he did much to enhance the standing of ISEAS as a research centre for Southeast Asian affairs. He is the author of a seminal work *Indians in Malaya: Immigration and Settlement, 1786-1957* first published by Cambridge University Press in 1969.

Singapore Police Force (SPF)

Sardar Gurdial Singh was the senior most Sikh police officer when he retired from the Singapore Police Force in 1968.

He joined the police force as a constable in 1939 and rose from the ranks. He was Commandant of the Police Training School and later Superintendent in charge of Area Three in Singapore. During the national referendum, he was Officer-in-Charge of referendum matters. Before his promotion to Assistant Commissioner in 1963, he was Superintendent in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department.⁵⁰ He passed away in Sydney on 31 May 2010 at the age of 88.

Other pre-1965 senior police officers included **Prison Superintendent Sardool Singh**, **Superintendent Sardara Singh** who served as head of the Traffic Police, **DSP Jernail Singh Khosa**, **DSP Sohan Singh**, **DSP Daljit Singh**, **DSP Harbans Singh**, **ASP Pritam Singh Brar**, **ASP Mahinder Singh**, **ASP Gurdial Singh Gill**, **ASP Jaswant Singh**, **ASP Gurpal Singh**, **ASP Savinder Singh Randhawa** and **Senior Inspector Santa Singh Bath**. Post retirement,

DSP Jernail Singh Khosa and **ASP Pritam Singh Brar** went on to acquire legal qualifications and practised law.

Post-independence, **Jagjit Singh s/o Subedar Sundar Singh** joined the Singapore Police Force in 1967 and served with distinction in many roles, including as a plainclothes officer, Director of CID, and finally retiring as Deputy Commissioner of Police (Operations) in 2001.

Inspector Sant Singh Tulse served in the late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's security detail from 1969 to 1971 and was also OC (Officer in Charge) Istana from 1971-1972. He later went on to qualify as a lawyer and was appointed Senior Counsel in 2007.

Singapore Armed Forces (SAF)

With impending self-government in 1959, the Singapore Military Forces (SMF) were established with the formation of its regular arm, the Singapore Infantry Regiment (SIR) on 12 March 1957. The Singapore Volunteer Corps (SVC) was the other component of the SMF. Following Singapore's merger with Malaysia in 1963, the SMF was absorbed into the Fourth Malaysian Infantry Brigade.

When Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, most of the SMF personnel chose to return to Singapore, and its officers including the Sikh military officers played a significant role in the formation and build-up of the SAF.

Regular Sikh Officers from the SIR included **Col. Jagrup Singh** from Infantry, who was the first Sikh regular officer in the SMF; **Col. Gurcharan Singh Sekhon** from SAF Combat Engineers; **Lt. Col. Mahinder Singh** from Infantry; **Lt. Col. Daljeet Singh** from Infantry; **Major Naranjan Singh** from Infantry; **Capt. Anokh Singh** from Infantry/Transport; and **Warrant Officer Harchand Singh** from Infantry – he was apparently the first regular soldier of SIR with Regimental Number 001.



Gurdial Singh, Assistant Commissioner of Police.
Courtesy: G S family



Prison Superintendent Sardool Singh. *Courtesy: Sardool Singh family*



Deputy Commissioner of Police Jagjit Singh

Chapter 8 EARLY SIKH PIONEERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATION BUILDING

Sikh volunteer officers from the SVC included **Col. Mancharan Singh Gill** from Artillery; **Lt. Col. Jaswant Singh Gill** and **Major Brij S. Soin** from the Navy; **Major Surjit Singh** from Artillery; **Major Ishwar Lall Singh** from Armour/Logistics; **Capt. Hardev Singh** from Infantry; and **Capt. Jagir Singh** from Navy Logistics.

The Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation (Konfrontasi) was a violent and undeclared conflict lasting from 1962 to 1966 that mainly arose from Indonesia's opposition to the creation of Malaysia. During Konfrontasi, the First and Second Battalions of the Singapore Infantry Regiments (1SIR & 2SIR) were placed under Malaysian command and deployed in various parts of Peninsular Malaya to fight against Indonesian saboteurs. The 1SIR was based at Taiping and the 2SIR in Singapore for the defence of Johore and Singapore against external threats. Local defence was the responsibility of the SVC and the Vigilante Corps (VC).



Col. (Rtd)
Jagrup Singh
*Courtesy: Asia
Samachar,
August 25, 2016*



Col. (Rtd)
Gurcharan Singh
Sekhon
*Courtesy: Gurcharan
Singh family*



Col. (Rtd)
Mancharan Singh
Gill
*All rights reserved.
National Library,
2009*



Warrant Officer Harchand Singh. *Courtesy: Harchand Singh family*

The aforementioned Sikh military officers saw action during Konfrontasi with no loss of life. Retired Major Ishwar Lall Singh enlisted as a volunteer with the SVC in July 1956, and was acknowledged and recognized as a skilled marksman early in his military career. During Konfrontasi, he was assigned duties to guard and protect the Sultan Ibrahim Reservoir, including the water filtration plant and adjoining reservoir in Pontian, Johor, Malaysia. Lt. Col. Daljeet Singh and Lt. Col. Mahinder Singh were then junior officers and platoon commanders from Infantry who faced real action and annihilated some terrorists in jungle encounters during Konfrontasi. Col. Mancharan Singh Gill, a mathematics and physics graduate from the then University of Malaya in Singapore, was responsible for ably converting and amalgamating the 20PDF (People's Defence Force) Singapore Volunteer Artillery to become the first 20 Singapore Artillery Battalion (NS).

It is of interest to note that Major Brij S. Soin from the Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (MRNVR, Singapore Division) was promoted to Lieutenant Commander in July 1961 for so long as he remained an Aide-de-Camp to the Yang di-Pertuan Negara. Lt. Col. Daljeet Singh also served as an Aide-de-Camp to the Yang di-Pertuan Negara.

Civil aviation



Flight Capt. B. S. Gurm
Courtesy: B.S. Gurm family

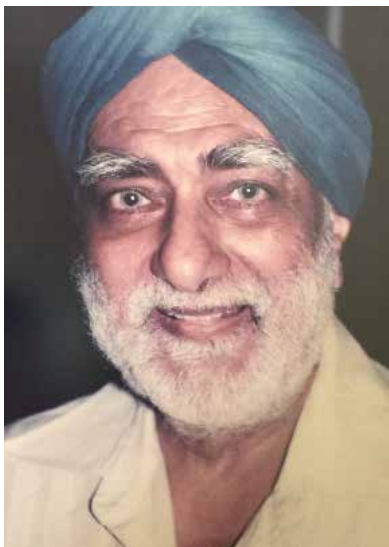
At the age of 35, **Bikramjit Singh Gurm** had the dual distinction of being the first Sikh and youngest senior officer with Malaysia-Singapore Airlines, having attained the position of Assistant Director of Flight Operations in 1972. Fourteen years earlier, Gurm had opted out of a pharmacy course at the then University of Malaya in Singapore, and taken up a two years Colombo Plan scholarship for training as a pilot at the Civil Aviation Training Centre in Bamrauli, Allahabad, India. The separation of Singapore Airlines (SIA) from Malaysia-Singapore Airlines took place in 1972. When Singapore Airlines provided management and technical assistance to Air Lanka (as it was then known in January 1979), Gurm served as its personnel manager for three years. Air Lanka was later re-branded to Sri Lankan Airlines in 1998. It is a little known fact that Gurm was the preferred flight captain each time the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew travelled abroad on his official and business

duties. Gurm was also responsible for training many of SIA's younger pilots and himself piloted many of SIA's inaugural flights on new airliners to new international destinations. He was SIA's Assistant Director of Flight Operations when he passed away in 1993 at the age of 56.

Medical services

There were only a few Sikh doctors in Singapore in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Dr. Sarban Singh was the first Sikh local medical practitioner in Singapore. Born in Malaya, he graduated from the King Edward VII College of Medicine in 1941 and served as a medical officer at the Singapore General Hospital before setting up his own private practice, City Dispensary, at 245 Serangoon Road. Unfortunately, he died suddenly in 1949 at a young age of 32. He was a keen cricketer and was Treasurer of the Singapore Khalsa Association at the time of his death.



Dr. Naranjan Singh

Courtesy Dr. Naranjan Singh family

Following him was **Dr. Naranjan Singh**, a 1947 graduate of the King Edward VII College of Medicine, who then worked for a short time in the Prisons Medical Unit before leaving to set up his own private practice, Lall Dispensary, at 119 Serangoon Road. He was truly a dedicated doctor, his clinic was always full of patients, a large number of whom were from the Sikh community. He gave free service to the poor and needy, and also served as President of SKA in 1963. Coincidentally, the General Secretary of the SKA in the same year was Niranjan Singh Dhothar, MBE. It is a little known fact that Dr Naranjan Singh was also an accomplished ballroom dancer during his undergraduate years. He passed away in August 1994.

Dr. Charan Singh was also another GP with a successful practice at Selegie Road for the last three decades. He passed away in July 2002.

The late **Datuk Dr. Keshmahinder Singh** was a classmate and fellow graduand of Dr. Naranjan Singh.

He worked for a few years at the Singapore General Hospital before returning to Kuala Lumpur to set up his own private practice as an ophthalmologist. While in Singapore, he served as General Secretary of the SKA in 1958. Like Dr. Naranjan Singh he gave free service to the poor and needy. He passed away in May 2007.

There was another **Dr Naranjan Singh** who graduated from the University of Malaya in Singapore in 1957. He joined the Prisons Medical Unit soon after graduation and retired as its Head in November 1990. He however continued to be re-employed in a number of public and private sector positions until 1998.

Dr Kuldip Singh Wasan graduated from the University of Singapore in 1965 and joined the Ministry of Health. Throughout his career, he has been actively involved in many different roles and responsibilities until his retirement in 2004. He was Medical Officer at the Police Academy and also served as Assistant Commissioner of Public Health in 1970. Dr. Kuldip Singh Wasan has, over the years, also been an active volunteer as a Prison Counsellor with SANA.

Accountancy and Inter-Religious Organisation

Sardar Mehervan Singh was the first professionally qualified Sikh public accountant in Singapore.

He arrived in Singapore in July 1929 accompanied by his mother, younger brother and sister. His father, Nand Singh, had arrived earlier in 1924 to serve as the first Granthi (ceremonial reader of the Guru Granth Sahib Sikh Holy Scripture) of the newly built Silat Road Gurdwara. He had his primary schooling at Radin Mas Primary School and secondary education at Raffles Institution. At school, he won the Old Rafflesian's Prize for being the best all-round student. He completed his Senior Cambridge Examination in 1937 and stood sixth amongst all the Straits Settlements candidates.

On completion of his school studies, he worked as an audit clerk at the British Air Ministry, Far East Command, from 1939 to 1942, and as a Treasurer with the Indian Independence League Headquarters in Singapore from 1942 to 1945. In the interim, he sat for the London Chamber of Commerce Examinations in November 1941, and owing to the intervening war years, did not get his results until 1946 when he learnt he had scored a distinction in accountancy. He worked as an assessor with the Inland Revenue Department from 1948 to 1952, leaving to set up his own office operating as an unqualified accountant



Mehervan Singh family photo. Courtesy: Mehervan Singh family

from his home at 67 Sophia Road. Meanwhile, he enrolled for a correspondence course to qualify as a professional accountant with the Chartered Association of Certified Accountants in 1957. He was admitted as an Associate (ACCA) in 1959 and a Fellow (FCCA) ten years later in 1969. He started practice as a qualified accountant in 1958 under the name Mehervan Singh & Company, setting up an office in the city in 1959. With a growing and successful practice, he found he was able to spend more time for community service and activities.

As early as 1948 he “was involved in community service through institutions like SATA, Singapore Aftercare Association, Singapore Leprosy Relief Association, Singapore Indian Education Trust, Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore Khalsa Association, and the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association. My principal activity was in the Inter-Religious Organisation (established in 1949), being its General Secretary from 1963 to 1983. With IRO, I was fully involved in the production of material for moral instruction in schools by the Ministry of Education in 1959/60”.⁵¹ He was awarded the Public Service Medal Star (PBM) in the 1966 National Day List of Honours.

He served as Sikh representative on the International Inter Religious Organisation and was Secretary General of the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace for 15 years, attending many world conferences on religion and peace, and meeting many world dignitaries including Archbishop Michael Ramsay of Canterbury, Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, and President Carter at the White House in 1979.

He has written a few books on Sikhism and two travelogues. He was truly a citizen of the world when he passed away on 2 January 1999.

List of publications/papers by the late Mehervan Singh:

From village to city. Singapore, Ford Printers Pte. Ltd., n.d.

Sikhism: its impact. Papers on contemporary Sikhism.

Singapore, Chopmen Enterprises, 1973.

Heart attack: seven weeks at Outram Road General Hospital by a heart patient.

Singapore, Institute for the Study of Religions and Society in Singapore and Malaysia, 1974.

Sant Sohan Singh, Malacca. Singapore, Bersaka Singh, 1976.

Religious and cultural heritage of Singapore. Singapore, Inter-Religious Organisation, 1976.

The Punjab vis-a-vis Punjabis abroad: a paper for the World Punjabi Conference. Singapore, 1976.

The Boat People Project of World Conference on Religion and Peace and Asian Conference on Religion and Peace. Singapore, Board of the Boat People Project, 1977.

Whither Singapore Sikhs? Singapore, 1978.

Sikhism, east and west. Singapore, 1978.

Sikhism, east and west. Singapore, 1984.

Daedal decades: autobiographical essays. Singapore Maja Corp., 1989.

Contemporary personal impressions upon Indian independence movement and Punjabi Suba struggle. Singapore, Maja Marketing, 1992.

A hearty patient's experiences on heart attack, originally edited by Ray Nyce, Singapore, 1997.

Business development

Hardial Singh (also known as **Hardial Singh Bajaj**) was only 17 years of age when he and his four brothers - Inder Singh, Harbans Singh, Hira Singh and Balwant Singh left their home in Punjab in 1920 and ventured down to Ipoh in Perak State to set up shop trading in spices, grains and foodstuffs. They came to Malaya mainly because their family in India was in debt owing to business losses. With the strong conviction that the food

you eat must be your own toil, the brothers worked hard and saved enough money to send one of the brothers back to India to clear and repay all the debts. Such was their sense of integrity and honour that they decided even if their original debtors were no longer alive, their children would be given the money.

They then ventured to Singapore in 1934 and established a successful business trading in foodstuffs and textiles. A three-storey shophouse at 4 Battery Road (where the present Bank of China now stands) housed their firm Gian Singh & Company, which served as a department store, wholesale office, and living quarters all rolled into one. They moved later and established a department store in Raffles Place opposite the Robinson & Company Limited department store, against which it competed successfully. Besides these

two, the other department stores operating in Singapore around that time were John Little's, Aurora and Whiteaways. Hardial Singh and his brother Hira Singh went on a business trip to Shanghai in 1949, and before too long, Gian Singh and Company became a family oriented multinational company with offices in Japan, Indonesia and Thailand. One of the brothers, Balwant Singh, was later elected in 1948 to serve as a member of the Legislative Council of Singapore. From their earlier days in Perak, his brother Hardial Singh learnt and spoke fluent Tamil and gave speeches in Tamil during his brother Balwant Singh's election campaign. The firm donated space in the Straits Times on 4 November 1948 urging the public to give generously on Poppy Day, 5 November 1948. *"Sikh merchants raised the prestige of the Sikh community in the eyes of the other communities. English ladies selling poppies on Poppy Day would make a bee-line for Sikh merchant houses in Raffles Place where many a Sikh proprietor or senior partner bought a poppy for as much as \$1,000! The late Sardar Singh Narula told me that he once paid \$2,000 for a poppy to a very persistent English lady"*.⁵² Generosity indeed!

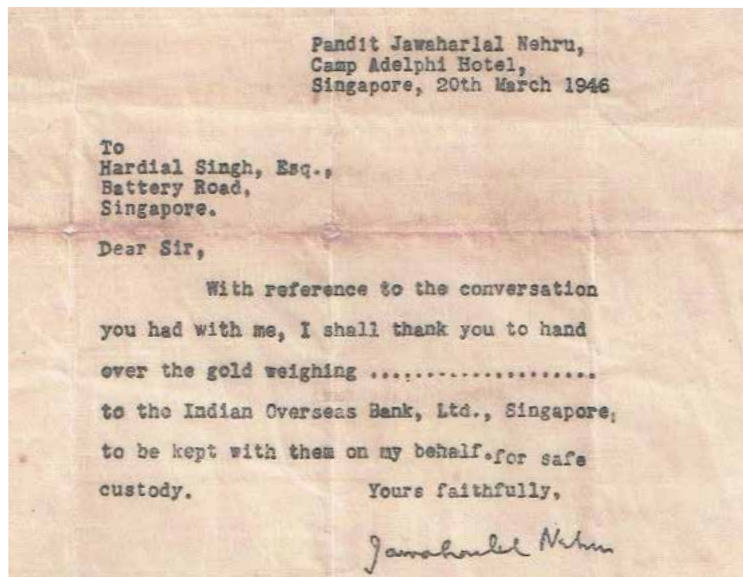


Hardial Singh Bajaj on a business trip to Shanghai, 1949. Courtesy: Bajaj family

Hardial Singh made sure that 10% of the company's profits was set aside not only for the benefit of the Sikh community's religious and welfare needs but also for the community at large. He was President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce between 1949 to 1951 and also served a term as President of the Sri Guru Nanak Sat Sang Sabha in Wilkinson Road. He passed away in 1967, and while the firm Gian Singh & Company no longer exists, his descendants are still living and have business interests in other areas.

During the Second World War, Hardial Singh served as Minister for Trade and Supplies under Subash Chandra Bose (the Commander of the Indian National Army in Singapore). He also supplied foodstuffs to interned British POWs in Changi Prison. Sir Shenton Thomas, the then Governor of the Straits Settlements was also interned in Changi camp and expressed gratitude to the company for supplying these foodstuffs without payment until after the war ended.

During the Japanese Occupation, he was left with some gold belonging to Subash Chandra Bose. Such was the integrity of Hardial Singh that he promptly returned the gold to Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru when the latter, on a visit to Singapore in 1953, laid the foundation stone of the Indian Association Building.⁵³ Choor Singh recalled being present at the event as he was a member of the Building Committee and noted the generosity of Sikh businessmen who donated thousands of dollars that facilitated the completion of the building.⁵⁴



Letter from Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Hardial Singh Bajaj.
Courtesy: Bajaj family

Gian Singh & Company is still in business in Kuala Lumpur, run by Gian Singh's descendants. Not many people know that Sardar Gian Singh was the maternal grandfather of Senior Counsel Davinder Singh Sachdev.

It can rightfully be said that Gian Singh & Company blazed the path for other Sikh merchants that came after them such as Pritam Singh & Company, Surjeet Singh and Ranjit Singh, Indersons & Company, Gurcharan Singh Narula, and Thakral Brothers. They established themselves in High Street and Raffles Place and mainly dealt in textiles. Sardar Surjeet Singh had the wisdom to invest in land in Meyer Road. He purchased the nine-hole golf course of Seaview Hotel fronting Meyer Road covering some ten acres of land. His descendants today are well settled in business and enjoy the comfort of luxurious homes in this area.⁵⁵

Soft-spoken and mild-mannered, **Sardar Kartar Singh Thakral** is one of the wealthiest Sikhs in Southeast Asia today. In 2006, Forbes ranked him the 26th richest person in Singapore with a personal fortune of \$175 million.



S. Kartar Singh Thakral
Courtesy: Thakral family

Born in Thailand on 22 September 1933, he was the eldest child in a family of seven, and was only 19 when he came to Singapore in 1952 to source textiles for sale in Thailand. He set up Thakral Brothers in High Street. Today, the Thakral Group is one of Singapore's largest companies, operating in more than 40 countries and employing thousands of staff. In 1995, it was ranked as Singapore's most enterprising privately owned company, and had an annual turnover of \$2.5 billion in 2002.⁵⁶

The Thakral Corporation is today a diversified company listed on the Singapore Stock Exchange and is engaged in supply chain management, electronics manufacturing services, creation of technology products, as well as property and equity investments. Thakral Holdings, the holding company of the Thakral Group, owns a chain of hotels, resorts, and shopping complexes in Australia.

Not only is Sardar Kartar Singh Thakral a highly successful businessman, he is also a philanthropist and a very generous man. He, together with his brother Mohinder Singh Thakral, have done many charitable deeds and made generous contributions to many worthy causes, be it requests from Sikh gurdwaras and institutions, or from other communities and institutions in Singapore. He is an exemplar of a Gursikh who lives a simple life of humility, is very approachable, of high moral character, and fervently practises the teachings of our Sikh Gurus. He has always made time to listen to Sikh community leaders who have approached him for advice and guidance. He was invited to perform the ground-breaking ceremony of the new building of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha on Wednesday 25th May 1994. Most importantly, he enjoys respect from all communities in Singapore.

When awarded the Businessman of the Year Award in 1996, he attributed the success of the Thakral Group to *“the hard work of the many people who have worked quietly behind the scenes. He said these special people, his family members, committed professionals and staff are the Group's biggest asset”*.⁵⁷ His advice to budding entrepreneurs is to *“watch for the signals, whatever the business you are in. Do your homework and start small. When you are in a new place, learn. If the signs are positive, then don't be afraid to expand”*.⁵⁸ Wise words indeed!

Final words from Sardar Kartar Singh Thakral, *“Merit is the only criterion in Singapore and the Sikhs have done very well in every walk of life”*.⁵⁹



Chain Singh Hayer
Courtesy: C S family



Tara Singh
Courtesy: Bal family

Sardars **Gurbaksh Singh** and **Pal Singh** were partners in a textiles and suitings shop in Coleman Street. Likewise, Harbhajan Singh (father of the late Flight Captain B.S. Gurm) and **Baboo Singh** ran textiles and suitings shops in Changi Village. **Chain Singh Hayer** was another successful Sikh businessman who owned a number of businesses, Victor Sports, Chain Traders Syndicate and Chain Enterprises. Like Sardar **Tara Singh**, Chain Singh Hayer was also a leading contractor supplying uniforms to the British Armed Forces in Singapore and Malaya. Chain Singh Hayer also served as Vice-President of the Pardesi Khalsa Dharmak Diwan at the time of his death in March 1982.

Historical records confirm a farewell party hosted by leading businessmen and professionals to honour **Jagir Singh**, director of leading sports goods firms Friends & Company and Ratan Sports for his contributions to the Sikh community in the early 1950s. In true Sikhi spirit, businessman **Gurcharan Singh Narula** has generously spent money publishing religious tracts and pamphlets on Gurbani for free distribution to sangats in Singapore and abroad, and has never been one to turn down a contribution to a worthy cause.

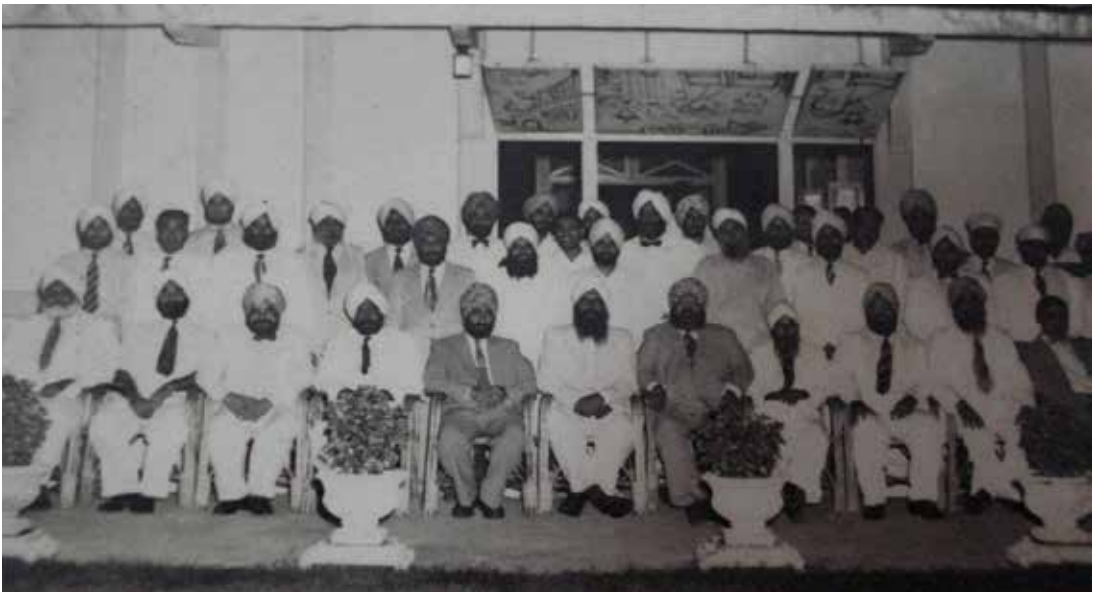
Three other Sikh businessmen also merit mention for their services to the Sikh community in Singapore. Sardar **Jagjeet Singh Sehgal**, born in Myanmar on 31 October 1928, arrived in Singapore from Punjab in 1952 to join his family firm of Rose & Company. After a period of four years, he left and worked for the Inchcape Group of companies for 25 years and through successive promotions, ended up serving as Director in three of its subsidiary companies. He then left the Inchcape Group at the age of 53 and started his own company Stockland (S) Pte Ltd.



Tara Singh's shop in Tanglin.
Courtesy: Bal family

Despite his busy and active involvement in business activities, Sehgal has always made time to be involved in the activities of the Singapore Khalsa Association, Singapore Indian Association, Singapore Indian Education Trust, Khalsa Dharmak Sabha, and Automobile Association. He also served on the Management Committee of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Sehgal was actively involved in the building committees of the Central Sikh Temple and the Silat Road Building complexes. In particular, he played an active role in the rebuilding and extension of the Silat Road Gurdwara and Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji Memorial. He also participated in the rebuilding of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha in Niven Road and the Yishun Gurdwara at Ring Road in Yishun Town.

He was awarded the Public Service Medal (PBM) for his services in the field of education, notably



Farewell party for Jagir Singh, Friends & Company. *Courtesy Jagir Singh family*

in the establishment of adult education centres in Singapore. Besides the PBM which he received earlier, Sardar Jagjeet Singh Sehgal was also awarded the Public Service Star (BBM) in 1996 for his community service.

Businessman the late **Kartar Singh Dalamnangal** (also known as **Jarabbanwala** – the white- stockinged man in his unique style of dressing as a British admiral) also put in many years of selfless service at the Silat Road Gurdwara, including supervising the renovation and reconstruction of both, the Silat Road Gurdwara and Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji Memorial Gurdwara in its early years. In 1969, he made a personal donation of \$10,000 towards the SKA Building Fund. He passed away on 18 February 2003.

Ujager Singh Usma came from Shanghai to Singapore in 1937 and was joined in 1940 by his younger brother **Boor Singh Usma** (father of current CSGB Vice-President and Sikh Welfare Council Chairman Gurdip Singh Usma). Ujager Singh Usma had earlier started



Boor Singh Usma
Selling cloth on his motorcycle.
Courtesy: Usma family

a business in Singapore and Pulau Samboe. Both the brothers were in Singapore during the Japanese Occupation and their trading business flourished as Ujager Singh Usma could speak Japanese and provided translation services for the Japanese rulers. He had picked up this language from his earlier days in Shanghai.

Following the end of WWII, Boor Singh Usma returned to India, and came back to Singapore in 1952 to start his own business, using a bicycle to sell cloth for ladies Punjabi suits to home-based housewives. With business doing well, he soon upgraded to a motor cycle and was able to travel greater distances and carry a greater variety of clothes.

Meanwhile, his family arrived from India in 1955 and they stayed at rented premises at 307 Bukit Timah Road opposite the Anglo Chinese School in Barker Road. This location was convenient for both, his daytime mobile textile trading business and his night watchman's job at the Indian High Commission staff quarters at 54 Stevens Road. His daytime business was doing well and it was not long before he invested in a brand new Austin 35 car.

Despite the fact that he held two jobs, Boor Singh Usma still found time for involvement in Sikh community affairs and served on the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Temple management committee in various positions, including being the Treasurer in 1962 and 1963, President in 1980 and 1981, and Trustee thereafter. He had a keen interest in kabaddi and was among the first Sikhs in Singapore to start a kabaddi team to promote the game and participate in Vesakhi mela and other outdoor festivals.

He rented a small shop in Queen Street in the early 1970s for his business, moving again in 1977 to a bigger shop in Rochor Centre called Punjab Sikh House. With advancing age, he later downsized to a smaller shop in Tekka Market in the 1980s. He passed away in 1997.

There were **four Sikh provisions shops** operating in the colonial and post-colonial years in Singapore. **Amar Singh & Sons** was probably the first to be established at Raffles Quay in the Central Business District (CBD) area. There are newspaper reports that thieves broke into his provisions shop on 22 November 1959 and ran off with a \$3,000 cash haul (a not insignificant sum in those days), 14 cases of liquor, and other provisions.

W.S. Ram Singh & Co. ran a provisions shop at 242 Serangoon Road. While Ram Singh has passed away, his descendants are still in business elsewhere in Singapore, having diversified into spare parts and sports goods.

Teja Singh operated a provisions shop Khalsa Trading Company Pte Ltd at New Bridge Road in the Chinatown area. Teja Singh was pre-deceased by one of his sons Ranjit Singh in 1982, and while he himself passed away in 1985, the provisions shop was still operating well into the late 1990s.

Harbans Singh ran a provisions shop right in the heart of the city at 66 Market Street. The land on which the shop stood was acquired by the Government in 1978 for urban renewal and the shop closed down. Harbans Singh passed away in 1992.

Doola Singh Chamba was active in the **motor transport business** in Singapore and served as Treasurer of the first Cooperative Society for Hire Car Owners when it was formed in 1953. In 1958, he served as Secretary of the Singapore Taxi Owners Cooperative Motor Garage and Stores Society Ltd. He was actively involved in playing cricket for the Singapore Khalsa Association in the 1930s. In 1962, he was appointed to serve a two year term as member of the Sikh Advisory Board, and was also actively involved in the affairs of the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara.

Dewan Singh Randhawa started publishing a Punjabi newspaper *Navjwan Punjabi News* in 1951 after he resigned from the police force in 1946. It was printed in Gurmukhi script and the business initially struggled through hard times even though it was the only Punjabi paper in Singapore. Advertisements, printing of wedding cards, and commercial printing kept the paper going. The situation brightened with the introduction of offset printing and it then had subscribers not only in Singapore, but also in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia. Dewan Singh Randhawa passed away in Sydney in 1999. Two other Sikhs subsequently went into the printing business and did only commercial printing. They were **Kartar Singh**, a retired police officer who owned Ford Printers, which ceased operations in 1986, and **Gurpal Singh** who today owns Khalsa Printers. Incidentally, Gurpal Singh learned the printing business as an apprentice at Navjwan.

Eateries serving Punjabi food undoubtedly existed in Singapore's early history. Two Sikh restauranteurs bear special mention owing to the patronage of their establishments by both Singaporeans and members of the expatriate business and diplomatic community in Singapore. Following his retirement from the Singapore Police Force in July 1977, Inspector **Bachittar Singh** and his wife **Amar Kaur** opened the Moti Mahal restaurant at 18 Murray Street at the junction of Tanjong Pagar and Maxwell Roads. It was popularly known as Moti's and specialised in Kashmiri, Punjabi and Mughlai Indian cuisine. *The Financial Times* acclaimed it as the best Indian restaurant in South East Asia and the *Business Traveller Asia*

Pacific mentioned it as having the best Indian food available outside the subcontinent. It was also awarded the American Gold Star for Gastronomy in December 1987. Following a takeover of the building in which the restaurant was housed, the restaurant closed its doors in 2008. Bachittar Singh passed away in 2012. **Ujagar Singh** ran a simple restaurant on the first floor over a Chinese coffee shop at 7 St. Gregory Place between Hill Street and North Bridge Road in the late 1960s through to the early 1980s. Deep fried and spicy tender mutton chops served with a squeeze of lemon juice and chutney was his specialty signature dish that attracted many customers. Although this restaurant is long gone, many still reminisce about it till today.⁶⁰

While it is not exactly known who was the first registered male Sikh taxi driver in Singapore, it is fairly clear they were held in some esteem by the Sikh community as evidenced by their active involvement in gurdwara affairs. In his book *Ithas Khalsa Dharmak Sabha Singapore, 1924-1983* (written in Gurmukhi) Tara Singh Hitashi Gujarwalia reported that three Sikh taxi drivers were represented on the 15 member Management Committee of the Khalsa Dharmak Sabha at its Annual General Meeting held on 15 December 1929. It is however a fact that **Madam Manjit Kaur** was the first female Sikh taxi driver in Singapore in 1977 when her taxi driver husband Hazura Singh had his taxi licence suspended for five years and she stepped into his shoes to help supplement the family income and support her son Parvinder's undergraduate studies in New Zealand (late managing director of the Kinara Cuisines of India restaurant chain). She reluctantly retired in 1992 at her son's behest and passed away in 2003.⁶¹

Sikh Moneylenders

Tribute also needs to be paid to the many and sometimes unnamed moneylenders in Singapore's early Sikh history who took up moneylending to supplement income from daytime jobs as guards, watchmen, and petty traders. They gave loans to assist in small business start-ups thereby contributing in no small way to the colony's business and economic development. These early moneylenders lived spartan lives and any extra monies earned were repatriated to support family dependents in India until such time as their families could join them in Singapore. Any spare monies left over were also used for the betterment of their Indian properties. The more successful among them also acquired property locally and gradually built up their wealth portfolio in Singapore.

At the same time, it must also be said that they never neglected their social and community responsibilities, making time to serve on gurdwara committees and

personally contributing to gurdwara building, renovation, and other fund raising efforts.

Over time, these moneylenders also ensured that their progenies received a good education, locally and overseas, were successful in their studies, and through their chosen professions, contributed to Singapore's economic development.

The roll call of successful Sikh moneylenders includes **Bachan Singh Brahmputra, Sadhu Singh Khaira, Biker Singh, Narain Singh Khaee, Mit Singh, Sadhu Singh Chore Madre, Dalip Singh Selahpur, Sohan Singh Khaira, Ratan Singh Chakrala, Banta Singh Jorsinghwala, Chanan Singh Jahangir, Chanan Singh Setiala, Suba Singh Daulonangal, Tirlok Singh Lauke, Mal Singh Phallewal and Malagar Singh Ghasitpura.**

Civil Administration

The period following the 1950s saw a steady and gradual increase in the number of educated Sikhs occupying positions in various sectors of the Singapore Civil Service, performing and progressing well in their careers, gaining well-deserved promotions to higher and more responsible positions, thereby enhancing not only their own personal standing in the eyes of their superiors, but also the image of the Sikh community in the general populace.



Jawala Singh Dhotha

Courtesy: Niranjan Singh family

Sikh/Punjabi interpreters were in demand. **Ishwar Das Kohli** was the first Punjabi interpreter in Singapore. He was recruited in 1893 from the Lahore Courts to work in Singapore as a Punjabi interpreter to meet the needs of the Sikhs in Singapore, and he was Sardar Kirpal Singh Sahni's ancestor. Kohli was bestowed the title of 'Rai Sahib' on 17 July 1918 by the Governor on behalf of the Viceroy of India. He was the maternal uncle of **Sunder Singh Sawhny**. It was not until 1922 that he was joined by his nephew Sunder Singh Sawhny on his recommendation, and by Senior Interpreter **Jawala Singh**, and much later by **Kirpal Singh Sahni** himself. Sunder Singh Sawhny returned to India on retirement from the service. Other interpreters in the service included **H. K. Suri**, brother-in-law of Kirpal Singh Sahni; Senior Interpreter **Dhanwant Singh**



Top:
Niranjn Singh Dhothar, Civil Defence
Corps. *Courtesy: Niranjn Singh family*

Left:
Niranjn Singh Dhothar family photo.
Courtesy: Niranjn Singh family

Jhaj who also served as Commissioner of Oaths and was appointed by the British to the Singapore After Care Association Committee in 1939; **Niranjan Singh Dhothar** (son of **Jawala Singh** and father of retired school principal **Dilbagh Singh**), subsequently promoted to Senior Interpreter and later retired as Registrar of the Civil District Court. Niranjan Singh Dhothar also served as General Secretary of the SKA in 1963; **Chanan Singh Dhothar**; **Joginder Singh Ghal Kalan** who retired as Head Interpreter in the late 1960s; **Sarban Singh Rikhraj** (father of Associate Professor and orthopedic surgeon **Inderjeet Singh Rikhraj** and ex-CSGB Council member **Dr Manjeet Singh Rikhraj**) who acquired a law degree in 1974/75. On retiring from service in 1979, he went on to practice law for a few years and passed away in 2015; Head Interpreter **Ajmer Singh**; **Atma Singh Samra**; and Head Interpreter **Gurdev Singh Smalsar**. **Lashman Singh** joined as interpreter in October 1964, retired as Head Interpreter, and was later appointed Assistant Registrar of the Small Claims Tribunal. He passed away in 2016.

Niranjan Singh Dhothar earned the distinction of being the only Sikh in colonial Singapore to be awarded the MBE in 1956. Early in his career, he volunteered as an air raid warden in March 1939, and following the outbreak of the war on 8 December 1941, he was on active full-time duty as an air raid warden. He served as a Volunteer Officer in the Civil Defence Corps and performed distinguished service during the period of hostilities in 1941/42 until the capitulation. He subsequently played an active and important role in its reorganization and training. He was awarded the Defence Medal Ribbon on 1 April 1948, and in recognition of his valued services for the civil defence of Singapore, he was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire on 28 July 1956. He was also awarded the Long Service Medal in the 1970 National Day Honours. He passed away on 9 March 1988 in Melbourne.

Kirpal Singh Sahni joined the service as a certified interpreter in 1947, was appointed Commissioner of Oaths in 1960, and was the youngest officer to be appointed Senior Indian Interpreter at the age of 34 in 1961. He was Executive Councillor for many years, Treasurer in the mid-1950s for 4 years, and Vice President in the 1960s of the Singapore Interpreters and Translators Union. He was active in community activities and served as General Secretary of the SKA in 1947/48, 1949, 1955 and 1956. He also served as Acting Chairman of the Singapore Sikh Partinidh Sabha (Youth Section) in 1953. He passed away on 11 April 2011.

The Administrative Service is the elite service in the public sector and Administrative Service staff are intimately involved in the formulation and implementation of Government policies and the efficient and effective implementation of these policies.



Kirpal Singh Sahni
Courtesy: Kirpal Singh Sahni family

Param Ajeet Singh Bal graduated from the University of Malaya in Singapore with BA (Hons) in history and subsequently gained his MA (Hons) in Economics from the Australian National University under a Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Award. He joined the Administrative Service in 1963 and six years later was awarded the PPA (G) medal in the 1969 National Day Honours. He was also the first Sikh to be promoted to a Deputy Secretary Superscale post in the Administrative Service. It is interesting to note that he once shared an office with Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong. In the various positions he has held, Bal has travelled extensively overseas on Government matters and negotiations. He retired in 1996 but continued being involved in a number of professional activities.



Param Ajeet Singh Bal

While a student at Raffles Institution, Bal was Chief Petty Officer and recipient of an overseas Sea Cadet Corps Training Scholarship. He was also a member of the People's Defence Force (PDF) Special Officer Cadets intake and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant.

He served as Secretary of the Singapore Sikh Cultural Group established in 1958, Secretary for the collection of donations for the SKA Building Fund, and was also General Secretary of the SKA from 1968 to 1970.

Sarjit Singh joined the Administrative Service in 1959 after graduating with a BA (Hons) in Economics from the University of Malaya in Singapore. During his three years' service, he worked in the Establishment Branch of the Ministry of Finance and the Trade Division. He resigned in 1963 to join the Rubber Research Institute in Kuala Lumpur.

Balbir Singh, son of Bhagwan Singh, was born in 1939 and studied at Raffles Institution. He won the University Entrance Scholarship (Merit) and graduated with BSc (Hons) in Geography from the University of Malaya in Singapore. He

joined the Administrative Service in 1963 and served in the Land Office from 1965 to 1969, and later in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He resigned from the Administrative Service to join Jurong Town Corporation holding the post of Secretary from 1969 to 1973, and later as Director of its Lands & Estates Division until 1978. He was then seconded to its Engineering subsidiary company until 1982. He resigned and opened his own company specializing in the removal and disposal of solid waste from industries.

While at Raffles Institution, he was active in the Sea Cadet Corps and rose to the rank of Sub Lieutenant. While in the Administrative Service, he was also a member of the PDF's Special Officer Cadet Intake 1966 comprising Cabinet Ministers, MPs and Administrative Officers and was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant.

Daljit Singh, son of Subedar Sundar Singh, was born in 1938 in Batu Gajah, Malaya. He studied at Raffles Institution in Singapore. In 1961, he graduated with a BA (Hons) in Philosophy from the University of Malaya in Singapore, and in 1966 with a BA (Hons) degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Oxford University.

Daljit Singh worked for 13 years in the Ministry of Defence, starting in 1966 as a Research Officer and was promoted to Superscale G post in 1978. He was a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for International Studies, MIT, USA in 1970-71, and did research on Soviet policies in Southeast Asia. He also attended graduate courses in Sino-Soviet relations and Chinese politics. He joined the Singapore Administrative Service in 1979 and was promoted to Superscale F one year later. He worked as Director of Information in the Ministry of Culture/ Ministry of Communications and Information until 1986. For the next 5 years, he was Director in charge of Projects in the Ministry of Communications and Information. He was officer-in-charge of the National Courtesy Campaign and helped to set up the Information Officers' Scheme of Service. He retired from the Administrative Service in 1991 and joined the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) as a Senior Research Fellow. He has been Editor of *Southeast Asian Affairs* and *Regional Outlook and Trends*, which are publications of ISEAS and has published many articles on security issues in local and international publications.

The Singapore Government introduced the **Executive Service** in 1958 to promote good serving officers and to provide direct entry to degree-holders to the Executive Service. Before its introduction, local staff with secondary education joined the **General Clerical Service (GCS)**. The introduction of the Executive Service provided opportunities to outstanding officers to move up as **Senior Executive Officers** or be transferred to **Higher Departmental Services (HDS)**.

Kernail Singh s/o Banta Singh Khosa was born in 1923 and educated at Raffles Institution. He joined the GCS in 1941. After World War II, he was posted to the Colonial Secretariat Office, where he dealt with establishment, pensions and training matters. In 1958, he was promoted to the Executive Service. Four years later, he was promoted to Higher Executive Officer in the Organization & Methods Branch of the Ministry of Finance. In 1963 he was sent on a Colombo Plan Fellowship to Australia for a course in Organizations and Methods. From 1964-68, he served as secretary of Singapore General Hospital. Later, he was appointed as Registrar of the Singapore Technical Institute and retired from the civil service in 1973.

Randhir Singh Pannu s/o Mehar Singh was born in 1930. He started his career in 1948 as a Clerk/Interpreter in the Marine Department. Later, he joined the Rural Board. In 1961, he was promoted to the Executive Service and posted to the Criminal District & Magistrates Courts. In 1966 he was promoted to Higher Executive Officer and was awarded the PPA (G) medal in the 1968 National Day Honours. He was appointed to a Division 1 post of Senior Assistant Registrar of Vehicles in 1970. His next posting was in 1980 when he was seconded to the Administrative Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He retired in 1985 from the Civil Service, but continued to work for a few years in a legal firm. Randhir Singh Pannu participated actively in Sikh community affairs. He was a founder member of the Singapore Sikh Cultural Group in 1958 and served as its Treasurer.

Chanan Singh joined the clerical service a few years before World War II. He was promoted to the Executive Service and became Higher Executive Officer. He served as Secretary of Singapore General Hospital in the early 1960s. Later, he worked in the Administrative Division of the Public Works Department and Ministry of Health before his retirement around 1970.

Other Sikhs who progressed to supervisory positions included **Daljit Singh** as Executive Officer in the Official Assignee and Public Trustee's Office, Higher Clerical Officers **Makhan Singh** in Income Tax Department, **Harbans Singh Jamarai** in Customs Department, Senior Health Inspector **Teja Singh** in the Ministry of Health, and **Kartar Singh** in the Survey Department. **Santokh Singh Atwal** was the first Sikh in the Executive Service of the Trade and Development Board. He retired from the Board in 1987.

The **Government Higher Departmental Services Scheme** was introduced by the Government in 1953 to enable local candidates with Honours degrees to be directly appointed as Division 1 officers, and for outstanding officers in Division 2 to be promoted to

Division 1. Greater opportunities for promotion arose in Singapore during the 1959 to 1965 period of economic expansion, and where previously, there was only a sprinkling of Sikhs as senior officers before 1959, a substantial number of Sikhs rose to Division 1 posts in the Higher Government Services of Ministries and Statutory Boards after 1959.



Kartar Singh Dhillon,
Controller of Posts. *Courtesy:*
Kartar Singh Dhillon family

Kartar Singh Dhillon was born in 1918, got his secondary education in Ipoh, Malaya, and joined the Singapore Postal Service as a clerk in 1936. He was later promoted and was Postmaster at the Naval Base Post Office when the Japanese forces occupied Singapore. He went to Britain in 1950 on a Commonwealth scholarship to study the British Postal Service. In 1952, he was promoted to Assistant Controller of Posts. He then became a Controller of Posts and was one of the few senior most Sikhs in the Civil Service. He was a good sportsman, member of the Public Service Commission, and also one of the three Trustees of the SKA when he passed away in January 1966 at 47 years of age following a brain hemorrhage. Other Sikhs in the Postal Service who also rose from the ranks of supervisory and middle management positions included the late **Gurmukh Singh, Amar Singh Shangara, Labh Singh, Gorbax Singh, Amar Singh and Sarjit Singh Chintgarh.**

Bicker Singh rose from the ranks in the Income Tax Service in Singapore. He came to Singapore from Penang in the late 1930's to join the clerical service. In 1948, he joined the Income Tax Department. He studied hard and passed the professional examinations, including an Advanced Course in Income Tax and Law. In 1956, he was promoted to the Division 1 post of Assessment Officer and promoted again in 1962 to Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax. He was further promoted to Superscale G as Senior Assistant Commissioner and was head of the Companies Branch in the Department for a number of years before his retirement in 1972. He passed away in 1994.

Ujagar Singh Gill s/o Surain Singh was born in 1930 and obtained a First Class Diploma in Radio Engineering from the Technical College in Kuala Lumpur in 1953. He then joined the Singapore Broadcasting Department as a Technical Assistant and was awarded a Singapore Government Scholarship in 1957 to study in UK, where he graduated with a

Diploma in Electrical Engineering (Hons) in 1959. He was attached to the BBC for a year. In 1961, he became the first Sikh engineer in the Singapore Civil Service and was promoted to a Superscale G post as Senior Executive Engineer in 1976, and then to a Superscale F post in 1984 as Director (Corporate Planning & Projects). He was awarded the PPA (P) medal in the 1981 National Day Honours.

From 1961 to 1963, he was involved in the planning of engineering infrastructure for the introduction of television service in Singapore, and then again in 1974 with the introduction of colour television. Later on, he also worked on upgrading the radio and television facilities and the planning of the radio transmitting station for overseas short wave services

He has been active in Sikh community affairs since the mid-1970s and has held a number of important positions on Sikh gurdwara management committees, advisory boards and institutions.

Nachatar Singh Sandhu obtained a degree in Social Welfare Studies from the University of Malaya in Singapore. He joined the Social Welfare Service as a senior officer and rose to the rank of Deputy Director before his retirement.

Nerphia Singh s/o Gurdit Singh was born in 1928. On completing his secondary education, he was the first Sikh to join the Singapore Customs Service in 1961. He studied part time and obtained an LLB degree from University of London. In 1966, he retired as Superintendent of Customs. He was a hockey goalkeeper for the national team as well as the combined Singapore/Malaysia Sikhs team.

Hardial Singh s/o Mahn Singh was born in 1940 and graduated with BSc (Hons) in Botany from the University of Malaya in Singapore. He joined the Botanical Gardens in 1963 as a senior officer. He gained a Master's degree from the University of Hawaii under an East-West Scholarship, and specialized in the cloning of orchids. He retired in 1996 from Superscale G as Deputy Commissioner of Parks and Recreation. He was awarded the PPA (G) medal in the 1988 National Day Honours.

Following Singapore's separation from Malaysia in 1965, there were opportunities for Singapore citizens to serve in the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs diplomatic and consular missions** that needed to be established overseas. Initially, most of the Foreign Service officers were seconded from other government Ministries. Seconded Sikh officers included **Balbir Singh** and **Randhir Singh** in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters, **Karam**

Singh Phallewal as Second Secretary in Bangkok and later as Vice- Consul in Medan, and **Daljit Singh Sandhu** in Moscow. Post-1965, there were direct recruitments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They include **Ajit Singh**, presently Singapore’s Consul-General in Mumbai, India.

Mejar Singh Gill started his career as a commissioned officer in the Singapore Armed Forces and rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Infantry. He served overseas as a member of the UN Peace Keeping Force. After taking early retirement from SAF, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Deputy Director of the Consular Policy Branch.

Mohinder Singh s/o Sadhu Singh Chaal was born in 1938 and graduated with a BA degree from University of Singapore. He joined the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1964, and was seconded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1967. He has served as Second Secretary in New Delhi, Jakarta and London, and as Singapore Consul in Vancouver. In 1977, he was awarded the PBS medal in the National Day Honours.

Industrial relations



Jamit Singh

*Courtesy: Jamit Singh
family*

Jamit Singh’s name stands out in terms of his contribution to industrial relations in Singapore’s early history. He was born in 1929, the son of a well-respected railway station master. His “legacy as a charismatic trade unionist and political activist on Singapore’s waterfront coincided with its changing political developments. He was instrumental in bringing about this change by transforming the dock workers into an effective political force”.⁶²

From his early student days, he was a member of a group of undergraduates at the then University of Malaya in Singapore that established the University of Malaya Socialist Club on 23 February 1953, and he served as its Publications Secretary. He did not complete his university studies because of his active involvement in student activities, and was recommended by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew to be taken on as a full-time paid Secretary of the Singapore Harbour Board Staff Association (SHBSA) in 1954.⁶³

The dock workers were dissatisfied by delays in settling claims pertaining to wage increases, working hours and overtime rates, pensions and bonuses. The 1,300 SHBSA staff took strike action on 1 May 1955 for 67 days. Following 100 hours of negotiation at the Ministry of Labour, Jamit Singh successfully brought the strike to an end on 7 July 1955, and secured wage increases and shorter working hours as part of a 15-points final agreement. He then embarked on an initiative to unite the various waterfront unions in 1956 and was successful in convincing five trade unions including the SHBSA to form a single Singapore Harbour Board Workers Union, and formally registered this trade union with the Ministry of Labour in December 1956.

Jamit Singh was arrested on 2 February 1963 under *Operation Coldstore* for alleged communist-led activities, and spent a year in detention at the Batu Gajah Detention Camp in Malaya. He was subsequently banned from returning to Singapore, a ban that was later lifted in 1990. In later life, he worked as a school teacher at the Anglo Chinese School in Ipoh, Perak, and later as Principal of the Methodist School when he died of a heart attack on 10 December 1994.

Singapore literature

In the field of an incipient **Singapore literature**, lawyer **Kirpal Singh** (1923-2012) wrote a novel *China Affair*, published by Singapore University Education Press in 1972, with a foreword written by Professor Tommy Koh. Together with Goh Poh Seng's *If we dream too long*, this thriller could be considered to be the first two novels in English by Singaporeans to be published in Singapore.

Sports

The post-war years saw an increase in the number of young Sikh hockey players, and the SKA produced some outstanding players like **Ajit Singh Gill, Avtar Singh, Kartar Singh, Baldiraj Singh, B.S. Soin, Mohinder Singh, Harbhajan Singh Loomba, Mehar Singh** and **Veer Singh** all of whom made it to the State team. Ajit Singh Gill was chosen to represent Singapore's hockey team at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. Ajit Singh Gill played as a fullback. From his early years, Ajit Singh Gill has always excelled in sports and represented Singapore in many hockey and cricket games in Malaysia and overseas. Ajit Singh Gill now an octogenarian, was invited in 2010 to run with the torch at the Youth Olympic Games held in Singapore. Another Sikh, Kartar Singh was selected for the hockey team at the 1964 Olympic Games held in Tokyo when Singapore was a part of Malaysia. Retired

school principal Avtar Singh, now in his late 80s, was an avid cricket and hockey player with SKA in his younger days and was appointed an international hockey umpire to the Singapore Hockey Association in 1952.

Pole vaulter Pal Singh from the Reserve Unit of the Singapore Police Force represented Singapore at the first SEAP (Southeast Asia Peninsular) Games held in Bangkok from 12 to 17 December 1959, and did Singapore proud by winning a gold medal. Pal Singh

FIRST EVER SIKH TO REPRESENT SINGAPORE HOCKEY AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES



(left): Mosbergen, Pennefather, Vellupillai, Noel Hay (Manaj Pillai, Doraisamy, Vijaratnam, Sharma, Hay, Schoon, Coutts, Abdullah Hamid, Fernandez Wright, Chai, Ajit Singh Gill, Devadas, de Rozario, Jayathura



As with all organisations, there were the politics that team selection entailed. Several news reports question some of these decisions and champion Ajit's inclusion. Ajit rose above these and instead of being demoralized, this warrior was spurred on to play better and hit harder. He became the first ever Sikh to represent Singapore in the Olympic Games. This Sikh was a member of the 1956 Melbourne Olympics hockey team.

Ajit Singh Gill, Hockey Player, Melbourne Olympics 1956. *Courtesy Ajit Singh Gill family*



Ajit Singh Gill, oldest torch bearer, Singapore Youth Olympic Games 2010.

had earlier also qualified for the Asian Games held in April 1958. His wife Indra Kaur represented Singapore against Malacca and Johore in the shot put event in May 1962. He passed away on Sunday 21 October 2001 at the age of 63 following a stroke.

Doola Singh Chamba took part in the First Asian Highway Motor Rally from Vientiane to Singapore in 1969. The following year, together with three of his friends, Tan Chin Seng, Lim Choon Eng and Dewan Singh, he was Singapore's sole car entrant in the Second Asian Highway Motor Rally. Together with the car, a 1958 Wolseley, they left Singapore aboard the ship Rajula on 19 October 1970. Starting on 7 November 1970, the Teheran-Dacca rally passed through Kabul, Islamabad, New Delhi, Kathmandu and Calcutta.

The Bajwa brothers Sewa Singh Bajwa and Ram Singh Bajwa were both keen sportsmen and played hockey and cricket for SKA at state and international levels. Sewa Singh Bajwa served as Vice-Chairman of the Singapore Hockey Association's Umpires Board. He officiated at the Southeast Asia Peninsular Games (SEAP) at Bangkok in 1975. At the time of his passing in 1977, he was one of only four international hockey umpires in Singapore.

Seva Singh Bajwa,
International Hockey Umpire.
Courtesy: Bajwa family



Sathiavan Singh Dhillon, PSM (better known as S.S.Dhillon) was born in Sitiawan, Perak, Malaya in 1931, and educated at King Edward VII School in Taiping before moving south and training at the Teachers Training College in Singapore. He graduated with a Diploma in Physical Education and Sport from Loughborough College in England in 1966-67 and went on to gain a Master's degree in Sports Administration and Sports Science from the United States. He was seconded as Secretary General of the Singapore Olympic Council for over two decades, and was responsible for organizing 52 national and SEA Games. He attended all World Olympic and Asian Games including the Commonwealth Games held abroad from 1968 to 1996 as Singapore's Representative travelling on an Ambassadorial passport.

Selfless lifelong langgar sewa



Dhala Singh (father of Dr Jasbir Singh) was born in 1931 and arrived in Singapore via Penang in 1953. He found his way to the Central Sikh Temple in Queen Street to locate the Pearl's Hill Gurdwara, where he was initially cared for by the late Dalip Singh Basian.

He could not join the police force because he was too short in stature and found a job as a security guard at the "Hong Kong Rope Factory" in Upper Bukit Timah Road in 1955. He then worked with Castrol (Far East) Pte Ltd from 1961 until his retirement in 1990.

His community sewa with our gurdwaras dates back to 1962 when he would join the late Gurbaksh Singh, Sewa Singh, and Joti Ram to prepare langgar, often discussing with them langgar cooking methods and quantities of the

Jathedar Dhala Singh
Courtesy: Dhala Singh family

dishes. Together with Bebe Gango whom he regarded as a mother figure, he started doing langgar sewa at the Central Sikh Temple in his early years right up till his death in 2014.

He was always looking for new, efficient, and innovative ways to prepare langgar without compromising on its quality and consistency. As a tribute to his culinary skills, he was approached by food companies like Prima for making independent assessments on Indian food quality like atta and spices.

On 13th April 1997, the CSGB presented him with a plaque and conferred him the title of “Jathedar” in recognition of his commitment to selfless sewa for the past 25 years.

Editor’s Note: Some of the information in this chapter, particularly that relating to Sikhs in the Singapore Civil Service, has been drawn and further edited by the compiler from the original script of an unpublished article written by Sardar Param Ajeet Singh Bal. Grateful thanks are due to Sardar Surjan Singh, PBM, PBS, BA (Lond) for providing me with his edited copy of this unpublished article.



Mr Balwant Singh Bajaj

Member of Legislative Council of Singapore

Source: *The Straits Times* © Singapore Press Holdings Limited.

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9

COLONIAL SINGAPORE'S FIRST SIKH POLITICIAN

Sardar Balwant Singh Bajaj was the first Sikh to enter politics in Singapore.

It is not commonly known that there was a Sikh in Singapore's Legislature as far back as 1948. He was Sardar Balwant Singh Bajaj, an elected unofficial Member of the Legislative Council of the Colony of Singapore, from 19 October 1948 to April 1951.

Balwant Singh was the youngest of four brothers and joint partners of Gian Singh & Co, the other three being Hardial Singh, Inder Singh and Heera Singh. They were the sons of Sardar Mehar Singh. Balwant Singh was the most active of the four brothers and did most of the travelling on behalf of the Company, often flying to Japan, New York and India.

In October 1948, Balwant Singh made a decision to enter politics and stood as an independent candidate for a seat in the Legislative Council for the electoral district of Rural Board West. The Rural Board West electorate comprised Sembawang, Jalan Kayu and the Seletar Naval Base areas, which was then a predominantly Indian residential area and it was mainly on the Indian votes that Balwant Singh won his election to the Legislative Council. His opponents were Mr Cheong Hock Chye of Cheong Koon Seng & Co and Mr G. Maganlal, a textile merchant of Arab Street. Balwant Singh received 1,638 votes, Cheong Hock Chye 705 votes and G Maganlal 606 votes. Balwant Singh was elected by a majority of 933 votes from his nearest rival. At a sitting of the Legislative Council on 19 October 1948, Balwant Singh, Member for Rural Board West took an Affirmation of Allegiance and assumed his seat as the official elected Member for Rural Board West. He was welcomed by the Governor, Sir Franklin Gimson. Balwant Singh remained a member of the Legislative Council for the next three years.

In the 1951 elections to the Legislative Council, Balwant Singh decided to switch electorates and stood for election in the City Electoral District. His opponents

were Mr Nazir Mallal, an Advocate & Solicitor and Mr M. A. Majid, a labour leader. Balwant Singh received 1,025 votes, Majid received 96 votes and Mr Nazir Mallal 1,308 votes. Balwant Singh lost by 283 votes and this result appears to have put an end to his political career and ambitions because he did not make any further attempts to enter the Legislative Council.

Although busy in business and politics, Balwant Singh found time for his community. He was President of the Singapore Khalsa Association from 1948 to 1950 and Captain of the Association's Cricket team for many years. His elder brother, Heera Singh, also played cricket and was a left-handed opening batsman. But he gave up the game quite early due to ill health. His eldest brother Hardial Singh also tried his hand at cricket but was not as adept as his brother in the sport. He was however, a great supporter of the SKA and donated generously towards the construction of the Association's pavilion when the sports ground was re-covered and re-levelled after the Japanese Occupation of Singapore.

Balwant Singh will always be remembered not only as being the first Sikh to enter the Singapore political arena but also as a very dedicated and generous sportsman. In one-day cricket matches hosted by the Singapore Khalsa Association, he always entertained both teams to lunch in a respectable restaurant.

Sardar Balwant Singh Bajaj's membership of the Legislative Council brought much credit to the Sikh community which in 1948 consisted mostly of illiterate security guards and petty money-lenders. By virtue of his membership of the Legislative Council, Balwant Singh was undoubtedly the most prominent Sikh in those days.

Four decades later in 1988, noted lawyer Davinder Singh Sachdev would make an appearance on post-independent Singapore's political scene and serve as a Member of Parliament for the Bishan-Toa Payoh Group Representation Constituency from 1988 to 2006. He was then joined by Dr. Kanwaljit Soin who served as the first female nominated Member of Parliament in 1992 and renominated in 1994. Two years later, fellow Sikh and entrepreneur Inderjit Singh served with distinction as a Member of Parliament for four consecutive terms before stepping down in 2015. Their manifold contributions to the nation and Sikh community are detailed in the book *Singapore at 50 – 50 Sikhs and their contributions*, published in 2015 by the Young Sikh Association to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Singapore's independence.

Editor's Note: The information in this chapter has been drawn from and further edited by the compiler from an article originally written by Sardar Choor Singh. Grateful thanks are due to Sardar Surjan Singh, PBM, PBS, BA (Lond) for providing me with his edited copy of this article. Legislative Council results are per courtesy of Mr P.O. Ram, Clerk of Parliament.

10

CONCLUSION

In a different turn of phrase from Winston Churchill's famous 1940 wartime speech, never have so few Sikhs contributed so much to nation-building in Singapore. The Sikh community in Singapore though small in number can be justifiably proud of its history, achievements, and contributions.

“The prosperity of a country depends on the security of the nation. In this regard, the pre-eminent contribution of the Sikhs in the early development of Singapore in providing peace and order and a suitable climate for trade is part and parcel of Singapore's national heritage”⁶⁴

The Sikh community is now into its fifth generation, and the stereotyping of Sikhs as security guards and petty money lenders has long since given way to a new and progressive image, actively involved in all spheres of community and nation building, and the creation of a unique Singapore cultural identity.

A cursory glance at the preceding chapters will readily affirm the breadth, depth, scope, significant roles, and notable contributions that Sikhs in Singapore have made in a diverse sphere of activities to nation-building in the lead-up to Singapore's independence in 1965 and beyond. Sikhs have held leadership positions in the judiciary, navy, armed forces, educational services, civil administration, and business promotion and development. Sikhs in Singapore today continue to have an even greater, very visible, and significant presence in politics, the judiciary, the army, the city, police, medicine, social work and community services, business and the professions. More importantly, these contributions have been regularly and publicly acknowledged across the board by Singapore's political leadership in the National Day Honours Lists.

The Sikh Advisory Board and the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, working in tandem with other Sikh religious societies and institutions in Singapore are playing an active and critical role in articulating, promoting, and representing Sikh interests and the confluence of these interests with the national interest.

We can look forward with confidence to an even more glorious future in terms of our continued contributions and achievements to nation-building over the next one hundred years.

APPENDIX I

Translation of a letter written by Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji while imprisoned in Singapore.

Translation of the letter of Maharaj Singh to Bhaee Jusurout Singh at Nowrunngabad. A village near Bhyowal Pergunna Turums Turums Zillah Umritsur. [Naurangabad in Amritsar district near Tarn Taran and Multan]

Glory to the true Guider the true protector of the poor and helpless, The Lord, Damodar [a name for God Krishna?] the all powerful actor free from anger. Oh gobina, oh gopal, oh kind friend lord of souls, the protection of the friendless the remover of pain. Oh all powerful endower with supernatural powers combining Moh and Maya.

(Side notes by translator):

Damodar—One of the names of the deity

Lines from the argruuth [Adigranth]

Moh and maya—affection and nature

Carry safe Nanuk through the dark and terrible worlds.

Let the affairs of Achal Singh and Maharaj Singh be made known to Gooroo Jusyruent Singh Sahib, let him learn the particulars of his slaves. I drank “neem” [translator: the leaves of the Neim Tree] three years (my) eyes cannot see.

Kurrug Singh continually forbade me to drink neem but I did not leave it off.

You told me that a dog even will not befriend me, so not a single dog has been of any service to me. I had no idea then that what you said was true, I have now become well aware of it—now kindly allow me to enjoy the company of your feet which are like the lotus (translator: from the dugruuth [Guru Granth Sahib]).

Many were friends in prosperity but no one befriends in adversity—meditate oh my heart, says Nanuk and god, that he may assist thee in the end.

We oh lord always forget thee but thou art beneficent and the forgiver of sins. Whoever goes to see thee is relieved of all worldly cares and troubles.

Come to my aid oh lord now that I am on the eve of destruction. Oh true guide, the hope of the hopeless, I who am utterly hopeless adore you, I am the dust of your feet.

Deprived of all favour placed in confinement, there is no remedy (for me) Raghoo nath is the only support who vouches safe assistance in time. Power is restored, set free every remedy is at hand. All blessings are received at your hands the moment you cover [come] to my assistance. Khurruck Singh's comments suggest that he had observed the punishment of others:

Petition written by Kurrug Singh dog [?] at Singapore near China beyond the seas far far distant from Juggernath & c.

There is news of these slaves being set free. We will present ourselves before you and you will kindly allow us always to remain near your feet. Oh Fareeda [Hazrat Baba Farid]⁴⁴ God will not forsake the man if thou forsakest him. Oh Fareeda forsake those deeds which have no good in them. Lest than be ashamed to appear at the tribunal of God.

We have forgotten you but do you not forget us...

...They beat innocent what is to become of us guilty? They beat it every ghuree [day] and chastise it every puhar [hour]. There is no rest (oh my heart) to the ghuryal [Clock] all night long. Salutation to Bhaee Sing and to the feet of the meree jee and of all the sadh sangut.⁴⁵

Source: Pieris, A. D. (2011). *The other side of labor reform: Accounts of incarceration and resistance in the Straits Settlements penal system, 1825-1873*. *Journal of Social History*, 45(2), 453-479. Information obtained from IOR F/4/2570, 151.780 paragraphs 75-77; Ghurree= 24 minutes, puhar/prahar= 3 hours or so (courtesy Will Glover and Farina Mir).

APPENDIX II

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACCA: Associate of the Association of Certified Accountants

Adi Granth: Sikh holy scripture

Agrahi: Seeking or soliciting donations for community purposes

Amrit: A syrup considered by Sikhs to be divine, and which they drink at religious observances including baptism

APC: Additional Police Constable

ASP: Assistant Superintendent of Police

Attap: Named after the attap palm tree *Nypa fruticans*. The leaves of this palm tree are dried, folded over a rod, stitched together in place, and used as thatched roofs for wooden huts. Until the nineteenth century, even significant public buildings such as temples in Singapore were built in this manner.

Bayam: *Amaranthus tricolor* or *Amaranthus gangeticus*, an upright, much-branched annual plant with green or red-green leaves which is eaten as a vegetable; Chinese spinach.

BBM: Bintang Bakti Masyarakat, Public Service Star

BG: Brigadier-General

Bhai: Etymologically, the word *bhai* means brother, but within early Sikh tradition this word was also used as an honorific for the holy men of the Panth. To qualify for this title a person had to demonstrate a capacity to interpret the *Adi Granth* (Sikh holy scripture), communicate the wisdom of the Gurus it enshrined, and be publicly recognized for his piety.

BOD: British Ordinance Depot

Chettiars: A caste of Tamil moneylenders

CSGB: Central Sikh Gurdwara Board

CST: Central Sikh Temple

Degh: In Sikhism, *Degh* or *Karah Parshad* is a type of semolina halva made with equal portions of whole wheat flour, butter, and sugar. It is offered to all visitors to the *Darbar Sahib* (Prayer Hall) in a Gurdwara. It is regarded as food blessed by the Guru.

Dera: Dwelling or encampment

Dogras: Dogras was a Hindu Rajput dynasty which traced its roots to the *Ikshvaku* dynasty of northern India. The rulers of the dynasty were *Dogra Rajputs* and the royal house of

Jammu and Kashmir. The Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir was the ruler of the erstwhile Indian princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The first ruler was Gulab Singh, who became Raja of Jammu principality through a grant from the Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and subsequently accepted the throne of Kashmir after the First Anglo-Sikh war. The principality of Jammu was ruled by Raja Gulab Singh as a governor of Sikh Empire till 1846. After the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1846, under the terms of the Treaty of Amritsar, the British government sold Kashmir to Maharaja Gulab Singh and the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the second largest princely state in British India, was created. Dhyani Singh Dogra played a strange role in Sikh history. He originally belonged to Jammu. He came to Lahore in search of a job and with his hard work and ability he rose to the top. Maharaja Ranjit Singh made him prime minister of Sarkar Khalsa. Then he also got his brothers inducted in different departments in Sarkar Khalsa. Soon, the Dogras had control of all the administration of state matters like treasury, finance, etc.

DSP: Deputy Superintendent of Police

EDB: Economic Development Board

FCCA: Fellow of the Association of Certified Accountants

FRGS: Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society

Ghee: Class of clarified butter that originated in ancient India and is commonly used in Kurdish, Afghani, Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan cuisine.

Gotong Royong: Concept of reciprocity or mutual aid

Granthi: A ceremonial reader of the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh Holy Scripture)

Gurdwara: Sikh temple

Gurmukhi: Literally means from the mouth of the Guru. Name of the script used in writing Punjabi. It is used in the Sikh scripture.

Gurpurabs: Sikh religious anniversaries and celebrations.

Gursikh: The word Gursikh has two components. The first component is Gur(u) and the second component is Sikh (learner/disciple). In its literal sense, it means a person who follows the teachings of his/her Guru. "One who calls himself a Gursikh of the True Guru, shall rise in the early morning hours and meditate on the Lord's Name." The first Gursikh was Bebe Nanaki, the sister of Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh holy scripture

IIL: Indian Independence League

INA: Indian National Army

IRO: Inter-Religious Organisation

Istri Satsang: *A Sikh women's religious society, which holds meetings in the Sikh temple in the afternoon of every Wednesday.*

Janjh Ghar: *Area for wedding receptions*

Jathedar: *Refers to a leader of a group, a community, or a nation*

Kabaddi: *A team sport originally from the Indian subcontinent*

Kangkong: *Ipomoea aquatica, a perennial semi-aquatic plant of the genus Convolvulus producing long shoots with white or pink flowers, arrow-shaped leaves and hollow stems, which is eaten as a vegetable; water spinach.*

Karnivala: *Possessor of special powers*

Kempetei: *Japanese Secret Police*

Khalsa Panth: *Worldwide community of baptized Sikhs*

Khande di pahul: *Sikh ceremony of initiation or baptism*

Khatri and Arora Sikhs: *Are also sometimes called "Kirar" or "Bhapa Sikhs". Both groups intermarry freely and are identical for all practical purposes. They used to constitute chiefly of shopkeepers, petty money-lenders, accountants, grocers, perfume sellers, grain traders, etc.*

Kirtan: *Gurbani Kirtan or Shabad Kirtan or simply Kirtan. Singing of sacred hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh religious scripture).*

Konfrontasi: *This Indonesian-Malaysian confrontation (Konfrontasi) was a violent and undeclared conflict lasting from 1962 to 1966 that mainly arose from Indonesia's opposition to the creation of Malaysia.*

Langgar: *Community kitchen*

MCCY: *Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth*

MIT: *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

MP: *Member of Parliament*

MRNVR: *Malayan Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve*

MT: *Motor Transport*

Naam Simran: *Meditation*

NRI: *Non-Resident Indian*

1SIR: *First Singapore Infantry Regiment*

Panth: *The word Panth, from Sanskrit patha, pathin, or pantham, literally means a way, passage or path and, figuratively, a way of life, religious creed or cult. In Sikh terminology, the word Panth stands for the Sikh faith as well as for the Sikh people as a whole.*

PB: *Pangkat Berkebolehan (Efficiency Medal)*

PBM: *Pangkat Bakti Masyarakat (Public Service Medal)*

PBS: *Pangkat Bakti Setia (Long Service Medal)*

PDF: *People's Defence Force*

POW: *Prisoner of War*

PPA (G): *Pingat Pentadbiran Awam, Gangsa (Public Administration Medal, Bronze)*

PPA (P): *Pingat Pentadbiran Awam, Perak (Public Administration Medal, Silver)*

Prema Plot: *A conspiracy allegedly engineered by Maharani Jind Kaur with the help of some Sikh sardars to assassinate Sir Henry Lawrence, the first British Resident at Lahore, and the Sikh Commander-in-Chief, Tej Singh, and to topple the British control of the Punjab. One of the factors responsible for the general unrest was the treaty of Bharoval (December 1846) by which Maharani Jind Kaur had been deprived of all authority and the Resident had been invested with unrestricted powers. The Maharani, who was opposed to the British assuming any concessions beyond stationing a few of their regiments at Lahore, chafed at the new treaty which conferred on them the right to remain in the Punjab up to the time Maharaja Duleep Singh (young son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh) attained the age of majority and which made them the virtual rulers. Prema, a Brahman desperado, who had been a soldier in Gulab Singh's service, came to Lahore in February 1847 and set up a secret campaign against the British and started associating himself with the officers and sepoys of the Sikh army. He visited Amritsar and received the approbation of Bhai Maharaj Singh, who was widely revered for his piety and who at the time of the second Anglo-Sikh war raised the standard of revolt against the British. The Bhai, it is said, bestowed upon Prema a sword, a turban and a shawl, as a mark of his blessing. Amongst other covert helpers were Atar Singh Kalianvala, Sher Singh Atarivala, Ranjodh Singh and Mian Jawahar Singh, a nephew of Raja Gulab Singh. The prime motive of the plan was to restore the power of Maharani Jind Kaur as the Regent of the minor Maharaja Duleep Singh and terminate British control by assassinating the Resident and his subservient council of ministers.*

Prema's nephew, Nihal Chand, accompanied by nine others carrying swords and shields, entered the Shalamar Gardens on 12 February 1847 with a view to finishing off Sir Henry Lawrence and Sardar Tej Singh, who were then attending a fete. The band was playing and everyone was lost in merriment. But the plotters hearts misgave them and they stealthily slunk away. The British authorities arrested eleven persons. After a trial in which twenty-five witnesses were examined, Prema and three others were sentenced to life imprisonment and deported out of the Punjab; four persons received imprisonment from 3 to 7 years and three were let off. John Lawrence, who conducted the enquiry, found the evidence in the

case `worthless` without any proof of the Maharani's complicity. But he held that "there were grounds for suspecting her of being cognizant of the intrigue if not its instigator." A sequel to the Prema plot was the unjustified removal of the Maharani from the capital of the Sikhs. The Regent's Council, chary of expelling her from the Punjab, decided to send her to Sheikhpura, 40 km away from Lahore. Her allowance was reduced from Rs 150,000 to Rs 48,000 annually.

PSB: Singapore Productivity and Standards Board

Ragi: Finger millet or red millet

SAB: Sikh Advisory Board

SACA: Singapore Aftercare Association

Samadh: Tombstone

SANA: Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association

Sant: Sikh saint

Sant-Sipahi: Saint -Soldier

SATA: Singapore Anti Tuberculosis Association

Sepoy: A designation given to an Indian soldier. In the modern Nepalese Army, Indian Army, Pakistan Army and Bangladesh Army it remains in use for the rank of private soldier.

Sepuluh dua: Malay term used in moneylending where interest was charged at \$2 for every \$10 that was lent.

Seva: Community service. Also spelt as sewa and short for the word karseva, refers to selfless service, work or service performed without any thought of reward or personal benefit. In the Punjabi language, the person performing such a service is called a sevadar.

Shaheed: Martyr

SHBA: Singapore Harbour Board Staff Association

SHBP: Singapore Harbour Board Police

SINDA: Singapore Indian Development Association

SIR: Singapore Infantry Regiment

SKA: Singapore Khalsa Association

SIWEC: Sikh Welfare Council

SMF: Singapore Military Forces

SPC: Sikh Police Contingent

SSEF: Singapore Sikh Education Foundation

STU: Singapore Teachers' Union

Subedar: *Subedar is a historical rank in the Pakistan Army as well as in the Indian Army, ranking below British commissioned officers and above non-commissioned officers. The rank was otherwise equivalent to a British lieutenant.*

SVC: *Singapore Volunteer Corps*

Tapioca: *Tapioca is a starch extracted from cassava root (Manihot esculenta). This species is native to the North Region of Brazil, It is now cultivated worldwide, and is a staple food in many world regions, tapioca is used as a thickening agent in various foods.*

Towkay: *Chinese businessman*

2SIR: *Second Singapore Infantry Regiment*

VC: *Vigilante Corps*

ENDNOTES

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- ² 'A momentous occasion: International Conference on Punjabi/Sikh Heritage, 5-7 June 1992', in *The Singapore Sikh*, November 1992, p.1
- ³ Tan Tai Tong, '*Singapore Khalsa Association*', 2nd ed, p.5
'Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji & Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road: A historical journey', p 7
- ⁴ Harjot Oberoi. '*The construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition*', p.121
- ⁵ Elisabeth Meru, '*Bhai Maharaj Singh – every day has its color*', September 13, 2013
- ⁶ Harjot Oberoi. '*The construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition*', p.118
- ⁷ Nahar Singh, ed. '*Documents relating to Bhai Maharaj Singh*', p.92
- ⁸ Harjot Oberoi. '*The construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity and diversity in the Sikh tradition*', p.122
- ⁹ Choor Singh, '*Bhai Maharaj Singh: Saint-Soldier of the Sikh faith*', p.17
- ¹⁰ Davinder Singh, Foreword to Choor Singh '*Bhai Maharaj Singh: Saint-Soldier of the Sikh faith*', p. 2
- ¹¹ Tan, Li-Jen, '*Sants and martyrs in the diaspora: Sikh identities in post-colonial Singapore and Malaya*', p.44
- ¹² Surjan Singh, '*Saluting Sikh soldiers of World Wars I & II*', p.5
- ¹³ Malkiat Singh Lopo-Dhaliwal and Mukhtiar Kaur Rattian-Sandhu. '*Sikhs in Malaysia Series: History of a century, 1873-1973*', vol 2. *A page from the history of Sikhs in Singapore.*
- ¹⁴ Tan, Li-Jen, '*Sants and martyrs in the diaspora: Sikh identities in post-colonial Singapore and Malaya*', p 65
- ¹⁵ Rajesh Rai, '*Indians in Singapore 1819-1945; Diaspora in the colonial port city*', p.110
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.181
- ¹⁷ Tan Li Jen, '*Sants and martyrs in the diaspora: Sikh identities in post-colonial Singapore and Malaya*', p. 24
- ¹⁸ Arunajeet Kaur, '*The Sikhs in Singapore*', p.10
- ¹⁹ *Straits Times*, 14 April 1963
- ²⁰ *Malay Mail*, 10 August 1964
- ²¹ *Straits Times*, 20 August 1981, p.13
- ²² *Straits Times*, 2 June 1917, p.9
- ²³ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 17 March 1917, p.7
- ²⁴ *Straits Times*, 2 March 1918, p.26
- ²⁵ *Straits Times*, 19 July 1949, p. 7
- ²⁶ *Straits Times*, 14 February 1952. p. 4
- ²⁷ Choor Singh, '*The Sikh community's contribution to the development of Singapore*', p. 84
- ²⁸ Surjan Singh, '*Saluting Sikh soldiers of World Wars I & II*', p. ix

- ²⁹ Thomas M. Leonard, *'Encyclopedia of the developing world'*, p.361
- ³⁰ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh_Regiment
- ³¹ Stephen P Cohen, *'The idea of Pakistan'*
- ³² Surjan Singh, compiler and editor, *'They died for all free men'*, p.55
- ³³ Ibid, p.56
- ³⁴ Lee Geok Boi, *'The Syonan Years; Singapore under Japanese rule 1942 -1945'*, p.233
- ³⁵ Karam Singh, *'The Sikh Police Contingent; Custodians of the Empire'*, p.295
- ³⁶ Ibid, p.293
- ³⁷ Ibid, p 294
- ³⁸ Surjan Singh, compiler and editor *'They died for all free men'*, p.65
- ³⁹ *Bhai Maharaj Singh Ji & Gurdwara Sahib Silat Road: A historical journey'*, pp. 59-60
- ⁴⁰ Surjan Singh, *'Saluting Sikh soldiers of World Wars I & II'*, p.1028
- ⁴¹ Surjan Singh, compiler and editor, *'They died for all free men'*, frontispiece
- ⁴² Lee Geok Boi, *'The Syonan Years; Singapore under Japanese rule 1942 -1945'*, p.156
- ⁴³ Choor Singh, *'The Sikh community's contribution to the development of Singapore'*, p.13
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- ⁴⁶ Ibid, p.67
- ⁴⁷ *Highlights*; Bi-monthly newsletter the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board, Issue No. 44, August/September 2010, p.8
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- ⁴⁹ *Straits Times*, 4 September 1963, p.5
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- ⁵⁶ Ibid, p.46
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