

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

Sikh Studies Program at Columbia University

(1988-1999)

The Sikh Studies program at Columbia University began in 1988-89 with a grant from the Sikh Cultural Society, Richmond Hill, New York. After sponsoring the program for three years, the Board of Trustees of the Society evaluated its achievements and resolved to expand it into a chair in Sikhism. Columbia, the premier institution of higher education in the New York metropolitan area, was thought to be an ideal place to create such a position.

In order to achieve this goal, the leadership of the Sikh Cultural Society decided to expand the program's base of support and authorized Rabinder Singh Bhamra to approach other Sikh organizations and individuals in the United States for support. In subsequent years, Mr. Bhamra and myself traveled extensively in the country to raise finances required to establish the chair. A complex set of circumstances, however, obstructed this initiative from reaching its fruition, and the community was not able to pool its resources and generate the required endowment.

A unique opportunity to create a Sikh Studies' position in a great seat of learning in New York was thus lost. I take full responsibility for my share in this failure. I leave New York with a heavy heart for having failed to put Columbia program permanently on Sikh Studies' map, but I sincerely hope and pray that it will eventually happen. I will await for that auspicious time.

I am indebted to Mr. Bhamra, the leadership of the Sikh Cultural Society, and the larger Sikh community for providing me with the opportunity to do this unique work at Columbia. I am extremely grateful to my mentor, Professor John Stratton Hawley, for assigning me the responsibility to navigate the program's course from its inception, and for his unstinting support and encouragement during these years.

I am gratified to append a detailed report of our activities of the past eleven years. In addition to teaching and research at Columbia, I was often called upon to speak on Sikh issues on a wide variety of forums. I will leave it to you to assess the degree of success we achieved. I am grateful to the Sikh Cultural Society for ensuring the program's continuation. From Fall 1999, the program is likely to center on the teaching of Sikhism and supporting Columbia students to learn Punjabi through the summer program in Chandigarh. Many thanks.

June 1999.


Gurinder Singh Mann

Sikh Studies Program at Columbia University
(1988-1999)

1. Courses Taught

Sikhism (Spring 89, 90, 91, Fall 91, 92, Spg 94, 95, Fall 96, 97, 98)

The course began with a detailed discussion of the theological vision of Guru Nanak, and concludes with an in-depth analysis of the current Punjab crisis as the latest assertion of Sikh identity.

An Introduction to the Theology of Guru Granth Sahib (Fall 89, 92)

The course began with an intensive study of the grammar of the language of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and goes on to analyze key passages in the text. These passages evoke discussion of the complex relationship of the Sikh theological concepts with their counterparts in Hinduism and Islam.

Elementary Punjabi (1990-91, 1992-93, 1994-95, 1996-97, 1998-99)

The course began with the teaching of Gurmukhi script and offers intensive study in speaking, reading, and writing of the language.

Intermediate Punjabi (1991-92, 1993-94, 1995-96, 1997-98)

Building on the work done in Elementary Punjabi class, students concentrated on reading Punjabi literature. We begin with Punjabi folk stories in the Fall and read a selection of contemporary Punjabi literature in the Spring.

Introduction to the Study of Religion (Fall 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, Spg 98, Fall 98)

A compulsory course for students majoring in Religion at Columbia deals with key themes in the study of religion. The course began with a discussion of theoretical issues, and goes on to present Sikhism as a case study, in how religious ideas function in a particular historical setting.

Colloquium on Major Texts (Spring 94, 95, 97, 98)

The course included reading translations of the major texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Islam. (It is one of the required courses in the Asian Humanities that all students must take to graduate from Columbia).

Monotheism East and West (Fall 92)

The course addressed the theme of monotheism in Semitic and Indian religious traditions and concludes with an attempt to establish the close relationship of Sikhism with the monotheistic traditions of the Middle East.

2. Columbia Summer Program in Punjab Studies (established 1997)

The SPPS was formally launched in 1997. The first group of participants included an assistant professor of Religion, a doctoral candidate in Political Science, six masters students, and an undergraduate. In 1998, participants included an associate professor of Political Administration, five doctoral candidates, one masters student, and an undergraduate. In the first year, eight educational institutions were represented; in the second year, six.

My move in 1999 to the University of California, Santa Barbara, has opened up new interesting opportunities for the SPPS. The administrative and fiscal arrangements were put in place in Spring 1999, and the SPPS began to function under the joint auspices of Columbia and UCSB. With two major centers of South Asian Studies in North America squarely behind it, the SPPS's future stability has become fairly certain. The great enthusiasm of its first participants suggests that it has answered well to a need widely felt.

3. Books

1993. **Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America**

(Albany: State University of New York Press) was the first publication of the program. The book was edited by Professor John S. Hawley and myself. The book has received positive reviews in both the academic journals and community papers. The book can be ordered at 1-800-666-2211.

1996. **The Goindval Pothis: The Earliest Extant Source of the Sikh Canon**

(Cambridge: Harvard Oriental Series). The book is the first detailed study of the Goindval Pothis prepared during Guru Amardas' time (1551-74). In the words of Professor J. S. Grewal, the book represents an ideal combination of the historical approach and sympathetic treatment of the Sikh tradition. The book can be ordered at 1-800-448-2242.

1999. **The Making of Sikh Scripture**

(New York: forthcoming). Based on the information available in the early manuscripts, the book presents the first comprehensive study of the evolution of the Sikh scriptural text from its origin in the 1530s to the compilation of its canonical version, the Adi Granth, in the closing years of the seventeenth century. The Ph. D. dissertation from which the book has emerged is available at the University Microfilms International Dissertation Service (1-800-521- 0600).

4. Articles and Chapters in Books

- 1999. "Sikhs in America." In *Religion in American Life*, edited by Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford).
- 1999. "Sikhism," and other related entries. In *Encyclopedia of Religions* (Chicago: Merriam Webster).
- 1998. "Sikhism in the USA." In *South Asian Religion in the Diaspora*, edited by Harold Coward (Albany: SUNY Press).
- 1998. "The History of the Khalsa." In the Vaisakhi issue of *The Sikh Review* (Calcutta, April 1998).
- 1997. "Sikhs." In *American Immigrant Culture*, edited by D. Levinson, and M. Ember (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan).
- 1997. Two entries ("Guru Nanak," and "Guru Granth Sahib"). In *Encarta Encyclopedia* (London: Websters International).
- 1996. "Punjabi Proverbs." In *The Columbia World of Quotations*, edited by R. Andrews et al. (New York: Columbia University Press).
- 1995. Ten entries. In *The Harper Collins's Dictionary of Religion*, edited by Jonathan Z. Smith et al. (San Francisco: Harper).
- 1993. "Sikh Studies and the Sikh Educational Heritage." In *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America* (Albany: SUNY Press).
- 1993. "Teaching the Sikh Tradition: A Course at Columbia." In *Studying the Sikhs: Issues for North America* (Albany: SUNY Press).
- 1998. Review. Amarjit Chandan, *Jarhan* (Ludhiana: Aesthetic, 1995), in *Yugantar Punjab*, On-line Magazine of Punjabi Literature and Culture, Spring 1998.
- 1995. Review. N. Singh, *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent* (London: Cambridge 1993), in *International Journal of Punjab Studies* 2: 1.

5. Academic Presentations

1999. "The Punjab: 1850-1900," Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, June 5.
1999. "The Khalsa and Sikh Identity," Center for South Asian Studies, Coventry University, England, May 1.
1999. "Future of Punjab Studies," Center for South Asian Studies, Coventry University, England, May 2.
1999. "The Sikhs of the Punjab," Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, April 7.
1999. "The Creation of the Khalsa," Regional English Language Center, Singapore, January 14.
1998. "Kabir and the Early Sikh Tradition," American Academy of Religion, Orlando, November 22.
1998. "Looking toward the Future: Sikh Studies at UCSB," Institute of Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, November 7.
1998. "Sikh Studies' Programs in North America," School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London, May 29.
1998. "The Institution of the Khalsa," School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London, May 28.
1997. "Canon Formation in the Sikh Tradition," Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, December 12.
1997. "The Sikhs of America," Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 14.
1997. "The Origin of the Sikh Tradition," Panel on Sikh Studies, Annual Conference of Philosophical Association, Hunter College, May.
1997. "The Sikh Experience in the United States of America," Department of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, April 24.
1997. "Current Situation in the Punjab," The Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board, Montreal, January, 24.
1996. "The Sikhs of America: Challenges and Opportunities," Institute of International Studies, University of Michigan, November 21??.
1996. "Sikhism in the USA," Conference on "A Comparative Study of the South Asian Diaspora," SOAS, University of London, November 5.
1996. "Sikhism and the American Media," Seminar on "Covering Religion," School of Journalism, Columbia University, April 12.
1995. "The Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and Sikh Studies," American Academy of Religion, Philadelphia, November 19.
1995. "Punjabi Writers in the United States," Conference on "Punjabi Literature Overseas," Columbia University, March 18.
1994. "The Teaching of Punjabi in the United States," Conference on "The Teaching of Punjabi," Punjabi University, December 27.
1994. "Textual Issues and the Adi Granth," Conference on "Interpretations of the Adi Granth," G. N. D. University, Amritsar, December 22.
1994. "Hymns of Non-Sikh Saints in Sikh Scripture," University Seminar on Asian Thought and Religion, Columbia University, March 4.
1994. "Early Manuscripts and Sikh Studies," Conference on "The Academic Study of Religion," University of Toronto, February 11.
1993. "Canon Formation in the Sikh Tradition," American Academy of Religion, Washington D. C., November 20.
1993. "The Controversy over *Gatha Sri Adi Granth*," Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, November 6.

- 1993. "Religious Conflict: The Sikh Experience," Conference on "Religious Pluralism," Chicago, September 1.
- 1993. "Ethics and Values: A Sikh Perspective," Parliament of the World Religions, Chicago, September ??.
- 1993. "Looking to the Future," Conference on "The Sikh Diaspora," Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, April 3.
- 1993. "Sikhism," NEH sponsored Integrated Humanities Institute on India, Columbia University, February 11.
- 1992. "Sikhs and their Others: Turks and Hindus," Seminar on Tradition & Change in South Asia, Columbia University, December 8.
- 1992. "The Structure of the Goindval Pothis," Conference on "Sikh Art and Literature," Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, November 28.
- 1992. "Guru Nanak in the Punjab, 1492," Conference on "Looking for India, 1492," Columbia University, November 13.
- 1992. "Sikh Ethics," Symposium on "The Ethical Import of World Religions," Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Columbia University, October 25.
- 1992. "'Insiders' and 'Outsiders' in the Early Sikh Tradition," Department of Religion, Columbia University, January 24.
- 1991. "The Concept of God in Sikhism," Symposium on "God in Monotheism," Baruch College, October 25.
- 1991. "Sikhs in North America," Conference on "The New Religious Landscape of America," Harvard University, October 5.
- 1990. "Sikhs and the Indian State: A History of Indifference and Conflict," American Academy of Religion, New Orleans, November 17.
- 1990. "The Concept of the Khalsa," Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, April 13.
- 1990. "Inside the Punjab Today," Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, February .

6. Conference Organization

- 1995. "Agriculture of the Punjab," a conference held at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, April 1.
- 1995. "Punjabi Literature Overseas," a conference held at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, March 18.
- 1994. "Post-Partition Punjabi Literature," a conference held at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, April 30.
- 1993. "The Sikh Diaspora," a conference held at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, April 3.
- 1990. "Sikh Theology," a conference held at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, March 31.
- 1989. "Sikh Studies: The American Agenda," a conference held at the Southern Asian Institute, Columbia University, March 25.

7. Professional Service

(Academic)

- 1999. "Sikh Religious Beliefs and Practices," in a workshop for San Francisco School teachers, Center for South Asia Studies, UC, Berkeley, June 5.
- 1999. "Understanding the Indian Traditions," in Seminar on "Covering Religion," School of Journalism, Columbia University, April 27.
- 1999. Offered a four-session workshop on early Sikh history for a group of 95 teachers

- belonging to Secondary School system, Singapore, January 12-15.
1998. Served on Columbia Campus Evaluation Committee for Fulbright grants for students doing research overseas (1999-2000), October.
1998. Pre-publication evaluation of Patwant Singh's *Sikhs* for Columbia University Press, and University of California Press, August.
1998. Pre-publication evaluation of Nirmal Dass' *Songs of the Saints from the Adi Granth* for the State University of New York Press, June.
1998. Appointed to the Advisory Board, Pluralism Project, Harvard University, in February. I have been associated with this project since its inception in 1991.
1997. Reviewed section on the Sikh tradition in Diana L. Eck's *On Common Ground* (New York: Columbia University Press).
1996. Appointed to the Executive Council for the World Conference on Religion and Peace, New York, September .
1996. Reviewed "The Sikh Way" in *Ways We Worship* (New York: Barron's Educational Series), July.
1996. Reviewed tests for licensing Punjabi teachers to be used by California's Commission on Teachers Credentialing, Spring.
1996. Pre-publication evaluation of Diana L. Eck's *On Common Ground* for the University of California Press, May.
1996. Deciphered inscriptions on the early Sikh arms available at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, May.
1994. Refereed Pashaura Singh's "An Early Sikh Scriptural Tradition," for the *International Journal of Punjab Studies*, February.
1994. Reviewed section on Sikhism in Warren Matthews' revised edition of *World Religions* (New York: West Educational), March.
1993. Reviewed section on Punjabi in *A Survey of Material Development Priorities in the Less Commonly Taught Languages for the 1990s*, Georgetown U., September.
1993. Appointed to the Editorial Advisory Board of the *International Journal of Punjab Studies* (New Delhi: Sage), September .

(Legal)

1997. Expert's report on the current situation in the Punjab, in a workshop held for the asylum officers, Immigration and N. Service, San Francisco, October.
1997. Submitted expert's report on the role of the turban in Sikh belief system, in a lawsuit, J. P. Singh (represented by the Asian American Legal Defense Fund, and Civil Liberties Union, New York) versus El Quijote Restaurant, NYC, June.
1997. Expert's report on the current situation in the Punjab, in a two-day briefing held for the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board, Montreal, January.
1996. Submitted expert's report and deposed on the significance of the turban in Sikh belief system, in a lawsuit, Charan Singh Kalsi versus Metropolitan Transit Authority, New York, May-June.
1994. Submitted expert's declaration in a lawsuit filed by Sikh students for not being permitted to carry swords on their school campus (represented by the ACLU, San Francisco) versus the Livingston Union School, California, April.

(Media)

1999. "Sikhs in the United States of America," an Interview with Clark Boyd, WGBH Radio, Boston, April 15.
1998. "Problems and challenges facing the Sikh community in the United States of America," an interview with Leslie Gosse, B B C overseas service, January.
1995. "Guru Nanak," as part of the special broadcast on the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, Voice of America, November.
1994. Participated in the Asianet Television program "Commonalties among World Religions," New York City, June.
1992. Interviewed by Douglas Martin for "The Freedom to Worship, the Freedom to

- Park," *New York Times*, September 30.
1991. Discussant, "Rajiv Gandhi's Assassination and its Impact on the Indian Community in the U. S.," in "Live Wire," a PBS prog., May 29.

8. Presentations at Public Forums

1999. "Sikhism and Other Major Religious Traditions," Wilhelm Baha'i School, Teaneck, NJ, February 7.
1998. "The Punjabis in the United States of America," Officers Training College, Punjab and Sind Bank, Chandigarh, July 31.
1995. "Sikhism: Monotheism Comes East," gathering of B'nai Jeshurun and United Methodist Church, New York City, November 9.
1994. Invited lectures on "Sikhs in the U. S.," New York Police Department (Precincts 100, 102, 105, 113), Fall. The invitation followed an eruption of serious law and order problems in the gurdwara at Richmond Hill, New York.
1994. "Sikhism and Indian Religions," Indian Cultural Night sponsored by the John Jay Residents, Columbia University, April 13.
1991. "Hindu-Sikh Conflict in the Punjab," Center for Continuing Education, Mamaroneck, New York, November 5.
1990. "The Evolution of Sikh Tradition," Protestant Campus Ministry, Earl Hall, Columbia University, November 29.
1990. "The Punjab Crisis in Historical Perspective," Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, New York, June 7.
1990. "An Introduction to Sikhism," Temple of Understanding, Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, New York City, June 5, 1990.

Sikh Forums

1999. "The Tercentenary of the Khalsa: Some Reflection," the Sikh Association at Katong, Singapore, January 17.
1998. "Sikhism in the Twenty-first Century," keynote address at the Sikh Youth Symposium, the Central Jersey Sikh Association, Princeton, June 7.
1998. "Sikh Education," Inaugural address at the Annual Symposium on Sikh History organized by Hemkunt Foundation, Plainview, NY., April.
1997. "Sikhism at Crossroads," keynote address at the annual meeting of Rutgers Sikh Student Association, New Brunswick, March.
1996. "The Punjab Crisis and the Sikhs in the Diaspora," in a conference organized by Michigan Sikh Students, Detroit, May.
1995. "Sikhism and the Religions of the Middle East," Eighth Annual Sikh Youth Camp, Linwood, New Jersey, August.
1995. "The Institutional Development in Early Sikh History," Conference on "The Sikh Renaissance," Duarte, CA., July.
1995. "Bhai Vir Singh's Contribution to Education," program organized to commemorate his death anniversary, Plainview, NY. June.
1993. "The Future of Sikhism," Conference on "The Sikh Renaissance," organized by Michigan Sikh Students, Detroit, November.
1993. "Sikhs in America: Opportunities and Challenges," First conference of the United Sikh Association held at Columbia University, April.
1992. "Sikh History: Significant Patterns," Conference on "Sikhism in the Twenty-first Century," held at U. C. Berkeley, March.
1991. "The Sikh Educational Heritage," Annual Meeting of American Association of Sikh Professionals, San Jose, CA, April.

9. Lectures at Columbia

In addition to the presenters in the conferences, the following scholars lectured on various issues in the Sikh tradition: W. M. Callewaert, S. S. Gandhi, J. S. Grewal, Madanjit Kaur, S. S. Kohli, D. S. Maini, G. S. Randhawa, and J. C. B. Webster.

10. Sikh Student Association at Columbia

The association was formed in 1988, and is registered at Columbia as a religious group. Satinder Jawanda, currently teaching at Hunter School, New York, was the founder president. The Association meets regularly and invites speakers to address issues concerning the Sikh community, and has been participating in the annual Vaisakhi parade in the New York City. The Sikh student association collaborated with the United Sikh Association in hosting a Vaisakhi conference at Columbia in 1993. Because of circumstances beyond our control, the SSA remained dormant during 1994-1996, but under the presidentship of Kim Singh it was fully activated in 1996-97. Mana Mann and Montek Singh provided it leadership during 1998-99. The association participated in the tercentennial celebration of the Khalsa at Washington D.C.

