

## **Sikh Studies at University of California**

### **Report on Activities**

#### **1. Sikh Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara**

##### **Professor Gurinder Singh Mann**

In the mid-1990s, the newly created Global and International Studies Program at UCSB, directed by Mark Juergensmeyer, requested the allocation of a position in Sikh and Punjab Studies. At the same time, he was able to persuade Narinder Singh Kapany, Chairperson of the Sikh Foundation, Palo Alto, to attach an endowment (\$350,000) that would provide funds for development of this position. His efforts eventually resulted in the creation of the Kundan Kaur Kapany Professorship in Sikh Studies, and after a national search for candidates, I had the good fortune to be invited to be the first occupant of the position to be based jointly in Global and International Studies Program and the Department of Religious Studies.



*Chancellor Henry Yang, Narinder Singh Kapany, and Mark Juergensmeyer*

I began my work in Fall 1999 with two goals in mind: to initiate teaching and research in Sikh and Punjab Studies at UCSB and to work toward establishing it as the leading center in this area of study in North America. The brief statement below comes from a deep sense of gratitude for cooperation of students, colleagues, departmental chairs, and deans of the faculties of humanities and social sciences at UCSB; the advice of friends around the globe; the goodwill of the Sikh community; and the confidence of the Kapany family in my work.

Before my arrival, the Sikhs and the Punjab appeared in the **teaching** of Mark Juergensmeyer (“Global Religions;” “Religious Nationalism”), and it

was not difficult to expand on his offerings. I began with an upper-division course entitled “Sikhism” (RS 162C), and this continues to constitute the center of my undergraduate teaching. In Fall 1999, 22 students were enrolled in the first class on this subject and it is gratifying to report that the numbers have increased over time with 287 students registered for the class in Fall 2013.

I also developed “Indian Civilization” (RS 20), an entry-level course for those interested in the subcontinent, and “Global Diasporas and Cultural Change,” (GS 104) an upper-division course focusing on migration and subsequent experiences of different religious groups including a segment on the Sikhs. In 2013-2014, these two classes had an enrollment of 122 and 154 students, respectively. In addition, we started the teaching of Punjabi language at elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels. This year’s Punjabi class comprised 29 (Fall), 22 (Winter), and 28 (Spring) students. The course evaluations of the past years indicate that students are largely pleased with my approach to teaching, please see <http://ratemyprofessors.com/ShowRatings.jsp?tid=597238&all=1>.



*Punjabi Punjabi Class (RS60A), Fall 1999*



*Sikhism class (RS 162C), Fall 2013*

At the graduate level, I taught a set of seminars to meet the needs of students working in the area. “Religion and Society in the Punjab” (RS 213A) dealt with the cultural history of the region; “Issues in Sikh Studies” (RS 213B) focused on significant landmarks in Sikh history; “The Guru Granth and the Sikh Tradition” (RS 213C) examined the making of its text, the rise of its status, and its current role in Sikh life; “The Major Texts of the Sikh Tradition (RS 213D)” dealt with the manuscripts and the editions of the key Sikh texts; and “The Sikhs: From Regional to a Global Community” mapped the migration and settlement experiences of Sikhs in different parts of the world and the opportunities and challenges that confronted them there. In addition to our own students, graduate students from Columbia and UCLA took some of these seminars.

Since 1999, six students have completed their **doctoral dissertations** relating to Sikh and Punjab Studies. Anna B. Bigelow wrote on the religious life in Malerkotla (2004) and presently teaches at North Carolina State University; Daniel M. Michon wrote on the early historic Punjab (2007) and teaches at Claremont McKenna College; Rahuldeep Singh Gill examined the writings of Bhai Gurdas (2009) and teaches at California Lutheran University; Gibb Schreffler wrote on the role of Dhol in Punjabi culture (2010) and teaches at Pomona College; Ami P. Shah worked on Sainapati’s *Sri Gur Sobha* (2010) and is currently preparing a set of translations of early Sikh texts; and Chloe Martinez wrote on the genre of autobiography in pre-colonial South Asian literature with a segment on the writings on Guru Gobind Singh (2013) and teaches at Haverford College. Three students are currently working on their projects. These include John Warneke (Sikh educational heritage), Philip Deslippe (Sikh immigrants and the history of yoga in the United States), and Elizabeth Weigler is ready to launch her work on the history of the Sikh community in England in the coming Summer.

Six scholars registered at other universities also made use of our resources in their pre- and post-doctoral research projects. Kristina Myrvold of at Lund University, Sweden, joined us as a Fulbright scholar for a year and wrote her doctoral thesis on the Sikhs of Banaras (2007); Laura Hirvi of University of Jyväskylä, Finland, also came as a Fulbright scholar and did her doctoral research pertaining to the Sikhs of California (2009); Natasha Behl was affiliated with our program while working for her dissertation on the caste and gender among the Sikhs at UCLA (2010); Harpreet Singh of University of Otago, New Zealand, completed his masters at UCSB and in the process prepared the ground for his doctoral research on the Sikhs of New Zealand (2011); and Simran Jeet Singh, a doctoral candidate at Columbia University is currently affiliated with our program. Asma Qadri of Punjab University, Lahore, pursued her post-doctoral research on Sufi poetry during her visit to UCSB in 2013. In addition, I served as the external examiner for three Ph.D. theses written at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. These included “Understanding Sikh Architecture” by Karamjit Singh, “Giani Dit Singh: Life and Writings” by Inderjit Singh, and “A Study of the Sikh World-View in the Context of Indian Tradition” by Sukhwinder Singh is expected to arrive in the

coming weeks. Our program has thus been closely associated with **eighteen research projects** in the past years. For details, see <http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/dissertations.html>

Mark Juergensmeyer's publications on religious violence and globalization of religious communities deal with contemporary Sikh history, and my writings have expanded the scope further. My *Making of Sikh Scripture* (New York: OUP, 2001) traces the history of the Guru Granth and it became the first book in Sikh Studies to be turned into an Internet edition in 2006. Additionally, OUP New Delhi has released four editions of this book for sale in India (hardbound, 2002; paperback, 2003, 2006, and 2009). *Sikhism* (Prentice Hall, 2004), a short introduction to the Sikh tradition, has had several reprints and its translated versions in Japanese and Spanish were released in 2007. *Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs in America* (New York: OUP, 2001), which I co-authored with P. D. Numrich and R. Williams, addresses the history of the Sikhs in the U.S. It was turned into a paperback edition in 2007.

The themes of the articles that I wrote during this period ranged from "Making Home Abroad: Sikhs in the United States" (*Nation of Religions* edited by Steven Prothero, 2006) to "Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times" (*Journal of Punjab Studies*, 2008), "Becoming a Sikh: An Essay on Conversion" (*Oxford Handbook on Religious Conversion* edited by Lewis Rambo *et al* and Charles Farhadian, 2013), and "The Sikhs" (*Religion in the Modern World* edited by Linda Woodhead *et al*, 2014). "Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh's Life and Times" has received special attention, and is said to "revolutionize our understanding about Guru Gobind Singh. The best work on him since 1967, and cannot be surpassed for decades (J.S. Grewal)."

In addition, we produced *Introduction to Punjabi: Grammar, Conversations, and Literature*, which was published by Punjabi University Press, Patiala in 2011. The writing of this book has been a journey of learning, teaching, and writing that spanned over fourteen years involving Gurdit Singh, Ami P. Shah and Gibb Schreffler, and myself. The teaching of Punjabi as a foreign language is an entirely new area of research, and *An Introduction to Punjabi* is beginning to be recognized as a foundational text that will be used by foreign learners of Punjabi all over the world and is also expected to serve as a reference work for teachers in the Punjab.

The first of the three special issues of the *Journal of Punjab Studies* (2006: Vol. 13; 2008: Vol. 15; 2010: Vol. 17) I edited focused on the twentieth century Punjabi poetry. Its primary contents emerged from "Advanced Punjabi" (RS 292), a seminar we held in 2005, and includes translations of fifty Punjabi poems completed by Randi Clary, Gibb Schreffler, and Ami P. Shah. The project provided these three scholars with the opportunity to translate Punjabi, an exercise that helped the progression of their doctoral research as well as build their publication portfolios. The second issue was dedicated to Guru Gobind Singh (1661-1708). Mohinder Singh, a New Delhi based scholar, thought this effort to be "the only meaningful academic tribute on the third death centennial of the Guru." The third issue included reflections

on the contribution of W.H. McLeod by his students and colleagues in the field.

With the consent of Eleanor Nesbitt (Warwick University) and Shinder Singh Thandi (Coventry University), two founder editors of the *Journal of Punjab Studies*, we were able to bring it to UCSB in 2004. Now in its twenty-first year of publication, the JPS has helped bring the UCSB Sikh and Punjab Studies program to the center of research in the field. Its special issues on agriculture, culture, economy, geography, literature and music of Punjab are now being used as standard teaching materials on these important themes, and we expect it to continue to play a key role in setting the parameters of research in the years ahead.

The **Summer Program** in Chandigarh, Punjab hills, which I directed from 1997 to 2009, provided us a unique opportunity to assist and mentor young scholars interested in Sikh and Punjab Studies from all over the world. The program included classes in Punjabi at the elementary and intermediate levels; lectures by invited academic experts in history, art, and culture; and week-end field trips to major religious, historical and educational sites in the Punjab plains and hills. During its operation, 182 scholars from 71 universities in 10 countries participated. As a sample, the 2009 group of sixteen participants included, one university professor, three schoolteachers, five doctoral candidates, three holding masters degrees, three undergraduates, and one with a degree in nursing. The universities they were affiliated with included Columbia, Coventry, London, Lund, Harvard, Montreal, New York, Rochester, Temple, Toronto, British Columbia, UC San Francisco, and UC Santa Barbara, and their areas of research ranged from art, economics, education, history, literature, medical sciences to religion. For details, please see <http://www.global.ucsb.edu/projects/punjab/home.htm/>. I was grateful that the external review of the Department of Religious Studies (2004) described the service rendered by the Summer Program as “truly exceptional,” and its contribution to the field was recognized at a conference held at University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2013.

In addition, we arranged eight **conferences** on the themes that ranged from Guru Gobind Singh (1999), Sikh Diaspora (2001), Punjabi Culture (2003) and other developments in Sikh Studies (2009 and 2014). We also co-sponsored conferences that were held at Lund University (2004), Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (2009), and the Center for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (2010). For details, please see <http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/conferences.html>.



*Conference participants in 2004*



*Conference participants in 2009*



*Chancellor Yang inaugurating the conference in 2014*

Scholars who visited UCSB to participate in our programs included leading figures in South Asian Studies: A. Behl (U. Penn), J. Brown (Oxford), A.T. Embree (Columbia), J.S. Hawley (Columbia), B.D. Metcalf (Michigan), T.R. Metcalf (UCB), L.I. Rudolph (Chicago), S.H. Rudolph (Chicago), C. Smith (San Diego Museum), and S. Stronge (Victoria and Albert Museum). Others in Sikh Studies included I. Banga (GNDU), B.N. Goswamy (Panjab University), J.S. Grewal (GNDU), W.H. McLeod (Otago, New Zealand), and C. Shackle (London). Punjabi poets: Amarjit Chandan (London), Surjit Patar (Punjab), Ahmad Salim (West Punjab), and Ajmer Rode (Vancouver), and other artists: Gharib Das (Chandigarh), Baldeep Singh (Punjab), and the Singh Twins (London) also visited UCSB to interact with our students.

Over the years, I have also been invited to lecture at different universities in the USA and abroad. Between January 2012 and December 2013, I spoke on Sikh related topics at the following institutions: Museum of Art, San Diego; Columbia University; Rutgers University; Yale University; Cal State University, Northridge; Stanford University; University of California, Davis; University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; UC Berkeley; UC Santa Cruz; UC Riverside; University of Lund (Sweden); Claremont Lutheran University; Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Five of these lectures were delivered in the aftermath of the tragic events at the Oak Creek gurdwara, Wisconsin. I have also been involved with the Sikh Heritage Project at Smithsonian Museums, Washington D.C. (2002-07), and worked with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History for their successful exhibition on Sikh heritage (Spring 2009). For details, please see

<http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/otheractivities.html>

To sum up, the past fifteen years have seen us develop a set of core courses around Punjabi, the history of the Sikhs, and the region of Punjab. In 2013-2014, the number of students who took these courses crossed 640. Reception of these courses has exceeded my expectations and I am grateful for the warm response of students. The teaching component of our program is now beginning to reach beyond UCSB and I am honored to report that Kristina Myrvold was the first scholar ever to teach a course on the Sikhs in a European University (Lund University in 2006-2007), and since then she has raised over one million U.S. dollars from Nordic and Swedish governmental and private foundations for research on Sikh studies in Europe. Rahuldeep Singh Gill now regularly teaches "Sikhism" at California Lutheran University; and Ami P. Shah was invited to teach a course on the Sikh tradition at Rutgers University in Fall 2012 and give a public lecture on the Sikhs at Princeton University in 2013.

Our publications, conferences, my lectures at various campuses etc., have brought our Program to the attention of scholars working around the globe, and UCSB is increasingly recognized as a leading center for teaching and research in Sikh and Punjab Studies. This is reflected in the fact that scholars from

Sweden (2007), Finland (2009), New Zealand (2011), and Pakistan (2013) came to pursue their research projects at our campus.

We are grateful to be able to state that we have in place a foundation for a sound academic program as well as a reservoir of goodwill within the Sikh community. While the number of students in the classes have increased over the years, the rigor of our Punjabi teaching program brought us the Federal Government's Title Six grant (\$286,000) to develop materials for online delivery. Our work with the community translated into donations (\$250,000+) to help fund the activities at UCSB ([www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/patrons.html](http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/patrons.html)), the participation of the community members in our events, and warm welcome to our students on their field trips to the local *gurdwaras* (*Santa Barbara Independent*, May 24, 2009, [www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/articles.html](http://www.global.ucsb.edu/punjab/articles.html)).



*Global Diaspora class (GS 104), Winter 2014, Visiting the gurdwara in Ventura (photo: A. Chandan)*



*Global Diaspora students during their visit*



The parents of a student in Sikhism class in Fall 2013 got in touch to express their gratitude for the opportunity our program created for their child to learn about her religion, sent a check of \$25,000 to be used toward our future publication plans, and made a specific request that the donation be kept anonymous. It was also deeply moving to receive the information from an attorney's office to the effect that our Center appears as a beneficiary in the will drawn by a Sikh family that has closely watched the program develop over the years.

In addition to continuing the *Journal of Punjab Studies*, which would be under new leadership beginning 2015, a group of us are committed to an agenda of fundamental research. The dissemination of this plan would begin with a series of critical editions and translations of early Sikh texts. These would include *Sakhi Babe Nanak Di* (ed. and trans. by G.S. Mann and Ami P. Shah); *Varan Bhai Gurdas* (ed. and trans. by Rahuldeep Singh Gill); *Sri Gur Sobha* by Sainapati (ed. and trans. by Ami P. Shah); and *Sikh Court Literature* (edited by Ami P. Shah). In addition, we would bring to completion projects that include *Essays in Sikh Literature* (G.S. Mann); *Essays in Sikh History* (G.S. Mann); *The Global Sikhs* (G.S. Mann and Shinder S. Thandi); and *Brill's Encyclopedia of Sikhism* (edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, G.S. Mann, Kristina Myrvold, and Eleanor Nesbitt).

These initiatives would advance scholarly understanding of the Sikh community, the region of the Punjab, and the teaching of Punjabi as a foreign language, to a new phase of development and would simultaneously secure for our Program a landmark spot in the history of Sikh and Punjab Studies in North America. I only hope that our activities of the past years meet the expectations of the creators of the position at UCSB as well as the Sikh and Punjabi community in general, which, in my view, is the primary beneficiary of this effort!

## **2. Sikh Studies at University of California, Riverside**

### **A Decade of Sikh Studies at the University of California, Riverside (2005 - Today) by Professor Pashaura Singh**

The beginning of the twenty-first century has seen the growth of 'Sikh Studies' as a distinct area of scholarship in some of the North American universities. In the University of California system, the Riverside campus became the second endowed chair to advance the study of Sikh religion and culture after the establishment of the Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair in Sikh and Punjab Studies at UC Santa Barbara in 1999. The Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UC Riverside was established in memory of the late Phoenix-based cardiologist who died tragically in 2000. His wife, Saranjit Kaur Saini approached the Sikh Foundation of Palo Alto with her husband's bequest of \$350,000 to establish the endowed chair at UC Riverside. Additionally, there were \$120,000 in gifts from various donors. A Gift

Agreement was signed between the UC Riverside Foundation, Dean of College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, the Sikh Foundation and the Estate of Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini on January 16-28, 2002 with the following stated purpose: "This gift is meant to build academic capacity, strength and visibility in matter pertaining to Sikh culture and religion, in collaboration with other Sikh initiatives throughout the UC system as outlined in the May 16, 2000 multi-campus Sikh and Punjabi Studies Initiative at the University of California."

The College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS) at the University of California advertised the position in the Fall of 2004, inviting nominations and applications of senior scholars in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, to be filled at the associate or full professor level by July 1, 2005. Professor June O'Connor, the chair of the search committee, alerted me to this position on October 28, 2004 to "consider this for yourself or to nominate another whom you think would be appropriate." After serious consideration for four days I replied that I will be submitting my application for this position before the deadline of December 1, 2004. After an initial review of my application in December I was further advised to submit a representative sampling of teaching evaluations from various sorts of classes I had taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, along with selected published works as most representative of my scholarly interests and contributions. On February 22, 2005 I received the communication from the chair, indicating that "the Sikh Studies Search Committee is very impressed with your file of materials and I write to invite you to our campus for an interview." Subsequently, the date of my interview was fixed on Tuesday, April 19, 2005, providing me with an information sheet to guide my understanding of the search process. Due to time constraints in the schedule and continuity and fairness across all of the candidate interviews, the search committee had specifically discouraged private meals and meetings of candidates with community donors and their constituents.

On the interview day the chair of the search committee had initial meeting with me at Coffee Co. at the Mission Inn in the morning. Then I was escorted back to Religious Studies Department at UCR where I had a lengthy conversation with the search committee. Being an interdepartmental search for an endowed chair, the six-member committee consisted of heterogeneous group of UCR faculty from the departments of Religious Studies, English, Women's Studies, and Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages. I had to face very tough questions about my interdisciplinary research focus and my position at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. It was followed by campus tour and conversation with UCR students as part of student-candidate interactions. Members of Sikh Student Association at UCR, in particular, asked me very intriguing questions about the controversy over my doctoral thesis at the University of Michigan in the 1990s. The chair of the search committee was taking notes of my responses to the controversial issues. At the luncheon meeting at Barn Patio I had a very productive and in-depth

conversation with CHASS faculty members from the Department of Religious Studies.

In the afternoon I had individual meeting with the Interim Dean Joel Martin of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences. He was more interested in my current research and my future plans. He explained the nature of an endowed chair which will enhance the study of Sikh religion and culture. During our forty-five minutes conversation I was constantly assured of the fairness of the search process, given the situation of behind the scene maneuverings of a special interest group within the Sikh community. I was aware of certain media reports that the Sikh community was trying to petition the university authorities to cancel the search because in their view the three candidates in the short list were not fit for the job. They wanted to have their own 'authentic Sikh scholar' from India, usually half-baked and poorly trained specialist who would flounder in a western setting and who could not make to the short list in the search process. The first candidate, Dr. Gurharpal Singh of the University of Birmingham, UK, had his interview on April 12, 2005, while the last candidate, Dr. Parminder Bhachu of Clark University, Worcester, was to come for interview on April 22, 2005, immediately after my interview. For me the reaction of the Sikh community was not unexpected. Under the circumstances I was rather trying to stay focused on my own experience of the interview process.

After meeting with the Dean I had half an hour to prepare for my public lecture on "*A Vision of Sikh Studies: Issues of Academic Integration and Legitimacy*" in a special room. I still cherish the beautiful memory of a senior colleague who brought a special pot of Indian tea and dates for me to relax for some time before my lecture. The search committee had asked each candidate to present a lecture providing "a vision of Sikh Studies" by addressing the question: How does the candidate envision this field of inquiry and its contribution to the life of the University? Within this presentation, some attention to the candidate's own research in Sikh Studies was assumed and desired. But this was not intended to be a research presentation geared to a particular disciplinary scholarly constituency as is characteristic of papers delivered at professional society meetings. Rather the formal presentations followed by discussion would occasion the inaugural showcasing of a field of studies made visible at UCR through *The Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies* and through each candidate's research foci in relation to Sikh and Punjabi Studies.

Before I arrived at the venue of public lecture the hall was already full with members of the Sikh community. I could recognize the presence of Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany and his wife, Satinder Kapany, in the front row. And, I could also recognize Dr. Jasbir Singh Mann and Dr. Hakam Singh in the audience but I did not know many others. Looking at the colorful turbans in the audience I started with a spirited Sikh Greeting *Sat Sri Akal* ['Truth is Immortal'] and delivered my lecture for forty five minutes with the help of some colorful slides. The moment I finished my talk there were number of raised hands simultaneously for asking questions. The moderator allowed each

one to ask any question related to my talk. But soon they became abusive in attacking my scholarship and questioning my ability to hold a Sikh Studies Chair. I was extremely careful not to lose my temper. I kept my cool and responded to their questions in a very positive tone. Then the search committee members came to my defense and the moderator even tried to explain the difference between the 'pulpit' and 'podium' through which a religious tradition is studied through 'confessional' and 'academic' approaches respectively. Even a senior colleague questioned the members of the Sikh community whether they would like to see more ignorance among Americans about the Sikhs and their traditions by blocking the establishment of Sikh Studies Chair at UC Riverside. He referred to my presentation when he gave the example of Balbir Singh Sodhi who was shot dead in Phoenix, Arizona, on September 15, 2001 after 9/11 event by a self-described 'patriot' who mistook him for a Muslim. The community members were, however, following their own agenda. It was quite evident that they had fully planned their strategy to sabotage the search process.

After the public lecture the search committee had allotted one hour exclusively for members of the Sikh community and student group on campus to meet with the candidate for conversation together with one or more search committee members. Therefore, the Dean arranged a special meeting with the community members at another venue for answering their questions. They repeated the same issues and became more aggressive. The Dean had to interrupt them number of times to be more civil in their conversation. Following meeting with the Sikh community I was taken to dinner at Ciao Bella with CHASS faculty members. During the conversation I was responding to their questions to the best of my ability, even though realizing in my heart that this is another missed opportunity. Next morning I flew back to Detroit and when I opened my computer in Ann Arbor I saw a message from a senior colleague: "I want to express my personal admiration for your bravery and class during what must have been, at times, an ordeal here at UCR. Whatever becomes of this search, you have our respect for the way you handled yourself. Let us hope for the best. My sense is that it was a minority who were so abusive. Many members of the community approached me after your talk, telling me how much they liked what I said. I think that signaled a lot of support for you" (Personal communication, Ivan Strenski, April 20, 2005).

On May 8, 2005 I received a telephone call from Interim Dean Joel Martin who invited me and my wife to Riverside for the second visit to campus to work out the details of the offer of the Sikh Studies position. The search committee had made a unanimous recommendation to select me for this position, and it was followed by a unanimous recommendation by the Department of Religious Studies. The Dean had accepted their recommendation to invite me for the second campus visit on May 24-27, 2005 to explore in more depth the feasibility and details related to the endowed chair appointment at UCR. It was made clear to me that it is the procedure at UCR for the faculty to recommend appointments; it is the role of the Chancellor to

make the formal appointment in letter form. During this second campus visit I had the opportunity to meet with the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor (EVC) Ellen Wartella, Interim Dean Joel Martin, faculty and the chair of the Department of Religious Studies. My wife, Baljeet and I also had Riverside residential tour with Connie Ransom to see different locations for buying a house. We were introduced to Mortgage Origination Program (MOP) in the Office of Economic Development and Real Estate Services which thoroughly explained campus policies regarding the housing loan program. Professor June O'Connor, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, made the formal offer of my appointment at a senior professorial level on the basis of my academic credentials and publications. Thus began a new chapter in my academic life.

### **'Growing Pains' in the Field of Sikh Studies**

The special interest group of the Sikh community of Southern California came to know about my selection for the Sikh Studies position. They intensified their lobbying efforts to block my appointment. On their petition to the Chancellor they were given the opportunity to make special presentation before a seven-member committee of University administration headed by the Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor, Ellen Wartella, on June 14, 2005. Most instructively, the public university does not inquire about people's beliefs as a feature of their hiring; to do so is illegal. The University realized that within the Sikh community there is division and disagreement, as is true of every religious community. This was made visible through the multiple emails, faxes, and letters received. The University was in no position to take sides. The University welcomed the Sikh community to the public lectures and even provided a forum for extended conversation with the candidates. The University even allowed additional appeals and presentations at the request of a particular group within the Sikh community. The University reminded the representatives of that particular group that although they were given voice in a spirit of neighborliness, they did not have a vote on university appointments.

The University administration firmly held the view that to yield to community special interest groups was to risk the research reputation of the University and to invite academic chastisement, undesirable publicity, and other unpleasant challenges from within the Academy. If this selective community special interest group achieves its goal of preventing the recommended appointment, faculty may well be inclined to mobilize and to write to Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany of the Sikh Foundation, advising him to direct Foundation funds not to UC campuses, but toward the establishment of a Sikh College or University where the Sikh community is free to make its own faculty appointment.

Unsurprisingly, the special interest group engaged the efforts of Joginder Singh Vedanti, Jathedar of Akal Takhat, who made a very provocative speech against me at Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha of Los Angeles, Alhambra, CA, on July 4, 2005. He repeated the same condemnation at Riverside Gurdwara on

July 5, 2005. Most of the presidents of Gurdwaras in California were present. The Jathedar issued a directive that Pashaura Singh should not be allowed to speak in any Gurdwara. My Sister-in-Law, the late Bibi Jasbir Kaur Khalsa (1947-2011) was sitting in the audience when this provocative speech was delivered in the Sikh congregation. Because of this venomous propaganda she became exceedingly alarmed about my safety in Riverside if I ever joined the University of California. Later on she had a very candid conversation with the Jathedar of Akal Takhat that he was simply being manipulated by this particular group to advance its own agenda. All Sikhs have some residual respect for the institution of the Akal Takhat, but most in the diaspora also know that in actual practice, it is a very undemocratic and often trouble-stirring operation. As a matter of fact, the American government prevented one Jathedar from visiting the US about two decades ago because he was a convicted murderer and also because he was intent in asserting militant control over all Sikh institutions in North America.

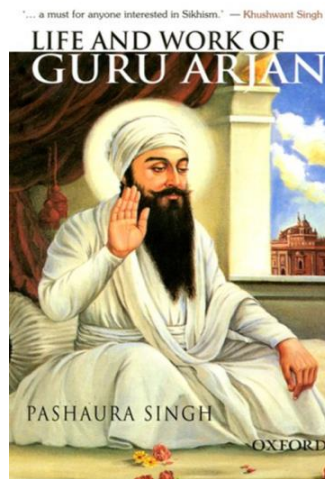
Meanwhile, my appointment file was undergoing the “tiered review process” during the months of summer. On August 22, 2005 the Chancellor France A. Cordova approved my appointment as Professor of Religious Studies, effective July 1, 2005. My appointment came after extensive review by the department, the Dean’s Office, the Academic Senate, and a special ad hoc committee charged with examining my academic credentials. Although I was previously considered a candidate for the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, the search for a chair-holder was indefinitely postponed pending formal approval of the chair by the University of California Office of the President. This was partly done because certain donors had reneged on their commitment to honor their pledges. The Executive Vice Chancellor (EVC) and Provost, Ellen Wartella, wrote letters to various individuals from the Sikh community to join her in welcoming me to my new position. I joined UC Riverside from the Fall quarter of 2005.

### ***Life and Work of Guru Arjan (2006)***

I started my work at UCR with much enthusiasm, observing the classes of my colleagues and making adjustment to my syllabi of different courses according to the quarter system from the semester system that I followed at the University of Michigan for 13 years. I cannot forget the warmth with which my colleagues welcomed me to the department. I offered the following three undergraduate courses in the first academic year: “Religions of India” (RLST 101), “Sikhism” (RLST 104) and “Saints and Gurus” (RLST 180).

Meanwhile, my monograph – *Life and Work of Guru Arjan: History, Memory and Biography in the Sikh Tradition* – was published by the Oxford University Press in a highly significant year, 2006 being the fourth centenary of his martyrdom. Unsurprisingly, it was on the “Best Sellers List” in India (*Tribune 2006*). It is an ambitious study of a highly influential period of Sikh history during which the complex process of crystallization of the Sikh tradition reached a significant milestone. It follows a multidisciplinary

paradigm in the reconstruction of Guru Arjan's life based upon history, memory, tradition and mythic representation. Guru Arjan is so culturally pervasive that writing about him means writing about culture. The reconstruction of his life, therefore, offers a window to look into not only the particular dynamics of Sikh history and culture but also into the larger question of rapidly changing landscape of religion and culture in Mughal India.



The book on Guru Arjan was received very well in Sikh circles. The late Dr. Amrik Singh and Dr. Mohinder Singh took me to dinner at India International Centre in Delhi to celebrate its timely publication. Dr. Jaspal Singh, Principal of Khalsa College in Delhi (currently the Vice Chancellor of Punjabi University, Patiala), invited me and his faculty to his house for a dinner conversation on the book. Dr. Dalbir Singh Dhillon, the author of *Sri Guru Arjan Dev Ji* published by Sikh History Research Board of Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) in 2006, was truly impressed by the interdisciplinary approach I followed in my work on Guru Arjan. Even the late Yash Raj Chopra wanted to make a film on Guru Arjan on the pattern of *The Passion of the Christ* which is a 2004 American epic biblical drama film directed by Mel Gibson and starring Jim Caviezel as Jesus Christ. He wanted me to be involved in the script of the movie. I asked him to take the SGPC and the Akal Takhat into confidence first about this project. He was quite optimistic of the approval of his idea but I never heard him back after this initial conversation.

### **The UCR Administration and the Role of the Sikh Community Representatives**

I

in the Fall of 2006 Stephen Cullenberg became the new Dean of the College of

Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS). He took fresh initiatives to address the unresolved issue of Sikh Studies Chair. By that time the Sikh Studies endowment had about \$38,000 left to be contributed by three donors over the period of two years. There was also a concern that at least one of the donors have held off his pledge. Also, the administration was seriously considering two ideas: one was to use this money on Sikh conferences and other scholarly activities without the establishment of a Chair, and other was to establish the Chair as named in the agreement. In a meeting with the Dean along with the Chair of the Department of Religious Studies on November 16, 2006 I did my best to resist the first option in order to protect the establishment of the Chair.

On May 11, 2007 Dean Cullenberg organized “a luncheon for leaders in the Sikh community featuring fine music and gourmet of Indian cuisine” at the Dean’s Patio. The two key persons involved in the fund-raising effort for Sikh Studies at UCR, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany and Dr. Harkeerat Singh Dhillon, attended the meeting along with Dr. Jasbir Singh Mann, Dr. Baljeet Sahi, Raminderjit Singh Sekhon, Ajit Singh Randhawa and some other people. A special *tabla* recital by Abhiman Kaushal (one of the leading *tabla* artists in the world) was organized by the Music Department. Professor Gurinder Singh Mann of UC Santa Barbara delivered a public lecture on “Sikh Immigration” after the lunch, giving an informed glimpse into Sikhism in the diaspora. This presentation wonderfully coincided with the “immigration” theme in CHASS for the academic year. As a matter of fact the public lecture and lunch were part of Administration’s attempt to build town-gown cooperation.

Despite the administration’s best efforts and intentions, lobbying activities, both inside and outside the university, continued to the ongoing resistance to the establishment of Sikh Studies Chair. By this time the University had started giving thought to returning the money to the Sikh Foundation. On August 22, 2007 Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany expressed sadness that the university has not made the appointment to the Sikh Studies Chair and that a small group of people have so much voice in this process. The silent majority wants this Chair and other university chairs to be implemented: “It would be a real shame to return the money to the Sikh Foundation. As a leader of that Foundation, he and others will support the University’s appointment.”

Professor Gurinder Singh Mann came to know about this unfortunate development. He expressed his concern to Professor June O’Connor, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies, on 13 September 2007: “I hear of some not very positive developments regarding the Sikh Studies Chair. Is there any way I could be of any help? Please let me know.” The Department Chair expressed her concern to the Dean of CHASS that the Sikh resistance community needs some real leadership from people like Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany and Dr. Gurinder Singh Mann who might talk sense into them about the long-range picture: “They are sabotaging themselves.” The Administration response was straightforward: “The decision has been made to not appoint a Sikh Studies Chair at UCR. OP (Office of the President) is looking into the



procedure of how to return the funding...I think you should let Pashaura know the status of this decision.”

### **The Role of Academics in the Field of Sikh Studies**

The scholars working in the field of Sikh Studies discussed this matter seriously at the annual American Academy of Religion (AAR) meeting held on 18 November 2007 at San Diego. Professor Louis E. Fenech took initiative to write a strong letter on behalf of other concerned scholars of Sikh Studies to UC Administration, including the Office of the President (OP) at Oakland, on November 30, 2007. He signed the letter on behalf of Dr. Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, Dr. Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, Dr. Robin Rinehart, Dr. Balbinder Singh Bhogal, Dr. Doris R. Jakobsh, Dr. Michael Hawley, Dr. Susan Prill and Dr. Pashaura Singh. The text of the letter begins with a “deep concern and dismay at UCR’s decision to no longer appoint a Sikh Studies Chair” and maintains that “UCR by so doing may have appeared to succumb to the pressure offered by a very small though vocal minority who had in the early 1990s successfully bullied the University of Toronto to abolish its own nascent Sikh Studies program to the great detriment of students and scholars of the Sikh Tradition.”

The third paragraph of the letter reads: “As the academic study of the Sikh tradition is relatively new, the Sikh community has had little experience in dealing with the academic study of their tradition. What in other religious traditions is seen as serious academic scholarship is, when directed towards Sikhism, often misinterpreted particularly by the vocal group mentioned above as an attack on the Sikh religion itself and subsequently an attack on the Sikh people and that which they hold most dear. Unfortunately, this situation has led to their taking a hasty stance against the proposed UCR chair which is definitely not in their long-term interests nor in the continuing interests of the Sikh community, a community besieged since the horrific events of 9/11. Indeed, such activities could well jeopardize the future of Sikh chairs throughout the collective academy itself.”

Hoping that this “Sikh Foundation promise might still be realized at UC Riverside” the letter ends with the plea: “We the undersigned would greatly appreciate if UCR would reconsider this decision as it adversely affects all of us, professors, students, and those of us deeply concerned with the future of Sikh Studies.” The letter certainly had a positive impact on the thinking of the administration. On December 24, 2007 the UCR administration had a conference call with Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany who “roared like a lion” during the call and impressed upon them to establish the Sikh Studies Chair at UCR. Most importantly, on January 8, 2008 Executive Vice Chancellor (EVC) and Provost Ellen A. Wartella responded to Professor Louis E. Fenech’s Letter: “We are in agreement that we will move forward in establishing the Sikh Studies Chair at UCR.”

### **Sikh Foundation Endows Chair at UCR**

On May 14, 2008 the Executive Vice Chancellor (EVC) and Provost Ellen A. Wartella formally appointed me “as the Jasbir Singh Saini Endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the Riverside Campus of the University of California, effective April 1, 2008.” This appointment was in addition to my professorial appointment in the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. It is instructive to note that “an endowed chair is one of the most important gifts to higher education, it is an honor that fosters academic excellence and recognizes superior faculty.” It provides invaluable financial support above and beyond salary that the chair-holder uses in research, teaching or service activities. It dramatically increases our capacity for organizing international conferences, seminars and outreach activities.

Bettye Miller ran the story in *UC Riverside Newsroom* on June 5, 2008 under the title: “Sikh Foundation Endows Chair at UCR: Pashaura Singh is appointed to the Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies.” The chair honors the memory of the late Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini, who was known for his expertise in treating heart-rhythm problems and served as chief of the cardiology department at Thunderbird Samaritan Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona. It will go a long way to make Sikhs more familiar to members of the university community, and will help break down barriers that exist between Sikhs and other people who perceive them in a stereotypical manner. It will help through its academic activities to erode the ignorance that now exists. It will bring academic respectability to the field of Sikh Studies. Indeed, teaching about Sikh religion and culture will reach far beyond the boundaries of the campus and will play a significant role in addressing urgent community concerns. Professor June O’Connor remarked that “this chair is important to our campus because it provides in perpetuity the opportunity for students of every worldview and every region to become knowledgeable about history, literature, music, art, religious beliefs and practices, and debates characteristic of the Sikh tradition, in its homeland of Punjab in India and throughout diaspora.”

It is no wonder that the special interest group was able to mobilize the Sikh community of Southern California to organize a protest against my appointment to the endowed chair at the UCR campus on September 26, 2008. Following the protest a delegation of five Sikhs – namely Dr. Jasbir Singh Mann of Anaheim, Professor Gurdev Singh Sandhu of Fontana, Dr. Dhanwant Singh Gill of Riverside, Dr. Baljeet Sahi of La Canada, and Mr. Raminderjit Singh Sekhon of Corona – met with Chancellor Timothy P. White. They presented a memorandum of their objections. The chancellor assured them that if they could provide him with a concise statement of their objections against my research he would be willing to examine those allegations per University of California Riverside (UCR) Policy & Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct (UCR Policy 529-900). This policy directs the UCR Vice Chancellor for Research, Dr. Charles Louis, to review the allegations in his capacity as the Research Integrity Officer for UC

Riverside. As such, he is charged with coordinating all procedures related to allegations of research misconduct by anyone performing research, broadly defined, under the campus' sponsorship.

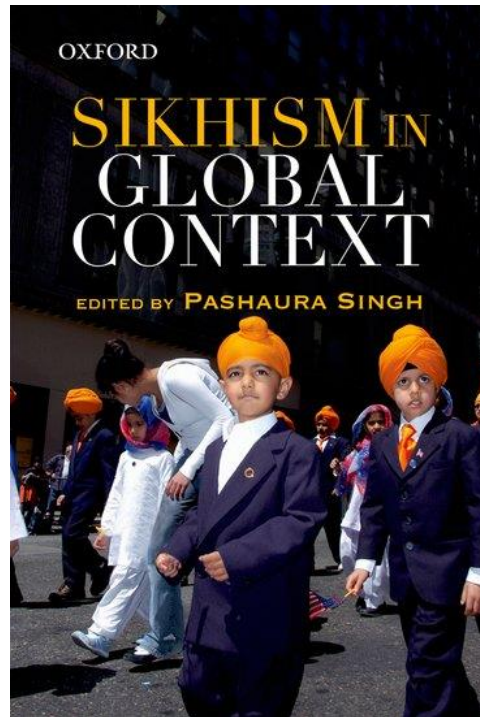


As the spokesperson of Coalition of Gurdwaras of California, Raminderjit Singh Sekhon wrote the letter on November 7, 2008 to the chancellor, along with associated documents regarding my academic scholarship, in which he asserted that "... Dr. Singh has published derogatory Sikh literature under the guise of academic research ...". The allegations were evaluated in detail by applying standard tests by Dr. Charles Louis. He concluded his findings in the following paragraph: "The University's policies promote the toleration of ideas. University policies do not provide a framework for assigning guilt for "wrong" ideas, nor procedures for apologizing to people whose authority has been "defied." The focus of this complaint is on limiting toleration of ideas, and the remedies requested are not within the authority of the University." In closing his response to Raminderjit Singh Sekhon's letter, Chancellor Timothy P. White explicitly stated: "After careful review, I concur with Dr. Louis that the allegations asserted by the Coalition fail to fall within the definition of research misconduct established by UCR policy, and that these allegations are not sufficiently credible and specific to warrant further investigation" (See "University of California Riverside Chancellor Clears Prof. Pashaura Singh of All Allegations of 'Wrongdoing'": <http://www.sikhchic.com/article-detail.php?id=762&cat=26>).

#### **1<sup>st</sup> International Conference in Sikh Studies:**

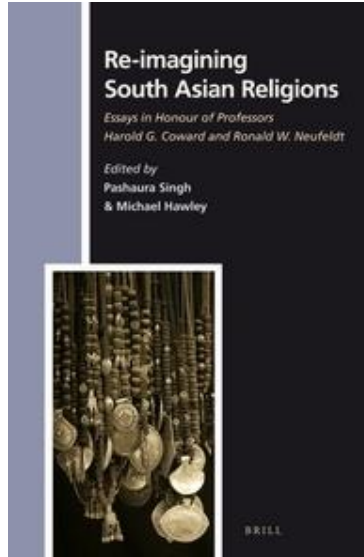
As the Chair-holder I organized the first major 3-day international research seminar on "Sikhism in Global Context" on December 4-6, 2008 at the historic Mission Inn, where twenty-two scholars from four continents presented their papers. The participants focused on Sikh life and thought as a global

community. The plenary session was attended by seventy people. It was a great success. A bunch of selected papers from this conference were edited for publication by the Oxford University Press in 2011.



### **2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference:**

A two-day international conference on “Re-Imagining South Asian Religions: A Conversation on Old World Cultures through 21<sup>st</sup> Century” was organized by the Saini Chair on Friday and Saturday, March 4-5, 2011 at the University of California, Riverside. Fourteen participants from Canada and USA presented their research papers. The scholarly interests of the participants in this seminar represented a diverse range of methodological and theoretical frameworks (e.g. history, philosophy, textual exegesis, myth and ritual, psychology of religion, feminist theory, and ethics) covering the Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions.



The papers presented in the conference were edited by me and Michael Hawley in honor of Professors Harold H. Coward and Ronald W. Neufeldt. The volume was published by Brill as part of its Numen Series. The opening section of this volume begins with the preface that puts the research seminar into perspective by highlighting the various activities of this event. It is followed by the introduction which deals with the interpretive discussion of various essays. The opening section ends with the personal reflections of Professor Harold G. Coward and Professor Ronald W. Neufeldt. The following three sections cover all the various essays in the volume.

### **Inauguration of McLeod Library**

At our annual Fall Retreat in September 2010, the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies voted unanimously and enthusiastically to endorse my proposal to work toward purchasing the library of the late Professor W. H. McLeod, for Rivera Library. The McLeod library was offered to me and UC Riverside by the executor on a right-of-first-refusal basis. With the collaboration of the Department of Religious Studies, the Saini Chair, the Holstein Chair and the Rivera Library, we were able to inaugurate the McLeod library on March 4, 2011. The library contains a number of rare and intellectually valuable items, and its acquisition has made UCR's South Asian collection a truly significant one.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference in Sikh Studies

A three-day international conference on “Dialogues with/in Sikh Studies: Texts, Practices and Performances” was organized by the Saini Chair on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, May 10-12, 2013 at the University of California, Riverside. Thirty-five participants from Canada, UK, Amsterdam, India and USA presented their research papers. The scholarly interests of the participants in this seminar offered a diverse range of methodological and theoretical frameworks (e.g. history, philosophy, textual studies, hermeneutics, arts, ethnomusicology, ethics, ethnography and ‘lived religion’ approaches). The main purpose of this conference was to explore interdisciplinary approaches, resulting from academic inquiries into Sikh texts, as well as the practices that surround them and their performance. The dialogues to be explored were made possible by the environment of the university, which served as a place where scholars from many fields and disciplines came together to pursue critical inquiries and comparisons. In many ways the Sikh community has been very supportive of academic inquiries – though, at times, they have voiced outright criticism. Our hope for this conference was to provide a forum that focused on how academic discussions and those arising in the community at large could complement one another, rather than being at odds.



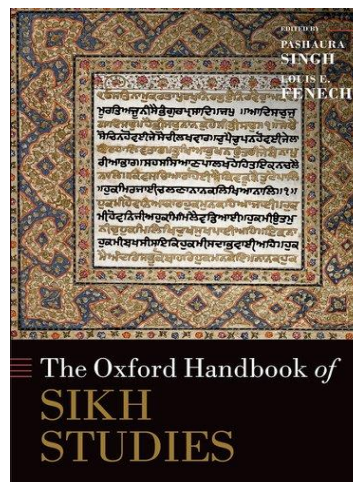
This was the largest conference in which all the eight Sikh Studies Chair-holders participated for the first time. We were also fortunate to have UCR’s Interim Chancellor Dr. Jane Close Conoley speak at the reception in the evening. This conference differed from the first two by opening its doors to the Sikh community to engage with the scholars in the field of Sikh studies not simply as audience members, but also participating members of the conference panels. In particular, our Sikh critics were invited and some of them even

presented papers in the panels. We have moved away from the stage of confrontation in pursuit of a win-win strategy that will help usher in a new era of cooperation and understanding. Let us hope this new spirit prevails.

### The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies

The Oxford University Press (UK) handpicked me from an international pool of scholars in the field of Sikh Studies to edit this volume in collaboration with Louis E. Fenech. After going through the review process our proposal for this new research project was formally approved by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press. The present Handbook contains fifty-one essays by a team of international experts in the field of Sikh Studies, integrating the study of Sikhism within a wide range of critical and, in many ways, postcolonial perspectives on the nature of religion, society, literature, art, institutions, gender, diaspora, ethno-nationalism, and revisionist historiography. It will provide a suitably lucid and critically nuanced volume which integrates all of these perspectives into a single framework, innovation well in keeping with the mandate of the new series of Oxford Handbooks. This volume is being published online first, followed by the print edition in 2014.

*The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* is divided into eight thematic sections that explore different ‘expressions’ of Sikhism. Historical, literary, ideological, institutional, and artistic expressions are considered in turn, followed by discussion of Sikhs in the Diaspora, and of caste and gender in the Sikh community (*Panth*). Each section begins with an essay by a prominent scholar in the field, providing an overview of the topic. Further essays provide detail and further treat the fluid, multivocal nature of both the Sikh past and the present. The handbook concludes with a section considering future directions in Sikh Studies.



### Teaching

During the last nine years at UC Riverside I have taught the following undergraduate and graduate courses:

- Sikhism (RLST 104) – Upper Division Course (UDC)
- Religions of India (RLST 101) — UDC
- Saints and Gurus (RLST 180) — UDC
- Modern Hinduism (RLST 108) — UDC
- Introduction to Comparative Scripture (RLST 02) – Lower Division Course
- From Text To Scripture: Canon, Performance and Reception (RLST 241) – Graduate Seminar
- Historiography of Sikh Hermeneutics (RLST 263) – Graduate Seminar
- Representations, Interpretations and Critical Histories (RLST 200B) – Core Graduate Seminar

In addition, I have also taught Classical Punjabi (Sacred Language of the Sikhs) to my doctoral students who are specializing in the field of Sikh Studies. I frequently employ modern technological tools (such as PowerPoint and audio-visual aids) to expose my students to different scholarly perspectives on the issues at hand in my lessons and encourage them to work independently on particular topics to make their individual or group presentations in the class. Thus they actively get involved in the learning process. In the classroom I have constantly reminded my students that in addition to the classic scholarship of discovery there is the scholarship of application and teaching. In my mind, the process involves conflating discovery with application and teaching. I have had an interesting and, in the eyes of an American student, perhaps intriguing life; by integrating the experiences of my life into my teaching, I have contributed much about intercultural understanding, cultural pluralism, and diversity.

My pedagogy has aimed at inculcating in the student mind an independent faculty of analysis. I have thus tried to foster inquisitiveness about the human condition and accommodation for diverse value systems. This encourages my students to develop an attitude of understanding without an inordinate ethnocentrism, or needlessly disagreeing on academic issues with rancor. In my teaching experience I have observed that non-Sikh students often write good term papers by doing careful research of various sources. Most of the Sikh students, on the other hand, take it for granted that they know everything about Sikhism from their background and hence they do not feel the need to do careful research. They write their term papers in a hurry at the eleventh hour. However, this should not be considered as a negative judgment on all Sikh students. There are always certain exceptional Sikh students who participate enthusiastically in class discussions and write excellent papers.



### **Conclusion**

Although the beginning of my career at UC Riverside was marked by a controversy within the Sikh community, the ensuing personal challenge has made me more circumspect and resolute in my academic endeavors. In addition, it has sensitized me to the fact that what we write as scholars is not only intended for a small group of other scholars in the field but for the world audience at large. For me, academic freedom is not free; it comes with heavy cost. The main focus of my research has been to understand topics related to Sikhism within the broader study of South Asia, and to link them with theories and methodologies of various humanistic disciplines, particularly hermeneutics and textual studies within the history of religion. Recently, I have moved away from my official ‘province’ of textual studies to an investigation of classical and folk traditions of North Indian music. My current research project seeks to explore a whole range of questions about the interconnectedness between music and the sacred – the relationship between music and religion, or spirituality.

Instead of sitting in the ivory tower of academics I perceive myself to be a public intellectual. I have delivered lectures in the public forums at the invitation of various Sikh organizations, including interfaith and volunteer institutions in North America, UK and India. Whenever I get the opportunity to participate in outreach programs I do so enthusiastically, since these programs are essential for understanding diaspora and also building an informal base among the diaspora Sikhs. In the end, I would like to extend a personal invitation to the members of the Sikh community, particularly Sikh organizations of California, to work together in the discipline-based training of a new generation of promising young scholars in the area of Sikh Studies. This will open up a wide range of academic appointment options for the young man or woman contemplating commitment to a lifetime of scholarship in the field.

### **3. Sikh Studies at University of California, Santa Cruz**

#### **Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz by Professor Nirvikar Singh**

[This is a revised and extended version of a talk given at the UC Santa Barbara conference on Sikh and Punjabi Studies, May 16-17, 2014. I am grateful to Professor Gurinder Singh Mann, organizer of that conference, for inviting me to make that presentation. I also acknowledge the help of numerous individuals who have contributed to making the program a success – I have tried to recognize some of them individually in the body of the paper, but apologize to those whom I have inadvertently left out.]

This paper summarizes the objectives, activities and possible future directions of the program in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the University of California,

Santa Cruz. It includes a discussion of organizational structures, conceptual framing, and educational constituencies for the program.

### **Introduction**

The Sikh and Punjabi Studies program at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) is the youngest of the three programs in the UC system, and distinguished from the other two – at UC Santa Barbara and UC Riverside – by some special features. The program can be said to have begun with my selection to hold the Sarbjit Singh Aurora Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UCSC. However, the genesis of the program goes back much further. In the late 1990s, I was a Trustee of the Sikh Foundation, and worked with Dr. Narinder Kapany, Chairman of the Sikh Foundation and a Trustee of the UCSC Foundation, to develop and submit a proposal for a Sikh and Punjabi Studies program at UCSC. However, this effort did not gain any traction. There was, at around this time, a parallel but independent effort to build a South Asian Studies program at UCSC, but that also did not make any substantive progress.

Meanwhile, Dr. Kapany had donated an endowment to create the Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair at UC Santa Barbara, and Professor Gurinder Singh Mann had been selected to fill that position, with the inauguration taking place in 1999. Professor Mann's position was in the Religious Studies department and the interdisciplinary Global Studies program. Soon thereafter, Dr. Kapany also facilitated the creation of an endowment to support work in Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UC Irvine, under the auspices of the UC systemwide Humanities Research Institute (HRI). The donation for this endowment came from the family of Sarbjit Singh Aurora, who had passed away at a sadly young age. Over time, this endowment became dormant, and it was agreed to move it to UCSC, in the form of a new endowed Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies.

The new Sarbjit Singh Aurora Chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies was to be housed in the Division of Humanities. Initially, the History Department conducted an international search, but did not get as far as inviting candidates to the campus. The next year, the position was broadened to be potentially in any department in the Humanities Division, and finalists were selected and invited to campus. In the end, after some delays, the external search did not reach a successful conclusion, and the then-Dean of Humanities approached me and invited me to consider taking on the position. This was late in the Fall quarter of 2010. In March 2011, the campus held a formal inauguration event, giving us a chance to honor the memory of Sarbjit Singh Aurora and the generosity of his family.

My own disciplinary background is in economics, where I have done a considerable amount of work on the Indian economy. However, in 2010 I had just finished three years working directly for UCSC's Chancellor on campus initiatives in Silicon Valley. When I was asked to take on the job of inaugurating and leading Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UCSC, I felt it was my responsibility to the community and the campus to accept. In some ways, I had

been unintentionally preparing for this role, alongside my theoretical and empirical work in economics. In the 1990s, I had written an analysis of the Punjab crisis, comparing it with the fraught situation in Kashmir (Singh, 1998). Subsequently, I had written on the Green Revolution (Singh and Kohli, 2005), Punjab's attempts to create a software industry (Singh, 2008), rural Internet kiosks in Punjab (Kaushik and Singh, 2004), inter-state river water sharing issues – including Punjab as one important case (Richards and Singh, 2002), and healthcare in Punjab (Singh, 2011). The work on the Green Revolution had been a byproduct of a small endowment at UCSC for studies of Punjab's economy and polity, funded by Dr. Kapany. For several years, I made small grants for graduate student projects on these topics, but then had to stop for lack of funds and student interest.

I had also written on topics unrelated to economics: a paper on Bhai Mohan Singh Vaid, a prominent figure in the Singh Sabha movement (Singh and Singh, 1999), and – among the work I am most proud of – a paper in which I excavated the problematics of the claim that Guru Nanak was a “Sant,” indeed, the claim that the “Sant movement” is a valid category at all (Singh, 2001). I later included this issue, along with a discussion of the weaknesses of Harjot Oberoi's assertions regarding the creation of a Sikh identity, in the inaugural Guru Nanak Lecture at San Jose State University, which I delivered in 2003. As mentioned earlier, I had served as a Trustee of the Sikh Foundation for three years in the 1990s.

### **Organization and People**

Despite my scholarly background in Sikh and Punjabi Studies, I faced a challenging organizational situation at UCSC. The Chair had been allotted to the Humanities Division, and my home department is in the Social Sciences. As an existing faculty member, I would be responsible for my teaching and research duties in Economics, unless I used the endowment income to buy out time, which I did not want to do. When I spoke to the Sikh students at UCSC, it was clear that one of their foremost wishes was to have a course that would teach them about their own heritage, and extend that teaching to their non-Sikh peers at the university. A new Dean of Humanities, William Ladusaw, had just taken charge. Dean Ladusaw proved to be enormously supportive. When I proposed a new 2-unit course “Introduction to the Sikhs,” which I could and would teach in addition to my regular economics teaching, he did everything he could to speed the administrative approvals. I have now taught the course successfully three times, and I will return to describing that effort. The general point is that no new educational effort in a university can succeed without high-level administrative support, as well as a certain amount of dedicated effort by senior faculty.

More broadly, there have been several other organizational challenges for implementing a Sikh and Punjabi Studies program. UCSC does not have a Religious Studies department, such as the ones that house Sikh studies chairs at UC Santa Barbara and UC Riverside (the Jasbir Singh Saini Chair, held by

Professor Pashaura Singh). Nor does it have a department, program or center for South Asian Studies, although various faculty and administrative initiatives on South Asia have been ongoing for over a decade. Hence, there has not been a natural curricular home for Sikh and Punjabi Studies. On the other hand, UCSC's Institute for Humanities Research (IHR) has provided a strong supporting framework for conferences and other extra-curricular activities that I describe later. In particular, the Director of IHR at UCSC, Professor Nathaniel Deutsch, who also serves as Co-Director of the campus Center for Jewish Studies, has provided intellectual encouragement and administrative support for UCSC's fledgling effort in Sikh and Punjabi Studies.

Another important strength at UCSC has been the presence of Dr. Inderjit Kaur, a Research Associate in the Music Department.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the inauguration of the Aurora Chair, Dr. Kaur, also an economist as well as a musicologist, had been building on her extensive formal training in Hindustani classical music and her deep experience of singing *shabad kirtan*, to conduct research on *shabad kirtan* as well as engage in community service. Dr. Kaur had been presenting regularly at Sikh studies and ethnomusicology conferences and seminars, and she had presented her paper (Kaur, 2008) on the meaning of *ghar* in the Guru Granth Sahib, at a UC Riverside conference in 2008 organized by Prof. Pashaura Singh: given the importance for the Sikh tradition of *shabad kirtan* and the musical information in the Guru Granth Sahib, this paper ought to be recognized as one of the most important in Sikh Studies in our lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Kaur had also created an international *shabad kirtan* competition for the Hemkunt Foundation, and herself founded the Sikh Music Heritage Institute, a non-profit organization to promote education, documentation and research on Sikh music. Dr. Kaur's insights and perspectives on the field of Sikh studies, and her ability to bridge the academy and the community, while keeping core values intact, have been enormously important for what has been accomplished at UCSC in Sikh and Punjabi Studies.

Having described the organizational challenges and the people who have supported Sikh and Punjabi Studies at UCSC, I want to note that a prospective curricular home for the program has now emerged. UCSC has approved a new major in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES), to be offered within the Division of Humanities. CRES is an innovative and conceptually complex effort. The beginning of its description states that<sup>3</sup> CRES

seeks an understanding of “the public” and “the common good” as centrally constituted by racial and ethnic formations. This understanding requires the study of the dynamic power relations resulting from the cultural and institutional productions of the idea of “race” on a local, national, and global scale.

Note that “religion” does not get mentioned in the full CRES description, but one can easily add religious formations to those of race and ethnicity. CRES potentially provides a home for Sikh and Punjabi Studies that includes its

contemporary and global dimensions, and core Sikh concerns with ethics and social justice. Some of the connections will become apparent in the description of my course, later in the paper. Note also that the IHR, perhaps as an umbrella for a future Center for Sikh and Punjabi Studies, will continue to serve as organizational support for non-curricular activities of the program. Furthermore, Punjabi language teaching, also described below, has a natural home in the Languages and Applied Linguistics Department at UCSC, also in the Humanities Division.

### **Activities: Curriculum**

The new class I teach at UCSC, "Introduction to the Sikhs," is a lower division 2-unit course with no prerequisites, listed under the Humanities Division. I keep the class size below 40, to permit discussion and interaction. In the first six weeks, I provide an introductory overview; describe the Sikh belief system; give a fairly detailed, linear account of 500 years of Sikh history; and then range over music, film, art and architecture, literature, class, gender, politics and religious institutions. The last four weeks are spent on the Sikh diaspora, starting with a global overview and successively focusing on North America and California, but also putting the Sikh experience in the context of other immigrant and minority experiences. Bhagat Singh Thind, the Komagata Maru, and the Ghadar Party all feature, as do modern day efforts to deal with hate crimes and civil rights in a post-Martin Luther King and post-9-11 world. Social justice, activism and equality all receive attention, and the Sikh case studies I have mentioned can be surprisingly effective in exploring broader themes of globalization, citizenship, migration and social movements. About half my students are Sikhs or of Sikh heritage; the others span the spectrum of America's new pluralistic society. There is self-selection of course, but the students regularly amaze me in their intuitive feel for what a just and diverse society can and should be.

The students are required to make individual or group class presentations, and to write a short final paper. They choose their own topics, with advice from me when requested. Sometimes the topics are what I might term "conventional," such as the *panj kakkar*,<sup>4</sup> or Sikh women, or dealing with discrimination, though none of these is a "safe" topic by any means. But students have also chosen topics such as Sikh horse culture, gay rights and Sikhism, and Amrita Pritam's poems, which are more specialized, or somewhat off the beaten path. Dance, weddings, food and clothes are popular subjects, as well as explorations of Sikh beliefs and practices. As might be expected, many students enjoy the "lighter" cultural aspects of studying the Sikhs, and some are not thrilled with what seems to them a heavy dose of history. However, given the importance of history in shaping the community and its self-perceptions, I think that segment is essential.<sup>5</sup> I have a detailed reading list for the course, but students, as might be expected, rely heavily on web resources for their presentations and papers, so that requires some

monitoring and guidance from me, given the variation in quality and accuracy of those resources.<sup>6</sup>

One of the highlights of the course, for me as well as many of the students, is a visit to the San Jose Gurdwara in a chartered bus.<sup>7</sup> We have *langar*, sit in the *diwan*,<sup>8</sup> visit the gurdwara museum, and generally tour the magnificent site, including its extensive Khalsa School wing.<sup>9</sup> This trip is an important part of the course, as it provides an immersive lived experience of the “subject” of our course. As one might expect, given the Sikh tradition of opening their gurdwaras to all comers, the community at the gurdwara has been extremely welcoming of the students, and supportive of this effort. In Fall 2012, my second offering of the course, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times was doing a feature on Sikhs in California, and she came along for our field trip and wrote about it in her broader story, which was then syndicated on the Internet.<sup>10</sup> I mention the LA Times story because it illustrates how one can leverage the core classroom experience in terms of impact. My course is young and small, relative to those taught by my UC colleagues, but it has had an impact outside the classroom.<sup>11</sup>

Let me now describe the second curricular activity that has been launched under the aegis of the Sikh and Punjabi Studies program. The Sikh students’ other initial request was for Punjabi language classes. Although I had certified individual UC students’ Punjabi language expertise on a couple of occasions in years gone by, one needs a specialist for teaching language effectively, especially for university-level credit and credibility. Once again, though, I had the good fortune to work with Dr. Inderjit Kaur and Dean Ladusaw to reach out to the San Francisco Bay Area Sikh community for the needed funding. Representatives of the community agreed to transfer an existing endowment (the Guru Nanak Heritage Fund), also languishing elsewhere, to UCSC.

In Summer 2012, UCSC sponsored an introductory Punjabi class, and innovated by offering it at the San Jose Gurdwara. By choosing this timing and location, we were able to reach out to college students throughout the area, as well as high school students and professionals. Using materials from UC Berkeley’s long-running Punjabi language program, and with support from the Dean and the chair of the UCSC Languages and Applied Linguistics Department, I was able to create a syllabus, get the course approved in an accelerated process, and find a top-notch instructor in a nationwide search, with a search committee headed by the Languages Department chair. We were fortunate to have a college-level textbook already available, this being the fruit of many years’ labor by Prof. Gurinder Singh Mann and his students and former students at UC Santa Barbara. Summer 2014 will be UCSC’s third offering of Introductory Punjabi at the San Jose Gurdwara, and the program is still taking shape. Possible future options include adding a second quarter of instruction, making the class available on the campus during the regular academic year (which has significant advantages in terms of being able to use the campus’s existing physical and intellectual infrastructure to the fullest), and taking advantage of online Punjabi language learning resources being developed at UC Santa Barbara.

### **Activities: Extra-curricular, Research and Outreach**

Universities exist for their students. Increasingly, in a world of online information, experiences outside the formal classroom constitute an important part of learning within a university setting that cannot be duplicated online. The inauguration of the Sikh and Punjabi Studies Chair at UCSC helped to catalyze the formation of a Sikh Student Association (SSA), which has served as a focal point for learning activities and community creation among the students. The SSA has organized a panel on the Oak Creek massacre,<sup>12</sup> in which the Dean of Humanities and the Director of the IHR participated along with Sikh community members; an all-day conference on Sikh feminist and social activist perspectives that included academics and community members; and UCSC's first-ever Turban Day, which was a joyful and successful occasion, providing visibility for, and education about, an important article of faith for Sikhs. This list is in addition to several smaller more inward-focused events, where SSA members share experiences, concerns and ideas. The SSA also organized a *seva* day, with 15 students going to the San Jose Gurdwara to do *seva* in the *langar* and listen to *kirtan*. In SSA activities, my role is to provide encouragement and sometimes financial support, but the students always decide what they want to do. I also make sure that my colleagues and the administration are aware of the students' activities and efforts.

On the front of graduate student research, there is less to report, but it is not trivial. I have already alluded to the small endowment at UCSC for studies of Punjab's economy and polity, which funded some work in the mid-1990s. More recently, I advised a Master's student in Philosophy, who was wrestling with issues of Sikh identity in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Currently, there is a new doctoral student in History, who is interested in the Ghadar movement in California. Hopefully, the CRES program will one day provide a long-term home for graduate students interested in such topics. Meanwhile, I have involved the undergraduate Sikh students in a research project on Sikh entrepreneurs, which is slowly moving forward: the students have played a major role in conducting interviews with successful as well as budding entrepreneurs.

Turning to academic research by faculty, I have already mentioned how Dr. Inderjit Kaur had been actively presenting her work on Sikh *shabad kirtan* at conferences and seminars for several years before I was asked to take on the position of Sarbjit Singh Aurora Chair. Dr. Kaur conceived of an inaugural conference that would take stock of the field, bring together as many Sikh Studies scholars as possible, established and emerging, and create a comfortable space for interactions across diverse perspectives, including community members as well as students in the audience. The conference as she conceived it, on "Achievements and New Directions" in the field, took place in November 2011, and was a success on many dimensions. Not that any revolutionary new discovery was necessarily presented, but the setting brought together specialists in the field, UCSC colleagues who are not in Sikh Studies, students, and community members, to discuss a wide range of issues, and not

just purely “academic” ones.<sup>13</sup> As one of my UCSC colleagues (History professor David Anthony) put it at the conference, there is an inherent tension in the academic study of any faith tradition, and we were able to provide a space for an open, animated, but respectful set of interactions that has arguably had some positive ripple effects for subsequent Sikh studies conferences and interactions, including positive interactions with the Sikh community from outside academia.

In March 2013, Dr. Kaur and I collaborated on a second conference, this time tackling a more specific theme, that of Punjab’s place in Sikh tradition, and the current status of its economy, polity and society. Again, this was a relatively small and intimate conference, and we brought together people who might otherwise never have interacted, or thought about each other’s work. Income from the original 1990s Punjab Studies endowment, which I had been hoarding for many years, came in handy in bringing leading scholars from Punjab and throughout North America to speak on economic transformation, social problems, and environmental challenges.<sup>14</sup> This effort also had positive ripple effects: I subsequently visited Punjabi University, Patiala, gave a public lecture on Punjab’s economy, and carried an Agreement of Cooperation between UCSC and Punjabi University, signed by our Chancellor, to my host’s Vice Chancellor, who we had met through the efforts of Dr. Mahinder Singh Madan, one of our staunchest community supporters. In March of 2014, Professor Lakhwinder Singh, Director of the Centre for *Development Economics and Innovation Studies* at Punjabi University, who had spoken at the UCSC conference, organized a major international conference on the Punjab economy, where I was honored to give the keynote address, laying out possible pathways for the state’s future economic transformation. Paper presenters addressed the full range of Punjab’s economic challenges and possibilities for development, and this conference represents an ongoing effort within academia in Punjab.

Scholarly research as part of UCSC’s Sikh and Punjabi Studies program has also had a significant outreach component. Both Dr. Inderjit Kaur and I have had various opportunities to present our ongoing research at several significant conferences. These included the University of the Fraser Valley conference that coincided with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first gurdwara in North America, a conference at Santa Clara University, two at the San Jose Gurdwara co-sponsored by the Chardi Kalaa Foundation, and Prof. Pashaura Singh’s conference at UC Riverside in May 2013.<sup>15</sup> Over these past few years, we have seen a greater positive engagement of Sikh studies scholars from India and Sikh community members with the activities of scholars based in Western academia. This is a significant trend, and one that needs to be nurtured and built upon: after all, the Sikh community in all its diversity and richness is what makes it possible to do what we do. This trend needs to continue, and I will return to this topic in my conclusion.



### **Conclusion**

When I took on the position of Sarbjit Singh Aurora Chair of Sikh and Punjabi Studies, the Sikh students I spoke with summed up what they wanted from a future program: to know their own heritage better, and to be better understood by their peers. The latter objective is particularly pressing in a post-9-11 world, and is shared with a much larger effort by the Sikh community in the United States. The former goal is a natural one for a small minority in a diaspora setting, and includes not just religion and language, but the community's cultural heritage in music, literature and the visual and performing arts.<sup>16</sup> The steps taken so far at UCSC have been small ones, but any positive quantity is infinitely greater than zero. Important determinants of continued forward progress will be the ongoing support of the Sikh community, which has displayed an enormous amount of patience and persistence in trying to establish a home for Sikh and Punjabi Studies in Western academia. Collaborations with my senior colleagues in the field at UC Santa Barbara and UC Riverside will also be vital to making further progress.

However, the scope of a Sikh and Punjabi Studies program in a major research university is not limited to education and outreach. There is still an enormous amount of work to be done in clarifying some of the core issues in the Sikh heritage and tradition. In this respect, I think the Sikh community is right in some of its concerns, that some of the scholarship on the Sikhs in Western academia has been driven more by intellectual fashions rather than by a deep engagement with, and understanding of, the Sikh community and its history. For example, there are popular academic tropes that reduce Sikhs to merely being post-colonial trauma victims, or being "misled" by a handful of influential Sikh thinkers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These tropes deny the agency of Sikhs, individually and collectively. Note that my concern is not predicated on accepting any reified or overly simplified view of the community: recognizing diversity and evolution are not incompatible with respecting the Sikhs' own views of themselves and their core traditions.<sup>17</sup> I have begun a conversation with several of my colleagues in Sikh studies, seeking to deepen our collective understanding of Sikh tradition, including its diversity as well as its continuity. I think it is also incumbent on holders of chairs in Sikh studies to engage positively and sympathetically with the community in all its diversity: this does not require any compromise of academic freedom, but more fully meets the responsibilities of the holders of these chairs. This is not an easy process,<sup>18</sup> but I think any academic who chooses to be in this field should be capable of this task.

### **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup> The Music Department at UCSC is in yet another academic unit, the Division

of the Arts, illustrating the complexity of organizational structures for interdisciplinary work.

<sup>2</sup> The significance of this paper is that the question of the original meaning of the term *ghar* in the Guru Granth Sahib had effectively been lost to the Sikh community over the centuries, and Dr. Kaur's work provides the first careful and convincing analysis for that possible meaning. See Kaur (2008), as well as Kaur (2011) for the detailed analysis.

<sup>3</sup> The following extract is from the official program description, which is available at <http://registrar.ucsc.edu/catalog/programs-courses/program-statements/cres.html> (accessed June 24, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Literally, the 5 K's, the well-known Sikh or Khalsa symbols.

<sup>5</sup> Some students do choose historical topics for their presentations or papers, with instances of sacrifice and royal subjects such as Maharaja Duleep Singh being popular choices in this category.

<sup>6</sup> Students are also becoming increasingly sophisticated in their use of media tools for their presentations, and a natural avenue to pursue in the future will be individual or group projects in which students create new media resources, such as short films or multimedia compilations of cultural or social significance for the Sikh community.

<sup>7</sup> In 2014, two students who were anthropology majors treated the field trip as an opportunity for formal ethnography, and made it the basis of their class presentation. Students in the class are invited to, and often do, bring friends who are not enrolled in the class.

<sup>8</sup> *Langar* is the congregational meal eaten at the gurdwara, symbolizing community and equality. The *diwan*, with its connotations of royal audience, is the site of congregational worship in the presence of the Guru Granth.

<sup>9</sup> This is a Sunday school staffed by community volunteers, which teaches Punjabi language and Sikh heritage to children of ages from kindergarten to high school. Several hundred children are enrolled at any one time.

<sup>10</sup> An abbreviated version of the original story is online at <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/nov/19/local/la-me-sikhs-20121119> (accessed June 25, 2014). The full story as syndicated is online at <http://www.csulauniversitytimes.com/news/view.php/46131/Sikh-religion-joining-California-univers> (accessed June 25, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> I would be happy to share my syllabus and lecture slides with colleagues and would appreciate feedback and suggestions.

<sup>12</sup> Six Sikhs were killed in a Wisconsin gurdwara by an alleged white supremacist in August 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Note that the presenters and discussants were all active scholars in the field of Sikh studies, but the discussions in each session permitted much broader participation and consideration of topics going beyond the specific theme of each session. In addition, the keynote talk was delivered by Dr. Inder Mohan Singh, Chairman of the Chardi Kalaa Foundation and a highly regarded

community scholar, on “Guru Nanak’s Message for a Flat, Interconnected World.”

<sup>14</sup> This conference also gave us an opportunity to acknowledge and honor Prof. Gurinder Singh Mann’s remarkable 13 years in leading his unique and irreplaceable summer program in Punjab: his keynote talk was rich in evocative images of the region, and was made special by the presence of a number of program alumni in the audience.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Kaur has presented her pathbreaking research on Sikh musicology at these conferences, while my topics have included ongoing work on Sikh ethics and entrepreneurship, as well as an investigation of the production of knowledge with respect to Sikh studies in Western academia. In particular, I have highlighted some of the problems with scholarship in the field, with respect to asymmetric treatment of sources, and continued reliance on work that has already been found to be flawed. These issues were first surfaced in Singh (2001), and are discussed more in the conclusion.

<sup>16</sup> One possibility to be explored is a UCSC conference focused on Sikh music, film and art, to take place in 2015.

<sup>17</sup> In stating this, I believe I am articulating, in my own words, a point made very lucidly by Dr. Inderjit Kaur at the UC Riverside Sikh Studies conference in December 2008. However, she is not to be held responsible for any infelicities in my expression of this idea.

<sup>18</sup> Again, I recognize that community responses and concerns may be diverse, and may be couched in terms that are challenging to respond to, but neither of these difficulties should be insurmountable for highly-trained professionals, and as my UCSC colleague David Anthony implied at our first conference, it comes with the territory.

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