

Hofstra Sikh Studies Bulletin

Newsletter of the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies



A Look Back ...

The Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies hosted several successful international conferences in Sikhism, including *Aspects of Sikh Heritage* (April 2001), *Sikhism and Critical Theory* (September 2002) and *Sikhism and Inter-Religious Relations* (October 2003, co-hosted at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom).

Aspects of Sikh Heritage Conference

Aspects of Sikh Heritage was the first conference of many to follow and was appropriately marked as an introduction to Sikhism.

A series of panels were led by prestigious speakers, including:

- Nikky Singh, Colby College
- Navdeep Singh, University of Warwick (U.K.)
- Virinder Singh Kalra, University of Manchester (U.K.)
- Jasdev Singh Rai, University of Nottingham (U.K.)
- Amandeep Singh Madra, Victoria and Albert Museum

- Tejwant Kaur Purewal, University of Manchester (U.K.)
- Jeevan Deol, Cambridge University and Smithsonian Institute
- Gurcharan Singh, Marymount Manhattan College
- Surindar Singh Matharu, Sikh Musical Heritage (U.K.)
- Daljit Singh, Sikh Musical Heritage (U.K.)

Discussions included: "The Khalsa: Past, Present and Future"; "Reflections on the 200th Anniversary of the Sarkar Khalsa of Maharajah Ranjit Singh"; and "Sikh Musicology." The keynote speaker was T. Sher Singh from Toronto, Canada.

Sikhism and Critical Theory Conference

This second conference attracted a field of distinguished scholars from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Japan. Over the course of two days, participants debated a wide range of issues, including Sikh bodily identity, text interpretation and diasporic transnationalism. The keynote

speaker was Professor Christopher Shackle, pro-director of the University of London's prestigious School of Oriental and African Studies, and himself a leading scholar of Sikhism. A special element of this conference was the Public Forum, which featured prominent members of the Sikh community who led a discussion on the future of community education in the Sikh diaspora.

This conference marked an innovation in the field of Sikh studies. During the last two decades, the growth of Sikh settlement in North America has given the Sikh diaspora a voice hitherto occupied by a few mostly non-Sikh Western academics. Recent years have seen the emergence of new intellectual demands for a Sikh studies agenda capable of addressing the needs of a Sikh diaspora in the English-speaking world. In accordance with this demand, *Sikhism and Critical Theory* explored new ways of relating contemporary Sikh experience to recent movements of critical thinking in the humanities and social sciences.

Welcome from Bindra Endowed Chair Dr. Mandair

Welcome to this inaugural issue of *Hofstra Sikh Studies Bulletin*, the annual newsletter supported by the Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies. The aim of this newsletter is to provide the broader community with up-to-date knowledge, information and news about courses, projects and events being organized at Hofstra University. This newsletter will be published at the time of the Vaisakhi festival. Vaisakhi is both the harvest festival and the Sikh New Year, marking the birth of the Sikh order of the Khalsa.



Dr. Arvind-pal S. Mandair,
Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies

The publication of this newsletter also coincides with a remarkable period of expansion in the study of religions at Hofstra. Since the establishment of the Sikh Chair, the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies has hired scholars specializing in New Testament studies (early Christianity) and more recently in the study of Islam. With a Chair in Catholic Studies on the horizon, the department will be able to offer undergraduate study in a wide selection of the world's religious traditions, including Chinese religion, Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

In future issues, we hope to highlight not only the activities of the previous year, but also the work of our students who are studying Sikhism and South Asian religions.

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Mark Your Calendars:

Sikh Studies 2004 Events ...

The year 2004 is a special year for the Sikh community which is celebrating, among other events, the 400th anniversary of the canonization of the Adi Granth (the original Sikh scripture) and its installation at the Harimandar Sahib — the central shrine of the Sikh religion — or, as it is better known, the Golden Temple at Amritsar. It will also be 20 years since Operation Blue Star (the storming of the Golden Temple complex by the Indian army in June 1984) an event that led to one of the most traumatic periods in the history of Punjab, particularly for the Sikhs. It is appropriate that these diverse events be commemorated by reflecting on the very means by which cultural memory itself is shaped. In this special anniversary year, the Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies is proud to serve the community by hosting the following events:

Saturday and Sunday,
May 8 and 9

*Remembering and Forgetting:
Memory and Trauma in Recent Sikh
and Punjabi Experience*

Saturday, September 18

Sikh and Punjabi Film Festival

Hofstra University Establishes Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies

The Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies was established at Hofstra University in September 2000 with a generous endowment from the Bindra family of Brookville, New York. This Chair aims to provide support for the development of Sikh studies within Hofstra University, thus fostering knowledge about the religious tradition of Sikhism to be shared by Hofstra students and members of the wider community on Long Island.

Since the inauguration of the Chair, several new and innovative courses in Sikh studies, and more broadly in South Asian religions, have become available to the student community at Hofstra. These include:

- *Warrior Saints* (Religion 155): An introduction to the Sikh religion.
- *Sikh Mysticism* (Religion 157): The religious philosophy of Sikhism based on the teachings of the Sikh Gurus.
- *Indian Religions* (Religion 120): An excellent overview of the cultural and religious heritage of India with a particular emphasis on devotional religions.



Dr. Arvind-pal S. Mandair, Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies

About The Bindras

The Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Endowed Chair in Sikh Studies was endowed by Mr. Ishar Singh Bindra and family in honor of Mr. Bindra's wife and family matriarch, Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra. The Chair was established to promote the academic study of Sikh religion, culture and history. The endowment supports the appointment of a faculty member in Sikh Studies, builds the University Library's holdings in Sikhism, provides scholarship assistance to students interested in Sikh religion and culture, and funds annual conferences and lectures directed toward the academic community as well as the general public.

Mr. and Mrs. Bindra were both born in West Punjab, now part of Pakistan. After completing a distinguished career as a senior telecommunications engineer in India, Mr. Bindra and his family immigrated to the United States in 1979. Along with his sons, Mr. Bindra established an import/export business in the garment industry. Under his astute management, the Jeetish Group of Companies has evolved into a successful, diversified enterprise with interests in apparel, commodities, real estate and hotels.



Mr. and Mrs. Bindra

Ishar Singh Bindra is a founder-trustee of the Sikh Forum of New York and senior vice president of the Sri Hemkunt Foundation. He has a rich and continuous record of accomplishments in communal affairs and has been a leading supporter of various humanitarian endeavors. He was honored by the Nargis Dutt Memorial Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to the support of medical facilities in India. He is also the first Indian to be honored as Humanitarian of the Year by the Interfaith Nutrition Network, a nonprofit organization serving the hungry and homeless.



The Bindra Family with members of the Hofstra University Administration

Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra, an individual of great personal warmth and exemplary kindness, has placed education at the core of the Bindra family's values. Mrs. Bindra was so devoted to the education of her seven children that she sold her personal jewelry to allow them to attend the finest schools. She takes great pride in the fact that all of her children have distinguished themselves as professionals dedicated to Sikh values.



"We learn terms and phrases from the scripture, but also where their concept was derived from ... I'll continue to study Sikhism, even when I'm at law school."

Ajit Heir
Spring 2004 Sikhism student

A Look Ahead ...

Saturday and Sunday, May 8 and 9, 2004 *Remembering and Forgetting: Memory and Trauma in Recent Sikh and Punjabi Experience*

Remembering and Forgetting: Memory and Trauma in Recent Sikh and Punjabi Experience is an international conference that will examine the importance of memory and trauma in recent Sikh and Punjabi experience. Focusing on the three main events that underpin the psychological disembodiment of the Sikh and Punjabi self – partition (1984), insurgency and migration (post-1984) – this conference will specifically address the central role that trauma and victimization play in the politics of memory.

Speakers at this conference are leading scholars in the field of South Asian studies:

- Jerry Barrier, University of Missouri
- Paul Brass, University of Washington
- Inderpal Grewal, University of California-Irvine
- Ian Talbot, Coventry University
- Darshan Tatla, University of Birmingham
- Pal Alhuwalia, Goldsmiths College, London
- Harjot Oberoi, University of British Columbia
- Harleen Singh, Brandeis University
- Brian Axel, Swarthmore College
- Gurharpal Singh, University of Birmingham
- Gurbhagat Singh, Punjabi University, Patiala

Discussants will include Giorgio Shani of Ritsumeikan University in Japan, I.J. Singh of New York University and Rita Verma of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The keynote speaker for this event is Edith Wyschogrod, professor emeritus at Rice University and former president of the American Academy of Religion.

Preserving Sikh Heritage: A session co-organized by the Smithsonian Institute Heritage Fund and the Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies

On the second day of the *Remembering and Forgetting* conference, there will be a special session comprising three lectures on aspects of Sikh heritage and its representation. These lectures are co-sponsored by the Sikh Heritage Fund of the Smithsonian Museum. Paul Taylor of the Smithsonian Institute will open this session by talking about the Sikh heritage project at the Smithsonian and focusing on issues of identity, representation and community co-curatorship in an evolving exhibition and preservation project. Gurpreet Maini from New Delhi will then speak about the treasures and travails of the House of Bagrian. The final speaker in this session will be Mohan Singh, former director of cultural affairs, archives and museums in Punjab, who will discuss the coins of the Sikh Raj.

For more information about these events please contact Dr. Arvind Mandair at (516) 463-5615 or SikhStudies@hofstra.edu.

Saturday, September 18 Sikh and Punjabi Film Festival

Following the success of the Toronto-based Sikh and Punjabi film festival "Sisters of the Spinning Wheel," Hofstra's Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies is pleased to announce the launch of the first Sikh Film Festival in New York. The festival will screen movies and documentaries about Sikhs and Sikhism. There will also be opportunities to meet with some of the filmmakers in small discussion groups.

June 2-6, 2005 Summer Seminar on Sikh Mysticism

This is an inaugural seven-day *Residential Summer Seminar in Sikh Religious Philosophy*. This summer seminar presents a unique opportunity to experience the academic study of Sikh religious philosophy within a practice environment. This course carries three transferable undergraduate credits. It examines the nature, roles and meanings of mysticism in Sikh thought and its relationship to Sikh existence in contemporary global culture. Expressions of Sikh mysticism as found in the Sikh scripture are presented in comparative context. Students are encouraged to explore the often-misunderstood boundaries between the political and the mystical, and to learn how this contributes to modern Sikh consciousness. Outside of India this is the only academic course in Sikhism that focuses on the meaning and application of religious experience. The course will benefit anyone who wishes to develop an advanced understanding of leading theological and philosophical themes in Sikhism.

For more information about this seminar please contact Dr. Arvind Mandair at (516) 463-5615 or SikhStudies@hofstra.edu.



"I have an aunt who lives in India, and this class allowed me to explore in depth the diversity and culture within the Sikh community ... Professor Mandair is very knowledgeable and gives us a hands-on approach."

Rachel Demby
Spring 2004 Sikhism student



"Professor Mandair seeks a breadth of similarity, and parallels religious ideas, even from my own Jewish studies ... he is very passionate in his approach to Sikh studies."

Seth Harris
Spring 2004 Sikhism student

Hofstra Sikh Studies Bulletin is published by the Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in cooperation with the Office of University Relations and the Publications Department of Hofstra University. Undergraduate assistant Trevor Wolfe is a contributing writer; Dana Siljander is the graphic designer. For more information call Suzanne Shareef, Associate Director for University Relations, at (516) 463-4601.