

# Turban Legends

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“Leadership by Turban,” a book by Indian American Ravi Singh, is unique both in form and content. The first e-book to be marketed in India, it challenges some of the most common stereotypes of life in the United States of America post 9-11. “I have dedicated the book, which was released in US on the 9-11 anniversary, to Sardar Balbir Singh Sodhi who was killed in the aftermath of the WTC terrorist attack. There is great hunger among the mainstream community in the USA to get knowledge about different cultures and the book tries to satisfy that. In fact, it’s time that Sikh community came out with pride to seek an identity in the West,” says Singh, who himself regularly goes to Gurdwara at Beverly Hills.

But it’s not just after 9-11, for Singh, a Chicago-born second generation Indian American, his turban has posed challenges for him right from the playgrounds as a kid growing up in the state of Illinois. He graduated from Marmion Military Academy as 2nd Lieutenant, becoming the first Sikh and the first US cadet ever to graduate from a US military academy with a turban. But both his military career and that as a NCAA Division I golf captain, with a three-hole handicap, unceremoniously ended because the turban was unacceptable. However, today as a successful Internet entrepreneur the CEO and founder of ElectionMall Technologies, Singh has left all that behind him. In fact, from the “cornfields of Illinois” where he became the first Indian American to run for the state House of Representatives in the mid-1990s, he has today moved to LA, California, with his business. “I may not have won that election but working for important Republican campaigns like Bob Dole and George Bush, showed me the power of the Internet. In fact, my company was founded when I realised that Net was the great political equaliser. You can break the political network through technology and candidates need their websites as differentiators. Technology can also bring more transparency and ethical practices into the political procedure,” says Singh whose company is non-partisan and provides political parties and candidates the necessary online tools, services and products. With branches in Washington DC and Chicago, ElectionMall also ‘outsources’ technology work to India.

Apart from Bob Dole’s National Asian American Planning Committee and director, community relations for the state treasurer of Illinois, Singh is the first Indian board member of the Association of Political Candidates. And even as he puts into his company a wealth of experience in community and public service, Singh has now tied up with academic institutions, like Chicago Kent College for Law and Bliss Institute in Abron University of Ohio. “Today it is essential to get the academic community involved in the political consultancy process . That will give more credibility to politicians,” says Singh who has a bachelor’s degree in science from Valparaiso University, a masters in political science from Northwestern and MBA from Loyola Marymount.

While he hopes his book will help younger members of his community in the US to accept the high values of their culture it will also educate the mainstream community. Of course, Singh in his thirties is completely at ease with his own cultural identity. “I prefer to wear *sherwanis* with *zardozi* embroidery to White House parties rather than three-

piece suits. And when Denzel Washington, whom I've always admired, said he admired me for wearing the turban I received the validation of a lifetime," he says.