

# LEST WE FORGET

By Amarinder Singh

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Military History of India  
A Review by Jagpal S. Tiwana\*

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@ The book can be ordered from: Col. Harwant Singh, MC (Retd.), Senior Vice President, The Regiment of Ludhiana Welfare Association, New Motibagh Palace, Patiala, Pb. India 147001.

You can take Amarinder Singh out of the army, but you cannot take the army out of Amarinder Singh, now the Chief Minister of the Punjab, who is a fully trained army officer from the Khadakvasla and Dehra Dun military academies. Gen. Harbakhsh Singh discharged him from the army in Aug. 1965 at the request of his father, Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, of Patiala. He was, however, back in the army the next month when war broke out between India and Pakistan. This time he joined as ADC to Gen. Harbakhsh Singh, Chief of the Western Command. This offered him an opportunity to watch the war operations of 1965 closely. Though he was again relieved of the army duties as the war ended, his interest in the Indian army continued unabated. The result is "**Lest we forget**", a well-researched book covering seven different battles of the three wars India fought, two with Pakistan and one with China, up until 1965.

Amarinder Singh spent four years in collecting data, maps and pictures for this book. The author visited several battlefields with a camera in hand, flew over certain areas in a helicopter, and had group discussions with veterans. The battalions covered were 1 Sikh, The Rajindra Sikhs (1 Patiala), 2 Punjab, 13 Kumaon, 2 Sikh (Amarinders' unit), 1 Para and 3 Jat.

The book pays glowing tributes to the bravery and gallantry of officers, JCO's and Jawans who faced the hardships and challenges cheerfully and never flinched from service to their country. Indeed 1 Sikh saved Srinagar in 1947. Amarinder Singh is all praise for it, "By their courage, skill and devotion to duty, they had prevented the city from falling into the hands of the raiders and denied them the airfield...." 1 Sikh was skillfully commanded by Major Harwant Singh, MC after it lost its able leader Lt. Col. Dewan Ranjit Rai. 1 Sikh suffered 494 casualties, but 1206 of the enemy were killed, with the result that it emerged as the most highly decorated battalion of the war in Kashmir in 1947-48.

Amarinder Singh expresses admiration for The Rajindra Sikhs (1 Patiala, a crack regiment of Maharaja Patiala), not because it belonged to his state, but for its acts of bravery and its fighting skills. Gen. K S Thamayya paid them signal honor of recommending that the whole unit should receive a mention in dispatches – a unit citation. Although this proposal was not accepted in New Delhi, it remains the only one of its kind made in any war since Independence. In his moving farewell address, Gen. Thamayya paid the much deserving tribute, "For five months you fought an enemy who outnumbered you three to one... but you carried out the task given to you to my entire satisfaction. You have maintained the dignity and reputation of your

ruler, HH the Maharaja, who sent you, and I know he will be proud to hear of your valiant deeds.”

If the deserving soldiers are not befittingly honored and awarded, Amarinder Singh makes it a point to protest. He justifiably exposes the discriminatory attitude of the Corps Commander, Gen. Katoch, towards his 2 Sikh. The 2 Sikh fought gallantly to bring about the fall of Raja in Kashmir. It suffered heavy casualties. Amarinder Singh's heart bleeds when he writes, “ At Raja, in less than three hours, 2 Sikh lost most of its hockey team in addition to eleven Services or Command level athletes.... Perhaps it was their competitive spirit which forced them to the front when the going got tough.” It lost its brave C.O. Col. NN Khanna. But their acts of bravery and sacrifice did not get due recognition. Though 36 citations were sent up, Gen. Katoch ignored all except only one. According to Amarinder Singh, Gen. Katoch could not tolerate Gen. Harbakhsh Singh being made colonel of the Sikh regiment when he wanted it for himself.

Another regiment, which catches his attention for their acts of bravery, is the Kumaon Regiment, which “fought off a Chinese brigade at Rejang LA. 110 men of the Company were killed, but not before they had accounted for over 500 of the enemy. Only seven men survived of whom four were wounded...”

Some politicians and army officers came under scathing criticism for their poor vision and selfish motives. Soon after partition in 1947, when Gen. Rob Lockhart asked Nehru for a formal defense policy, Nehru shot back, “Rubbish, total rubbish. We don't need a defense policy. Our policy is Ahimsa (non-violence). We see no military threats. As far as I am concerned, you can scrap the army. The police are good enough to meet our security needs.”

Amarinder blames mostly three men, Prime Minister Nehru, Defense Minister Krishna Menon and Gen. B M Kaul, for India's humiliation in the 1962 war against China. Nehru provoked China with an unfortunate statement. On Oct. 13, when leaving for Ceylon, he stated that the Armed Forces had been ordered to throw the Chinese aggressor out of NEFA.

“Menon was an arrogant self-opinionated man known to look down his nose at everyone. Small wonder then that he was universally disliked in the armed services...” writes former Captain of the Indian Army, Amarinder Singh. The only officer Menon liked was Gen. B M Kaul who had access to Nehru's ears and was an arch sycophant. He was promoted out of turn. A new corps – 4 Corps – was created under his command with operational responsibility for NEFA. The appointment of this inefficient General in place of the straightforward and professional soldier, Gen. Umrao Singh, proved disastrous in the 1962 war. Krishna Menon was asked to resign whereas Nehru as Prime Minister was more responsible for the debacle.”

In fact, the Congress politicians imbued with Gandhi's Ahimsa were not suited to administer war efforts. It was a mistake to accept a cease-fire in Kashmir in 1948 against the advice of the army generals who wanted to clear whole of the area now called *Azad* Kashmir. The army officers continue to resent the *Tashkent Pact* of 1966, which returned to Pakistan some of the strategic points, gained in the 1965 war. Had there been no Tashkent Pact, there would have been no Kargil operation of 1999 and no loss of many valuable soldiers. Amarinder Singh takes full notice of the poor political decisions.

The book is not without some oversights and omissions. There is no reference to the 1971 war in Bangla Desh, or any recognition of Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora's service, though author's stated aim was to cover 50 years of war history. Though loyal to Gen. Harbakhsh Singh as his ADC, Amarinder Singh takes no note of the historic decision of Harbakhsh Singh against orders from Delhi to withdraw from Khem Karan sector when Pakistan made advances there with its armed division of Patton tanks. According to Maj. Gen. D. K. Palit, had Gen. Harbakhsh Singh carried out the orders, half of the Punjab would have been under Pakistani occupation. Military account of the 1965 war is incomplete without a tribute to Harbakhsh Singh on this courageous decision.

There is a small relevant Bibliography if a reader wants to go further in this subject, but the bibliography does not have names of publishers and years of publications. Field Marshall Ayub Khan's "*Friends. Not Masters*" is missing from the list, though Air Marshal Asghar Khan's, "*The First Round*", is there.

The knowledgeable author lists all necessary details about army life and operation, explains the hierarchy of ranks, but does not tell the layman how the army is organized into platoons, companies, regiments, battalions, brigades, divisions, Corpses or Wings, and what is the strength of each and who could be their commanders.

Over all, Amarinder Singh has done a splendid job. He writes with passion and his grasp of the subject is thorough. It looks as though a military career was his first choice, but for his father who took him out of the army. He is now applying his military bent to removing corruption from the Punjab's political life as its Chief Minister. How successful he will be as Chief Minister, it is too early to say, but he would have made a great army commander!

He appears to have consulted almost all the available sources on the subject, but with 450 pages, containing 323 memorable photographs, 43 sketches and maps, and a valuable Index, it is a heavy book to hold in hand, but not heavy to read. The language is simple and keeps the reader's interest throughout. There is useful glossary of military terms.

The list price is Rs. 1950, but if you speak to the kind Col. Harwant Singh, MC in charge sales, you can get a good discount. A highly commendable gesture of the author is that sale proceeds are donated to The Regiment of Ludhiana Welfare Association, founded by the officers of the 2 Sikh, which was Amarinder Singh's battalion. This Association looks after the war widows and orphans of the ex-servicemen. Money spent on the book is a donation to a noble cause.

In summary, it is an excellent work, which will serve as a useful textbook for military academies. It belongs in all homes and libraries where there is an interest in the military history of India.

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## **AMONGST THE SIKHS: Reaching for the stars**

**By Dr. Surjit Kaur**

**Published by Roli Books, M-75, GK II Market, New Delhi - 110 048.**

**Pages: 192 Price: Rs. 595**

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According to a popular joke: no matter which country of the world you go to, you are likely to find two things - potatoes and Sikhs! Diaspora Sikhs seem to be the flavour of the season with two books on them coming out in a space of a few days. These are '*The rise of the Sikhs Abroad*' by Gurmukh Singh (who works with The Times of India) and '*Amongst the Sikhs Reaching for the stars*' by Dr. Surjit Kaur.

Dr. Surjit Kaur, a professional counselor in Virginia, USA, is the daughter of Late Sardar Jodh Singh (of All India Radio, Jalandhar) to whose memory the book is dedicated. Dr. Surjit Kaur has previously written four books about counselling and various aspects of gender-related issues. She was Khushwant Singh's research assistant when he was revising his "*Histry of the Sikhs*" in 1988 and when she felt the itch to write something about the Sikhs, Khushwant Singh suggested that she write on Sikhs settled abroad. He not only suggested a list of questions and framework for the interviews but has also written the introduction to the book. In a rare honour for Dr Kaur, the normally reclusive Khushwant Singh held the book release function in his home in New Delhi.

The book narrates 34 Sikh success stories, each of them illustrated with photographs of the main protagonists. The stories are mostly told in question-answer form with Dr. Surjit Kaur asking open-ended questions. In case of a few personalities where she was unable to personally interview them, she has relied on biographies and other published information. All but one of the personalities are based in North America or United Kingdom where bulk of the Diaspora Sikhs reside. Dya Singh of Australia being the only exception.

Among the colourful personalities from the U.S. featured in the book are Singh Sahib Harbhajan Singh Yogi, credited with having introduced Sikhism to the U.S., who began by teaching Kundalini and Tantrik Yoga, but today heads a huge congregation of American Sikhs as well as an enviable corporate empire and his wife Bibi Inderjit Kaur Khalsa, who is amongst the few people to have been honoured by all the five Sikh Takhts. It also has the story of the brilliant scientist Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, owner of over 100 patents in the field of fibre optics who tells the author with conviction that "**Don't let anyone tell you that being a Sikh is a disadvantage.**" The success stories of American Sikhs would be incomplete without mention of Didar Singh Bains-dubbed "America's richest Sikh" - who started life in that country as a farm labourer working for 75 cents an hour, but now owns both extensive farmlands and urban real estate. His daughter, Diljit Kaur Bains is also featured in a separate story. Amongst the younger Sikhs from the US are Tejbir Singh Phool and Sandip Singh, who are proud of being both Sikh and American.

The Canadian Sikhs covered include "The Lawyer with the edge" T. Sher Singh, and the first turbaned Sikh in Canadian parliament Gurbax Singh Malhi. But the most interesting story is of Nav Bhatia, the only Indian in Canada who owns a dealership in new cars. His desire to see Sikhs occupy the center stage of life in his adopted country makes him spend more than 50 thousand dollars per annum in just buying

front row tickets to watch basketball matches so that all the TV cameras focus on him. He has become a bigger celebrity than some of the players.

Holding aloft the Khalsa Banner in Britain are Indarjit Singh, OBE, whose "Thought for the Day" on BBC Radio 4 sets the day rolling for many and Mota Singh, QC, the first Sikh Barrister in British Court who later became the Queen's Counsel. It also features Piara Singh Khabra, who began life in a village in Hoshiarpur, migrated to London where he worked in factories, taught in schools, eventually entered politics and at 77 is a Member of the British Parliament. Manjit Singh Gill, the youngest Asian designated to the Queen's Counsel, and Reuben Singh, the **schoolboy millionaire** both prove that the *Sikhi* spirit is still alive among the British Sikh Youth.

Each of the personalities has an interesting story to narrate: how they come to foreign shores in search of opportunities, the problems they had to face, the prejudices of their new countrymen and how they overcame them. While most of them kept the Khalsa insignia despite all the hardships they faced, some abandoned them for no particular reason. All of them agree that being a Sikh helped them in one way or the other.

The two major - if somewhat dated - issues explored in almost every story are the attitude of the protagonists towards Sikh sovereignty and the future of the Khalsa identity in the generations to come. Almost all of them feel that Sikhs should be free to practice their faith, but very few of them seem to be in favour of a separate homeland for the Sikhs. This makes the author conclude that the demand for Khalistan is dying down amongst the Diaspora Sikhs who, at one time, were its staunchest supporters. Most of the people interviewed wanted their future generations to keep the Khalsa emblems but some of them were disappointed with this not happening. Mixed marriages are a major issue confronting Diaspora Sikhs.

Dr. Surjit Kaur's experience as a counselor comes in handy to her as she is completely at ease while conducting the interviews. The only occasion where she gets worked up is while interviewing the self-appointed President of The Council of Khalistan - Dr. Gurmit Singh Aulakh. The story of Sant Singh Chatwal (the 'Tsar of Indian Hotels Abroad') based on his biography by C.S. Puri makes interesting reading. The only story told in autobiographical mode is that of Dr. I.J. Singh, successful dentist and scholar based in New York. The story is quite interesting and makes one feel that the author could have experimented with a few more stories this way.

The book's obvious pluses are its elegant language and modern idiom, as also the personal touch which Dr. Surjit Kaur lends to the interview. One of the weaknesses of the book is the absence of an epilogue wherein the author could have summarized the conclusions drawn from the interviews. But then in the opening note to the reader, the author mentions about her ill health. This might have forced the author to rush through with the book. The book mainly deals with the stories of very successful Sikhs. Hence the conclusions drawn by the author from the interviews might not be true for all diaspora Sikhs. While Yogi Bhajan and his associates have been given generous coverage (with 4 stories on them) there are notable omissions in the book - Herb Dhaliwal and Ujjal Dosanjh, to name just a couple.

With the appetite having been whetted by success stories in Amongst the Sikhs, one hopes that some author would soon take up the more difficult task of chronicling the experiences of lesser-known Sikhs abroad.

Flip through the pages of journalist Gurmukh Singh's *The Rise of Sikhs Abroad* and the rags-to riches stories will make you wish you'd been born a *sardar* or *sardarni*, as the case may be.

The coffee-table book traces the family ties, tenacity and fortunes of the Sikhs who have traveled across the seas – to Europe, Britain in particular, Canada, America, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and East Africa – in search of greener pastures.

Lives of ordinary people with not-so-ordinary doses of ambition and success are brought under the spotlight in an easy-to-read style that is seasoned with interesting tidbits of personal details. Take the case of Sukhi Turner (nee Gill). A first-generation Sikh immigrant, Sukhi became the first woman, and Indian, to become a mayor in New Zealand, Dunedin City, to be precise. Keeping the reader engaged is the story of how Sukhi met her husband, Kiwi cricketer Glenn Turner, in Mumbai and of their successful - albeit discreet – courtship during Sukhi's student days in the US.

The truly intriguing diaspora stories are as diverse as are the currencies. What is it that makes people like Kuldeep Singh (Tonny Deep) Wouhra land in alien London at the age of 17 with just three pounds to call his own! Wouhra, incidentally, went on to sell eggs on the streets before establishing East End Foods, one of the biggest food chains and a prime example of close-knit family business.

What comes through the individual stories is the ability of a community to adapt itself to the challenges of a new world and yet retain its traditions of festivity, hospitality and even farming!

The "king of peaches", Didar Singh Bains of California hails from Nangal Khurd village, near Hoshiarpur in Punjab. Today, he owns more than 16,000 acres of land in America. Then there is Harbhajan Singh Samra who went to the US in 1985 and within five years was crowned the "King of Okra" with a royal fortune of more than \$12 million, last year.

Yet, when it comes to net worth, few can surpass well-known Sant Singh Chatwal of Manhattan. A close friend of the Clintons, hotelier Chatwal's son Vikram is equally illustrious. In addition to his business skills (Vikram is a Wharton graduate), his face is his fortune too. Vikram, who rubs shoulders with the likes of Jennifer Lopez as well as the rich and famous of New York and runs a happening Manhattan hotel called 'The Time', is a former *Vogue* model who has worked in Ben Stiller's movie, *Zoolander*, as well.

The more popular faces also appear in the pages of the book, with the brief biographies of Gurinder-Bend It Like Beckham-Chadha, Meera-Goodness Gracious Me-Syal, Bally-bhangra-remix-guru-Sagoo, and others.

With its matter-of-fact portrayal of grit and wealth, through its text and interesting pictures, *The Rise of Sikhs Abroad* will inspire you to make your dreams come true.

[**Courtesy:** Swagat. Indian Airlines Magazine, Oct. 2003]

# **TEACH YOURSELF SIKHISM**

**By W. Owen Cole**

**Published by Teach Yourself (UK) 1003, Hodder Headline Ltd., 338 Euston Road,  
London. NW1 3BH (UK)**

**For Canada: McGraw Hill Ryerson Ltd, 300 Water Str. Whitby, Ontario.**

**For USA: Contemporary Books, 1, Prudential Plaza, E. Randolph St.  
Chicago. 12.60601. USA.**

**Pages: 210 Price: UK 8.99 (Paperback)**

The Teach Yourself Series in Great Britain has been long renowned as the authoritative source for self-guided learning in diverse fields of basic knowledge. The series includes treatises on Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. This key publication, timed to coincide with the Quarter centenary of Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy scripture of profound relevance in Modern Times, deserves to be widely disseminated.

The author of *Teach Yourself Sikhism* is none other than the illustrious Dr. Owen Cole, Professor Emeritus, University College, Chichester, and long time member of *The Sikh Review's* Editorial Advisory Board. While he acknowledges the help of a host of Sikh friends, foremost among them the late Piara Singh Sambhi, co-author of his standard works on Sikhism, Prof. Owen Cole writes with a rare insight and understanding of the core concepts as well as fascinating nuances of the Sikh religion, its moral traditions, spirit of congregational worship, role of functionaries (not priests) in "what is essentially a non- hierarchical religion".

Chapters trace the origin of Sikhs, their initiation, symbolism of 5 Ks, ceremonies like Naming and Anand Karaj, and, more importantly, the Nature of God, the Ethics and states of Guru Granth, and its emancipatory message. No less relevant is Prof. Cole's treatment of contemporary issues, Partition of India, the Diaspora, dispersal and cultural hiatus, the pain and pleasure of inter-action with other communities.

The book is illustrated with imaginatively designed illustrations that enhance one's comprehension of the text. Its chief merit is authenticity combined with a felicitous lucidity. Educational institutions as well as individuals everywhere, including India, could benefit from such a publication which could be more reasonably priced for India.

**- S.S.**

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