

# Meet our President: Sardar Martin Singh

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Canada's Maritime Sikh Society created its own little piece of history when it unanimously elected a 33-year-old white Sikh, Martin (Jarnail) Singh, as its president for the year 2006 at its annual meeting on December 11, 2005.

The Maritime Sikh Society is a well knit organization of Sikhs who settled in Nova Scotia, Canada, primarily during the early 1960s. This organization has many unique features. **It has been electing its executive unanimously ever since it was founded in 1968.** Both men and women have equal roles in running the Gurdwara, with both genders having occupied all levels of the Executive. The Gurdwara has an extensive library that includes current publications and classics, representing Sikhs as well as Western authors. The Maritime Sikh Society website can be accessed at <http://home.istar.ca/~cye/mss.html>. The organization is free from factional fighting. Both turbaned and non-turbaned Sikhs sit and work together in harmony. There are about 90 Sikh families in the Maritimes, Martin is the only *Gora* (white) Sikh in this region. Electing a white Canadian Sikh as our President is another feather in our turban.

Martin Singh, son of Eric and Shirley Hill, was raised on the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia. Martin Singh's mother's side of the family has been living on the Eastern Shore of Nova Scotia for the last 200 years. Martin was interested in both politics and religion while growing up. He is now quite active in the New Democratic Party. Martin's education includes a BSc in Chemistry, a BEng in Chemical Engineering, and a BSc in Pharmacy.

**When Martin was about 15, he began searching for a faith that he was comfortable with. "Three years later I was in Calgary for a political convention" recalls Martin, "and it was at this same convention that I met a number of people from the Sikh community from Calgary and the rest of Canada. Through a Sikh friend, Dalwinder Aujla, I acquired a number of texts that spoke about the Sikh faith, I felt as though I had found what I been looking for. After completing a good amount of reading and performing a good amount of soul searching, the conversion to becoming a Sikh felt as though it was the natural next step."**

Martin came to the Gurdwara at 10 Parkill Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the first time in October 1991 and got 'baptized' with *Amrit* a few years later at Martindale Gurdwara in Calgary. Though he got a new name, Jarnail Singh, after the Amrit (baptism) ceremony, it did not 'stick' as there were no Sikh families in the area he lived in. For his relatives and friends he was still 'Martin'.

**Martin's search for a life partner took him to Amritsar in 1997 where he met Amandeep Kaur and her family. The marriage took place at the local Gurdwara located in A Block, Ranjeet Avenue in Amritsar. The couple is now blessed with twin sons, Sukhamrit and Haramrit born in 2001 and a two-year-old daughter Ariadeep.**

Martin is well accepted as a turbaned and bearded Sikh by both his family and friends. "The reaction from my family has been generally nonchalant, in that my life is mine to live and so long as I don't interfere in their lives, they will not interfere in mine" remarks Martin. "I do not feel as though I have lost any friends as a result of my conversion. One important factor that may work to my benefit is that being a Sikh does not require me to proselytize. First of all, if actively trying to convert others was part of the Sikh faith, it would lie outside my own personal belief system and, secondly, I think that preaching my faith to others would have

the potential to generate conflict”, observes Martin.

In his opening speech in the Gurdwara (temple) after taking oath of office, Martin stressed the one of the basic principles of Sikhism, i.e. to help the poor and needy - *vand Ke Chhakna*. To put this in practice, Martin made a fervent appeal to the sangat to bring at least one item for the Food Bank every Sunday they visit the Gurdwara.

Martin has qualities of leadership and Sikhs in Nova Scotia are looking forward to a very exciting year with Martin as head of their Gurdwara.

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