

A Glimpse of Sikhs in Australia

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A keen desire to see a new country resulted in an agitated excitement a few days before my departure for Australia. 'Air Canada' officials welcomed all passengers aboard the airplane which flew through the commiserating skies and reached Honolulu in five hours and forty-five minutes. After refuelling, it was again sailing through the cloudy skies keen to reach Sydney. Another long flight of nine hours and fifty minutes made it land at the airport of Sydney. Nirmal Singh, my nephew, was waiting at the airport and soon we were on our way, through the city, to Killara. The whole family of Nirmal Singh was excited to see me and made me feel homely. Nirmal Singh Haara is a chartered accountant and lives in a flourishing part of the city.

For a few days I had an analytical look at the diverse architecture of this harbour city. The Darling Harbour and the beauty of the Opera House captivate the hearts of the visitors. The Sydney ferries that ply between the various parts of the city enhance the beauty of the harbour. The Centrepoint Tower pierces its height above the city and into the scenic sky. The bustling Circular Quay is the heart of Sydney's harbour activity. My nephew, Nirmal Singh, also took me for a ride to view the picturesque beaches of the city. Manly Beach and Bondi Beach, with its famous swimming pool, are the activity centres of the beach admirers. The Sydney Harbour Bridge adds attraction to the alluring and appealing City of Sydney. A friend, Tejinderjit Singh, accompanied me to the City Centre several times and we also had a tour of the Royal Botanical Gardens. My nephew, Nirmal Singh's son, Kamaljeet's 21st birthday celebrations took us to Gurdwara Sahib Turramurra for prayers and *Sukhmani Sahib* collective path. These celebrations were also a central point of intense activity at home. Kamaljeet is the eldest son in the family and sets the beginning of a promising futurity in the family.

On July 31st I flew to Launceston on the holiday island of Tasmania. It was a two hour flight. My niece, Mahinder Kaur, and her husband, Kulwant Singh, were waiting to receive me. After visiting Ranjit Singh, brother of Kulwant Singh, who has a big bungalow on a twelve acre site, we had a cursory look at the city of Launceston. Then left for Grindewald where Mahinder Kaur and Kulwant Singh live in a bungalow situated on a hill in a nine acre site. This area is called the Swiss Village.

The next day we went to the village of Exeter where I was asked to give a talk on Sikhism to the Retired Service League. There was a congregation of about twenty-five retired military officers. We also visited Kulwant Singh's farm of 200 acres on Winkleigh Road. The scenic and picturesque beauty of this Island is captivating. We also visited the Beaconsfield Goldmine, Beauty Point, Australian Maritime College, Batman Bridge and many other places.

The next day we saw Riverside School where Mahinder Kaur taught for seven years and Kulwant Singh for fourteen years. After glancing at many other places of interest, we returned home at Swiss Village. On Saturday, we went to the Launceston Campus of the University of Tasmania where we met Inderjit Singh, a student of Maritime College and Kirandeep Kaur

Aujla, a student of the University of Tasmania. We brought them to Kulwant Singh's house for an overnight stay in order to have a *Satsang* the next day. Ranjit Singh and his two children joined also.

Sunday we had a *Satsang* from 10.30 am to noon. I did *kirtan* for about an hour, with explanations. It was followed by *Guru ka Langar* and some sweets. In the evening I flew back to Sydney.

Besides the usual sight-seeing, the most important event that gave me solace was the meeting of Sikh teachers who are working in public schools and doing yeoman's service by organising Punjabi classes. Most of them are Malaysians. They also have the cooperation of other supporters of the Punjabi language. This meeting was held in a public school and it lasted for more than two hours. The discussions were focussed on the promotion of the Punjabi language and the Sikh religion.

The teachers had drawn up a syllabus for the Punjabi language which is to be presented to the Ministry of Education. This syllabus, methods of teaching, *kirtan*, support of parents and involvement of the *sangat* were discussed in length. Khalsa School, Vancouver was made the base of all discussions. The Sunday *Satsang* and the Sikh Missionary College, Vancouver were events of interest to all of them.

I encouraged them whole-heartedly and told them to carry on this service and never be discouraged by the criticism they may face. I also encouraged them to involve the parents in learning *kirtan* and start a Sikh Missionary College for adults in order to promote the Sikh religion. They wanted me to speak at Gurdwara Sahib, Revesby Road the next day where I was also honoured with a *Saropa* after the talk.

My friend, Harbhajan Singh Dhillon, who played a role in drafting the syllabus, took me to his house for an overnight stay. He showed me Gurdwara Sikh Mission Centre Society, Sydney before going to the teachers' meeting. After meeting, we had lunch and then we visited Gurdwara Sahib, Parkela. It is the biggest Gurdwara Sahib in Sydney.

I returned to Vancouver by the same Air Canada on Monday, August 13. It was a very long flight, with an hour's stop at Honolulu. I returned early for health reasons. It was an enjoyable and fruitful trip. I intend to continue these trips, in December when they have summer in Southern hemisphere.

