



INDO-CANADIAN STUDIES CENTRE

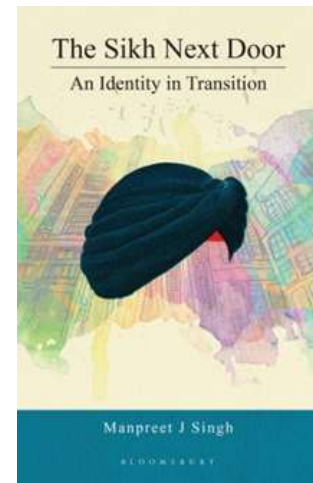
University of Mumbai



Indian Diaspora Centre

**Report on the
Online Book Launch
THE SIKH NEXT DOOR: AN IDENTITY IN TRANSITION
By Dr. Manpreet J. Singh on 22 October 2020**

CoHaB Indian Diaspora Centre (CoHaB IDC), University of Mumbai, had organized an online book launch of *The Sikh Next Door: An Identity in Transition* by Dr. Manpreet J. Singh, on 22 October 2020, in collaboration with the Indo-Canadian Studies Centre, University of Mumbai. Dr. Kanwal Singh Neel of the Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada, was the Chief Guest and Dr. Satwinder Bains, Director, South Asian Studies Institute (SASI) and Associate Professor in Social Cultural Media Studies, College of Arts, University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), British Columbia, Canada, was the Special Guest at the event.



Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, Constructions of Home and Belonging Indian Diaspora Centre (CoHaB IDC), welcomed all the participants to this joint launch of Dr. Manpreet Singh's book by CoHaB IDC and ICSC of the University of Mumbai. She then provided a brief overview of the establishment of CoHaB (Phase I), CoHaB IDC (Phase II) and the ICSC. She spoke of how the University of Mumbai has been a long-standing partner of the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies (CICS), now renamed South Asian Studies Institute (SASI), University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), British Columbia, Canada. She also recalled the triangular relationship between the CoHaB IDC, the University of Mumbai, its long standing academic partner the WW University of Muenster, Germany and the UFV, Canada.



Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha, Director, CoHaB IDC, University of Mumbai

Professor Bharucha spoke of how Dr. Singh's book was a result of this collaboration between the universities of Mumbai and the UFV and that she was the third senior fellow from the

Diaspora Fund set up between the two universities. She then introduced the Chief Guest Dr. Kanwal Singh Neel, Simon Fraser University, B.C., Canada, and invited him to give his address.

Dr. Neel congratulated the author and said how the book is a research synthesis of the Sikh identity's transition in all aspects - global, local, historical, geographical, cultural, economic, social, religious and intellectual. It is an inclusive analysis discarding all stereotypes and in a way provides a more nuanced understanding of the Sikh community. The book is in line with the current context of the changing world. Dr. Neel touched upon a few key ideas from the book and cited examples from his own life to reflect how the Sikh identity is in transition. Starting with a brief history of the Sikhs in Canada, Dr. Neel demonstrated how the community now participates in all aspects of Canadian life. He mentioned how Sikhs went through a lot of hardships to set up a new life in a new country. Over time, Sikhs have established *Gurdwaras* across Canada where it was not just a place of worship but a haven for the Sikh community to gather. In fact, the Khalsa Diwan Society *Gurdwara* was designated as a Canadian National Heritage site in 2002.



Dr. Kanwal Singh Neel, Simon Fraser University, B.C., Canada

Since 1979, Sikhs have been celebrating *Vaisakhi/Nagar Kirtans* in Vancouver and Surrey, BC, holds the largest Khalsa Day parade outside India. However, many other Canadian cities too now organize parades. Over time, a Khalsa school was established in 1986 followed by the establishment of other schools. From 1996, the schools also started offering Punjabi language in its regular curriculum in the secondary and higher secondary grades. Punjabi is now the third most spoken language in BC.

Sikhs have now established businesses in industries, ranging from transportation to technology. Moving from the brief historical overview of the Sikh community, Dr. Neel mentioned how the use of turban gives them entry into a brotherhood despite their many internal diversities. Using his own example as an educator, he demonstrated how Sikhs have multiple identities, some of which are albeit mistaken. However, despite all this, a deep sense of community that goes beyond the Sikh mind, thus enabling them to be at the forefront to help others in times of need.

Dr. Neel then touched upon the issue of portrayal of Sikhs in media. While the media portrayed the Sikhs in a negative light, their ethnic presentation remained true to their depiction. In the present times, social media is majorly changing the way Sikhs are viewed. He

then spoke about the 1914 incident of Komagata Maru incident when the British subjects were denied entry into Canada, which was both tragic and shameful, characterizing and symbolizing exclusion.

Dr. Neel concluded his presentation by reading a poem 'Legacy of the Komagata Maru' and a prayer. He then launched Dr. Manpreet Singh's book.

Professor Bharucha then invited Dr. Manpreet Singh to give her response.

Dr. Manpreet Singh thanked the organizers for launching her book and started by talking about how she had envisioned the book as a result of the ICSC fellowship. She spoke about how it was a chance to fill the gap about the way Sikhs were represented and their lived reality. Sikhs were primarily viewed as agriculturalists or marshals. However, the entire community does not fit into these static images. She mentioned how identity evolves through ethnic contexts and land ownership when an agriculturalist Sikh moves to an urban setting. In her interaction with the Sikh community in Canada, she realized that the Sikh community still tries to maintain its connection to culture, they are also comfortable with the other Sikh Diaspora identities in transnational spaces than those back home. There has also been a significant shift in their worldview. The book she said further explores the portrayal of Sikhs in mainstream media. She has also looked at the symbol of the turban, which she thinks is more of an immigrant identity than that of the Sikh religious identity. Her book she said, has attempted to bring out the community's changing profile into social cognition and also brings into focus the issues of women especially in the urban Sikh identity.



Dr. Manpreet Singh

Dr. Manpreet Singh concluded by saying that her book might provide directions to the Sikh community and its trajectory, going forward.

After applauding Dr. Singh, Professor Bharucha invited Mr. Chandra Sekhar, representative of Bloomsbury, Academic, the publisher of the book to give his response. He spoke about how Bloomsbury Academic publishes books with specialized content. He commented how Dr. Manpreet Singh's book challenges the stereotyping of the Sikh community and images as seen in the media. By tracing the evolution of Sikhs through old and new contexts, the book establishes the centrality of the diverse identities of the Sikh community.



Mr. Chandra Sekhar, Representative of Bloomsbury India

Professor Bharucha thanked Mr. Chandra Sekhar for his remarks and invited Dr. Sachin Labade, Honorary Coordinator, ICSC, University of Mumbai, to introduce the Special Guest for the event, Dr. Satwinder Bains (Director, SASI, UFV, Canada).

Dr. Bains began her remarks by congratulating the author for writing the book and thanked the organizers for arranging the launch. She spoke about how the title of the book resonates with Sikh society which is in transition. She felt that the book gives a good start to seeing where the Sikh community is headed. Dr. Bains appreciated Dr. Manpreet Singh's attempt to fill the gap which is the need of the hour and is important. The concepts in the book resonate with the Sikh community regardless of their geographic location. According to Dr. Bains, the author has thoroughly dealt with the ideas of reimagining the Sikh Identity and the changing symbol of Turban for both men and women in her book as the creation and transitioning of identity is very challenging. Dr. Bains ended her address by mentioning how the book beautifully contemporises the Sikh identity as it is today.



Dr. Satwinder Bains, Director, SASI, University of the Fraser Valley

Dr. Sachin Labade then summed up the event and spoke about how the book touches upon the different aspects of the Sikh community. The book, he said, also gives voice to the aspirations and concerns of regional, national and international Sikh citizens. The book is also a means of challenging the othering of the community and to look beyond the stereotypes. He once again congratulated the author at the end of his remarks.



Dr. Sachin Labade, Honorary Coordinator, ICSC, University of Mumbai

The session was then open to questions from the participants. The author and guests answered all the questions that were posed and there was a fruitful discussion.

The event ended with a vote of thanks by Ms. Kirti Risbud, Research Associate, CoHaB IDC, University of Mumbai.



Ms. Kirti Risbud, Research Associate, CoHaB IDC

You may view the entire event on the link given below:

[Online Book Launch: *The Sikh Next Door: An Identity in Transition* by Dr. Manpreet J. Singh](#)

Date: 22 October 2020

Place: Mumbai

Professor Nilufer E. Bharucha

Director, CoHaB IDC

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