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NORTH AMERICAN Newsline

Canada gets first 'gora' gurudwara president

GURMUKH SINGH

Halifax

IN a first for Canada, Sardar Jarnail Martin Singh was elected the country's first 'gora' Sikh to head a gurdwara. Based at Musquodoboit near Halifax in Nova Scotia, Martin Singh was made the president of the Maritime Sikh Society earlier this year.

The society, set up in 1968, runs the local gurdwara in Halifax where the Sikhs started arriving in the early 1960s. "This gurdwara, built in 1978, caters to about 100 Sikh families in the region," says 33-year Martin Singh who sprinkles his conversation with words like 'uncleji', 'gora', 'pugree' and 'sangat'.

Born in Halifax to Protestant parents, Martin Singh says that he was a typical teenager. "I mean those few bad things. Then I also believed in God. But I found that the Protestant faith was not my path. As an alternative, I looked at Catholicism, Islam and Judaism because they have similar prophets as Protestants, and they are similar in terms of religious theology. I was 20 then."

However, he found no solace in anything. The young man was in



search for something else. "I studied Buddhism, Hinduism and other religions. But I found that it was not me. In the end, I stopped this elusive search." Then something happened which changed his life forever. "As a Liberal Party supporter, I went to Calgary to attend a leadership conference in 1990. There I met quite a few turbaned Sikhs who had come from Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary. I was impressed and asked them questions about 'pugree', 'daarhi', and their religion. One Devinder Singh Aujla promised to send me some books.

So when I got back to Halifax, I received a packet of six/seven books on Sikhism. I read them, and I realized I had found my path."

Soon the young man was on his way embrace Sikhism. "I felt as if I was always a Sikh. I just didn't practice it. I studied Sikhism deeply and started growing beard and kesh in 1991."

But how did his Protestant parents and friends react to his conversion? "My dad was skeptical. He thought I had fallen into some cult. But my mother was indifferent. She thought it was just one more of those

weird things I did at that time. As for friends, I lost none of them because of my conversion. They just asked me some inquisitive questions."

Finally, he was baptized as Sardar Jarnail Martin Singh in Calgary in 1996. Next year, he took another step closer to Sikhism when he visited Punjab and found a Sikh wife for himself. "I went to Amritsar with Mr. Aujla (of Calgary) and we visited the Golden Temple and Guru Nanak Dev University. It was a sort of free time for me as I had finished my chemistry degree and was about to start my chemical engineering degree. During the visit, I got the idea of having a Sikh wife. I foresaw my future in rural Nova Scotia and I thought I needed someone as my partner who was well-versed with Sikhism and the Punjabi Language."

Prof Gursharanjit Singh of Guru Nanak Dev University introduced him to Amandeep Kaur who had just finished her MA degree in Punjabi literature. "She was the one I was looking for. So in July 1997 we got married in Amritsar. Her immigration took about a year and she came here in May 1998." Amandeep had no problems in adjusting

to the new land. The couple has twin sons—Sukh Amrit and Har Amrit, 4—and a daughter, Arya Deep, 3.

A member of the Maritime Society Gurdwara since 1991, this gora Sikh has been instrumental in bringing many young people into its executive. "We youngsters have embarked on new programs and upgrading the gurdwara. The beautiful thing about our society is that there has never been a contest for any position on the executive. There is no fee for services like Akhand Path or wedding ceremonies. Three times a woman was elected its president." And this gora Sikh president has his job cut out. "We are trying to bring in very seasoned raagi jathas from other places to serve our community. In June, we have planned a multi-cultural festival here. We will showcase our cultural items such as bhangra etc. We want more and more young people to learn about Sikhism," explains Martin Singh, who, with his brother, runs the family business of pharmacy in his hometown. He claims theirs is the only pharmacy in all Maritime provinces which has what he calls "a whole compliance package" for any kind of medication.

'I can never come out of the emotions of music... there is no time for anything else'

Acclaimed music director, **A.R. RAHMAN** is currently in Toronto working on the music score for the \$27 million production of *The Lord of the Rings* stage production, which premieres at the Princess of Wales Theatre on March 23. In what promises to be a treat for lovers of musicals, the production boasts the combined skills of both Rahman and Finland's famous group, Värtina. Both of them are working together for the first time. Earlier, Rahman wrote the score for Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Bombay Dreams* which premiered at the Apollo Victoria Theatre in London recently. **RENU MEHTA** spoke to the master musician on a wide variety of issues. Excerpts from the interview:



Tell us about your experience with the *Lord of the Rings*?

I think it has been a very good experience. First of all, it was going out of the Indian scenario. When I did *Bombay Dreams*, it had an Indian theme. With *Lord of the Rings*, I am going towards an international audience for the first time and working on something as huge as this with lot of expectation. There are a lot of things that I didn't know. I was doing things in a different way and I think the pure joy of working in theatre is something that is different from film. In film you can do it again and again. In theatre you have to live with it, fine-tuning the work and hoping it will work on stage.

How is the music of *Lord of the Rings* different?

The Lord of the Rings is more ethnic in character and more folk, and a culmination that derives inspiration from the book. You have to sound original, and then make a melody with the theme you are composing. In Bollywood, what you do is make a nice tune and then it is fitted into the script; sometimes they just throw it here and there. It's sold. Here you have to be so specific for a tune, and only then it is okayed.

How was it to work with the Finnish group? You live in two different countries. What were the challenges?

There are more than a dozen songs in the musical. We were both given certain songs to work individually and some songs we had to work together. We started with a collaboration first. There is a song called *Morning* and

that was done together. This was the first piece of music that broke the ice. Certain songs went to Finland first and we finished all the work there. Certain music I did in a studio in London and then we put our parts in. Certain songs would have my melody in the beginning and some songs would have their melody first. So there's no individual composition and it's a nice blend. You don't see brilliant musicians every day and all nine musicians in the Värtina group are brilliant.

How difficult was it to work in a medium other than Hindi? For instance, in this case in English.

When I was doing *Bombay Dreams*, my biggest problem was in doing a tune in English, not knowing whether it will work or not. So this is a second step for me. It has not been as difficult this time. Most of the lyrics are in English, Bosnian and also Elvish. We need this quirky flavor.

It's important to be disciplined but creative inspiration can come any time.

Sometimes in the middle of a session, I call for pack up because I want to write this tune. I need to make this happen because once it goes, it never comes back.

What are your interests outside of music?

I can't come out of the emotions of music. There is so much within that and there is no time for anything else.

SAT exam: 12-year-old Indian American scores perfect 800

SAM RAO

Davis, Calif.

IT COULDN'T have been a more perfect score for 12-year-old Rahul Dalal from Davis, California, about 20 miles west of state capital Sacramento. He scored a perfect 800 in the mathematics section of the Scholastic Admissions Test (SAT). Normally taken by 11 and 12th graders applying for admissions to college, this 7th grade student is the latest in his family to ace standardized tests: two decades ago, his dad Mukesh qualified for the IIT-Kanpur by getting the 16th national rank in the grueling JEE (1984) exam in India. "Rahul took part in the regular SAT test on January 28th along with about 300 other mostly high school students. We knew he would do well but did not expect a perfect score," said his parents Mukesh and Leenam.

Spotting his son's talent and unusual interest in Science and Mathematics, his father applied to the prestigious John Hopkins University's Center for Talented Youth. Each year, the center holds a talent search to identify exceptionally gifted students. Once the top 300 students in the nation are identified, the JHU center offers free academic services and programs, like summer camps, to nurture selected students.

Rahul says he is an average kid at his school except for mathematics and reading habits. He plays computer games, dungeons and dragons, swims and watches movies and television. In typical 'desi' fashion, his parents have enrolled him in several after-school activities like playing the clarinet for his Junior High school band and also Hindustani vocal music classes. He is also the troop leader for his Boy Scouts brigade and fluent in Spanish and pretty good at Hindi as well. "Rahul even acted as Gandhi at the recent January 26 Republic Day of India celebrations," said dad Mukesh, a former professor of Computer Science at Columbia University, who now runs a software company called Look Ahead Decisions in Davis.

What next for the Dalal family? While waiting on Rahul's official entry into the JHU program, they are awaiting the results for their daughter Neha (10), who applied for Open Quest, another program conducted by JHU. Rahul's youngest sister, Megha, 5, is already showing signs of following in her siblings' footsteps.



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