FROM GURU NANAK TO NEW ZEALAND:
Mobility in the Sikh Tradition and the History of the Sikh Community in New Zealand to 1947

Harpreet Singh

Abstract

Currently the research on Sikhs in New Zealand has been defined by W. H. McLeod’s *Punjabis in New Zealand* (published in the 1980s). The studies in this book revealed Sikh history in New Zealand through the lens of oral history by focussing on the memory of the original settlers and their descendants. However, the advancement of technology has facilitated access to digitised historical documents including newspapers and archives. This dissertation uses these extensive databases of digitised material (combined with non-digital sources) to recover an extensive, if fragmentary, history of South Asians and Sikhs in New Zealand.

This dissertation seeks to reconstruct mobility within Sikhism by analysing migration to New Zealand against the backdrop of the early period of Sikh history. Covering the period of the Sikh Gurus, the eighteenth century, the period of the Sikh Kingdom and the colonial era, the research establishes a pattern of mobility leading to migration to New Zealand. The pattern is established by utilising evidence from various aspects of the Sikh faith including Sikh institutions, scripture, literature, and other historical sources of each period to show how mobility was indigenous to the Sikh tradition. It also explores the relationship of Sikhs with the British, which was integral to the absorption of Sikhs into the Empire and continuity of mobile traditions that ultimately led them to New Zealand.

In New Zealand, the research begins with an analysis of the early South Asian history in the country. The analysis provides a context for the arrival of the Sikhs and also reveals new evidence of a non-Sikh Indian community previously unknown to scholars. This has placed South Asian settlement decades earlier than documented in the current research. The research also uncovers new evidence showing an earlier arrival date of the Sikhs in the 1880s, a wider geographic dispersal, the presence of greater numbers, and extensive integration into local society before the twentieth century.
Research on the first half of the twentieth century brings forth new evidence on Sikh life in New Zealand. The information provides a detailed account of life in the public sphere including religious and cultural life, interactions with colonial institutions, political activities, and a multitude of connections in local communities. It also highlights Sikh contributions to local communities in areas such as military service, sports and entertainment. The information details the shifting attitudes and perspectives about the Sikhs and also Sikh perspectives towards greater New Zealand society as they sought to define themselves and their position in local society.

Ultimately, the research in this dissertation provides new evidence on the Sikh community in New Zealand, reshaping our understanding of Sikh history in the country. Though Sikhs were a community of small numbers, but they were a distinct and significant part of New Zealand’s history.
Acknowledgments

This thesis is the culmination of 11 years of work beginning on the sunny shores of California and ending in Dunedin. It has been a journey which has taken me from the sciences into the humanities and ultimately required both to achieve it. In the process, a list of people must be thanked for supporting and enabling me to make this thesis.

To Tony Ballantyne, thank you for taking me in as a Ph.D. student and supporting me right through this thesis. If it were not for your skills, knowledge and support, I would not have achieved this. Thank you for your tolerance of me in Dunedin and from a distance. My respect for you is second to none, and I am honoured to have done this thesis under your supervision.

To Vanessa Ward, thank you for the immense help you gave me in bringing my thesis to its conclusion. I know it was a challenge and I would not have finished it without your help.

To Gurinder Singh Mann, thank you for the knowledge, the support and the guidance to transition me into the humanities. I came from a distant place, the bottom of the earth, with nothing more than an engineering degree, and you instilled in me the fire and motivation to study Sikh history and set me on the path to this work.

To William Hew McLeod (late), thank you for placing me on the road to this thesis 11 years ago.

To the National Library of New Zealand and to those who are digitising documents worldwide, do not stop, your work is rewriting history. Without the relentless work of archivists, and those developing digital archives this thesis would not have reached this standard.
To my family, my mother, Gurbaksh, you have supported this entire endeavour through your motivation and endless support. I am humbled and forever grateful, without you I would not have achieved all that I have achieved, thank you, mum. To my father, brother and sister, it’s over, thanks for putting up with it all. I love you all.

To my wife Liza, you have seen me through this thesis, through the ups and down – when I was about to give up you dragged me back to the desk. We even got married in the middle of it all. You are my rock and my strength, thank you for your support and sticking with me through it all.

To the Guru Panth, may this seva serve to inspire you in the search for knowledge.
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** .............................................................................................................................. 1

1 Mobility in the Early Sikh Tradition ................................................................................ 17
   Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 17
   Guru Nanak: Foundation of Mobility ................................................................................... 19
   Institutionalisation of Mobility ............................................................................................. 24
   Geographical Spread of the Sikh during the Guru Period .................................................... 33
   Mobility in the Eighteenth Century ...................................................................................... 35
   Summary .............................................................................................................................. 41

2 The British Relationship with the Sikhs from the Confederacies to the Colonial Era . 43
   Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 43
   First Perspectives on Sikhs in Punjab ................................................................................... 44
   The Sikh Kingdom and the British East India Company ..................................................... 47
   Fall of the Sikh Kingdom ..................................................................................................... 48
   Colonial Punjab under the British East India Company ....................................................... 50
   The Mutiny and the Changing Sikh Relationship ............................................................... 53
   Security Deployments and Integration into the Empire ....................................................... 54
   Punjab as a State in the Empire ............................................................................................ 57
   Summary .............................................................................................................................. 63

3 From the Lascars to the Sikhs: The Early Indians in New Zealand 1795-1900 ............ 65
   Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 65
   The Early Lascar Presence ................................................................................................. 66
   The Indian Community in the South Island from 1850-1880 .............................................. 69
   The Indian Community in Auckland and Wellington from 1850-1880 ............................... 72
   The Indian Community from 1890-1900 ............................................................................. 78
   The Indian Community in Auckland from 1890 to 1900 ..................................................... 79
   The Indian Community Outside of Auckland from 1890 to 1900 ....................................... 81
   The Early Sikhs .................................................................................................................... 86
   Summary .............................................................................................................................. 97

4 The Sikh New Zealanders: Integration and Expansion 1900 to 1920 ............................ 99
   Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 99
The Indian Contingent............................................................... 101
Entertainment and Sports ............................................................ 105
Interactions with the Justice System ............................................. 107
Economic Activity............................................................... 109
World War I............................................................................. 116
Sikhs in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force............................. 118
Summary ................................................................................ 123

5 1920-1930 – Citizenship and Race .............................................. 125
Introduction ............................................................................ 125
Challenges of Migration during the 1920s .................................... 127
Geographical Spread of the Community ...................................... 135
Population and Growth ............................................................... 138
The Community Organizes ......................................................... 146
Cross-Cultural Connections ...................................................... 160
Occupations within the Community ........................................... 164
Deaths in the Community .......................................................... 168
Global Interactions ..................................................................... 169
Summary ................................................................................ 174

6 1930-1945 – Continued Challenges and Independence ..................... 177
Introduction ............................................................................ 177
Challenges of Mobility ............................................................... 180
Sikh Movements ........................................................................ 184
Sikh Community life in the 1930s ................................................ 192
The Justice System ................................................................... 193
Political Activism and Engagement ............................................ 193
Employment .............................................................................. 195
Entertainment and Sports .......................................................... 198
Wrestling .................................................................................. 198
Hockey ..................................................................................... 199
Religion and Faith ..................................................................... 201
Marriages .................................................................................. 202
Death within the Community ...................................................... 204
List of Figures

Figure 1 - Table of the Sikh Gurus ................................................................................................................. 3
Figure 1-1: A Map of Punjab........................................................................................................................... 24
Figure 3-1: Geographical Spread of Sikhs from 1888-1910........................................................................ 94
Figure 3-2: Diversity of Occupations 1888-1914......................................................................................... 94
Figure 4-1: The Indian Contingent in Australia, Auckland Weekly News, 18 January 1901, 2. ............... 102
Figure 4-2: The Indian Contingent viewing Auckland from Mount Eden, Auckland Weekly News,... 104
Figure 4-3: The Indian Contingent at viewing Geysers at Whakarewarewa, Auckland Weekly News, 1 March 1901, 8. 104
Figure 4-4: A Sikh soldier posing with children, Auckland Weekly News, 1901, 6................................. 105
Figure 4-5: Diversity of Occupations 1888-1920.......................................................................................... 112
Figure 4-6: Sikhs Drafted into the New Zealand Army during the First World War. ......................... 119
Figure 5-1: International Travels of the Sikh Community in NZ According to Destination during 1920-1930. .......................................................................................................................... 131
Figure 5-2: The Arrival and Departure of Indians in New Zealand during the 1920s. The New Zealand Official Year Book 1931, Statistics New Zealand, 1931, Section V. ............................ 133
Figure 5-3: The Age of Sikhs Arriving in the Port of Auckland (1925).................................................. 134
Figure 5-4: Geographical Spread of the Sikh Community in New Zealand 1920-1930. ................. 140
Figure 5-5: The deportation of Sikhs in 1914. Auckland Weekly News, 9 July 1914, 50. .................. 154
Figure 5-6: Employment in the Sikh Community in 1928. ...................................................................... 167
Figure 5-7: V.S.S. Sastri (3rd from right) in Whakarewarewa, with local Maori. Auckland Weekly News, 27 July 1922, 39. .................................................................................................................. 170
Figure 5-8: Maharaja Rana Bhawani Singh of Jhalawara in New Zealand (second from right).
Auckland Star, 6 July 1925, 7. ................................................................. 172

Figure 5-9: The Indian Army hockey upon arrival in Auckland (1926). Auckland Star, 11 May 1926, 10. ................................................................. 173

Figure 5-10: A Sikh hockey team member meeting a local Indian fruit seller in Auckland.
Auckland Star, 14 May 1926, 8. ................................................................. 173

Figure 6-1: Indian immigrant arrivals and departures to NZ between 1930 and 1939. .... 184

Figure 6-2: Indian trade delegates in Auckland (1945): Mr N. N. Wadia (left) and Sir Datar Singh (Right). New Zealand Herald, 4 April 1945, 9. ................................................................. 186

Figure 6-3: Concentration of New Zealand Population (excluding Maori) in the North and South Island 1881 and 1936. The New Zealand Year Book, 1941. ........................................... 190

Figure 6-4: Concentration of New Zealand Population (excluding Maori) in Urban and Rural Areas 1881 and 1936. The New Zealand Year Book, 1941. ........................................... 190

Figure 6-5: The wedding procession in Te Aroha for the marriage of Miss Kartari Kaur, 1932. Auckland Star, 29 November 1932, 8. ................................................................. 203

Figure 6-6: A heavily veiled Kartari Kaur with her father Phuman Singh during wedding day ceremonies. Auckland Star, 29 November 1932, 8. ................................................................. 204

Figure 6-7: A photo of Kartari Kaur during marriage ceremonies, 1932. Auckland Star, 29 November 1932, 8. ................................................................. 204
Introduction

Sikhs in New Zealand are frequently imagined as a small, marginal and sometimes beleaguered community, a group whose visible religious difference has led to their marginalisation. This dissertation explores the development of the Sikh community in New Zealand before 1947 and challenges the established view by highlighting the range of Sikh social activity and recovering a range of previously unknown stories. By making extensive use of materials that have not been utilised to a great extent by earlier historians of Sikhs in New Zealand, especially colonial newspapers, this dissertation presents new evidence that shows the Sikhs were not always isolated and insular. Piecing together these fragmentary materials, I demonstrate that early Sikhs in New Zealand were in fact often actively engaged in the routines of colonial social life and that they participated in important institutions.

The Sikh population in New Zealand has always been relatively small, a few hundred in the early twentieth century. By 2013, the Sikh population only represented less than 1 percent of the total population or approximately 20,000 adherents. Comparatively, the population of Indians in New Zealand currently stands at approximately 3 percent of the total population.¹ The Sikh, Indian and Asian populations have been deeply affected by immigration legislation geared to exclude Asians between 1920 and 1987. In fact, population growth of Sikhs has been a recent phenomenon, with exponential growth occurring after 2001. The precise size of the Sikh community has been difficult to establish with certainty as census information has been organised by nationality in New Zealand and this means that people of South Asian origin have been counted primarily as ‘Indian’. Of course, there have also been fierce debates over the

The Sikh faith was formed in Punjab, an area currently split between India and Pakistan. The establishment of the faith occurred during the late fifteenth century when North India remained under the control of various Islamic rulers and dynasties. The faith was led by ten Gurus who held the office successively, between the late 1400s and the first decade of the 1700s (see Figure 1). Each Guru contributed to the development of the community by establishing various teachings, guidelines, institutions and practices. The teachings of the Gurus were codified in a central holy scripture called the Guru Granth Sahib. On orders of the tenth Guru, the power of the Guru’s office was transferred to the Sikh community (Guru Panth) and the Sikh Scripture (Guru Granth). The scripture is treated as the eleventh Guru of the community and holds that status to the current time.

The Sikh religion is considered to be revelatory by its followers. The ten Gurus, who led the community successively for almost three centuries, revealed Sikhism through their special connection with Vāheguru (see below for a detailed explanation). The religious teachings were expressed through poetic compositions that were compiled within the Guru Granth scripture. Five of the ten Gurus contributed to the Guru Granth – each was given a designation (Mahala) and a respective number based on their succession (for example Mahala 1 represents Guru Nanak’s contribution). All the five Gurus contributed under the name Nanak.

---

The beliefs of the Sikh religion centre on Vāheguru. Vāheguru is an entity described as the “wonderful sovereign”\textsuperscript{3} who is different from creation. Being different from creation, Vāheguru is considered beyond gender and human distinctions. According to Sikh beliefs, Vāheguru was responsible for bringing creation into being with a single command. Creation was based on the twin principles of justice and grace. Humanity is considered the pinnacle of creation as it allows the opportunity to attain liberation and hold a place “in the divine court after death”.\textsuperscript{4} To attain liberation, a Sikh is expected to live a life of social commitment. Social commitment includes hard work, service to humanity and keeping Vāheguru as the sole object.

\textsuperscript{3} Gurinder Singh Mann, *Sikhism* (New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall, 2004), 15.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, 14.
of prayers. The primary medium of devotion for the community is congregational prayer held at a Sikh temple or gurdwara. Gurdwaras are found within South Asia, outside Punjab, and in many nations, reflecting the long history of mobility that has been a prominent element of the social history of Sikhism. Sikhs sojourned, settled and travelled the world and eventually reached New Zealand.5

For more than thirty years the history of the Sikh community6 in New Zealand has been defined by the work Punjabis in New Zealand written by the late William H. McLeod.7 After publishing landmark works on the development of the Sikh textual tradition and the evolution of the Sikh community, McLeod focused his attention in this study on the history of Sikh migration to New Zealand.8 Drawing on McLeod’s extensive knowledge of Punjabi history and his fieldwork in the North Island during the early 1980s, Punjabis in New Zealand reconstructed the history of the Punjabis who had their homes in the central North Island in the first half of the twentieth century. Although some sociologists and ethnic studies scholars were working on the history of Punjabi migrant communities in Southeast Asia, the United Kingdom and North America in the 1980s, McLeod’s study of New Zealand Punjabis (published in 1986) was the richest historical case-study of Punjabis beyond their homeland. In the New Zealand context, McLeod’s work remains the only text on this tradition of migration based on extensive research and use of Punjabi-language materials, which understood these migrants against the

---

5 This paragraph draws upon Gurinder Singh Mann, Sikhism.
6 Community is generally defined as a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. In this thesis the Indian community is defined by nationality while the Sikh community is defined by religion. At times the evidence is suggestive, as the definition of religion, faith and identity can be fluid depending on a multitude of factors including extremism, socio-economic situations, societal acceptance and so forth.
7 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1986).
distinctive regional features of their source culture. The work has been a primary source for many scholars and continues to be an important work on Punjabis and Sikhs in New Zealand.

Since *Punjabis in New Zealand* was completed the historiography on South Asians in New Zealand has grown significantly if slowly, but few of McLeod’s arguments have been questioned. Most work has centred on presenting additional information on the wider Indian and South Asian community including detailed works by Tony Ballantyne on Te Anu\(^9\) and Edward Peters\(^10\) in the early nineteenth century.\(^11\) Jacqueline Leckie has also produced a sequence of important works on South Asians in New Zealand that have built upon her pioneering Ph.D. on Gujarati migration. She has drawn particular attention to the development of the New Zealand “Indian community”, exploring its development at a political level and common features of its social experience. Leckie’s work has been invaluable because it has particularly drawn new attention to the contribution of migrant women, but it has not placed religion at the centre of the stories of the diverse communities, shaped by region and devotional traditions, that in reality make up “Indian New Zealanders”.\(^12\) Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has also produced significant recent work on the ways the Indian community have been understood in New Zealand and the relationship between India and New Zealand.\(^13\)

The new scholarship on South Asians in New Zealand has added no significant new information on the Sikh community and has largely accepted McLeod’s key arguments about the development of that community. At the outset of undertaking the research for this dissertation, I hoped to update and extend McLeod’s work published in 1986. The research

---

\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) For further information on early Indians in New Zealand please see, Anne Salmond, *Between Worlds: Early Exchanges Between Maori and Europeans, 1773-1815* (University of Hawai’i Press, 1997).
\(^12\) Jacqueline Leckie, *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community*.
undertaken initially followed his methodology of oral histories. The method included video-recorded interviews following an established set of questions, and I hoped to build on those conversations by gaining access to materials from the descendants of original settlers. It was quickly apparent that oral histories that I conducted with several families in the Auckland and Waikato region offered little detailed information about the origins and development of the early Sikh community. My interviews were with elderly second and third generation Punjabi-New Zealanders, and this effectively meant that the oral histories began in the post-1960s period, and anything before that was unclear, unreliable or third hand (in fact many of the interviewees referred to McLeod’s book). Due to these issues, it was important to find more reliable, original and comprehensive sources that could add depth to the community’s early history.

Hence, the research shifted focus to newly digitised materials in databases such as Papers Past\textsuperscript{14} and Trove.\textsuperscript{15} These databases held massive stores of digitised newspapers and these sources offered a very wide range of stories that cast new light on New Zealand Sikhs and became the basis of this thesis. Through initial searches within digital databases, a tremendous amount of detail on the Sikhs were discovered. The volume of material was so extensive that it took several years to gather and collate the information. Although these stories were scattered, dispersed, and brief, their sheer volume provided many more details about Sikh life in the public sphere. These newspaper stories have revealed details about work, entertainment, social, political, cultural and religious activities, producing a fuller, if still fragmentary, picture of early Punjabi Sikh migration and life in New Zealand. The data effectively provides a map of what the Sikhs were doing in New Zealand and how the community was perceived by the colonial state and the colonial press. It also reveals shifting

\textsuperscript{14} The Papers Past database can be found at http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast
\textsuperscript{15} The Trove database can be found at http://trove.nla.gov.au/
attitudes and a variety of opinions from local European New Zealand society and the Sikhs themselves. Hence, these materials enable a new picture of the history of the Sikhs in New Zealand to be assembled.

The methods used in this thesis focus on a multi-source cross-verification approach to ensure data reliability and maximum data capture. Digital databases were used to carry out searches on common terms relating to Punjabis and Sikhs. Taking the initial base data further in-depth searches were performed, focussing on each year from 1839 to 1947 and analysing the results to draw common themes. Further external analysis was also performed from international databases, such as Trove, the Library of Congress and Ancestry.com to capture any outlying information which could contribute to enrichment, verification and expansion of the datasets. In addition the data was verified using original documents (where possible). These documents included hard copy sources such as court records, electoral rolls, original shipping lists, personal collections and McLeod’s original interviews held at the Hocken Library. The approach required multiple scans of the entire datasets which were performed by developing specific algorithms to sort the data and capture information relating to the Indian and Sikh communities. Over the length of this thesis the datasets were continually expanding which led to ongoing constant analysis until a cut-off point was applied.

Though McLeod’s work was pioneering and offered some real insights, there were some limitations to Punjabis in New Zealand.16 These include the patchiness of memory, the focus and style of interview questions, and the effective under coverage of the Sikh population due to a reliance on a particular range of informants. At the crux of the problem was the reliance on oral histories for the majority of the research. McLeod’s reliance on oral histories reflected the absence of any significant sequences of archival records and the lack of written materials.

produced from within the Sikh community. Of course, colonial newspapers were available to McLeod, but piecing together relevant news stories from a large range of newspapers through traditional methods of manual research would have been painstaking, slow and produced few returns within a limited time. The lack of means to search newspaper archives left McLeod with limited ways to access the history of the Sikhs.\footnote{In the digital age scholars have distinct advantages with the advent of sophisticated search engines which are able to analyse vast data sets in a short amount of time.} Hence, McLeod needed to rely primarily on oral histories and some additional archival research on migration records was utilised to support them. Almost three decades after McLeod’s work was published, new digital technologies and the creation of vast searchable databases has opened up new possibilities for writing history and for recovering stories that were very difficult to retrieve in an age of analogue research.

McLeod’s oral histories also offer tremendous information as they provide perspectives of the early community. McLeod’s work captured data which was not recorded within archival and documented sources, including relationship dynamics, emotions and feelings. The oral histories can enrich print data by providing detailed accounts, as recalled by informants. Ultimately McLeod’s work provides a unique and differing perspective and his invaluable dedication to gathering the memories of early Sikh settlers is immeasurable.

Taking into consideration the problems and challenges noted above, McLeod argued a number of points about the Sikhs in New Zealand. His key arguments included the timing and identity of the first Sikh arrivals to New Zealand (who he believed were two brothers from Punjab), the general seclusion of Sikhs from wider society, the rural focus of the community and what he believed to be the relative unimportance of religion to the identity of local Sikhs. These arguments were based on the oral histories provided by his informants throughout his extensive research.
Another point must also be noted regarding McLeod’s perspective on religion within the New Zealand Sikh community. During the compilation of McLeod’s research Punjab was in the midst of a violent militancy driven by economic, social and political issues. The instability had an impact on the diaspora both in Punjab and globally. The definition of a Sikh and perceptions of identity shifted with an emphasis on the *rahit* (Sikh code of conduct) as a means of determining how important religion was to individual Sikhs. Within this context, McLeod emphasized the rahit as the litmus test of how religious individual Sikhs were. After emphasizing the external identifiers such as the beard and hair, McLeod observed many had shaved or cut their hair. He also noted few were reciting prayers, and his informants were sceptical that their ancestors actively maintained their religious observances. McLeod ultimately determined that ‘the devout few strive to uphold the rahit while others had better things to do’.\(^{18}\) He also found few instances of religious and cultural reproduction in New Zealand which likely convinced him further that religion was at the periphery of identity. These arguments have been influential throughout his work on the Punjabis in New Zealand and the field of Punjabi/Sikh diaspora studies. Leckie relies on McLeod’s *Punjabis in New Zealand* for her interpretation of the Sikhs, as stated in the first footnote of her book *Indian Settlers*.\(^{19}\) Bandyopadhyay in a recent article ‘A History of Small Numbers’\(^{20}\) also continues to reference McLeod’s research and names the first two South Asian settlers in New Zealand as discovered by McLeod. More broadly, *Punjabis in New Zealand* has had a profound effect on Sikh scholarship globally influencing methodologies and research for decades. It has been the primary source for information on Sikh history in New Zealand and continues to be influential in global Sikh diasporic studies.\(^{21}\)

\(^{19}\) Jacqueline Leckie, *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community*.
In addition, various scholars have made ground-breaking contributions to Sikh diaspora studies globally, including Tony Ballantyne, Gurinder Singh Mann, Verne Dusenberry, Bruce LaBrack, Darshan Singh Tatla, Shinda Thandi, Karen Leonard, N.G. Barrier and many other scholars who have built up a corpus of information on the Sikh diaspora.\textsuperscript{22} The scholarship has been critical in understanding Sikh communities around the world including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, United States of America and South East Asia. Much of the research was triggered by McLeod’s influential work, and many authors worked in conjunction with him.

Other existing work on Punjabis in Australasia focuses on the post-1900 period, relying on histories derived from oral sources. Again this work is characterised by the same limitations identified in my discussion of McLeod’s work above. The limited nature of written sources from within the community and the scattered nature of newspaper references made it difficult for researchers to undertake extensive archival analysis and the best sources were the earliest known settlers and their descendants. An example of this type of research is \textit{A Punjabi Community in Australia from Indian Sojourners to Settlers}\textsuperscript{23} which uses oral histories to recreate the history of Sikhs in Australia, in a similar way to Punjabis in New Zealand. This work was a collaboration between Verne A. Dusenberry and Rashmere Bhatti, but Hew McLeod also made a contribution to the volume.


\textsuperscript{23} Rashmere Bhatti and Verne A. Dusenbery, \textit{A Punjabi Sikh Community in Australia: From Indian Sojourners to Australian Citizens}. 
In the light of previous scholarship, the purpose of this thesis is to reanalyse Sikh diasporic history and mobility within New Zealand and the development of the tradition of mobility within the Sikh religion. The thesis challenges long-standing scholarly positions in relation to the seclusion of the community from wider society, the mostly rural basis of the community, the beginnings of the Sikh community in New Zealand (challenging the argument that its origins lie with Phuman and Bir Singh), and the importance of the Sikh religion amongst the New Zealand Sikhs.

The secondary purpose of this thesis is to frame this New Zealand story within the deeper history of Sikh mobility during the establishment and development of the faith from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. This thesis argues that mobility is an integral part of the Sikh tradition and that it predated and was independent of the colonial constructs that have defined mobility post-1849. Fundamentally, the migration to New Zealand and integration into local society were an extension of established traditions of mobility that evolved to meet the new context.

An understanding and examination of sources are critical to undertake any analysis. The digitisation and powerful new search tools have opened up possibilities as evidence can be located, assessed and curated with much greater speed and efficiency. These gains mean that stories about particular ethnic and religious communities can be effectively recovered and evaluated in ways that were previously unimaginable. While newspaper sources have been especially important for this dissertation, the digitisation of passenger lists, immigration files, and army records have also greatly facilitated my research.

The creation of digital databases such as Papers Past has helped researchers to conduct targeted searches over large datasets of many archival sources. This technological shift means that researchers can assemble a substantial body of evidence out of scattered traces that were
left in colonial sources. This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of multiple print culture archival sources with the greatest concentration on New Zealand newspapers from various databases. The archival research looks into recently formed local digital databases such as Archives New Zealand\(^{24}\) and Papers Past while utilising international databases such as Ancestry.com, Trove (Australian Archive Database) and the Library of Congress archive in the United States of America.\(^{25}\) By exploiting these multiple sources, the thesis seeks to enrich, verify and provide various perspectives on Sikh history in New Zealand. The analysis of a vast array of sources has made it possible to establish cohesive themes and ideas. As the era of digitisation has only just begun, this research should be considered open-ended and is by no means complete, but rather just the beginning for reassessing the histories of Punjabis and Sikhs in New Zealand. Perhaps the key insights that come from print culture sources are that they illuminate the social worlds of migrants and allow us to read the history of Sikh migrants against the broader backdrop of colonial New Zealand society. This information widens the understanding as to how Sikhs interacted with and integrated into, colonial society during the earliest stages of migration to New Zealand.

Print culture sources provide a detailed perspective of the Sikh community in the public sphere. The information from digital databases records how Sikhs used colonial institutions and engaged with the routines of colonial life. The records are variable in detail but encompass information that is highly-accurate, easily-dated, and easily-verifiable and enables the formulation of a reliable dataset with a clear chronology. Of course, this body of material is highly fragmentary as it only shows snapshots of occurrences and events relating to the Sikhs. The archive also has some significant shortcomings—the misspelling of names, mislabelling of individuals and groups, and often ambiguous information—which have been recorded and

\(^{24}\) Archives New Zealand database can be found at http://archway.archives.govt.nz/
\(^{25}\) Library of Congress Digital Collections can be found at http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html
discussed in this thesis. Though significant, I was able to mitigate shortcomings within the databases, the information on which it drew needed constant reanalysis and cross-verification. The verification meant non-digital sources were required in conjunction with digital sources to fill gaps and enrich the data. To further mitigate shortcomings in many of these accounts a knowledge of Sikhism and wider Indian culture needed to be applied to rectify misspellings of names and other cultural identifiers, both for the Sikhs and wider Indian community.

Though technology has provided access to much more information, problems have also occurred. The age of the materials—most were captured on microfiche or film during the mid to late twentieth century—has resulted in unreadable text and imagery when digitised and has inevitably contributed to gaps in information and the likelihood of further information being revealed in the future. The development of technology including sophisticated search engines, the deeper integration of the internet into archives and crowdsourcing the correction of materials is continually revealing new information. The accessibility of information from print culture sources is inevitably tied to the development of technology for the future.26

The thesis is conceived of as a chronological path that begins beyond New Zealand, back to the foundation of the Sikh religion. The reason for this was to redefine what mobility was to Sikhism, to separate it from colonial constructs and explore how the faith was an important part of the historical narrative. After providing a historical backdrop to Sikh migration worldwide in the next two chapters, the proceeding five chapters follow a chronology that transitions between the pre-colonial and colonial era in Punjab and follows a trajectory to New Zealand. The division in chapters does not reflect any clearly defined phase or stage of development of the community. Instead, the divisions are for chronological and analytical

convenience and is useful for this thesis because it underlines the persistence of some key features of Sikh life in New Zealand.

Chapter 1 (Mobility in the Early Sikh Tradition) explores mobility and the institutions of mobility during the formation of the Sikh faith in the medieval period and the eighteenth century. The chapter draws a narrative of mobility from Sikh sources by analysing the actions of the Gurus, their travels, the positions of villages and the institutions they developed. By revealing these themes the chapter aims to show that mobility was indigenous and inherent to the Sikh tradition, in contradistinction to the argument that colonialism caused Sikh mobility.

Chapter 2 (The British Relationship with the Sikhs from the Confederacies to the Colonial Era) looks into the Sikh relationship with the British including first recorded contacts, Sikh Kingdom and the arrival of colonialism. It explores how the Sikhs were perceived by the British and the views they had about each other. The chapters also reveal how the British-Sikh relationship was affected by politics, war and alliances. Ultimately it is argued that the relationship with the British served to widen borders for Sikhs who made use of new-found freedoms along with their tradition of mobility.

Chapter 3 (From the Lascar to the Sikh: The Early Indians in New Zealand 1797-1900) brings the research into the New Zealand context by dealing with the period 1797-1900. This chapter begins by exploring South Asian settlement in New Zealand from the earliest known records. The purpose of this is to reveal the context of Sikh arrival in New Zealand. The Sikhs were not completely alone in the country and were by no means the first settlers as argued by scholars. Instead, Indians were interacting with all levels of society and in different geographical regions. The chapter also sheds light on Indian women in New Zealand during this early period, revealing the ordinary life and philanthropic activities in the public sphere. The latter part of the chapter discusses the consequences of the arrival of the Sikhs on and for
the wider South Asian presence. It looks at initial arrivals, the early phase of settlement, cross-cultural interactions and many other themes.

Chapter 4 (The Sikh New Zealanders: Integration and Expansion from 1900 to 1920) explores the lives of settled Sikhs across New Zealand, including their integration into local communities and interactions with colonial institutions. The chapter covers significant events that exposed the wider public to Sikhs, ranging from the arrival of the Sikh regiment to the Sikh troupe that entertained local communities across the country. The chapter also provides additional details on the most extensively researched early settler, Phuman Singh, including details of his daily life and integration into local New Zealand society. The chapter also presents a snapshot of global events that had an effect on the broader New Zealand public’s perceptions of the Sikhs, including the Komagata Maru incident in Canada and the activities of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa.

Chapter 5 (1920-1930 – Citizenship and Race) details the Sikh life in the period 1920-1930. Aspects of cultural and religious reproduction are discussed, including details of marriage, death and prayer within the community. This chapter offers detail of Sikh political activities across New Zealand, such as the establishment of political organisations and the lobbying of the public as well as politicians. Such political activity occurred in the context of heightened racial tension and the passing of restrictive immigration legislation. The chapter also details global interactions, such as the arrival of the Indian Army hockey team in 1926.

Chapter 6 (1930-1947 – Continued Challenges and Independence) covers an era of profound change in the world, the British Empire and India. The call to war was combined with the growing cries of Indian independence and a global depression. The chapter details the continued activities of Sikhs within this context, including the presence of Sikh entertainers and sportsmen, ongoing political activism, death, marriage and employment. The chapter also
briefly discusses the political developments, and New Zealand’s responses as India was preparing for independence.

Chapter 7 (Conclusions) draws together multiple themes throughout the thesis including mobility, integration, racial discrimination and political activities, religious and cultural reproduction, interactions with colonial institutions and the colonial press. The conclusion summarises my arguments challenging previous scholarship, including dating of first arrivals, seclusion of the community from wider society, and the importance of religion within the community. The chapter also discusses the future of Sikh diasporic studies.

It is important to understand the nature of Sikh life in New Zealand from first settlement through the first half of the twentieth century by returning to the religious foundations of Sikh culture and that is the concern of the next chapter.
Mobility in the Early Sikh Tradition

Introduction

Mobility within the Sikh community has been seen as a consequence of British colonialism and expansion after the fall of the Sikh Empire in 1849. This perspective has been in part due to the relative lack of research on the movement of Sikhs before the formal annexation of Punjab by the East India Company. During the latter half of the twentieth century, scholarly interest grew in the global Sikh community, coinciding with the lifting of immigration regulation that had prevented Sikhs from entering European-dominated states around the world. The focus of that scholarship\(^1\) has centred on the arrival of Sikhs into regions beyond South Asia, including the United Kingdom, North America and the South Pacific during the late nineteenth century. For explanations of these migrations, scholars have looked towards the immediate context in Punjab from where the majority of the Sikhs came, analysing socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental reasons to establish causality.

The key here was the detailed research undertaken by Tom Kessinger in his groundbreaking work on ‘Vilyatpur’.\(^2\) His work recorded the history of a village’s development for over a century, highlighting the local impact of migration of cohorts of young men to Australia on the village’s economy and social structure. This book was closely followed by

---


works from McLeod, Bhachu, Barrier and Dusenberry and later La Brack, Singh, Ballantyne and Tatla, who went further to record migratory histories and developed theories around them. Ballantyne’s work on Sikh diaspora has framed Sikh mobility through the lens of British imperialism and religion seeing “colonialism” and “diaspora” as “heavily intertwined” histories. Though Ballantyne retreats deeper into the past and focuses on religion’s part in this, he frames mobility within a distinctly colonial framework. His primary interest is in the ways in which the British Empire enabled and shaped Sikh migration, which means that his treatment of the pre-1849 period is schematic. Other scholars, however, have continued to equate mobility and British colonial rule. Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh, for example, summarizes the history and nature of Sikh migration in one line stating “the phenomenon of Sikh migration is traced to the British annexation of the Punjab in 1849”.

This preoccupation with the connections between British colonialism and migration means that scholarship on Sikh history has neglected a deeper history of mobility engrained within the Sikh tradition running back to its foundation laid by the first Guru, Guru Nanak. This neglect means that the nature of Sikh movement has been misunderstood as primarily a response to British initiatives, but historians have not sufficiently explored the connections between the social values and religious vision of the Sikh tradition and the long history of Sikh mobility. The research presented in this chapter draws upon sources on the history of the Sikhs analysing the mobility within the tradition. By examining literature from the period of the Gurus and the eighteenth century, I will argue that mobility, migration and supporting

---

3 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand.
5 Barrier and Dusenbery, The Sikh Diaspora.
6 LaBrack, The Sikhs of Northern California.
8 Tony Ballantyne, Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World (USA: Duke University Press, 2006).
9 Tatla, The Sikh Diaspora.
10 Tony Ballantyne, Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World, 39.
11 Singh, Sikhism, 198.
The sources utilized in this chapter show a continuity of a tradition from the first Guru, challenging theories and perspectives binding mobility to the arrival of the British in Punjab.

**Guru Nanak: Foundation of Mobility**

The *janam sakhis* (or birth stories) record the traditional narratives of Guru Nanak’s life (1469-1539). The literature flourished during the early history of the Sikh community, between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. It was a corpus utilized “for missionary work by the ‘orthodox’ followers of Guru Nanak to underline the uniqueness and to uphold the unity of the Guruship on the principle of nomination”.\(^{12}\) The literature was integral to Sikhs during the time of Guru Nanak and after his passing. Intertwined within the sakhis are the stories of Nanak including his travels, activities, trials and tribulations. Scepticism surrounds the material due to the miraculous accounts and metaphor that envelop the literature. This doubt is reflected extensively in W.H. McLeod’s *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (1968). Controversy surrounds the reliability of this textual tradition as a factual record.

Recent research by Gurinder Singh Mann has shed new light on this often undervalued source on Guru Nanak by analysing the dates, historical development and the authority of the literature within the community.\(^{13}\) The research on the janam sakhis has revealed the importance of this material within the Sikh community. The literature was influenced by the politics of leadership – as Gurus came to power, they were challenged by contending family members. The rule of succession within medieval India assigned power to the oldest son within the family unit. However, the office of the Guru within the Sikh tradition was handed to the


\(^{13}\) Gurinder Singh Mann, ‘Guru Nanak’s Life and Legacy’, *Journal of Punjab Studies* 17, no. 1&2 (2010). Janam Sakhi material has proven controversial due to its dismissal by scholars such as W.H. McLeod ref. *Guru Nanak & the Sikh Religion*, 1968. Arguing the validity of the janam sakhis falls beyond the scope of this thesis. The new research by Gurinder Singh Mann places the puratan janam sakhis as the oldest, consistent and most reliable source of all extant janam sakhis.
best-suited follower for the position. Due to this method of succession rifts arose between the Gurus’ and family members claiming the Gurus’ authority. For family members to boost their claims to the Gurus’ office, some adopted and manipulated markers of power. One of the most important markers of power was the janam sakhi literature. As janam sakhis were used to lay claim to the leadership of the Sikh community several versions developed over time. The first, and what Mann considers the oldest and original, is the Puratan janam sakhi (circa 1600). The second was the Miharban janam sakhi (pre-1620). The third is the Bala tradition that is dated between 1648 and 1658. According to Mann, the authoritative and mainstream tradition was the Puratan.14

The janam sakhis are divided into five *udasis* or journeys, each enriched with the details of Guru Nanak’s experiences and activities. The first journey had taken place before he founded his village Kartarpur on the banks of the river Ravi (located in current day Pakistan). Another four trips took place after its establishment. The four journeys were distinctly missionary in nature and set Guru Nanak in various regions including Sindh, the Himalayan foothills, Mecca and in current day Peshawar. Each narrative of these journeys was chronological in nature and reflected a significant phase of his life and teachings. The literature also serves as a valuable record of the community’s early development, showing the implementation of institutions, traditions, the delegation of authority and success of drawing followers into the Sikh faith. It also emphasized the centrality of Kartarpur as an exemplary site for the traditions and institutions of daily Sikh life.

For this dissertation, it is crucial to recognise that the janam sakhis draw a picture of mobility beginning with the founder Guru Nanak in the early sixteenth century. From the foundation of the Sikh religion, mobility was an important aspect of the faith and something

14 Ibid, 7.
that led to the rapid spread of the religion across South Asia. According to these traditions, Guru Nanak was a prolific traveller who visited major cities of political and religious importance such as Varanasi, Lahore and Mecca. W.H. McLeod’s critique of the evidentiary reliability of the narratives of Nanak’s travels in the janam sakhis misses the essential point that the texts stress the importance of the Guru’s mobility, regardless of whether he made all of these journeys. Moreover, in these narratives Nanak’s knowledge of the political situation in each locale and his interactions with local people were extensively recorded, leading to the portrait of an individual who engaged with a broad range of communities and adapted to the various locations in which he travelled and lived.

Guru Nanak’s background was a Punjabi Hindu of Khatri caste descent. His caste meant he was a member of a mobile mercantile group whose primary occupation was trading. During Guru Nanak’s time, the Khatris were involved in a diverse set of professions, including working as artisans, traders, moneylenders and landowners.¹⁵ Nanak was born into a family who had close connections with the Mughal authority. His father was a patwari (revenue official), and this occupation required training in bookkeeping and the state language, Persian. These abilities meant his father and family were connected to the expansive Persianate world of the Mughals and were aware of the political structures and intellectual flows that joined the Mughal world. The family had an inherently high status in the village, and its ownership of land further enhanced this position. Guru Nanak’s mother was from the village of Chahal (near Lahore), the political and cultural centre of Mughal Punjab. Guru Nanak was schooled to prepare for the occupation of his father, as professions were inherited during the medieval period. According to Mann, this required Guru Nanak to learn “Persian and some basic Arabic at the village mosque, and training in account keeping as a member of a merchant caste”.¹⁶ This

¹⁶ Mann, Sikhism, 20.
educational background gave Nanak the tools to allow for extensive travels in the Mughal Empire and beyond, and introduced him to a world of texts that reached out beyond Punjab itself.

Guru Nanak eventually moved to the city of Sultanpur Lodhi, a move that proved influential. Sultanpur was a thriving multicultural centre of commerce located on the important Delhi-Lahore trade route, with substantial and diverse trading communities. There he worked for a local official. During the late fifteenth century, the city was a bustling hub of emissaries, travellers and pilgrims. These included political emissaries and pilgrims travelling to and from Mecca as well as followers of Shiva and Devi on their way to Kashmir and the Shivalik Hills. There were also pilgrims on their way to the Gangetic plains, a religious centre for Hindus across North India.\(^\text{17}\) It was also a significant political centre, as high-level diplomats, officials, administrators of justice and interpreters of Islamic law resided in the city.\(^\text{18}\) Sultanpur was known as a centre of religious learning (with many madrasas), and the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb is said to have completed his religious education in the city. Guru Nanak resided in this bustling cosmopolitan hub for over a decade during the late 1400s, and he undoubtedly encountered a range of travellers attracted to the city.

It was during this time that Guru Nanak underwent a profound religious experience that led to a change in the course of his life. He set out on his travels, beginning (whether consciously or not) a tradition of mobility and community creation that would expand across generations and become an integral part of Sikhism.

The janam sakhis inform readers that Guru Nanak travelled prolifically throughout the Mughal Empire and the Middle East during his lifetime, and they emphasize the centrality of

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid, 20.
travel in Nanak’s life. As Nanak visited, he entered many centres of trade and politics. According to the Puratan janam sakhi, these included regions such as the Himalayan foothills, Peshawar, and Mecca.ären When taken together with Guru Nanak's historical context the janam sakhis suggest that his travels reached from the Ganges to Persia and the Arabian Peninsula, as well as reaching north to Afghanistan. He is said to have challenged religious leaders, criminals, and wealthy individuals with his new beliefs and gained many followers on the way. For over two decades he moved freely, mingling with different people speaking various languages and paying close attention to religious groups around him. Nanak’s journeys focused on places of pilgrimage and religious centres where he engaged different groups and leaders. His interactions are reflected in his detailed writings on groups such as the Jains, Vaishnavas, Yogis, Sufis and Ulemas within the Guru Granth, the holiest Sikh scripture. Nanak’s knowledge was extended to their practices such as *ras lila* and *arti*.20 Nanak’s mobility was unique within the medieval context. “Unlike his fellow travellers, whose itinerary included visits to their religious centres, Nanak seems to have gone to places of pilgrimage irrespective of their affiliation”.21 During these journeys, Guru Nanak established his community on the banks of the river Ravi, calling it Kartarpur. It was also during the early 1500s that Guru Nanak became a focal point of pilgrimage for Sikhs and, according to Mann, “in no uncertain terms the Puratan [janam sakhi] reports that Kartarpur with the Guru’s *dargah* (home) at its centre represented the sacred site for the Sikhs”.22 Kartarpur as a sacred pilgrimage site is supported by the Guru Granth scripture that explicitly references the attendance and celebration at holy sites within the writings of Guru Nanak.23 In other words, Kartarpur itself fostered a new tradition of mobility amongst Nanak’s followers who were drawn to the Guru’s dwelling place.

21 Ibid, 20.
23 *Guru Granth Sahib*, 150.
Institutionalisation of Mobility

The institutionalisation of mobility began during the period of Guru Nanak and developed through successive Gurus. The traditions of mobility and linkages between communities required the development of core institutions. These systems were maintained through strong governance and by followers in local communities as the Gurus sought to respond to the changing political situations and the needs of mobile people. The institutions were required to serve multiple purposes, combining both spiritual and practical activities within local communities. Institutions and traditions complimented each other, providing

shelter, food and a mode for religious instruction within each local congregation as Sikhs travelled between communities and the centre located wherever the Guru was based. Along with the establishment and development of such institutions was the rapid expansion of the faith and founding of villages and towns to support the wide geographical spread of the Sikhs. The positioning of towns on important trade and pilgrimage routes emphasized the importance the Gurus placed in mobility and the need to support it. The Sikhs were unified under a common religious identity and language that made mobility even easier. Ultimately the foundations and institutions set up by Guru Nanak continued to evolve throughout the early period of Sikh history.

The establishment of villages and towns specifically for the purpose of building a new and distinctive community was started by Guru Nanak. These cities and villages encompassed the core institutions that facilitated Sikh mobility. The ideas of mobility extended to the positioning of towns and cities, reflecting Nanak’s experiences with travel and his awareness of the importance of movement (for both commercial and devotional purposes). Many were situated on routes with the high trade and pilgrim traffic and were generally within the vicinity of important cities and along established trade routes across northern India. For example, the location of Kartarpur provides some insight into Guru Nanak’s awareness of the importance of roads for the maintenance of culturally-important connections. In founding Kartarpur on the banks of river Ravi, Guru Nanak acknowledged a nearby important pilgrimage route to an ancient Shiva temple in Amarnath, Kashmir, and the proximity of Lahore. The route was a passage for those paying homage to the Devi temples located in the Shivalik Hills. During this period “a large number of pilgrims passed through the Kartarpur area.”

---

26 Ibid.
the conversion of Bhai Lehana (renamed Angad, Guru Nanak’s successor) who was drawn to Kartarpur while on pilgrimage.

The establishment of towns and cities along highly traversed routes was repeated by successive Gurus and included towns and villages such as Tarn Taran, Sri Hargobindpur (located near Amritsar and Lahore) and Kiratpur. An example of the importance of roads was the positioning of Goindval (“the abode of God”), near a route between Delhi and Lahore. This route was critical for not only trade and commercial communication but also for the Mughal state that valued a direct connection between the two major cities. The route was part of a much larger road that continued between Punjab and Kabul through to the Middle East. French cartographers recorded this route throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on maps depicting the Mughal Empire. The Mughal Emperor Akbar passed through Goindval while travelling along this road. Another example was the emphasis by Guru Hargobind (1595-1644) on the main routes that carried trade and pilgrims across Mughal India. This focus was represented in the establishment of Kiratpur on a road running between Kashmir and Delhi (through Punjab), crossing through the area between the Jamuna and the Ganges. This route carried Jain pilgrims and Hindu devotees to sacred shrines including Naina Devi, Jawalamukhi and Adi Nath in Kangra. It was an important route not only for pilgrims but also for the British explorer, Thomas Croyat (1615) and French explorer Jean de Thevenot (1666). Akbar’s memoirs also record the importance of the route by noting the distances pilgrims travelled to reach the sacred Hindu temple, Jawalamukhi. The establishment of Kiratpur, in proximity to

27 Grewal, The Sikhs of the Punjab, 51.
28 Jean : de Thevenot, Voyages de Mr De Thevenot, contenant la Relation de l’Indostan, des nouveaux mogols, & des autres peuples & pays des Indes (ches la veuve Biestkins, rue de la Harpe, a l’imprimerie des Roziers, 1684).
31 Ibid, 1:110.
ancient Jain and Hindu temples, continued a consistent pattern of the establishment of towns on the main routes.

The establishment of townships also occurred outside of Punjab, and this was especially true during the Guruship of Gobind Singh (1675-1708). Two townships of particular importance were Paunta and Anandpur, towns established during his reign. The position of these towns reflects the continued importance of the main routes for trade, pilgrimage and accessibility into the early eighteenth century as both were established on important trade and pilgrimage routes. Paunta was located at a passageway where Hindus crossed the Yamuna River to carry the remains of those who had passed away to Ganga at Haridwar. Anandpur (which was near Kiratpur as mentioned earlier) was also important for both Hindus and Jains as they travelled to multiple religious sites in the area. These routes were not only conduits for pilgrims but served as arteries for trade connecting Kashmir, Punjab and Delhi.32

These roads and routes also carried the devotees of the Gurus out of Punjab to numerous cities across North India. Bhai Gurdas noted the presence of Sikhs across the subcontinent in the towns such as Kabul, Bukhara, Lahore, Agra, Delhi, and from South India to Bengal.33 Persian sources dating to the 1560s (the period of Guru Arjan’s reign) recorded Sikhs in Kabul, Ujjain, Burhanpur, Lucknow, Prayag, Jaunpur, Patna, Raj Mahal and Dhaka.34 The expansive reach of the Panth was reinforced by Bhimsen in 1708 during the period of Guru Gobind Singh, as he wrote that it had been “seen and heard that no country, city, township and village is without people believing in [Guru Nanak]”.35

Such interconnections were also embodied through *panj piyare* (five beloved ones). These first initiates into the Singh order came from a variety of areas including Bidar, Delhi,

34 Ibid., Var 11 Pauris 30 & 31.
Dvarka, Lahore and Jagannath Puri. This geographical range confirms the existence of strong links between distant regions such as Orissa, Karnataka and Gujarat. These were major centres of politics and religion in medieval India and were connected by major trading routes throughout the subcontinent. The geographically widespread nature of Sikh communities indicates an extensive interconnected network for Sikhs to travel through. As mentioned earlier, these systems were likely utilized by various Sikh groups including the Khatris and Vanjara Sikhs, as well as many Gurus. For example Guru Hargobind (1595-1694) requested horses from the Balkh congregation in Northern Afghanistan while residing in Kiratpur.36 Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675) also requested resources such as linens and elephants from the Dhaka congregation while living in Patna, Bihar.37

Mobility and the cultivation of linkages between communities need to be understood as fundamental to the development of the Sikh tradition and were supported by a significant set of institutions, including the langar, gurdwara, manji, and the masand. These institutions provided a means of connecting with mobile people, supporting them on travels and maintaining the channels of communications across the subcontinent. One of the core supportive institutions for mobility was the langar, a community kitchen that served food to everyone “regardless of age, creed, or social distinctions”.38 The langar allowed people including travellers, traders, pilgrims and later soldiers to seek nourishment while travelling from community to community or while making their way to the Guru. This provision was not unique – various community kitchens were already in use by the Sufis and Nath Yogis. The difference between the Sikh institution and that of the Sufis was that the Mughals provided state support for the maintenance of Sufi communal kitchens, while the langar was driven by

36 Ibid, 75.
38 Mann, Sikhism, 121.
and funded from within the Sikh community, reflecting both the Sikh commitment to equality and a recognition of the importance of feeding mobile members of the community. The Nath Yogis begged for food to run their kitchen, something that did not occur in the Sikh langar. Sikhs initially ran the langar with offerings from followers, but this became more formalised during the period of Guru Arjan (1563-1606) who established the tradition of dasvandh. This tradition required all Sikh families to give a tenth of their income to the centralised treasury, or Guru di Golak. According to Mann, this “strengthened the collective Sikh resources” and was an “expression of gratitude for the divine bounty” from the families. The dasvandh benefited the langar within local Sikh communities by providing funds to service it, further cementing its centrality for a large community that embraced the economic, cultural and religious value of mobility. The institution of langar also provided an avenue for those outside of the community to connect with its members and a medium for the community to come together.

Along with langar, the gurdwara was a central meeting place for Sikhs in the Indian medieval context. It was a cornerstone for mobility as communities were interlinked across the sub-continent. For the Sikhs, the gurdwara provided a place for followers to meet and receive instruction from the Guru or his representative, and probably provided residence for those travelling to the Guru and those passing by the village or town seeking a place to rest. According to Mann, “early Sikh towns like Kartarpur (in the 1520s) and Goindval (in the 1550s) were built around the gurdwara”. This strategy later developed further as large towns like Ramdaspur (in the 1570s), now known as Amritsar, were established and were centred around Darbar Sahib, the current day Golden Temple. The developing network of gurdwaras across the Indian subcontinent provided a central point for local congregations away from the Guru to meet. The importance of gurdwaras to mobile networks was confirmed in 1700 (during

---

39 Ibid, 33.
40 Mann, ‘Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh’s Life and Times’, 231.
the period of Guru Gobind) which described Sikhs away from the centre congregating at their local gurdwara to listen to stories about Nanak and to share langar. The centrality of the gurdwara to mobility was further reinforced by the custom recorded in the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama (an important guiding text on the conduct of Sikhs during the eighteenth century). This rahitnama stipulated that Sikhs be required to undertake prayers before travelling and upon their return (details about the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama are discussed later).

Overarching the langar and gurdwara was the manji system and the office of the masand. The manji system represented the “seat of [the Guru’s] authority in the early Sikh community”. The establishment of the first positions across Punjab were elaborated in the janam sakhis. The manji was further expanded with the establishment of the masand. Guru Ram Das sought to strengthen the system of governance and mobile linkages across the Sikh communities by assigning leaders or masands who were the “guru’s deputies” and the “authorized leader[s] of a local congregation”. The purpose of this office was to lead congregational prayers and provide doctrinal guidance with the aim of bringing new people into the fold and importantly to serve as links between the local congregations and the centre. The offices facilitated and maintained connections between the Guru and the myriad of Sikh congregations across the Indian sub-continent and the Middle East. Individuals were assigned authority as masands, and a list was recorded by both Bhai Gurdas and later by Guru Tegh Bahadur in his letters (hukamname) to congregations. The offices were then terminated by Guru Gobind Singh as the masands became corrupt and disloyal to the Guru. After the dissolution of the offices, Sikhs were instructed to bring offerings and support directly to the

---

41 Ibid.
42 Mann, *Sikhism*, 120–121.
44 Mann, *Sikhism*, 121.
Guru. Nevertheless, for a significant period, the network of manjis and masands served an important function in maintaining communication, representing the Guru’s authority and facilitating mobile linkages between communities. These links were further consolidated by the common language and belief system that existed under the leadership of the Gurus and their teachings.

Another tradition of mobility encouraged and fostered by the Gurus was pilgrimage. The influence of pilgrimage manifested in two ways. The first was in the way infrastructure and institutions were founded and positioned across the sub-continent. As I have already noted, towns and villages were deliberately situated in high traffic areas and near primary roads. The second was the development of Sikh sacred geography across Punjab and Northern India. As each Guru passed through a region, particular places and events associated with them became highly significant to the Sikhs, eventually becoming sanctified and incorporated into Sikh sacred geography. Townships like Kartarpur (established by Guru Nanak), Amritsar (founded by Guru Ramdas), Kiratpur (founded by Guru Hargobind), were examples of the proactive awareness of the Gurus and the importance of routes that channelled pilgrims through these respective towns. They were a means of bringing new converts and provided an efficient way for Sikhs to visit sacred sites as well as the Guru himself. Guru Angad became a follower of Guru Nanak and was eventually given leadership of the community. Guru Angad became the second Guru and a hallmark for the importance of pilgrimage within the tradition of mobility. Both aspects of the pilgrimage’s influence (developed throughout the period of the ten Gurus) can be viewed as evolutionary.

The Guru Granth scripture also prescribes the importance of pilgrimage. According to Guru Nanak (in his writings) in the Guru Granth, “there was no pilgrimage centre like the Guru
himself”.47 This significance was attached to the Guru himself investing in the landscape he travelled across. The importance developed further where Sikhs were to venerate the spot where the Guru sat and “to rub their forehead with its dust”.48 The appropriation of annual festivals like Vaisakhi and Diwali into the Sikh ritual calendar expanded these attachments to the Guru and the value in seeking him out. Sikhs came to Goindval for the blessing of the Guru during these festive occasions. A well approached by 84 steps was constructed there and became a central focus of religious devotion for many Sikhs.49 Guru Arjan also encouraged Sikhs to make a pilgrimage to the sacred pool at Amritsar because it washed away the sins of followers.50 Guru Hargobind expanded Sikh sacred geography into the Malwa region of Punjab, and later Guru Tegh Bahadur pushed it further into Assam (eastern India) on his travels there. The Gurus made proactive efforts to visit distant congregations to “sanctify houses and dharamsals”.51 In a Persian text called, “tomb of Guru Nanak,” Surat Singh described the tomb of Nanak as a “shrine” and even specifically stated that he had travelled there for pilgrimage with his mother.52 As the Guruship changed throughout the two centuries, sacred geography continued to grow across Northern India.

Combined with these institutions and mobility, was the idea of sojourning. Even as Guru Nanak undertook his journeys, he returned to his wife and two children. The cycle of travel and sojourn was recorded in the janam sakhi literature while Nanak made his trips. Nanak’s sojourning had a personal toll on his family. Guru Nanak’s wife Sulakhani was upset about his travels and made her feelings known.53 Another janam sakhi refers to Nanak’s meeting with his mother on returning to Talvandi, his birthplace, with his Muslim companion.

47 Mann, ‘Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh’s Life and Times’, 231.
48 Ibid.
49 Grewal, The Sikhs of the Punjab, 51.
50 Guru Granth Sahib, 623.
51 Mann, ‘Sources for the Study of Guru Gobind Singh’s Life and Times’, 231.
52 Grewal, Sikh History from Persian Sources, 88.
53 Bhai Vir Singh, Puratan Janam Sakhi Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji (New Delhi: Printograph, 2010), Sakhi 8.
Bhai Mardana. Here he directed Mardana to meet his family in his stead, requesting that not to notify his parents of his presence. Guru Nanak’s mother became suspicious and followed Bhai Mardana back to Guru Nanak, and a touching reunion ensued. Guru Nanak’s mother begged him to stay, but he refused and continued his journey. Successive Gurus also went through similar episodes with family members who were reluctant for them to leave. Thus, the idea of sojourning has been apparent in the Sikh tradition from a very early stage. In fact, the idea of returning home after a temporary absence was undertaken from the very onset of Sikhism and consistently continued through the period of the Gurus.

Geographical Spread of the Sikhs during the Guru Period

The vast geographic spread of the community was a consistent theme in various Sikh and Persian documents from the period of the Gurus. Sikhs travelled great distances to reach the Guru, indicating how far some of these links were. According to the Persian corpus Dabistan-I-Mazahib (dated 1644-1645), “not many cities remained in the inhabited region [that] the Sikhs had not settled in some number”. There are also references in this literature to Sikhs in Kabul and Balkh within Afghanistan and travelling as far as Iran to collect horses.

There are multiple references to the mobility of Sikhs in other Persian sources. These include the memoirs of Emperor Jahangir of the Mughal Empire, written during the seventeenth century. According to the Emperor, “from all sides and directions ignorant ones and dervish-garb worshippers inclined towards [Guru Arjan] and reposed full faith in him”. Another document from the latter half of the seventeenth century was the Khulasatu’t Tawarikh (completed, 1696). This compendium is a history of the Mughal Empire and briefly describes

54 Ibid, Sakhi 31.
56 Grewal, Sikh History from Persian Sources, 66.
57 Ibid, 75.
58 Ibid, 57.
each province within it. According to this manuscript, Sikhs were highly mobile. When describing Guru Nanak, the author states that he travelled “through many parts of the world” and that upon establishing Kartarpur (Guru Nanak’s village), multitudes of peoples from all parts and lands came to him.\(^{59}\) According to another text attributed to a Muslim named Bhismen in 1708, “no country, city, township, and village is without people [who] believe in [Guru Nanak]”.\(^{60}\)

Sikh documents also recorded the extent of the community during the mid-sixteenth century, during the period of Guru Arjan (fifth Guru) and Guru Hargobind (sixth Guru). One such document was *Vaaran Bhai Gurdas*, a corpus created by Bhai Gurdas (a prominent and senior member of the Guru’s entourage). As noted earlier, this corpus recorded Sikhs located in cities such as Kabul, Ujjain, Burhanpur, Lucknow, Prayag, Jaunpur, Patna, Raj Mahal and Dhaka.\(^{61}\) The listing of these towns, when combined with references in the Dabistan-I-Mazahib, placed the Sikhs from Iran to current day Bangladesh by the mid-sixteenth century. It would also be fair to assume that many of the major towns had Sikh congregations between these distant points.

The spread of the community further reinforced the importance of mobility within the Sikh tradition, with the Guru at its geographic centre. The formal linkages carried communications, administered authority and shifted resources and peoples across Middle and Northern India to the Guru, inherently entrenching mobility further into the Sikh tradition.

The geographic reach of the Panth was also supported by the Vanjara Sikhs. Vanjara refers to a group of “trading-class nomadic people” from Central and South India. This community were known as traders and carriers across central and South India for centuries.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 91.
\(^{60}\) Ibid, 105.
According to Mughal references in the sixteenth century, the Vanjaras employed caravans driven by bullocks with dogs for company. They were allowed to trade during conflicts and moved between armies with some immunity from attack. Their caravans were designed to carry food grain and other trading supplies. According to Pashaura Singh, the incorporation of Vanjaras into the Sikh community dates to at least the mid-1550s, during the reign of Guru Hargobind. It remains unclear when they were first converted to Sikhism, but their undeniable importance within Sikh tradition is suggested by the selection of the ninth Guru (Guru Tegh Bahadur) by a member of the Labhana caste, which was a core section of the Vanjara community. The individual who selected Guru Tegh Bahadur, Baba Makhan Shah, was described as a sea merchant (according to traditional sources). The incorporation of the Vanjaras served to create further linkages throughout the subcontinent and beyond.

**Mobility in the Eighteenth Century**

By the time of Guru Gobind, the tenth Guru, the community spread from Northern Afghanistan to current day Bangladesh. In between these regions were a network of communities unified by a common language, religion and identity. With the establishment of the gurdwara, langar, manji and masand, the Gurus reinforced these institutions throughout their reign. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, authority was vested into the Guru Granth (Sikh Holy Scripture) and Guru Panth (the Guru’s Community), thus effectively dissolving the office of the Guru. The eighteenth century was a period during which the community sought guidance on matters of religious importance within daily life. This new cultural order spawned

---

a vast amount of literature called *rahitnamas* which became an important part of the Sikh textual tradition for centuries to come.

During the eighteenth century, after the death of Guru Gobind (1666-1708), Punjab was divided into *misl* or confederacies that were ruled independently by Sikh leaders but could be mobilised and linked by their common religion and identity, especially during armed conflicts. Misl leaders would meet in the city of Amritsar to discuss political matters and disputes that required constant communication between the confederacies.

The eighteenth century also saw the weakening of Mughal authority within Punjab. The emboldened Sikhs angered by the death of their Guru aggressively took up arms against the instruments of Mughal control in the region. In the first half of the century, Sikhs attempted to demarcate a sovereign state with varying control over Punjab. In the process, they challenged Mughals and Afghanis, attacking from both Delhi and later Kabul. The Sikhs suffered some setbacks, but by the 1760s, Lahore was under their control. The consolidation of Sikh control over Punjab led to the gradual subjugation of other territories and the conclusion of treaties with other sovereign powers.

The consolidation of Sikh authority over Punjab also gave people the freedom to travel in safety throughout the region. It also came with increased support for, and the development and expansion of, critical mobile institutional infrastructure. This support included the development of gurdwaras, the donation of revenue lands, and other support for non-mainstream Sikh sects. It also resulted in an increase in the number of caretakers of institutions like the gurdwara. The creation of a sovereign state ushered in an era of

---

65 Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 82.
66 Ibid, 96.
67 Ibid.
widespread Sikh support for institutions across Punjab which facilitated and encouraged increased mobility.

Within this dynamic (in the post-Guru period) the rahitnamas grew in importance and held a high level of primacy within the Sikh tradition. The rahitnama is a “manual of Sikh belief and practice” with its origins in the foundation of the faith. The codified form of the rahitnama is attributed to Guru Gobind though it is unclear what the “original” contents of the rahitnama were. According to Mann, “the first text of this type was prepared in 1701” and a version of it was incorporated into the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama (early eighteenth century). 68 It was intended for the Sikhs only and was not a universal document applied to non-Sikhs. The Chaupa Singh Rahitnama was considered “open-ended” in the sense that the rahitnama continually evolved to meet the issues and problems of the changing times. The manuals document different aspects of Sikh practice and pay specific attention to the demands that flowed on from mobility.

Rahitnama literature grew and diversified throughout the eighteenth century as Sikhs sought guidance on all aspects of life. The Chaupa Singh Rahitnama is one of the most detailed texts guiding the community on mobility. According to this text assistance, such as the provision of shelter, “should always be given to a Sikh traveller who is in need”. 69 Such support also included feeding Sikh visitors “generously as circumstances permit[ted]” 70, particularly those on long distance journeys. It went into great detail, noting that “if a visiting Sikh wishes to wash his hair he should be supplied with [soap] if any is available”. 71 It further stipulated that rituals and observances were to be conducted before a Sikh left for a journey and when a Sikh returned from a trip, noting that these were to take priority over any other activity. A Sikh

68 Mann, Sikhism, 78.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
was required to “proceed directly to the [gurdwara] to prostrate himself” and he was to “offer worship and thanksgiving for his safe return”. These were directives given to Sikhs and specifically referred to travel “near or far”.

The institution of the gurdwara features prominently in the Chaupa Singh Rahitnama, with specific requirements for the construction, purpose and ceremonies surrounding the operation of these vital institutions. According to Chaupa Singh, “every village or locality with Gursikh homes should maintain a [gurdwara] dedicated to the Guru” and the “sangat should regularly gather”. The rahitnama explicitly states that there “must be free access” and “no Sikh should be prevented from entering”. This reference meant that gurdwaras should not restrict entry on the basis of caste or lineage and stated that anywhere a Sikh community was present a place of worship was to be established to serve the needs of both the local people and those Sikhs travelling, whether for religious or worldly reasons. Within the gurdwara, there should be “facilities for Sikhs who may need a place to stay”.

By the early eighteenth century, the langar was also enclosed within the gurdwara as the institution became a multifaceted centre. The langar was a mode of feeding all, without distinction, and provided a place for a free meal for anyone, including those travelling long distances. The institution like the gurdwara was a core part of the Sikh faith. The Chaupa Singh Rahitnama states that “every Sikhni (Sikh woman) should daily contribute a handful of flour to the [gurdwara] kitchen”. Not only was the langar specified, but it also appears as an attachment to the gurdwara and the Chaupa Singh indicates the langar’s attachment to the

---

72 Ibid, 34.
74 Ibid, 37.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
gurdwara was the norm at the time. The position of the langar meant the gurdwara had become a centre where the langar and worship were incorporated.

Other lesser known rahitnama traditions also referenced and encouraged mobility within the Sikh community. The Sau Sakhian (circa early eighteenth century) gave specific guidelines for behaviour at a pilgrimage centre and the significance of particular pilgrimage destinations; pilgrimage to Amritsar was recommended to “shed your karma and enter the abode of the Guru”. Pilgrimage is also referred to in the Desa Singh rahitnama (circa mid-eighteenth century) which also extensively outlined essential sacred sites for pilgrimage – Anandpur, Patna, Amritsar and Abchalnagar. The Daya Singh Rahitnama (mid to late eighteenth century) also specified multiple sacred sites, including Kesghar, Anandpur, Damdama, and Amritsar. Regardless of the variations in these texts, they all consistently promoted travel in one form or another.

Ideas of mobility were not only expressed in the rahitnama corpus but featured in other Sikh historical records such as the Sri Gur Sobha text that describes the event surrounding the Khalsa initiation in 1699. According to the Sri Gur Sobha text, Sikhs had come for blessings from “towns and cities afar”. Persian documents of the eighteenth century also describe the geographical spread of the Sikhs and their mobility throughout the Indian sub-continent. For example, the Mir’at-I Waidat, a history of the Mughal dynasty completed in 1734, notes that the rebellion led by Banda Singh Bahadur aimed at overthrowing the Mughal authority and that Sikhs came from “all parts of Hindustan, Dhakin, Bengal, Kabul, Kashmir and other places…” and that “no village or city is without this topsy-turvy sect”. This text reiterates the expression

---

77 W.H. McLeod, Sikhs of the Khalsa, A History of the Khalsa Rahit (Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2003), 144.
78 Ibid, 119.
79 Ibid, 130.
80 Ibid, 268.
81 Grewal, Sikh History from Persian Sources, 160–162.
82 Ibid, 161.
of broad geographical spread that appeared in the seventeenth-century Persian corpus Dabistan-i-Mazahib (mentioned earlier in this chapter).\textsuperscript{83} Persian texts are one source among many, including British, Americans and Sikhs texts that confirm the importance and continuity of mobility during the eighteenth century.

British accounts also briefly make note of the importance of mobility within the Sikh tradition and its incorporation into Sikh prayers. For example, Charles Wilkins, a member of the Asiatic Society of London, made note of the surroundings, ceremonies and prayers when he visited the “college of the Seeks” in Patna, Bihar during the 1770s. Wilkins mentions the content of a prayer for the “safety of those who at the time were on their travels”.\textsuperscript{84} The reference to travel was no surprise due to the constant emphasis on mobility within Sikhism.

By the late eighteenth century, Sikhs had gone far beyond South Asia. According to Tony Ballantyne’s research, a Sikh, who had reached Salem, Massachusetts in the United States of America, was described as a “tall black bearded Sikh” who wore a “white woollen coat bearing the red sash of his sect”.\textsuperscript{85} His appearance suggested that he was likely interacting with the local population while working for a white American trader.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the Sikh community spanned multiple kingdoms and Empires. The continually changing Indian political context and the encroachment of European powers made Sikhs citizens subjects of different rulers. These included the Marathan Empire, British Empire, Oudh Kingdom, Mysore Kingdom and Hyderabad Province. At the same time, Sikhs consolidated their rule over Punjab and brought Lahore under direct Sikh control. The effect on Sikhs was threefold – the first was the growing difficulty for remote communities to remain connected to the central base of Sikhism in Punjab. The second was the increasing

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 59–84.
\textsuperscript{84} Asiatick Society (Calcutta India), \textit{Asiatic Researches: Or, Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia}, 1798, 291.
\textsuperscript{85} Tony Ballantyne, \textit{Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World}, 71.
accessibility of global infrastructure, especially with the expansion of British Empire into South Asia and the third was the centralisation of Sikh power in Punjab, which showed the first semblance of a continuous Sikh rule over the region. The eighteenth century ushered in a period of Sikh consolidation and British expansionism which placed the Sikhs and the British on a collision course as both powers negotiated their position in the sub-continent.

Rules surrounding travels differed significantly between Hindus and Sikhs. Unlike Hindus, there were no religious prohibitions for where and how far a Sikh went. In fact, as noted throughout this chapter, Sikhs were encouraged to be mobile, and institutions were established to facilitate this. For Hindus, it was taboo to cross the *kala pani* (black waters). Kala pani was especially important for high caste Hindus (Brahmins) as it was believed that it would corrupt a devotee’s ritual purity and affect how they were treated in their afterlife. Kala pani was interpreted by many Hindus as travelling overseas. Additional rules and requirements surrounding caste meant dietary requirements and rituals and prohibitions on interacting with other castes (especially low-caste Hindus), which made travel difficult as it again placed ritual purity at risk. These prohibitions on Hindus were in stark contrast to the Sikhs who had no such rules or vertical caste structure.

**Summary**

This overview of the period of the Gurus and the eighteenth century describes the complex interconnected web of links and the multiplicity of institutions that promoted mobility within the Sikh tradition. The institutions of the manjis and masands extended the Guru’s authority into regions distant from the centre of Sikh government. Such institutions were further supported by the gurdwara and langar that offered free temporary residence and food to Sikh travellers. Additional support was provided by the reach of the tradition of community-building and the teachings of the Gurus that unified Sikhs, regardless of caste, gender or social distinction. The links between communities were utilized for both spiritual and temporal means
as they channelled resources to Sikh spiritual centres and provided religious connections to the centre and among congregations.

These institutions were further developed and supported by the creation of Sikh centres by the Gurus to accommodate the continually expanding community. These attracted followers from remote congregations; villages and towns established throughout Punjab and in Northern India. The frequent sojourns of the Gurus served to maintain their authority within the communities and served to strengthen the mobility of the Sikhs. Most of these communities were based on the main routes which connected Sikhs from Balkh to Chittagong, Jagathnath Puri and beyond. Mobility, support systems, sojourning and community-building, were institutionalized in the Sikh tradition from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind, and they continued to evolve, accommodating the ever growing community.

The ongoing mobility of the Sikh community after the passing of Guru Gobind (1708) was reflected in Sikh, Persian American, and British sources. Rabitnama literature also proved valuable in guiding the community on mobility. It had its roots much earlier in the period of the Gurus and provided explicit guidelines on pilgrimage, institution building, supporting Sikhs and religious protocols before and after travels. It signified the continuation of traditions of mobility after the end of the Guru leadership. While traditions of Sikh mobility predated the arrival of the British in the subcontinent, the British annexation of Punjab in 1849 offered new avenues and opportunities to exercise this tradition.
The British Relationship with the Sikhs from the Confederacies to the Colonial Era

Introduction

The causes of Sikh mobility and migration during the late nineteenth century included economic pressures, marriage, the concept of izzat, military recruitment and the adventurous nature of the Sikhs. Scholars have emphasized these causes based on a history following the annexation of Punjab in 1849 that led to the arrival of the British, who brought unparalleled access to technology, communications, institutions and state machinery spanning across the globe. However, the continuity of the relationship between the Sikhs and the British from the pre-colonial era to the colonial era has been neglected.

In the research of authors such as Tatla, Dusenberry, Guninder Kaur and Mann, Sikh migration and mobility have been viewed through the limited time frame of colonial Punjab. This limited perspective has led to the lack of information on how relations between the Sikhs and the British during the Sikh misl period and the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh contributed to Sikh mobility across the globe. Ballantyne has noted the pre-colonial connections as the British sought to understand the rising power in the North. However, he has overlooked the importance of the long-standing military alliance between the Sikhs and the British, and

---

1 Izzat: Honour, reputation or prestige.
2 Tatla, The Sikh Diaspora.
3 Barrier and Dusenbery, The Sikh Diaspora.
4 Singh, Sikhism.
5 Mann, Numrich, and Williams, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America.
6 Misl: Sikh confederacies prevalent within Punjab during the eighteenth century.
Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s role in influencing Sikh mobility through his relationship with the British.\(^7\)

In this chapter, I will argue that the relationship between the Sikhs and the British was a product of a development that began during the misl (confederacy) period of Sikh history, rather than being established after the annexation of Lahore by the British. The relationship developed during the “golden era” of Sikh rule when both powers became allies. This chapter will explore the cultural dynamics of the British relationship and the technological developments that occurred after the annexation of Lahore and the role of the 1857-1858 mutiny in re-solidifying the relations. I argue that the relationship reached its apogee during the revolt of 1857 when Sikhs came to the aid of the British. The combination of British rule, positive perceptions of the Sikhs (especially after 1857) and new transport and communications infrastructure created the opportunities and structures that Sikhs were able to exploit in light of their long-established relations with the British.

**First Perspectives on Sikhs in Punjab**

The relationship between the Sikhs and the British began during the eighteenth century when the British grew curious of the Sikhs in the North. Before the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1799-1839), British adventurers and agents of the East India Company paid close attention to the rising power in Punjab. After the establishment of Sikh rule in Lahore (by the 1760s), the British began to gather information on the Sikh way of life and religion, for strategic reasons. This interest coincided with the British push to the east of India, the disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the beginning of the influence of the British East India Company up the Gangetic valley. As the Company became an active territorial power, it became increasingly interested in India’s political economy, part of which saw a sustained interest in the Sikhs

\(^7\) Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, 38–41.
(whom the British saw as a dominant force on the northern fringe of the declining Mughal Empire). The Company was deeply interested in the religious traditions that underwrote the growing power of the Sikh kingdom based in Lahore, and hence, intelligence from Punjab became particularly valuable.

One of the first men to record the history of Sikhs was Major James Browne of the British East India Company. His research was one of the first extensive studies of the people he called the “Sicks.” In his compendium, he documented the history and the current political context of Punjab and he also collated military maps of the region. He described the Sikhs as men having “a manly boldness in their manner and conversation” which was “very unlike the other inhabitants of Hindostan”.

Browne’s study was supported by Richard Joseph Sullivan, who published another work (in 1779) analysing the political history of India. He described the Sikhs as “powerful and extraordinary people” and went on to make the ominous prediction that the Sikhs “have every appearance of being one day or other a very formidable power in Hindostan”.

Colonel A.L.H Polier, a member of the Asiatic Society, also carried out extensive studies on the “Siques”. His work carried a negative undertone especially when it came to the khande di pahul ceremony. However, at the same time he called the Sikhs “strong and well made” and noted their sense of equality, stating the only differences between the chief and

---

8 James Browne (Lieut.-Colonel.), India Tracts: Containing a Description of the Jungle Terry Districts, Their Revenues, Trade, and Government: With a Plan for the Improvement of Them. Also an History of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks (Logographic Press, 1788).
9 Hindostan: Earlier name for India.
10 (Lieut.-Colonel.), India Tracts, 114.
11 Richard Joseph Sullivan, An Analysis of the Political History of India (Becket, 1784).
12 Ibid, 200.
14 Gândá Singh, Early European Accounts of the Sikhs (Distributors: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyaya, 1962), 63.
15 Khandi di Pahul: “the nectar made with the double-edged sword.” The ceremony instituted by Guru Gobind Singh at the time of the declaration of the Khalsa. Those who undergo this ceremony constitute an elect group called the Amritdharis. They are expected to dedicate themselves to Vahiguru and work toward the establishment of the Khalsa Raj. For more see Gurinder Singh Mann, Sikhism (New Jersey, USA: Prentice Hall, 2004).
16 Singh, Early European Accounts of the Sikhs, 62.
regular Sikhs were a better horse and additional jewels. Another scholar, the influential Sanskritist Charles Wilkins, who was also a member of the Asiatic Society, entered a “college of the Seeks” to record the community and their religious practices in 1781. ‘College of the Seeks’ is a significant text, as Wilkins was encountering Sikhs in Bihar, this “college” was Takht Sri Patna Sahib in Patna. The Takht was a great complex, constructed on the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh, a site visited by Guru Tegh Bahadur, and one of the five Takhts (sacred seats of authority) of the Guru. While doing so, he had a positive experience and, referred to the omnipotence and omnipresence of their Deity and emphasis on equality. Some of these religious attributes were also mentioned by Sullivan, Browne and Polier.

Early British accounts of Sikh faith have been extensively analysed by Ballantyne, who states “British commentators framed Sikhism as an improvement of the increasingly degenerate forms of belief and ritual that they believed characterized popular Hinduism.” Ballantyne’s argument is grounded in a range of evidence, including the observation on the comment made by Browne who suggested that Sikhism’s apparent order and rationality compares to Hinduism as “the Protestant [tradition] does to the Romish.” These British observers were struck by the echoes of Protestantism in the practices of the Sikhs, and this convinced them that the Sikh faith was a superior creed to that of popular Hinduism. Running through these accounts reveals a positive evaluation of the Sikh religion and praise for the Sikh physique, moderate way of life and even their taxation. These works offered powerful

---

17 Ibid, 63.
18 India), Asiatic Researches, 288.
19 Sullivan, An Analysis of the Political History of India, 201–202.
20 (Lieut.-Colonel.), India Tracts, 5, x.
21 Lawrence Dundas Campbell and E. Samuel, The Asiatic Annual Register, Or, A View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia (J. Debrett, 1803), 9–11.
22 Tony Ballantyne, Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World.
23 Ibid, 44–45.
24 (Lieut.-Colonel.), India Tracts, 5.
frameworks for British understandings of Sikhism, and these arguments were reworked and repeated by later authors.

**The Sikh Kingdom and the British East India Company**

The early interactions in the years around 1800 set the stage for the development of the constructive relationship between the Sikhs and the British, which flourished in the nineteenth century. In 1799, Punjab shifted from “confederacies” of the past to a firmly established kingdom under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. His political manoeuvring and highly developed military strategies saw the various kings and leaders around Punjab unite into a centralized entity. This unification saw the centralisation of power in Lahore and the subsequent development of a new set of relationships between the Sikhs and the British. High-level diplomatic contacts were established during the early nineteenth century as both powers began encroaching on each other’s territories while expanding in the Indian sub-continent. This diplomacy ultimately led to an agreement between both powers to prevent the outbreak of hostilities. Ranjit Singh’s push to maintain a mutual peace saw an alliance develop between both powers that consisted of mutual respect (and at times admiration) for each other. For almost forty years, Sikhs were perceived as an ally and friend in the sub-continent and this perception was advanced in media sources throughout the world.

Contemporary media reports of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s period described him as friendly to Britain and supportive of the British interests. In a meeting with the Governor-General of India, Lord Auckland, Ranjit described himself as a friend to the English and considered all the British officers around him as friends. He is reported as having described Lord Auckland as a “warm friend” and “gallant soldier”. These views persisted for almost

---

27 “India,” *South Australian Register*, 27 July 1839, 5–6.
the entire span of Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s reign and were firmly acknowledged by top dignitaries after his death in 1839. These views were also circulated widely throughout the Empire. A reporter for the *Sydney Herald*, for example, described Sikh soldiers as “finer looking fellows [who] never carried the musket” and compared them to the local British sepoys, who were described as a “disgrace to the army” and “far from striking terror into the hearts of the people”.

On the 10 July 1839, the Governor General (based in Meerut headquarters) described the sadness he felt on the passing of Ranjit Singh. He described “His Highness” as a “faithful” and “highly valued Ally” and he ordered guns be fired sixty times in accordance with Ranjit Singh’s age. These were to be fired from “fortifications in Delhi, Agra, Allahabad and at all the principal stations of the army throughout the North Western Provinces”. Hence formal diplomatic relations and mutual respect between the British and the Sikhs reinforced their close relationship.

**Fall of the Sikh Kingdom**

Between 1844 and 1849, the Sikh Kingdom fell into turmoil and the relationship with the British broke down. Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s successors were unable to stop the lethal political fight in Lahore. A spate of assassinations led to the death of three successors, the establishment of the government and contest over leadership, which caused the Sikh army to splinter. Initially, Maharaja Kharak Singh held the throne and maintained the status quo over Lahore and with the British. However, his sudden death attributed to “poison” contributed to instability within the Kingdom. The volatility was further exacerbated by his successor and son Nao Nehal Singh’s death as he was “killed by [a] falling beam” at the funeral, plunging the

---

28 *Sepoy*: An Indian soldier serving the British during the colonial period of Indian history.
kingdom into crisis. The new successor Maharaja Shere Singh brought some stability. He continued to assist the British as troops passed through Sikh territories heading for war in Afghanistan, but he too was assassinated along with his family. The assassination left one last legitimate heir to the throne, Maharaja Dalip Singh, an eight-year-old boy at the time. The British argued that the young king was highly vulnerable to assassination and moved British troops (under Lord Ellenborough) to Lahore to stabilize the situation. Within a year, the situation deteriorated, and war broke out between the British and the Sikhs. After a year-long war, the Sikhs had been quelled and defeated, losing large tracts of land throughout Punjab and forfeiting many lands beyond. The Kingdom continued but was weakened and much smaller. Hostilities flared again in 1847 when the Sikhs challenged the British authority in Punjab in the hope of restoring the Sikh Kingdom to its former glory. The second war was closely fought, eventually leading to British victory, and ultimately the annexation of all of Punjab. According to the declaration at Lahore on the 29 March 1849, “The kingdom of [Punjab] is at an end and all the territories of the Maharaja [Dalip] Singh are now and henceforth of the British Empire in India”. This instrument effectively resulted in the removal of Dalip Singh from the throne and the incarceration of his mother in Varanasi (Benares), until her escape to Nepal. Dalip Singh’s movements were heavily restricted so as to contain any future threat in Punjab—eventually, he was taken to Britain where he became a favourite of the Queen. The reign of the Sikhs had come to an end.

During and after the two Anglo-Sikh wars (1840-1849), the British continually referred to their alliance with the Kingdom during Ranjit Singh’s reign. A deep underlying relationship between the two powers was constantly touched upon throughout the period. After the first Anglo-Sikh war, media reports continued to describe Ranjit Singh as a “friend” and even his

32 Ibid, 19.
successor Shere Singh as a man of “great natural ability”.

In 1846, a news report (recalling the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh) stated, “the kingdom was upon terms of perfect friendship with the British Government”. In London papers, the Sikhs of Punjab were described as a “fine race” that was “more muscular” than its Hindu counterparts with an “animal spirit” and “firmness of mind”. One Sikh Maharaja, Golab Singh, even used the “ancient friendship that existed between the English and [Ranjit] Singh” to gain a pardon from the British after the Sikh army was defeated. The strength of the memory of the alliance between the Sikhs and the British was such that the pardon was granted and later Kashmir was sold to him. One commentator summed up the feelings of many British and by those who served under Ranjit Singh by stating “[Ranjit] Singh died in 1839, and less than six years have sufficed to destroy the prudent labours of his life to throw his kingdom back into the anarchy from which he reclaimed it, and to wantonly break, by a most wicked and unjustifiable invasion, an alliance of forty years standing with the rulers of British India.”

The relationship between the British and the Sikhs was not merely seen as a military alliance, but also a friendship that was reciprocated by the British. When the union was broken and Punjab eventually annexed by the British, the memory of Ranjit Singh continued to ring throughout the British establishment. The alliance, friendship and respect for Sikh military prowess established by Ranjit Singh reverberated through the two wars.

Colonial Punjab under the British East India Company

By 1853 (four years after the final Sikh war and the annexation of Punjab), the British had utilized Sikh soldiers on expeditions beyond India. Sikhs were deployed in the Far East

35 “India. The Punjaub. (Concluded from Our Last.),” 4.
37 Ibid.
38 “Indian News,” New Zealand Spectator and Cook’s Strait Guardian, 2 September 1846, 4.
39 “India. The Punjaub,” 3.
during the Second Burma War. Two regiments were raised from the Malwa\textsuperscript{40} region of Punjab, the Regiment of Ludhiana (later the 15\textsuperscript{th} Ludhiana Sikhs) and the 4\textsuperscript{th} Sikh Local Infantry, in 1846 (after the end of the first Anglo-Sikh war).\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{Singapore Straits Times} newspaper reported the usage of Sikh troops with some glee, stating, “our old foes the Seiks (Sikhs) are now vigorously fighting under our colours in Burmah!”\textsuperscript{42} Thus, within a very short time, the Sikhs were a part of the war machine of the Empire. Their deployment marked a continued cautionary approach from the British, depicting an ever-changing relationship with the people.

Between the end of the second Anglo-Sikh war in 1849 and the 1857 “Sepoy Mutiny,” the British relationship with the Sikhs was one of cautious admiration. The British fury at the second war resulted in the active suppression of the aristocracy who were blamed for the war. Lord Dalhousie determined that “the chiefs and fief holders of the Punjab should be effectively deprived of the power of doing mischief”.\textsuperscript{43} John Lawrence, the administrator of the province, agreed with Lord Dalhousie and pursued the policy of undermining the old aristocracy actively. At the same time these officials praised the Sikhs, John Lawrence described the Punjab forces as containing “a fine body of men as ever have been brought together in India.” He went on to describe them as vying “with any troops in the world”.\textsuperscript{44} Colonial newspapers also supported the Sikhs (as they did during the period of Maharaja Ranjit Singh), making comparisons to the native troops and praising the physical condition and military prowess of the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{45} Even after the second Anglo-Sikh war, the British-Sikh relationship continued in various forms.

\textsuperscript{40} Malwa: Region south of the Sutlej River in Punjab.
\textsuperscript{41} It is interesting to note that the 15\textsuperscript{th} Ludhiana Sikhs reached New Zealand in 1901.
\textsuperscript{43} Ganda Singh, Harbans Singh, and Norman Gerald Barrier, \textit{Punjab Past and Present: Essays in Honour of Dr. Ganda Singh} (Punjabi University, 1976), 188.
\textsuperscript{44} Tony Ballantyne, \textit{Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World}, 63.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 62.
At the same time, the suppression of the aristocracy also extended to zamindars\textsuperscript{46} or land holders who became targets of strict tax regimes. Before the Sepoy Mutiny Sikh soldiers were also targeted by the British, who were fearful of the possibility of an uprising. They were seen as “dangerous” by the British and also by Sikh chiefs such as the Maharaja of Patiala who stated “Punjabi troops should on no account exceed one-third of the whole of our native army”.\textsuperscript{47} Sikhs were rejected from enlistment, ridiculed by fellow non-Sikh officers who called them “dirty sepoys”\textsuperscript{48} and undermined by British officers who wanted them to cut their hair, “forgetting that the very essence of Sikhism [which] lies in its locks”.\textsuperscript{49} The active suppression came out of a genuine fear of upheaval in Punjab. The immense restrictions on Sikh leadership and attempts to prevent hostilities formed the basis of policies for the Sikhs. To ensure British governance in Punjab a force of 60,000 British Indian soldiers was maintained, alongside a police force of 15,000 men. The troop numbers meant there was essentially one officer for every 40 people to uphold British authority in the region.

Opinions of the top brass in the British Indian Army were complimentary toward the Sikhs but remained cautious of their intentions. On the 2 December 1852, Lieutenant General Sir Charles Napier was asked by the House of Lords about the Sikh troops and their suitability for recruitment. Napier responded with approval of the Sikhs but with the reservation that “we do not know if the Sikhs are true”.\textsuperscript{50} Positive appraisals of Sikh ability were noted by other British Generals who believed, for example, that “the pure Sikh, [Ranjit Singh’s] army; [were] a very superior set of men, thorough soldiers”.\textsuperscript{51} General Henry Hardinge (another top ranking

\textsuperscript{46} Zamindar: Landholder in Punjab.
\textsuperscript{47} Singh, Singh, and Barrier, \textit{Punjab Past and Present}, 190.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 191.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Great Britain House of Lords Select Committee on Indian Territories, \textit{Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the Operation of the Act 3 & 4 Will. 4, C. 85, for the Better Government of Her Majesty’s Indian Territories ...} (House of Commons, 1853), 93.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 68.
officer in India) also praised the Sikhs as “the most warlike, and physically powerful in India”. Lieutenant General George Pollock also supported the Sikhs, stating that the most efficient part of the native army artillery was the Sikh service. These men represented some of the top ranking military officials in British India. Sikh soldiery was highly sought after by the British and its absorption into the Indian army was rapid, even before the annexation of Lahore in 1849. At the same time, the British remained cautious of the Sikhs and for almost a decade actively suppressed them. The situation changed with the mutiny in 1857.

The Mutiny and the Changing Sikh Relationship

As discontent translated into mutiny throughout the ranks of the Bengal Army, troops across India turned against their British commanders. The alliances between rebellious sepoys, disenchanted land owners, and Muslims eager to restore the old Mughal regime did not gain much purchase in Punjab, which remained largely stable throughout. This stability eventually turned into support for the British as they sought assistance in reclaiming Indian territories. This support was confirmed by Arthur Moffat Laine, who was stationed in Lahore. During the mutiny, he stated that “if we survive this, never will a Hindustani be enlisted again. Our army should be entirely European, Afghan, Gurkha and Sikh”. As the mutiny continued, he stated, “Punjab will be our saving” as the Sikhs stood fast in Lahore. In the aftermath of the rebellion, Lawrence stated “…Had the Sikhs joined against us, nothing humanly speaking could have saved us”. The results of John Lawrence’s reversal of policies on the Sikhs in 1858 were significant – raising of 80,000 soldiers and 50,000 police (of which 23,000 were Sikh). The Sikh response during the mutiny ended the mistrust and fears felt by the British. They were deemed to be the saviours of “every vestige of European civilisation” in India. The alliance

---

52 Ibid, 201.
53 Ibid, 37.
54 Tony Ballantyne, Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World, 63.
55 Ibid, 64.
56 Ibid, 64.
and friendship that had been unstable for almost a decade were restored with even greater vigour, as British recruitment and investment policies focused on Punjab.

The mutual relationship between the Sikhs and the British up to 1858 was made up of a number of factors. As Ballantyne has mentioned, British fascination with Sikh “masculinity and martiality”57 was a consistent trope that dated back even before Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s Kingdom. The British captivation with the Punjabi physique set the Sikhs up against non-Punjabis who were deemed inferior and a “disgrace”.58 During the period of Ranjit Singh, these perceptions developed into British admiration and respect for the military prowess of the Sikhs, as they were trained in European military techniques. Another factor was Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s strong alliance with the British, which shaped many perceptions of the Sikhs during his reign and after his death. His good personal relationship with the Governor-General and his consistent support for the British gained him and his Kingdom much favour in their eyes. Though this relationship suffered after the two Anglo-Sikh wars, the British still utilized Sikhs for wars (as shown in the Burmese conflict). Relations were fully restored during the 1857-1858 Sepoy Mutiny as the Sikhs defended British rule in India. The mutiny began a new era for the Sikhs which turned the British Empire into a vehicle for Sikh mobility and migration.

Security Deployments and Integration into the Empire

In the wake of the mutiny, the Sikhs became the premier soldiers in the British Indian Army and were highly sought after by not only various colonial governments but also private entrepreneurs in the service of foreign states. Sikhs were already an active part of British forces before the transition from Company to Crown rule in 1858. The shifting military policies led

57 Ibid, 61.
to the recruitment of Sikh soldiers as British expansions gained momentum throughout Asia and the South Pacific.

The military recruitment and deployment of Sikhs have been noted by authors, such as Ballantyne, McLeod and Mann. As Sikh enlistment rapidly increased after the Sepoy Mutiny, more Sikhs were deployed into overseas colonies as a part of the colonial security machinery. By 1874, the Bengal Army was 44 percent Punjabi and by the twentieth century, the number of battalions recruiting Sikhs had doubled. This number was significant considering that active recruitment began in 1846. Sikhs were deployed as police, soldiers and private security for various colonies and Anglophile states.

The British proactively fostered the Sikh identity by upholding the ideal soldier as the rural turbaned Sikh, who had kept his hair and undertaken the initiation of khand di pahul, also known as amrit. Sikh regiments were formed, and the administration in Punjab proactively recruited from the old army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Guru Granth was central to the Sikh regiments. Only those who had undertaken the initiation ceremony were considered as suitable Sikhs; those who cut their hair were also not considered true Sikhs and “were to be avoided”. Only the Singh’s and the Khalsa of Guru Gobind were regarded as true tribes of Sikhism. This element of recruitment policy was aggressively enforced. Sikhs who wore the external symbols of the faith but had not taken the initiation were required to do so upon joining the British Indian Army. Granthis were assigned to regiments to ensure that all symbols of Sikh

---

59 Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, 70.
63 Ibid, 71.
64 Khalsa: A brotherhood instituted by the tenth Guru Gobind Singh. Refers to an individual or the collective group of Sikhs.
faith were maintained, and rahitnamas were given to soldiers to emphasize their distinct identity. The reason for these measures was the genuine fear of “dilution” of the ideal Sikh identity – as Ballantyne has noted many recruits carried the name Singh but had failed to undertake the pahul ceremony. The monotheism of the Sikh faith (as mentioned earlier) was contrasted with polytheistic Hinduism, which was seen as an inferior form of belief by the British. The fostering of Sikh identity became a core part of the British policy towards the Sikhs after 1857 and was proactively maintained until India’s independence in 1947.

With tightly defined recruitment policies in place after 1858, overseas Sikh deployments increased. By 1860, it was “very properly decided that the Sikh troops [were] to proceed onto China” and the Sikhs were described as “impatient to be sent on”. Sikh forces were united once again with the French and a “Sikh cavalry numbering four to five hundred” was sent within “200 yards of the walls at Pekin”. This engagement deep into China was closely followed up with the announcement of “troops for New Zealand” in 1861. This deployment was eventually cancelled for the “sole reason” of financial “symmetry” and “direct economy”. Sikhs were deployed in 1867 in Hong Kong and police officers and Sikh troops were used in 1868 in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in the war against King Theodorus. Deployments during the 1870s occurred in Malaya (through private means) to help contain the Chinese clans there. In 1885, “a force of 2000 men” was sent to Mandalay (Burma) due to unrest in the city that British troops had been unable to stabilize. The number of deployments continued to

66 Rahitnamas: Textual tradition which outlines the code of conduct for the Sikhs. It was an open ended document which allowed for changes depending on the context.
67 Tony Ballantyne, Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World, 66.
68 Ibid, 65.
69 Ibid, 56.
71 “China,” Colonist, 8 January 1861, 3.
increase through to the twentieth century, in Africa and South East Asia. By 1905, Sikh deployments had reached Fiji where soldiers were deployed to secure the capital Suva. At the same time as Sikh troops were used internationally, there were national deployments to secure critical British infrastructure and ensure peace in India, especially after the mutiny.

Military recruitment added another important dynamic to the causes of Sikh mobility and migration overseas. Sikh soldiers and police were recruited from the rural regions of Punjab, where the British preferred to source these men and landholders (who were leaders in local communities) actively encouraged military enlistment. The rural region accounted for the majority of all early Sikh migrations especially out of the Doaba region. One reason for this was the deployment of Sikh soldiers into distant colonies for military engagements and security and protection. Sikhs recognised new lands, regions and economic opportunities and there deployment continued into the late nineteenth century.

**Punjab as a State in the Empire**

The British invested in the Punjab region shortly after the annexation of Lahore (in 1849). The new administration targeted agriculture, transportation and communication as essential instruments of colonial development, thrusting Punjab into a new era of modernity. These advances were largely geared towards enhancing profits for the British East India Company, which was looking to satisfy shareholders in Britain as well as seeking to secure its political authority to maximise revenue extraction from the territory. Investments had positive developments for Punjab through the profit-driven policies placed a hardship on small landholders who were struggling to compete in the new economy. The changes created pressures for the community seeking to adjust to the new economic environment. Most importantly, Company rule drew the Sikhs more firmly into the economic contours of colonial India and the opportunities that distant markets and proliferating transport connections offered. There were new avenues for the Sikhs to practise long-standing traditions of mobility and
migration. The changing political and economic landscapes in Punjab, in particular, and India, more generally constituted important factors in Sikh movement throughout the British Empire.

The first phase of integration of the Punjab economy into that of the British Empire came in the form of extensive investment, particularly in agriculture. Within a decade of annexation, the British had poured millions of rupees into Punjab, more than Agra and Mumbai combined and the administration received the finest bureaucrats in India. According to Thavaraj, Punjab received a quarter of the “Rs 558 million of gross public investment in irrigation” during 1860-1898, the “largest dose of canal irrigation facilities created during the nineteenth century”. After 1898, the investment increased to 47 percent of all gross agricultural investment by the British government. By the turn of the nineteenth century, 1.8 million acres of farming land were serviced by canals. This infrastructure encouraged Sikhs from non-canal areas such as Jalandhar (in Punjab) to expand water well development. Between 1849 and 1900, the number of wells increased from 146,000 to 317,000. In 1867, the lowering of export tariffs led to further commercialisation of Punjabi agriculture and provided large landholders with even greater revenue. Commercialisation had a twofold effect – the Sikhs with more extensive land holdings became richer, making travel and mobility highly accessible while those with smaller landholdings were pressured to move and seek supplementary income.

The investment in agriculture was accompanied by road and rail development by the Company and later by the British Crown. For example, approximately Rs. 92 million was spent

---

77 Ibid, 4.
78 Ibid.
80 Ibid, 335.
81 Ibid.
in Punjab for road investment between 1860 and 1919. A network of metalled roads was rolled out that provided not only infrastructure support but also allowed enhanced mobility and more secure transportation connections across India. Rail was another channel of rapid movement throughout Punjab and the Empire, enabling the swift movement of military resources and the transport of high bulk goods and commodities at great speed. The first rail line established in Punjab was completed in April 1862, connecting the major cities of Lahore and Amritsar.\textsuperscript{82} According to British statistics, the North Western rail network (of which Punjab was a part) received Rs. 740 million in investment between 1860 and 1919, second only to the East Indian rail services.\textsuperscript{83} By 1895, the investment in Indian rail was so vast that the Indian rail network had surpassed its British counterpart in length. The British continued to develop Punjab rail until the 1940s, creating a rail system that connected major cities (such as Sind, Delhi, Kashmir, Pathankot) with the wider network of British rail in India. Such an extensive rail network provided an efficient means for mobility and movement across the sub-continent, made travelling easier and cheaper and provided Sikhs (especially from the rural class) with an opportunity to utilize new channels.

These internal developments of transportation took place within the framework of a well-established international shipping network that was protected by the powerful British Navy. The network of maritime transport lanes included multiple modes of travel, including military ships, civilian transport, mail services, merchant vessels and cargo ships that were shifting people, goods and services between different colonies and different nations around the world. This active network was the critical backbone of the British Empire, ensuring its authority in the colonies. The British colonial network spread deep into the South Pacific to New Zealand and Australia, which were being serviced from major ports such as Calcutta and

\textsuperscript{82} Singh, Singh, and Barrier, \textit{Punjab Past and Present}, 283.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 283.
Bombay. British naval dominance was a critical part of the mobile infrastructure used by the Sikhs to travel throughout the 1800s.

Communication systems facilitated the movement of news, money and people. Initially, communications were supported by separate regional mail services that connected various cities, towns and villages in India. In 1854, Lord Dalhousie amalgamated India’s postal services. The number of post offices grew from 700 in 1854 to 12,970 in 1900, and served cities and towns through the pre-existing road infrastructure. The postal service was interlinked with shipping, road and rail, and became faster and more extensive. The speed increase was significant, for example “a letter from Mumbai might reach [Kolkata] the next day, compared with two weeks or more in 1850”. The advent and implementation of steam led to an increase in the mail speeds across continents. The network of postal ships was critical for communication within the Empire. Its security and reliability were essential to the British government. The British paid one million pounds by 1860 for various shipping line contracts to Peninsular and Oriental Steam (P&O) to maintain the services.

Running parallel to the postal service was the development of the telegraph network. The telegraph offered speed and efficiency beyond any other means of communication at that time. Lord Dalhousie, who aggressively promoted the development, stated that “in less than one day the Government made communications that, before the telegraph was, would have taken a whole month – what a political reinforcement this is!” The speed of its development was so rapid that by 1865 British India had 28,000km of telegraph line and by 1900 this reached 84,000km line. The telegraph network was not restricted to government agencies as the public

85 Ibid, 54.
86 Ibid, 53.
87 Ibid.
was allowed access to it at a cost. This technology drew in industry and media who relied on it for accurate, up-to-date information. As the telegraph became cheaper and more accessible, it provided a means of communication for those travelling across the Empire. Eventually, the network reached from London to New Zealand, spanning the British Empire and the entire globe. The financial ability of the Sikhs to utilise these services gave them an edge over many others and this advantage, combined with the centuries old traditions of mobility, created the foundations for a new phase of Sikh mobility.

While it promoted mobility and migration, Sikh interaction with the British colonial administration was not uniformly a positive experience. Infrastructure development and British policy also had an adverse impact on Punjab. As mentioned earlier, the attention of the British administration shifted to Punjab as it became the centre of British rule. British investment into the region came at a cost to the farmers who were incorporated into a reordered economy, which was reorganised around exports and the needs of Britain. The issues that arose during British rule included increasing indebtedness, the concentration of land ownership and fragmentation of family land holdings, falling commodity prices, harsh taxation policies, capital outflow, famine, and crop failure. The Sikhs sought to cope by seeking economic opportunities beyond India to supplement incomes in Punjab—a further “push factor” for Sikh mobility.

A key area of British investment in agriculture was irrigation. Through canal development, the British aimed to create an extensive network of waterways to increase production and yields for farmers in the region. At the same time, the arid unproductive land came into use as water became highly accessible to the Punjabi farmers – these land plots were known as the “canal colonies” or settlements. The leasing and sale of available agricultural land were a political and economic process for British administrators as they believed certain
sectors of the population were much more efficient farmers than others. British land policy strictly prohibited non-Punjabis and non-landowners from accessing valuable canal tracts. Biased land sales/leases resulted in large concentrations of land being held by a fewer number of people, and concentrations of wealth among the zamindar (landholding) classes. Jat Sikhs also benefitted at the cost of other non-landholding groups. This bias also unexpectedly led to a drop in commodity prices. The rapid reclamation of land through increased irrigation development created a flood of goods in the market which resulted in a decrease in the prices of exports. This decrease may have been easily weathered by larger landholders, but shrank the already low incomes of smaller landowners and farmers who were unable to produce high financial returns from crop yields.

Indebtedness also contributed to increasing economic pressures in Punjab. The strict taxation regime combined with increased demand for land, crop failures, the fragmentation of land holdings and falling commodity prices resulted in Punjabi Sikh farmers turning to banks and money lenders to supplement their income. Indebtedness prompted a shift in ownership and control of land from Sikh farmers to money lenders and banks. Between 1865 and 1900 there was a 431 percent increase in the sale of land, and between 1875 and 1900, a 200 percent increase in the number of mortgages. These figures were further supported by the number of law suits for unpaid loans in Punjab. According to Thorburn, there were 96,222 suits in 1866 relating to money due for loan payments. By 1884 this increased to

89 Jat: A group of agriculturists who largely reside across Northern India. They currently make up the majority of the Sikh community.
92 Ibid. 49–50.
94 Ibid. 253.
95 Grewal and Banga, *Five Punjabi Centuries*, 337.
96 Ibid.
213,297 per year, making up a total of 79% of all civil litigations in Punjab. Commodity prices also provided serious problems for farmers. As mentioned earlier, the prices began to drop as the market became flooded with goods from higher yields and the increased availability of fertile agricultural lands. Unable to pay back high-interest loans from banks and local money lenders, Sikhs fell into heavy debt. The shifting position of traditional landholders and the need to service debt pushed many Sikhs to travel throughout the British Empire and supplement their low income.

Summary

This chapter has discussed multiple factors for Sikh mobility and migration into the British Empire and beyond. These include pre-colonial religious patterns, British appraisal of Sikh military prowess, Anglo-Sikh political alliances and the fluctuating relationship during and after the fall of the Sikh Kingdom and Sepoy Rebellion. These factors continued into the colonial era of the British rule and led to the international deployment of Sikh soldiers as the Empire expanded. British economic investment shifted dramatically into Punjab, leading to Sikh access to worldwide transportation, communication and commercial networks. Finally, these factors were compounded by the difficult domestic situation in Punjab, as Sikhs faced tougher taxation policies and increased indebtedness. Such factors led to rapid increase in the migration of the Sikhs across the globe during the colonial period. Underlying the complex impact of the Anglo-Sikh relationship was the embedded mobility within the Sikh tradition established by the founder Guru Nanak.

---

98 Ibid. 47.
From the Lascars to the Sikhs: The Early Indians in New Zealand 1795-1900

Introduction

Scholars have argued that the Sikh community was the first settled South Asian community in New Zealand. This argument was particularly forwarded by W.H. McLeod’s *Punjabis in New Zealand* which placed the arrival of Sikhs in the 1890s and identified Phuman Singh Gill as the first influential South Asian settler. There has been work that explored the presence of some earlier individuals, such as lascars (South Asian sailors) like ‘Te Anu’ and the pioneering miner ‘Black Peter’, but it was not part of larger population flows or the development of South Asian communities.

The publication of landmark works by Leckie¹, McLeod², Taher³ and Tiwari⁴ centred on the twentieth-century community of Indians in New Zealand and recorded their histories based on extensive field work. These accounts were produced during a period of interest in Punjabi and Gujarati diasporas and their historical development beyond India. The work of these four scholars represented some of the richest case studies available on Indians beyond their homeland. Their case studies used multiple sources, including works in both Punjabi and Gujarati to produce pioneering histories of South Asians in New Zealand. More recent scholarship has explored some of the broader political contexts that shaped the development of

---

² William ‘Hew’ McLeod, *Punjabis in New Zealand*.
⁴ Tiwari, *Indians in New Zealand*.
these communities and the debates that surrounded them but has not added to our understanding of the deeper history of these communities.\(^5\)

The research presented in this chapter primarily draws upon previously unused newspaper and archival sources to recreate the public life of Indians in colonial New Zealand and offer a reassessment of the development of the early Indian community. These sources reveal details of the earliest recorded phase of Sikh arrival and integration into the New Zealand society. The details include activities occurring in the public sphere, cross-cultural contacts and interactions with colonial society. When added to some recent work on the genesis of Indian mobility to New Zealand, these new details provide an enlarged and enriched account of the early Indians in New Zealand before 1900. The discussion in this chapter also provides a context to the arrival of Sikhs in New Zealand during the late 1880s and emphasizes how an Indian presence in New Zealand could have supported Sikh migration into the country. This early history, I argue, reveals a community that predates the dates provided in the current scholarship, and one that had much stronger links to colonial society and institutions than the existing historiography suggests.

**The Early Lascar Presence**

The first contact with New Zealand by Indians was made in 1795 by a group of lascars, who abandoned the ship *Endeavour* in Dusky Bay. According to research by Dr. Thomas M. Hocken, multi-generational lascar groups (from the crew of the vessel) were living on Stewart Island.\(^6\) Hocken relates that the *Endeavour* was “bound from Sydney to India”\(^7\) and had initially carried supplies from Mumbai including “a large number of cattle and stores” to Australia before reaching New Zealand. Captain Brampton made this trip for “the third time”, but

---


\(^6\) “Otago Institute”, *Otago Witness*, 17 June 1887, 8.

\(^7\) Ibid, 18.
“scuttled” the Endeavour after the hull was damaged. Hocken also refers briefly to East India Company ships “occasionally returning” to India via New Zealand “principally around the Thames” to pick up “spars and masts”. He cites this trading connection as the likely reason for the Endeavour being in New Zealand waters when it was scuttled. Hocken also notes that ships travelled between India and the South Pacific. An example of a vessel going to India was during 1793 when the Brittania was chartered to go to India from Sydney and was diverted to Dusky Bay, New Zealand because of the successful sealing industry there. These initial contacts between Indians and New Zealand led to the first, albeit unplanned, arrivals of South Asians in the colony.

These connections, of course, were the product of British imperial activity. Lascars, sailors of South Asian origin serving on European-owned ships, played a significant role in the British maritime world which encompassed New Zealand long before its formal incorporation into the British Empire in 1840. Ballantyne has explored the history of another lascar by the name of “Te Anu” whose story offers insight into the presence of these mobile South Asians in early New Zealand and their relationships with Maori. Between 1813 and 1814, a group of lascars landed in New Zealand after abandoning the ship Matilda, enduring difficult conditions and possible ill-treatment while on board. The six lascars took a boat attached to the ship and went ashore. A second party of six lascars, led by a European sailor Robert Browne, was sent in pursuit. According to Ballantyne, both groups did not fare well as they clashed with the local Maori Kai Tahu tribe. Three lascars of the first party (who deserted the Matilda) were killed and eaten by Kai Tahu and the second party suffered a similar fate. One of the three survivors of the deserter group became a prominent member of the tribe. This lascar was given the name “Te Anu” – a name that might be translated as “the cold one” or “the one who spits”. He was

---

8 Ibid
9 Ibid, 18.
10 Ballantyne, Webs of Empire, 105–121.
incorporated into Kai Tahu through marriage and his Kai Tahu wife bore him a child who was named George.\textsuperscript{11} Te Anu wore ta moko (facial tattoo) and became a valued intermediary between the tribe and Europeans. Information about Te Anu remains scant, but his contact and integration into Maori society provides a unique perspective of Indian contact and settlement in New Zealand. The fate of the remaining two lascars is unclear, although it has been suggested that they also assisted the tribe.\textsuperscript{12}

By 1816, another group of lascars had ended up in the Bay of Islands after being abandoned at sea by the whaling ship \textit{Betsey} (when disease broke out on board). According to the \textit{Sydney Gazette}, the abandoned vessel had an original crew of nineteen but by the time the ship made landfall, in the Bay of Islands on the North Island, only four lascars and two Europeans survived.\textsuperscript{13} The local Maori tribe captured all the survivors who were duly stripped of their belongings and given potatoes as recompense. The four remaining lascars were separated from their two European counterparts who seem to have been treated more harshly. The two Europeans were held much longer and also forced to endure considerable hardship. According to the newspaper report, the two Europeans were “obliged to carry potatoes towards another group of men and women among whom were the four lascars.” The Europeans were eventually passed on to another Maori tribe that decidedly allowed them to leave when another ship came near the coastline. An unsuccessful attempt was made to reach the ship after “obtaining and repairing an old canoe”. Eventually, the two Europeans reached another ship and made their way back to Australia. Notably, the four lascars “were left under the charge of the Missionaries at the Bay of Islands”.\textsuperscript{14} Again, as was the case with Te Anu, South Asians were at times treated comparatively better than Europeans by local Maori during the earliest

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, 114.
\item Ibid, 110.
\item “Sydney”, \textit{The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser}, 19 October 1816, 2.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
contacts with New Zealand. The cross-cultural exchange showed how Maori did not necessarily view all foreigners as the same and how Indians were able to adapt rapidly to a different context.

With the annexation of New Zealand in 1840, British imperial activity shifted from resource extraction to organised settlement of colonists. This change opened up new opportunities for Indians who were drawn into British imperial networks. These men came in the form of entrepreneurs (who had made their way to the colony) and servants (brought here by Indian army officers or those attached to the Indian Civil Service).

**The Indian Community in the South Island from 1850-1880**

Although, in the early twenty-first-century, New Zealand’s South Asian population is principally concentrated in the major urban centres of the North Island, the situation was different during the nineteenth century as many of the pioneering South Asians were drawn to opportunities offered by the new economies of the South Island.

The arrival and settlement of Indians dates back to at least 1851 when an Indian named Edwards Peters, popularly known by the name “Black Peter”, arrived in Otago.\(^{15}\) He came from Australia and set to work in Otago seeking to make his fortune like his European counterparts. Peter’s activities in Otago suggest he was an entrepreneurial South Asian. He was credited with the discovery of gold in Tuapeka, Otago. He engaged colonial institutions such as the local council and established relationships with local Europeans.\(^{16}\) According to Ballantyne, Peters was “explicitly and reductively racialized” especially through his commonly referred name “Black Peter”.\(^{17}\) Ballantyne goes on to note that the use of the racial epithet “black” was important as it reflected hardened attitudes towards South Asians, especially after the 1857


\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ballantyne, *Webs of Empire*, 120.
Edward Peters was closely followed by the arrival of Indians who were employed by John Cracroft Wilson. Wilson was a wealthy British officer and a distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service. During the 1850s, he journeyed, via Australia, to New Zealand with the aim of restoring his health. He was accompanied by Indian servants who tended to him on the voyage and would do so in his new home. According to the manifest of the ship Akbar (on which Wilson travelled), six Indians were onboard. These included “Mr & Mrs Warzen Rlid, Mr & Mrs Singh, D Singh and G Ram”, all of whom arrived from Australia with Wilson. Some of these individuals became permanent settlers in New Zealand, and their activities were recorded in local newspapers. In 1853 Warzen (recorded as Wuzeerah) was noted to be around Christchurch where he worked for Wilson. He was also reported to have donated ten shillings to the local “Indian Relief Fund” by the Lyttelton Times, which described him as a “Mahommedan”. Wuzeerah was also linked to two other Indians who were present as witnesses in a court case against him when he was charged with larceny against Wilson in 1858. These two men were among those who had accompanied Wilson to New Zealand and named in the shipping manifest mentioned above: “Gunga Ram” (a Hindu “Brahmin of high caste”) and “Bhowanee Singh” (possibly a Sikh). Gunga Ram and Bhowanee Singh were employed by Wilson, but they were no longer working for him. Warzen was mentioned multiple times in the court reports and, in 1877, a landmark in the area was described as “Wuzeerah’s Drain” reflecting his prominence and level of integration within the local community.

18 “Local Intelligence” Otago Witness, 6 August 1859, 3.
20 “Page 5 Advertisements Column 2”, Lyttelton Times, 8 May 1858, 5.
21 “Supreme Court”, Lyttelton Times, September 7, 1859, 4.
22 Ibid.
23 “Resident Magistrate’s Court,” Press, October 8, 1869, 3.
community. In 1883 Warzen was reported in a Christchurch court case as being “in difficulties”, the court required an “Indian Oath” and the solicitor had difficulty fulfilling the request. “Wuzeerah” spoke “Hindoo” and this was also a challenge for the court though it was unclear what crime he was charged with. In the trial, it was clear that other “Hindoos” who were not servants of Wilson but otherwise employed by him were present in Christchurch. Warzen’s wife was also mentioned briefly in these court proceedings. Warzen, Ram and Singh, who came through employment, were different from previous sailors, and the reports of their activities comprise some of the earliest records of Indian settlement.

In 1875, another Indian by the name of “Butterdean”, “one of Mohomet’s followers”, was described in an Otago court report as a native of “Cashmere” (Kashmir) who wore a “turban” as well as “Indian costume”. Butterdean detailed the method in which an Indian oath was taken: “an oath was administered by joining the hands and kissing them”. According to another article in the Otago Daily Times on that same day, the method of taking the oath was to place the man’s hand on the Quran and kissing it. In another incident in the town of Ahaura, on the west coast of the South Island, a “dark-coloured” lascar was arrested for being drunk and sent to prison. He had given his purser’s name as Barney McKenzie. These occasional references to Indian settlers continued into the late 1880s when a “Goluf Mollah” appeared in Otago city police court after a theft was allegedly committed against him by a woman. The court dismissed the case as the theft was seen as a “lark”. Other newspaper reports of the late 1880s recorded that Indians were working as hawkers, suggesting that early Indians in New Zealand found itinerant work a viable option

24 “Page 1 Advertisements Column 4”, Press, May 11, 1877, 1.
25 “Local & General”, Star, October 12, 1883, 2.
26 Hindoo: A literal reference to the word Hindu. In this context it was used to refer to individuals from India.
28 “Resident Magistrate’s Court,” Otago Daily Times, June 24, 1875, 3.
29 “Resident Magistrate’s Court Ahaura,” Grey River Argus, November 4, 1875, 2.
30 “City Police Court,” Otago Daily Times, May 21, 1888, 3.
just as pioneering South Asians in Australia did. One article in the *Ashburton Guardian* compared a “cheap-jack and a hawker” in the context of a complaint from a Mr Cutherbertson that “Hindoo hawkers had not got licenses” while peddling goods at a nearby railway reserve. Their numbers and conduct, it seems, were significant enough to warrant court action so as to force them to get licenses.31 This court case anticipated many of arguments that would be mobilised against South Asians in New Zealand during the early twentieth century particularly in its suggestion that mobile Indians were undermining the economic security of white colonists. In Dunedin, another hawker by the name of Helim Dean was brought before the court for “assaulting James Johnstone” with a “tomahawk”. He was given a one-month prison sentence.32

**The Indian Community in Auckland and Wellington from 1850-1880**

In Auckland the presence of Indians was also noted between 1850 and 1880, again newspaper reports on court proceedings provide valuable evidence. In 1864, a lascar known to the locals as “Happy Jack” or John Mickles was said to have attempted “to approach the Government House gate”. He was shot by a guard and wounded “on the face and breast”.33 Mickles was convicted multiple times for vagrancy,34 drunkenness35 and once for “obscene language”36 in Auckland. He was reported to have been “muttering Hindoo” by a police constable in 1873 – this was further confirmation of his Indian identity.37 In the same year, another Indian by the name of “Gooey” from “Hindostan”, who was for some time an “inhabitant of Chancery-lane”, was murdered in a drunken fight. Gooey had previously lived in Taranaki before moving to Auckland.38 A year later in Auckland another Indian by the name

---

33 “Auckland,” *Otago Daily Times*, March 5, 1864, 5.
34 “Police Court —Wednesday. [Before T. Beckham, Esq., R.M.],” *Daily Southern Cross*, May 9, 1867, 5.
38 “Supreme Court,” *Auckland Star*, July 14, 1873, 2.
of “Baba” was brought before the magistrate’s court for vagrancy. He was detained until he could be sent to the “Old Men’s Home” – this case suggested the perilous economic situation that some of these lone South Asian men found themselves in.\(^{39}\) By 1878, a lascar by the name of “Abdool” was the victim of theft in Auckland. The police caught the offender and returned the money.\(^{40}\)

In 1876 an Indian, who did not fit the general occupational profile of Indians in New Zealand appeared in the court reports in Waiwera, north of Auckland. His name was “Mahabeer” and he was a doctor. He was a victim of theft of the extraordinary amount of “six hundred pounds”.\(^{41}\) The rendering of his name ‘Mahavir’ as Mahabeer suggests that he was of Jain descent. He was one of the very few Jain migrants during this period of migration throughout the British Empire and represented a very different profile of Indian migrants – an educated professional working in New Zealand. This case raises intriguing questions about the actual extent of our knowledge of the early South Asian settlers in New Zealand, as Mahabeer has not figured in any previous writing on Indian migrants.

During the 1880s, the visibility of non-Sikh Indians grew significantly. Their presence was noted throughout the country as they engaged in local institutions, interacted with the local community and even attended entertainment functions. The geographical spread of these migrants extended from Otago to Auckland with concentrations in both major centres (Dunedin and Auckland) as well as Wellington. This pattern reflected the importance of economic opportunity as the three cities represented the major economic hubs for the colony.

With the increasing integration through the employment of Indians and the growth of the Indian community in Auckland, they continued to come into contact with colonial

---

39 “Police Court,” Daily Southern Cross, 10 March 1875, 3.
40 “Local and General,” Star, December 17, 1878, 2.
41 “Special Telegrams,” Waikato Times, 13 July 1876, 2.
institutions, especially the justice system and were increasingly recorded in the press. In 1883, Sam Wylie, a gum digger described as a “half-caste Hindoo” and a “native of Calcutta [Kolkata],” drowned in Kaiko, Auckland. Two years later an Indian was robbed in Auckland by a woman who appeared before the Supreme Court to answer for the crime. In 1887, an “East Indian” by the name of “Amenudden” appeared in court three times for fraudulently claiming money from locals. Indian hawkers were also frequently mentioned in Auckland papers as was the case for “Mosell Mallie” who was located on Newton Rd, Auckland. He was in court as a witness to a boy who was detained for throwing stones at his house, suggesting that Indians were targets of violence because of their cultural difference. Another “Hindoo” by the name of “John Gingall” appeared in court several times on the charge of having “no visible means of support”. He had attempted to find passage back to India unsuccessfully and ended up at a refuge as he was in a deprived state. Like the earlier case of “Baba”, John Gingall’s plight hints at the fragility of colonial opportunity.

Indians also continued to trust in the courts. In 1889, an Indian hawker by the name of “Haniff” went to court seeking payment from a creditor “H. Smith” who had defaulted on payment of “£1 13s for a dress supplied to the defendant’s wife”. The legal system could also be brought to bear on travelling Indians such as “Sheik Budrodeen” who was arrested for having “deserted his wife and family in Sydney” in 1888. Budrodeen had been in Auckland for “some months” selling “Moran sauces”. He was duly arrested for extradition back to Sydney to face the judge there.

43 “Latest Locals,” Star, December 1, 1885, 3.
45 “Police Court - This Day,” Auckland Star, August 14, 1888, 5.
By the end of the 1880s, the appearance and demeanour of Indians were being analysed by colonial papers. The Auckland Star noted in an editorial the attendance of “several sleek and smiling natives of India” at a local dance hall.\(^{49}\) Indian activities further emphasized in the same newspaper that had depicted “Hindoo hawkers” in the area in a negative light. It described them as being “oily Indians” while referring to another Indian who was accused of indiscretions.\(^{50}\) What makes this particular article interesting was the response to the editorial a week later by an individual named “Suleiman”. Suleiman wrote: “I know all the natives of India in Auckland, who like myself are of the Mussulman\(^{51}\) persuasion”.\(^{52}\) He goes on to dismiss the editor’s descriptions, stating that his fellow countrymen were “not guilty of what [the editor] stated”. The newspaper responded by expressing “the hope that no prejudice may be formed against men who are peaceful and sober fellow-subjects, simply because one of their number may have done wrong”. The article not only confirms the presence of a community in Auckland, but it also shows that some men in the community identified themselves as members of it, and were literate and able to contest colonial ideas. The level of engagement in the earliest stages of the Indian community’s establishment suggests that it was extensive engagement with the European population. Not only does the above article confirm Indian Muslims were working in Auckland, but also that they were attending functions, bargaining with locals, and most importantly, directly challenging negative portrayals of the community in the press. These activities were occurring in the 1880s almost three decades earlier than current scholarly dating of the Indian community.\(^{53}\)

\(^{49}\) “Random Shots,” Auckland Star, July 14, 1888, 2.

\(^{50}\) “Random Shots,” Auckland Star, May 26, 1888, 2.

\(^{51}\) Mussulman: A Muslim.

\(^{52}\) “Random Shots,” Auckland Star, June 2, 1888, 2.

Indians were also apparent in Wellington. Much like Auckland they engaged with local institutions and the courts. These men were not silent victims, nor were they helpless on the periphery of colonial life but, on the contrary, were fully involved with institutions (such as the courts, councils and police), community and entrepreneurship. In 1883 “John Relli” aka “Touri Alli”, described as a “Hindoo” (a frequent reference to Indians as opposed to religious affiliation), had been the victim of a theft in Wellington. He was a Muslim, and a “Koran” was required to swear him in, causing the case to be adjourned until further notice due to lack of availability of a copy of the holy text. Two years later, there was a brief reference in the *Evening Post* to an Indian being assaulted by a servant girl. This report was closely followed by a report of an assault on a lascar named “Sheikh Ishmael” who had ended up in an altercation with Europeans. According to the report, several lascars from the ship *Ganges* were confronted by “a number of Europeans” on “Queen’s Wharf”. No reason was given for the “melee” and one lascar was hospitalised for a number of days when he was “knocked down…and rendered unconscious”. He was described as a “Hindoo of the [ship] *Ganges*” and his stint in hospital delayed court proceedings. He gave evidence in the “Hindustanee tongue” which created further problems for the court. In 1886, another Indian by the name of “Abdool Kadir” was in court after a theft was committed against him. His case was conducted through an interpreter who was able to speak Hindi, which suggests that colonial courts were beginning to adjust to the reality of the polyglot and multi-ethnic nature of colonial society. He chose not to proceed with the case, and it was ultimately dismissed. Two years later an Indian named “Rer Nundo Lal Dors” was lecturing in Wellington on medical conditions. The activity in Wellington

---

54 “Magistrate’s Court,” *Evening Post*, August 3, 1885, 2.
57 “Magistrate’s Court,” *Evening Post*, 3 August 1885, 2.
58 Hindustanee: Refers to the Hindi language.
suggests that Indians were publicly engaging local society and reflected greater integration and rising profile of Indians in New Zealand. In 1888, another lascar was arrested in Wellington for vagrancy. In the court report, “Kotungia” was described as a Hindu seaman who was in a destitute condition. He had deserted his ship that was bound for Kolkata. A local colonist came to his aid, offering him employment so he would not be jailed by the court.62

At the same time as these men were present in the colony, lascars continued to enter and leave New Zealand’s ports. Most did so without much issue while some came to the attention of the local police. In 1878, “twenty-five Lascar seamen” abandoned the Tararua due to the “frigid climate”, and left for London on a different ship63 – consequently, the captain had to find a new crew. In 1879, ten lascars refused to sail from Port Lyttelton because they had originally been told that they were “not to be taken to such cold latitudes”.64 They had been imprisoned in the local jail at the request of the captain and were placed on the ship Florence in the hope it would be forced to sail. By 1885, the crew problem flared once again, this time in Auckland. The lascar crew went on strike when they “got no breakfast”.65 The striking crew was discharged with the wage of four pounds each. The lascars caught up in these incidents represented a fraction of those who would have travelled to New Zealand on ships from India. The constant intercourse with India was a channel by which a small number of Indians migrated to New Zealand. The vast majority of the men who appeared in the newspapers seem to have been of Muslim Indian descent, generally from the Bengal region where thousands of lascars served British shipping lines in the Pacific and around the globe. The presence and activities of these Indians reported in colonial papers gives only a small glimpse into a much larger community and broader scale of activities in the public sphere.

62 “Magistrates Court,” Evening Post, December 10, 1888, 3.
64 “Inter-provincial,” Timaru Herald, February 15, 1879, 2.
The Indian Community from 1890-1900

During the 1890s, the increased presence of Indians in the press reflected a growing sensitivity to racial difference in the wake of immigration controls that had not successfully ‘closed the door’ to mobile South Asians. These increasing sensitivities were not something unique to New Zealand as Australia\textsuperscript{66}, Canada\textsuperscript{67}, USA\textsuperscript{68}, Africa\textsuperscript{69} and the British colonies in South East Asia saw increased reporting of, and hostility towards, Asian immigrants.\textsuperscript{70} The increased reporting in New Zealand was consistent with the tightening of immigration legislation against “Asiatics” in the period. Asian migration to New Zealand during this time built on more than half-a-century of continuous presence in the country. The majority of travellers to New Zealand were Bengali Muslim and, as the issue of “race” and “Asians” came to the fore, their South Asian identity made them targets of heightened attention.

Small numbers of Indians were scattered across New Zealand during the 1890s as Indians resided in Napier, Taranaki, Wanganui, New Plymouth, Malborough, Roxburgh, Franklin along with Auckland, Wellington and rural Otago. The growing dispersal of the Indian community in New Zealand in part reflected the increased opportunities for hawkers in the multiplying smaller regional centres. For example in September 1898 in Awanui, located on the northern tip of the North Island, two “Hindoo” hawkers called, “Joyonal Abden” and “Living Alli” were charged for “hawking without a license”. The hawkers “had left the district” and the charges were withdrawn.\textsuperscript{71} Another “Hindoo” in “Roxburgh” was described as “A sable

\textsuperscript{67} ‘Asiatic Immigration’, \textit{Marlborough Express}, 12 June 1900, 2.
\textsuperscript{68} ‘Our American Letter’, \textit{Evening Star}, 23 August 1883, 1.
\textsuperscript{69} ‘The “Asiatic Invasion” of South Africa’, \textit{Taranaki Herald}, 4 March 1897, 2.
\textsuperscript{71} “Poverty Bay Herald. Published Every Evening. Gisborne, Monday, September 12, 1898,” \textit{Poverty Bay Herald}, September 12, 1898, 12.
wandered from the tawny shores of Ind[ia]” and as “softly peregrinating through our township offering for sale, with honeyed words, the costly shawl, the perfumed cape”. The description gives a brief insight as to the public perception of Indians during those times.

**The Indian Community in Auckland from 1890 to 1900**

Activities in Auckland continued to diversify as the number of migrants grew. The increasing number of Indians led to greater contact with local European society. The contact was mostly positive but at times resulted in conflicts between Indians and the dominant European community. An example of an Indian seeking the assistance of a European was recorded in the *Auckland Star*. According to the report, a “Hindoo” by the name “Goolon Baser” was in court in 1891 for being assaulted and was represented by “A. Whittaker”. The attack was sufficiently severe to fine the attacker “£2 7s 6d”. Another example was in a less formal setting. In the same year an “annual ball” of the “Caledonian Society” listed a “Hindoo peddlar” by the name of “Mr. Semadini”. Both examples reflect differing types of interaction with the wider European community, one in the courts while another in a social capacity, shedding further light on the level and type of integration into New Zealand.

During this time, there were interactions between Indians of different religions and faiths. These relationships were often tested when business dealings failed, and friendships broke. In 1891, Indians were involved in a large court case, “Abdul Khan & Co. vs. Abdul Bohan,” over a business transaction between Indians. The court report noted that Khan’s partner was “Box Mahomet” who had sold a hawking operation to Bohan, and identified the witnesses as “Duraht Sing[h]” and “Solomon and Abdul Assan”. This case is suggestive of the interlinking of Sikhs and Muslims in New Zealand. Other court reports also demonstrate

that there were fault lines between the diverse South Asian faith communities. In 1894, during a court case at Auckland’s magistrate court, “Deedar Box” successfully claimed money from a “Chatter Singh”. In another instance in the same year Mangoo Singh, Chunder Deep and an individual named “Louis Hassam Alli” went to court after a fight broke out between “lolly vendors from the Orient”. The case did not appear to be a religious dispute; it was rather an issue relating to the business. These underlying tensions showed the negotiation of relationships between Sikhs and Muslims in a different context as many attempted to settle in New Zealand.

A significant concentration of Indians in Auckland was a factor in the type of interactions between Indians and the wider population in the region. Inter-religious connections showed the fluid nature of the relationship between the Indian community and other sectors of the population. In 1897, another Indian was injured by a local man, who was committed to trial in court. “Chun Deep” in Auckland was assaulted by a Frederick James Spark with a knife; Spark was imprisoned and allowed bail for £30.

By 1898, the colonial press had begun to note the presence of women in the Indian community. One example is a report of a costume show at Government House in Auckland. A “Hindoo lady” by the name of “Anar Kullio” left a card and dress at the venue and this was noted along with the list of numerous other women who had also attended. Kullio was not the first Indian woman recorded in New Zealand. Two Indian women arrived with Cracroft Wilson as a servant in 1853, as noted earlier in the chapter. Their presence predates evidence provided by scholars. McLeod, for example, has stated the first Indian woman to arrive in New Zealand as being Daya Kaur, the wife of Ganda Singh in circa 1907.

76 “Untitled,” Auckland Star, April 18, 1894, 4.
77 Ibid.
79 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 168.
The Indian Community Outside of Auckland from 1890 to 1900

By the final years of the nineteenth century, court reports and articles in colonial newspapers suggest that there were small numbers of Indians spread widely throughout New Zealand. In Napier, on the East Coast of the North Island, Indian hawkers presence was noted in the context of donations to the local hospital. Two “Hindoo hawkers” who had been residing in Napier “for some time” reportedly had donated “£10 10s 6d” to the Napier Hospital, \(^{80}\) a significant amount for the period. They were described as “Mahomedans” (Muslims) and the newspaper continued in jest, stating “we could do with more Mahomedans”. \(^{81}\) A later article (from December 1892) reported that the two men described as “natives of India” donated money “as it was contrary to [the men’s] religion to receive interest”. \(^{82}\) The news of this philanthropy reached from Auckland to Gore in Otago as it was seen as an unusual occurrence. However, within months, two more Indians named “Korbonari” and “Mahomet Hara”, were in court in Taranaki, on the West Coast of the North Island, in a case of stolen goods. Hara was sworn on the “Koran”, a testament to his Islamic beliefs. Another interesting individual, mentioned in Napier, had a very different skillset to his Muslim counterparts – in 1897 a Hindu “Mia Dass”, was recorded as having made and sent Queen Victoria “two pairs of shoes in exquisite Hindoo gold workmanship” as a memento for her reign. \(^{83}\) Mia Dass was a Punjabi Hindu, who hailed from the village of Rawalpindi, an important town for the Sikh tradition.

During the 1890s in the town of New Plymouth, another unnamed Indian complained to a newspaper correspondent about the difficulties that taxation imposed on his hawking business. According to the correspondent, the “Hindoo” was of the opinion that New Zealand was not a paradise for a hawker like himself”. \(^{84}\) This hawker was not the only individual in the

\(^{80}\) “By the Way,” Mataura Ensign, March 1, 1890, 6.
\(^{81}\) “Page 2 Advertisements Column 5,” Nelson Evening Mail, 15 March 1890, 2.
\(^{82}\) “Untitled,” Hawke’s Bay Herald, 1 December 1892, 2.
\(^{83}\) “Untitled,” Nelson Evening Mail, July 2, 1897, 2.
\(^{84}\) “Local and General,” Ashburton Guardian, July 11, 1890, 2.
region. In 1898, another Indian in Rangitikei (a short distance away from New Plymouth) reportedly approached the land board for a delay in rent so he “might go to India to get married”.85 In the same year, in the town of Wanganui, northwest of the Rangitikei district, another Indian hawker by the name of “Nababim” was arrested by police for hawking without a license.86 This area was originally thought to have the initial Indian and Punjabi settlements into New Zealand by scholars.87 The presence of Indians would have likely attracted some Sikhs to settle into the region as familiar countrymen could provide support and security.

During 1891 a new dimension was added to the Indian presence in New Zealand – Indian men were increasingly prominent in the public sphere as entertainers. In Otago the “Indian Fakir Adbool Ahmud” reportedly gave “excellent entertainment” at Forester’s Hall in Port Chalmers. He was described as a “pure Hindoo” who spoke “English very fluently”.88 The Fakir toured his performance around the South Island for some time, speaking at halls such as Ashburton “Oddfellows Hall”.89 This additional dimension of the Indian community provides information on new avenues of employment and interactions with local non-Indian communities and the reactions of the press to them.

At the same time the Fakir toured the South Island, Indians continued to appear in newspaper articles around the country. In Wellington, “Montaz Ali” was in court on 29 August 1891 claiming back “silk” from a “prisoner of the Crown”.90 He won the case. In Napier, a case against another hawker named “Osman Ali” for “hawking goods without a license”91 was dismissed as the defendant did have “an unexpired license from Palmerston North” and had only “been in Napier a short time”. In the same year, the Otago local court issued “Tozowal

87 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 53.
89 “Local and General,” Ashburton Guardian, May 12, 1891, 2.
90 “Victorian Jealousy,” Evening Post, August 29, 1891, 2.
91 “Untitled,” Daily Telegraph, 4 April 1892, 2.
Ali” with a hawking license. In 1892, a local paper reported a clash of customs when an unnamed “Hindoo” sought a hawking “license from the Resident Magistrate”. When he entered the courtroom, his “tight fitting hat” (Taqiyah, Islamic headdress) was forcibly removed as that was the New Zealand custom. In response, he explained it was a matter of respect that in his country to have the head covered and, in fact, he had also removed his shoes before entering the court voluntarily. Such complex and often confusing interactions depict the nature of contact between distinctly different cultures within colonial institutions.

Indians not only appeared in court but also continued to contribute to local public institutions. An example was the instance of two “Hindoo hawkers” originally from “[Kolkata]”, one of whom was named “Nab-ab-Din”. News of Nab-ab-Din’s reported donation of “£2 5s 9d” for religious reasons, spread to all the main centres in the colony. This charity echoed the case mentioned above of Indian hawkers in Napier, who had donated to the local hospital the previous year. The integration and positive nature of the relationship with local communities were reflected by the contributions made by Muslim Indians who supported the local community with donations.

In Rotorua, the divisiveness of Indian interaction with the local community was remarked upon in the local press. One Indian received a custodial sentence following an accusation of assault. The local press was vocal in his defence. In 1893, the accused was in court after a fight broke out between him and a Chinese man while both were working at the “Lake House”. The Indian “Ali Mahomet” accused the Chinese man of attempting to stab him. The case was ultimately dismissed by the judge. In less than a month, Ali was before the court

---

92 “The Southland Times. Published Every Morning. Luceo Non Uro. Friday 8th April, 1892,” Southland Times, April 8, 1892, 2.
93 “Untitled,” Bruce Herald, 19 April 1892, 2.
94 “Untitled News,” West Coast Times, 9 November 1892, 2.
95 “R. M. Court, Rotorua,” Bay Of Plenty Times, May 29, 1893, 2.
again and this time, proceedings were taken out against him. His Lake House employer “Mr McRae” accused him of stealing a rug before Ali had recently left for Auckland.96 Ali disputed this, but the judge ruled against him, sentencing him to “one week’s imprisonment”.97 What makes this case interesting is the defence of the local paper for Ali. A local reporter of the Bay of Plenty Times argued for Ali’s innocence by stating that there was “no conclusive evidence that he was a thief”. He questioned the proof of the police, and defended Ali as a “respectable resident”, concluding “we are desirous of making these observations injustice to one, who although an alien, has, in the opinion of many, suffered wrongfully”.98 This defence of Ali is all the more remarkable in the context of deteriorating public opinion towards Asians in general and the emergence of anti-Asian immigration policies in particular.

In the Hawkes Bay region, some South Asian hawkers continued to come to the attention of authorities while others sought to return to their home countries. A Muslim hawker by the name of “Abdool Mahbood” was looking to sell his “stock off at cost price” as he was about to “return to his country”.99 In 1895, “Esau” sued a Maori woman for payment of goods she had purchased. The local reporter called it a case of “when Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war” in what was a likely reference to the Maori and Indian being somehow similar.100

The situation in the Hawkes Bay was similar in Taranaki where reports of the Indian community increased. Hawking continued to create tensions with local businesses and the activities of unlicensed traders often resulted in court appearances. During 1893, “Mahomet Ali”, probably the Ali Mahomet mentioned earlier in this chapter, was summoned to court for

96 “Rotorua,” Bay Of Plenty Times, June 5, 1893, 4.
97 “Rotorua,” Bay Of Plenty Times, June 12, 1893, 4.
98 “Rotorua,” Bay Of Plenty Times, June 19, 1893, 6.
99 “Page 2 Advertisements Column 6,” Hawke’s Bay Herald, August 10, 1893, 2.
100 “Untitled,” Hawke’s Bay Herald, 3 October 1895, 2.
having an expired hawking license. He caught a train and left the area but was fined by the judge for leaving. After that, the council was reluctant to issue any further licenses to Indian hawkers due to the perceived nuisance they caused to local businesses.\textsuperscript{101} Another hawker “Smalji” was in court for not having a license in 1894.\textsuperscript{102} In 1895, a vendor by the name of “Abdil Midgid” was denied a license by the local council as the council was not persuaded that he would “not sell goods that would disturb trade”.\textsuperscript{103} What is interesting in these cases is the apparent reluctance of the local councils to approve further licenses and the stronger enforcement of regulations against unlicensed hawkers. The increased enforcement could suggest a saturation of vendors in the region or increasing racial tensions with the growing number of Indians in New Zealand. The area became an important site for Sikh migration during the 1890s.

By 1900, the Indian presence throughout New Zealand attracted more attention as numbers increased and some South Asian women became visible. The growth and changing demographic composition of the community reflected a well-settled community that had fashioned some strong links to the wider colonial society and, in particular, actively engaged with the legal system. Moreover, Indian women, who had gone largely unremarked before 1907, were noted in the colonial press in the Otago region. According to a notice in the \textit{Otago Daily Times}, “A Grand Tamasha\textsuperscript{104}” was to occur at the Athenaeum Hall in Arrowtown on a Thursday afternoon in 1900 as a fundraising event for Indian Famine Relief. Local musicians were to perform “vocal and instrumental items” and afternoon tea was to be served by “Mahomedan\textsuperscript{105} and Hindoo ladies” including “Zareema, Zora, Beaunt, Mohee, Jadeh, Chuia,

\textsuperscript{101} “Borough Council. This Day,” \textit{Taranaki Herald}, August 20, 1894, 2.
\textsuperscript{103} “Shop Early Closing Association,” \textit{Taranaki Herald}, January 15, 1895, 2.
\textsuperscript{104} Tamasha: A party or celebration.
\textsuperscript{105} Mahomedan: A Muslim.
Biscea and many others”. The contact person given in the notice was “Durogha, Mrs M’adam”. It is unclear whether these women were short-term sojourners or longer term residents – in either case, the evidence above is significant given that the existing scholarship has located Indians primarily in the North Island and has stressed that almost all mobile South Asians were men.

**The Early Sikhs**

Sikhs arrived in New Zealand to join established Indian communities. As noted earlier in this chapter, Indians had been arriving in New Zealand from the late 1790s, and their number grew incrementally for over the following century. Sikhs travelled to regions where Indians from other religious groups and parts of India were already interacting with broader society in multiple ways. This interaction occurred in the context of colonial institutions including courts, the press, trade, local clubs and entertainment. The Sikhs had no hesitation in following the same paths and became rapidly integrated and successful.

Evidence of the presence of Sikhs in the colony is found in the passenger lists of ships arriving and leaving New Zealand internationally and domestically. The information shows the route travelled by these men during the earliest period of migration. According to passenger records from the 1890s, the vast majority of Sikh migrants went to New Zealand via Australia. They included individuals such as “W. Singh” on the S.S. *Wakatipu*, a vessel that journeyed from London to Dunedin, via Sydney. According to the manifest, Singh and another man with the same surname boarded in Sydney and were destined for Auckland in 1892. Their embarkation in Sydney was not unusual as a substantial Sikh population was by then firmly

---

106 “Page 3 Advertisements Column 7,” *North Otago Times*, 3 May 1900, 3.
110 ‘Sikhs Punjab Indian Trope’, *Auckland Star*, 10 May 1902, 2.
established in Sydney and other major Australia cities. The two Singh’s were followed by other individuals travelling together. Travellers included people such as “F.M. Singh” and “C. Singh” who were passengers on the *S.S. Te Anau* to Auckland on 7 April 1893\(^{112}\) – a “Hername Singh” made the trans-Tasman voyage on 12 April 1893, as did a “K. Singh” on 3 December 1896. These men were among the first of many Sikh migrants in the 1890s and into the nineteenth century. The connection with Australia reflected both the size of the Sikh population in New Zealand’s neighbour as well as the strong economic relationship between the two colonies, especially as Sikhs continually entered.\(^{113}\) Australia was the jumping-off site for migration to New Zealand. Such connections were significant and strengthened throughout the 1890s, becoming an integral part of the picture of Sikh migration to Australasia. By the turn of the twentieth century as the gates closed in Australia, different avenues such as Fiji were taken to enter New Zealand.

What was clear in the international context were the multiple flows of mobility and migration occurring during the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. Sikh connections to New Zealand concentrated initially on Australia and shifted to Fiji as anti-Asian bias and legislation pushed the growing flow of migrants to seek alternative destinations. The Sikhs were not bound to Australia or Fiji in the British Empire, as shown by the extent of Sikh migration to the Canary Islands and beyond, to Honolulu. During the 1900s, Sikh migration was global, and the New Zealand records open a small window on a widely-spread diaspora.


\(^{113}\) For additional information on Australian Sikhs please see Rashmere Bhatti and Verne A. Dusenbery, *A Punjabi Sikh Community in Australia: From Indian Sojourners to Australian Citizens* (NSW, Australia: Woolgoolga Neighbourhood Centre Inc., 2001).
Within New Zealand, the Sikh community was also highly mobile. Groups and individuals entered ports such as Auckland, Wellington, Lyttelton, Tauranga, Picton, Napier, Gisborne and Dunedin, all of which were commercial hubs in the colony during the late 1800s. As these Sikhs appeared, brief references were made to their movements between different parts of New Zealand. Sikhs travelled between places in the Hawkes Bay and Auckland, and Wellington during the early 1890s. These men arrived in places without Sikh populations, regions absent from scholarship such as Hawkes Bay. Records from newspapers and passenger manifests depict a community travelling throughout New Zealand from the 1890s, with multiple trips per year being recorded. The evidence suggests that a small but significant set of communities had been established, but also that many Sikhs remained highly mobile, travelling both locally and internationally.

The first possible reference to a Sikh in New Zealand was associated with the arrival of John Cracroft Wilson in 1853 from Kolkata, India (mentioned earlier in this chapter). Among the Indian workers and servants that accompanied him were the possibility of Sikhs; those named “D. Singh” and “Mr & Mrs Singh”. According to colonial papers, another member was called “Bhowanee Singh” (a possible reference to Mr Singh). The first reference was in 1859 when he was imprisoned at “Lyttelton gaol” for “drunkenness” and “resistance to police while at the police station”. Bhowanee returned to court twice more that year as a witness; in one case, for a fellow Indian “Brahman” by the name of “Gunga Ram” and, in another, for an Indian Muslim called “Wuzeerah”. It appears that Bhowanee was mostly employed as

114 Ibid.
116 “Arrivals,” Hawke's Bay Herald, April 15, 1893, 2.
119 “Resident Magistrate’s Court, Christchurch,” Lyttelton Times, February 5, 1859, 5.
120 “Resident Magistrate’s Court,” Lyttelton Times, June 11, 1859, 4.
121 “Supreme Court,” Lyttelton Times, September 7, 1859, 4.
a labourer on road projects in and around the Christchurch area.\textsuperscript{122} The two Singh’s travelling from Lyttelton to Dunedin on the steamer “\textit{Toomey}” noted on a shipping list in 1861 were possibly Bhowanee and his wife.\textsuperscript{123} After 1864, there are no further records for the couple. It was not for another two decades that a Sikh was again recorded in colonial papers in the same region.

The next Sikh in New Zealand to reach the attention of the colonial press came from Dunedin. “Miransen” was described as “a Sikh” working in Otago as a “hawker”. He was in court for “hawking lollies without a license” and “fined 1s” on 21 April 1888.\textsuperscript{124} His presence confirmed the arrival of Sikhs in the 1880s as Mahmood Taher related in 1965 citing an oral history of Punjabi’s working on the Otago rail line in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{125} “Miransen” was one of the first identifiable Sikhs to appear in the printed record and come into contact with the justice system.

Sikhs reached Auckland during the 1890s. On 2 March 1892, a Weer Singh appeared in an Auckland court for the first time. Weer was the brother of another prominent settler, Phuman Singh – the pair arrived together from Australia sometime during the late 1880s or early 1890s. The \textit{Auckland Star} reported that Weer was fined “10s” or “48 hours in the gaol” “for being drunk”.\textsuperscript{126} Later that year, the newspaper again reported that he was in court “for being drunk while in charge of a horse and cart on Mount Street” in Auckland. In that case, he was penalised for his transgressions with a “fine of 40s” or “7 days imprisonment”.\textsuperscript{127} The high number of references to Weer Singh and his brother Phuman in the colonial press provide detailed insight into the earliest Sikh settlers in New Zealand.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{122} “Page 6 Advertisements Column 4,” \textit{Lyttelton Times}, November 17, 1864, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} “Shipping Intelligence,” \textit{Press}, August 31, 1861, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} “City Police Court,” \textit{Otago Daily Times}, May 21, 1888, 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Taher, ‘Asians in New Zealand’.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} “Police Court - This Day,” \textit{Auckland Star}, March 2, 1892, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} “Police Court — This Day,” \textit{Auckland Star}, April 23, 1892, 5.
\end{itemize}
In Wellington, two more Sikhs were also recorded for the first time in the local *Evening Post* newspaper in April 1893. “Godson Singh” and “Harunam Singh”, who lived in a boarding house on Willis St, were arrested for drunken behaviour and destruction of property on 19 April 1893.128 By the end of 1893, three other Sikhs had been mentioned in an Auckland newspaper: one was Weer Singh, the second his brother, Phuman Singh, and the third was a “Hernim Singh”. Weer Singh, described as a “hawker,” has been severely assaulted and robbed in Rangiri.129 The attack was severe enough to be reported in newspapers as far as the Bay of Plenty.130 Phuman reportedly lost a “purse” containing two cheques for “£10 and £1 10 s” and a reward was offered if it was found and returned to the local police court.131 Hernim Singh appeared in the local Police Court after a “Charles Ross” had stolen “£4 of belongings” from him. A constable acted as an interpreter in the case.

From colonial newspaper reporting, Sikhs in Auckland seem mainly to have been hawkers. They interacted with other Indians and were involved with colonial institutions. As mentioned earlier an example included “Chatter Singh” and “Deedar Box” were in court when Box successfully pursued a claim for “£9 15s 11d” from Singh.132 In another court case between two Sikhs, a “Chunderdeep and Mangoo Singh”133 were prosecuted for assault in the Auckland Magistrates Court after they got into a fight while working for a Muslim confectioner named “Louis Hasam Alli”. This court case provides insight into cross-cultural relationships within the Indian community and how the courts were utilized by these men mentioned above to resolve disputes, showing a degree of trust for the justice system.

131 “Page 1 Advertisements Column 4,” *Auckland Star*, October 13, 1893, 1.
133 “Untitled,” 18 April 1894, 4.
In 1894, Weer Singh was working in Taranaki on the west coast of the North Island as a hawker and again appeared in the local court for drunkenness.\textsuperscript{134} He was just one of many Sikhs moving into ports such as Auckland across the colony.\textsuperscript{135} By 1895, Sikhs had also reached Wanganui – an auctioneer’s article referred to a bag once owned by a “Singh” to be auctioned off as unclaimed baggage.\textsuperscript{136} This passing reference provides us with some idea of how early Sikhs entered Wanganui. \textit{The Wanganui Herald} and \textit{Chronicle} provided some of the most detailed information on Sikh activities though it was focussed on one individual, Phuman Singh. His activities were widely reported in newspapers. This reportage included business dealings such as partnerships with other Indians that showed how he began his retailing career.\textsuperscript{137} Phuman also made donations to various organisations,\textsuperscript{138} as well as being involved in criminal proceedings\textsuperscript{139} and even hiring help.\textsuperscript{140} Newspaper reports into the early 1900s provide us with information about not only his activities but also those of his family such as Mrs Singh’s search for a “good girl for housework” in Victoria Avenue, Wanganui where she lived with Phuman.\textsuperscript{141} This large corpus of information on Phuman provides even more, insight into the life of a Sikh individual in a typical New Zealand town. This evidence counters the argument that Sikhs kept to themselves, avoiding interaction with the majority British community.\textsuperscript{142}

In 1896, the first references were made to the Salvation Army’s adoption of Sikh names in New Zealand. In April that year, Adjunt Sukh Singh was reported as holding an “Indian Durbar” (religious gathering) in the Salvation Army barracks located in Fielding, in Manawatu-Wanganui.\textsuperscript{143} Other individuals mentioned in conjunction with various “Indian Durbars”

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[134]{“News,” \textit{Taranaki Herald}, 17 September 1894, 2.}
\footnotetext[135]{“Arrivals,” \textit{Auckland Star}, December 20, 1894, 4.}
\footnotetext[136]{“Auction Sales,” \textit{Wanganui Chronicle}, January 10, 1895, 3.}
\footnotetext[137]{“Abraham & Singh,” \textit{Wanganui Chronicle}, February 2, 1898, 1.}
\footnotetext[138]{“Trawling,” \textit{Wanganui Herald}, February 20, 1899, 2.}
\footnotetext[139]{“Magistrates Court,” \textit{Wanganui Herald}, November 17, 1899, 3.}
\footnotetext[140]{“Page 1 Advertisements Column 9,” \textit{Wanganui Chronicle}, July 16, 1900, 1.}
\footnotetext[141]{“Page 3 Advertisements Column 5,” \textit{Wanganui Herald}, May 16, 1899, 3.}
\footnotetext[142]{McLeod, \textit{Punjabis in New Zealand}, 113.}
\footnotetext[143]{“Page 3 Advertisements Column 6,” \textit{Fielding Star}, April 21, 1896, 3.}
\end{footnotes}
included a Lukh Singh and a Dev Ratna. These were not Indians but rather men who had acquired Indian names in accordance with the rules issued by the General of the Salvation Army that required “officers of whatever nationality” (who enlisted into the Salvation Army of India) to “become natives in name, costumes, etc.”. The rationale behind these rules was the belief that the assimilation of Europeans into Indian culture would enable the “[Salvation Army to] do more good than to make [Indians] embrace European customs”. The usage of Indian names was also the approach used in the propagation of Christianity in New Zealand and the conversion of non-believers into the fold. The Salvation Army’s involvement with the Indian community is also noted on death certificates of some Sikhs such as Saugh Singh. His certificate was signed by the Salvation Army, suggesting that he had a deep connection with the organisation. The Salvation Army’s close links to the earliest Sikh migrants is neglected in existing scholarship on the Sikh community in New Zealand.

During 1896, the first Sikh recorded as owning land was an individual by the name of “Sikh Bain”. In Gisborne, the minutes of the “Crown Land Board”, an administrative entity that divided the land for farming development among settlers through leasing, rent or purchase, show that “Sikh Bain” leased land in Hangaroa. The minutes record that an application for forfeiture of the land by a “J. Colleary”, that was granted on 22 April 1896. It remains unclear as to how long Bain had possessed the land, but the forfeiture was likely due to neglect and non-use. A few years later Weer Singh was recorded as being with another Sikh, Geeman Singh, in Wellington. The Evening Post noted Geeman Singh in an advertisement after his father sent a message from Punjab that he wanted to communicate with his son “at once”. Geeman’s address was in the care of Weer Singh. Weer was not only mentioned in newspapers

147 “Page 1 Advertisements Column 4,” Evening Post, November 14, 1898, 1.
records but also in New Zealand Defence Force Archives, which detail his service for the
country in World War I.\textsuperscript{149}

By 1897, Sikhs were appearing in newspapers right across New Zealand on the West
Coast of the South Island in the mining town of Greymouth – Seaball Singh was attempting to
claim money from a Māori woman.\textsuperscript{150} The court report relates that he sought “claim £2 10s”
from a “Rihaka Tauhere (Mrs George)” and that, after “a very lengthy hearing”, the defendant
was ordered to pay “£1, costs of court and 13s”. The following year, the \textit{Taranaki Herald}
recorded a Puang Singh being “granted a hawkers license” by the chairman of the local
council.\textsuperscript{151} We can see brushes with the courts again in 1899 when a theft had occurred in
Invercargill, which was covered by newspapers nationwide. In this case, two Sikh men G.C
Singh and Gurdath Singh were accused of two accounts of theft from hawkers, in one instance
of “goods of the value of £90”.\textsuperscript{152} According to the \textit{Grey River Argus}, the robbery took place
“in the house of Lawburn, near Cromwell” in Central Otago. The two men charged were
convicted and sentenced to prison time. Singh and Denham received one month’s
imprisonment.\textsuperscript{153} This incident was one of the worst known crime committed within the
community between 1890 and 1914.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{149} New Zealand Defence Force, Personnel Archives, ‘SINGH, Weer - WW1 N/N - Army.’ Box. 29, AABK;
New Zealand Defence Force, Personnel Archives, ‘SINGH, Jagt - WW1 13/1011a - Army.’ Box. 29, AABK.
\textsuperscript{150} “Untitled News,” \textit{West Coast Times}, June 5, 1897, 2.
\textsuperscript{151} “Taranaki County Council,” \textit{Taranaki Herald} (December 6, 1898), 3.
\textsuperscript{152} “Invercargill,” \textit{North Otago Times} (September 27, 1899), 3.
\textsuperscript{153} “Per Press Association, New Zealand Telegrams,” \textit{Grey River Argus} (September 28, 1899), 4.
\end{flushleft}
Through records such as newspapers and court reports we can see a more detailed picture of the Sikh community. Not only was the population larger, more diverse, widely spread (as shown in Figure 3-1) and employed in a wider variety of jobs (as shown in Figure 3-2) than what was noted by the earlier scholars (especially W. H. McLeod), but it was also very much a part of New Zealand society. Sikhs resided from Auckland to Invercargill before the end of the nineteenth century, working in a range of jobs, interacting with a variety of other colonists, and coming into contact with colonial institutions like courts. This activity in the 1890s continued to increase into the 1900s as Sikhs grew in prominence and anti-Asian sentiment drew attention to them.
The activities of Phuman Singh of Wanganui are well-recorded by McLeod and Leckie as he was believed to be the first known Sikh settler in New Zealand. References to his life and family come up during the late nineteenth century as his family wealth increased. The advertisement mentioned above that his wife placed in the *Wanganui Chronicle* for hired help illustrates this. In the same year that his wife was looking for hired help, Phuman Singh was contributing to various organisations such as the local “more men” fund, which supported New Zealand troops in engagements overseas by raising donations from the general public. He had been involved in such community activity regularly since 1899 and had participated in

---

154 “Page 1 Advertisements Column 9,” *Wanganui Chronicle*, 16 July 1900, 1.
other organisations such as the New Zealand Rifle Association\textsuperscript{156} and the Famine Relief Fund in Transvaal, Africa\textsuperscript{157}. His wealth had grown so significantly that by 1909, he had a personal telephone line connected to the exchange in Wanganui.\textsuperscript{158} Such facts suggest how successful Phuman Singh had become in New Zealand in a relatively short amount of time, something not common among Sikh settlers during this early period of migration into the colony.

The majority of newspaper references present us with the Sikh and Indian community engaged with the justice system in New Zealand. Why was there a focus on these activities in colonial newspapers? Newspapers in general provided day to day court proceeding of local courts such as the resident’s magistrate court. There was also growing anti-Asian sentiment and the slow influx of Sikhs with their distinctive identity attracted public attention towards the community. Newspapers reflected this awareness through racist views that were exaggerated in editorials. This anti-Asian sentiment saw papers focusing on the negative aspects of the Asian communities in New Zealand, such as criminal activities. This focus was not unique to New Zealand but reflected contemporary attitudes throughout much of the Empire. This negative focus was compounded by the sensational nature of reporting where criminal activities within New Zealand, in general, were extensively recorded, especially during the earliest periods of Sikh migration. The attention given to criminal behaviour by colonial newspapers can also be seen in the new cultural context. These men migrated into a new society where the rules and restrictions of rural Punjab no longer applied. They were young men who often lacked familial restrictions and guidance in New Zealand. Their new-found freedom could often lead them into brushes with the law. Many of the men who were arrested

\textsuperscript{157} “The Refugee Fund,” \textit{Wanganui Herald}, October 26, 1899, 2.
\textsuperscript{158} “Local & General,” \textit{Wanganui Herald}, December 11, 1909, 5.
were young adults who found a new exciting life far different from the one they had come from in India.

Even though criminal activities were covered extensively by colonial presses, they were by no means the norm of the community. The new migrants were adjusting and settling into a new society, and this could often create friction, and attract negative attention.

Summary

This chapter has revealed in great detail both the Sikh and non-Sikh Indian community that challenges and questions many current assumptions. The non-Sikh community is shown as a small but bustling and demographically varied community that interacted with colonial institutions and the local community, and took up a diverse range of occupations and trades, constituting an extended continuum within in New Zealand history. The chapter also provides an Indian context to the arrival of Sikhs during the 1880s. Sikhs also interacted with their non-Sikh countrymen as they integrated into New Zealand society. The presence of other Indians across New Zealand would have undoubtedly assisted Sikhs migrants.

This chapter has also extensively covered the overlapping early Sikh community. It was a community involved in New Zealand society on many levels through various occupations, entertainment, interaction with colonial institutions and donations to charities —an involvement that runs counter to the seclusion implied by the previous scholarship. The Sikh connections with the broader community were not unique to any particular area in New Zealand but common to Sikh communities all over the country. The widespread nature of the Sikh community and the dating of its formation was much earlier than initially recorded by McLeod – the evidence mentioned above also counters the assumption that Phuman and Bir Singh were the first known Sikh settlers in New Zealand.
Ultimately, the highly textured evidence adduced above suggests that while Sikhs were a small community, they were very much a part of New Zealand society by the late nineteenth century. It offers a deeper understanding of arrival, communication, mobility, causality, spread, growth and development than that evident in the existing scholarship. It also raises new research questions that suggest the need for further analysis of the wider Indian history in the country.
The Sikh New Zealanders: Integration and Expansion

1900 to 1920

Introduction

The only academic work to cover the 1900 to 1920 period of Sikh history is McLeod’s *Punjabis in New Zealand* (1986). The dominance of his research is evident in the more recent publications by Leckie, Bandyopadhyay and Ballantyne, who continue to reference his work. McLeod’s research on this period was heavily influenced by oral histories because of the “patchy and unreliable nature of Indian returns during the years before 1921”. His research on the pre-1914 period relied on the testimonies of descendants of the pioneering Sikhs, including “Mrs Santa Singh, Mr Varyam Singh, Mr Hans Raj Kapoor and other informants”. McLeod was aware of references to other Indians around New Zealand such as five Indians working for the railway in Christchurch, but dismissed them as not being Punjabi because none of his informants recalled anyone being “aware of Punjabi railway workers”. McLeod faced insurmountable challenges in researching the first two decades of the twentieth century as the scattered, and fragmentary records of Sikh activity in newspapers made an exhaustive examination of print culture materials impossible. This chapter offers a re-evaluation of this period, utilising the power of digital tools to piece together a fuller picture of the Sikh presence in New Zealand from archival and newspaper records. The image from available records

---

1 Jacqueline Leckie, *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community*.
3 Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora: Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*.
5 Ibid. 55.
6 Ibid. 59.
remains fragmented and patchy but has been fortified through the use of shipping lists and military records, to offer new evidence that suggests a new outline of the patterns of Sikh mobility and social life.

McLeod considered the decades from 1900 to 1920 to be the early phase of Sikh migration to New Zealand, defined by “young males work[ing] in groups, living apart from the host populations in tents and crude huts”. McLeod made this argument because he was only “able to trace ten Punjabis who arrived in New Zealand before 1910”, most of whom worked in rural labour. He divided the phase into a pre-1912 and a post-1912 period according to the region of origin. In the period between 1890 and 1912, there was only evidence of “Malwais”, a reference to Punjabis, who originated from the area south of the Sutlej River in Punjab. In the second period, between 1912 and 1921, migration was “overwhelmingly Doabi”. The second period was demarcated by the enactment of the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act, after which “strict control was exercised over Punjabi immigration”. Due to this legislation, McLeod believed that the Sikh population in New Zealand primarily “reflected the pattern that had emerged during the 1912-1921 period” and the only significant divergence was the “increase in the number and proportion of women”.

The importance that McLeod ascribed to the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act (1920) effectively focused his research on the rural population descended from ten individuals he was able to identify. Along with the issues surrounding his methods of research which included limitations of oral history and his selection of interviewees, McLeod inadvertently excluded a wider gamut of history which had passed beyond the living memory of the

---

7 Ibid. 48.
8 Ibid, 49.
9 Doabi: An individual from the Doaba region of Punjab located between the Beas and Sutlej Rivers.
10 Ibid, 49.
11 Ibid, 75.
12 Ibid.
community. The traces of Sikh engagement with public life that dot colonial newspapers and records offers a valuable record that calls into question some of the arguments that McLeod developed on the basis of his oral histories.

The new evidence presented in this chapter counters McLeod’s argument of an entirely rural-based population, secluded from broader society and living in substandard and challenging conditions. Sikh activities, interactions, integration and dispersal in the early twentieth century was a continuation of patterns evident in previous decades and were influenced by the economic and social context of the times. The Sikhs continued to engage with the broader colonial society and, despite various challenges, continued to be involved in the public sphere. It must be noted that the 1900-1920 period does not reflect any clearly defined phase or stage of development of the community. Instead, the division is essentially one of chronological and analytical convenience, but for this chapter, it is useful because it underlines the persistence of some key features of the pioneering period of Sikh life in New Zealand. It also demonstrates the limitations of McLeod’s arguments that stress the primacy of these regional divisions (Malwai/Doabi) and social marginalisation.

During the 1900 to 1920 period, more Sikhs appeared across New Zealand in greater numbers. The movement of Sikhs into the colony was more frequent, and the occupations were more diverse. The Sikhs who appeared in records during the 1890s were still present in 1900, including Phuman and Weer Singh.

The Indian Contingent

New connections with India were also forming in New Zealand. An Indian Army contingent arrived in Wellington on 11 February 1901 from Australia, as an extension of a visit to mark the celebration of the federation of the Australian colonies. The Bay of Plenty

---

13 “Arrival of Indian Troops,” Wanganui Herald, January 11, 1901, 2.
*Times* saw the arrival of the troops as a “sentimental” tribute to New Zealand’s loyalty to the Empire, as opposed to their visit to Australia which was seen as “business”.\(^{14}\) The celebrations in Sydney (as shown in Figure 4-1) were met with immense excitement, with newspapers describing crowds of “seven hundred and fifty thousand”.\(^{15}\) The Indian troops received a similarly enthusiastic reception in New Zealand according to the *Wanganui Herald*, which described the route of arrival being “lined by thousands”.\(^{16}\)

Figure 4-1: The Indian Contingent in Australia, *Auckland Weekly News*, 18 January 1901, 2.

The Indian Contingent represented regions in Punjab from where post-1901 immigration was the highest. One of these included the 15\(^{th}\) Sikh Regiment drawn from Ludhiana.\(^{17}\) These men carried information about the country back to Eastern Doaba, a short distance from Ludhiana located in Malwa. Also, in the Contingent were several Punjabi and other Sikh regiments, including the famed 36\(^{th}\) Sikhs that had defended Fort Sarghari in 1897.

\(^{14}\) "The Bay of Plenty Times and Thames Valley Warden,” *Bay of Plenty Times*, February 8, 1901, 2.


\(^{16}\) “Arrival of Indian Troops,” 2.

\(^{17}\) “The Indian Troops,” *Southland Times*, March 2, 1901, 2.
against thousands of armed Afghans. In total six of the regiments that comprised the
Contingent that visited New Zealand were from Punjab. Sikh soldiers shared their experiences
of New Zealand with local reporters of the Evening Post, a Wellington newspaper. One
remarked that “he would not care to live in this country even if they doubled his pay—it was
too cold”.18 Evening Post reporters described the soldiers in both racial terms and in light of
their strategic importance to the Empire, “dark-skinned soldiers of the King”.19 The Indian
Contingent travelled extensively across New Zealand – its itinerary included towns such as
Palmerston North, Wanganui, Nelson, Gore, and Invercargill, and the cities of Auckland and
Dunedin. Some of these places had Sikh populations. The presence of the Indian Contingent
(as shown in Figures 4-2 to 4-4) offers insight and may answer multiple questions as to why
Sikh migrant populations concentrated on the Doaba and Malwa areas of Punjab. As mentioned
above, some of the regiments were drawn from cities like Ludhiana in Punjab, and many of the
early migrants came from near this town. There is a high likelihood that news of New Zealand
reached villages in Punjab through many of these soldiers. It also exposed New Zealand society
to turbaned Sikh men, who were broadly recognised for their loyalty and military prowess
within the Empire, and who proudly carried the external articles of their faith and interacted
with colonists. Photographs of New Zealanders posing with Sikh soldiers record the local
interest in their unique culture and religion.20

19 “The Western Section. It's Arrival Last Night,”
20 Harpreet Singh, ‘Reassessing the Early History of the New Zealand Sikh Community 1853-1914’, New
Zealand Journal of Asian Studies 12, no. 2 (December 2010); For further discussion please see, Lachlan
Paterson, ‘The Similarity of Hue Constituted No Special Bond of Intimacy Between Them: Close Encounters of
Figure 4-2: The Indian Contingent viewing Auckland from Mount Eden, *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 February 1901, 7.

Figure 4-3: The Indian Contingent at viewing Geysers at Whakarewarewa, *Auckland Weekly News*, 1 March 1901, 8.
Entertainment and Sports

Another type of contact between Sikhs and the broader society came with a tour of a Sikh dance troupe from Punjab in 1902.\textsuperscript{21} These men performed acts such as “long pole spinning”, “stick combat” and “varied feats of arms”, suggestive of the Sikh martial arts called \textit{Gatka}.\textsuperscript{22} The performers were described by local newspapers as “Eastern sensations” and “the famous Sikh Tribe”.\textsuperscript{23} The troupe toured across the North Island of New Zealand, passing through Taranaki, Auckland, Hawkes Bay and Manawatu, often accompanied by other acts. They performed in front of crowds of English-speaking Europeans, providing exposure to a distant and often unseen culture. The support of local members of the Sikh community to such tours has been overlooked by previous scholars. R. Singh, a fruit broker from Hawera close to

\textsuperscript{21} “Page 6 Advertisements Column 2,” \textit{Evening Post}, 1 April 1902, 6.
\textsuperscript{22} “Sikhs Punjab Indian Troupe,” \textit{Fielding Star}, June 10, 1902, 2.
\textsuperscript{23} “Page 3 Advertisements Column 2,” \textit{Bush Advocate}, April 19, 1902, 3.
Wanganui, sponsored the troupe and was listed in newspaper advertisements as the “lessee”.\textsuperscript{24} His active participation in bringing a distinctly Sikh act from India is a testament to his wealth as the resources to undertake such a task likely required significant funds. R. Singh was likely Ruanag Singh, who arrived from Australia in 1893. He was initially a hawker based in the Taranaki region, before accumulating enough wealth and going into a fixed dwelling grocery business (much like Phuman Singh).\textsuperscript{25} He was also involved in local society through business and building relationships with colonists who were customers and friends.

Sikhs were also becoming involved in mainstream sporting pursuits. H. Singh of Onamalutu, Marlborough had been selected in the “Marshlands” team to play cricket along with other local players.\textsuperscript{26} On the West Coast of the South Island, sports combined with entertainment as four Indian brothers named “Singh–George, Riordan, Bob Scott, and ‘Sandow’” who entered a weightlifting competition for the Antonio Circus in the hopes of winning a “handsome medal”.\textsuperscript{27} They were described as “local men”, they had also entered a local wrestling contest at the same event. One was later identified as Brann Singh by the \textit{Otago Witness} and, according to the paper’s Greymouth correspondent, lost his wrestling match against Riordan.\textsuperscript{28} On 5 November that year, more Sikh athletes appeared in Greymouth as reported by the \textit{Grey River Argus}. A group from the “Physical Training School” planned to do a “grand refined, athletic and gymnastic display”.\textsuperscript{29} This group included a Sunda Singh who was described as a “champion Indian athlete”. These snapshots of Sikh sportsmen in West Coast newspapers are intriguing as previously there has been no scholarly or community

\textsuperscript{24} “Page 6 Advertisements Column 2,” 6.
\textsuperscript{25} “Page 2 Advertisements Column 4,” \textit{Hawera & Normanby Star}, April 18, 1903, 2.
\textsuperscript{26} “Cricket,” \textit{Marlborough Express}, January 29, 1908, 5.
\textsuperscript{27} “Antonios Circus,” \textit{Grey River Argus}, 21 March 1904, 2.
\textsuperscript{29} “Page 3 Advertisements Column 4,” \textit{Grey River Argus}, November 5, 1904, 3.
knowledge of these men though there was a cluster of Sikh sporting participation in these rugged West Coast communities during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

**Interactions with the Justice System**

As Sikhs in New Zealand acquired wealth, they were targeted in robberies and assaults. The above-mentioned Ruanag Singh, for example, became a victim as “watches and chains” valued at “£7 18s” were stolen from him in Wangaehu. He was also assaulted by Timothy O’Neill after Singh had “asked him to go out” of his store. Singh had pushed O’Neill, who was drunk, resulting in an altercation on the street. O’Neill pleaded guilty and voluntarily offered to pay all costs. Phuman Singh also suffered at the hands of criminals who shoplifted from him while he was based in Wanganui. Ruanag and Phuman represented wealthier and more established Sikh settlers, but they were by no means the only Sikh targets of criminal elements in society. Lacchman Singh was “assaulted and robbed” of his “chain and sovereign case” shortly after he had arrived in Auckland, from Taumarunui. The court remanded the offender for trial before the Supreme Court. Another Sikh in Wanganui, Kahan Singh, also engaged the justice system to seek £24 in unpaid wages from his employer. He was among several “Hindus” who were rewarded with the balance and court costs. M. Singh also successfully went to court claiming money from a R.W.S Orr in 1914. When the above-mentioned Weer Singh was arrested for “keeping liquor for sale” in Paeroa, near Wellington, the *Ashburton Guardian* cited it as an example of the “danger” caused by Hindu migration. In the small town

---

31 “Magistrate’s Court,” *Hawera & Normanby Star*, December 10, 1903, 2.
32 “St. John’s Station,” *Wanganui Herald*, 11 October 1902, 2.
33 “Police Court,” *Auckland Star*, 15 September 1914, 4.
of Wairoa in the North Island, another Sikh called Gurdet Singh was embroiled in court proceedings after he was arrested for being drunk at the “Waikare Hotel”.37

Sikhs were sometimes in court as witnesses – the Sikh hawker Chatta Singh gave evidence against a Māori man suspected of having stolen “£10 from a purse he found on the road”.38 The suspect had purchased goods from Chatta Singh with the money and Singh identified him as the person who had given him the money. Chatta provides us with a different engagement with the justice system, not as a victim or offender but as a witness. Other Sikhs were also witnesses in court cases. Gajadhar Singh, who was “employed as a hall porter in [a] hotel” was involved in a court case involving £2000 in damages in the Hawkes Bay region.39 Another Sikh, Nagina Singh40 was required to give evidence in a murder what occurred in the scrub cutting camp where he worked. The case became a sensation in the local press.

Criminal activity within the Sikh community formed a significant part of Sikh involvement with the justice system. Drunkenness was a common problem, as many young Sikh men arrived in New Zealand where life was free of the social controls and kin connections that were a strong feature of life at home. 41 Sunda Singh, for example, was fined 10s after he appeared in court in Nelson for drunkenness. Sham Singh was fined in Wellington for the same reason in 1915.42 Sham’s contacts with the court were frequent and well recorded in the colonial press.43 Weer Singh was also frequently in the newspapers for drunkenness. 44 In November 1906, the Northern Advocate reported that he had been taken to Auckland on “a charge of

40 “Tokirima Murder,” Hawera & Normanby Star, 5 November 1920, 5.
42 “Magistrate’s Court,” Evening Post, December 13, 1915, 4.
44 “Magistrate’s Court,” Evening Post, February 26, 1916, 6.
vagrancy”.45 In Taranaki, Sikhs such as Khusae Singh46, Puang Singh47, R. Singh48, and Phuman Singh49 were noted in local court reporting claiming money and applying for hawking licenses. In Invercargill, a scandal broke out when the “Inspector of Nuisances” was accused by a council member of bribery, after receiving “socks from Kissan Singh”.50 Kissan Singh was described as an “Assyrian hawkers,” likely an error in identity. In return for the alleged bribe, the inspector “let him off from complying with sanitary by-laws”. The charge of bribery was one that Kissan “emphatically denied”. The case caused such a furore that the entire council chamber descended into chaos. Kissan Singh’s presence in Invercargill reveals the vast geographical spread of the Sikh community, its intimate interactions with local society and the all-too-often misidentification of the individual Sikhs. In the same year the criminal activities of Sham Singh51, a resident of Christchurch, caught the attention of the national newspaper NZ Truth. Such attention did not deter Sikhs from engaging with colonial institutions and the broader New Zealand society.

Economic Activity

By 1903, more Sikhs were becoming involved in business and acquiring land and other assets. One such individual was Lullah Singh of 114 Manners St, Wellington. Lullah Singh was a “masseur, hydropathist and herbalist” who could solve problems of “swollen feet” and “nervous complaints”.52 In Auckland another Sikh business person, an “Oriental and European masseur” named J. Singh, offered services such as “magnetic massage” on Grey St, Auckland.

45 “Local & General,” Northern Advocate, November 22, 1906, 2.
47 “S.M. Court,” Hawera & Normanby Star, January 21, 1903, 2; “Opunake,” Hawera & Normanby Star, January 31, 1903, 2.
48 “Magistrate’s Court,” 10 December 1903, 2.
50 “Scene in A Council Chamber,” Northern Advocate, October 8, 1910, 2.
51 “Shikkured Sham,” NZ Truth, February 12, 1910, 6.
52 “Page 1 Advertisements Column 3,” Evening Post, March 24, 1903, 1.0
He was also available to attend people at their homes to provide these services. On the West Cost of the South Island, C. Singh sought a lease for a section of land from H. Werner through an agent by the name of T.V. Byrne. The transaction was recorded by the Westland Land Board, a state agency responsible for land distribution in the area. Two more Sikhs made similar leases in the following two years. In Wanganui Phuman Singh sold his businesses to a local European man by the name of J.B. Atkins. Sikh employment grew in diversity (as shown in Figure 4-5).

If many Sikhs prospered in business, many others suffered economic hardship. In Hamilton, a hawk by the name of Ver Singh faced hard times and was declared bankrupt. The matter was handled by the Supreme Court, and an assignee was given charge of the case. Men such as Ver Singh were different from their hawking and other business counterparts – they provided services as opposed to selling goods and acquired the confidence and sufficient command of English to interact with local society and institutions. Sikhs’ occupations became increasingly diverse into the twentieth century as they looked to different paths to earn income and establish themselves.

The profile of Sikh employment also changed over the course of these two decades, as agricultural work did become more important for many Sikhs. This trend in “Hindu labour” was reported in the local colonial press. According to an Evening Post reporter, farmers were “finding it difficult to secure labour” in Auckland. The difficulty in finding work was due to many of the farmers’ “sons and farm hands hav[ing] gone [a]way”. This labour shortage caused many of the farmers to “attempt to replace” shortfalls in labour or managing with the shortage.

---

54 “Westland Land Board,” Grey River Argus, June 18, 1915, 8.
57 “Page 5 Advertisements Column 1,” Auckland Star, October 29, 1919, 5.
The journalist compared the situation to other areas, stating that “some relief had been provided in the Waikato and King Country by employment of Hindu Labour.” The journalist further said that “the Hindu with a fruit car is well known about the city, but a greater number of those who arrive go to such centres as Te Awamutu, Te Kuiti and Taumarunui”. This trend is confirmed by oral histories, voting registration rolls\(^{59}\) and by military draft ballots\(^{60}\) that noted the locations of the Sikhs during this period. Indians in rural regions were employed in businesses, as well as in the agricultural sector.\(^{61}\) The urban to rural transition reflected the economic opportunities for Sikhs and the impact of the First World War on the New Zealand rural labour force. The article shows that the population reorientation was a phenomenon that was growing during the mid-1910s, and counters McLeod’s conclusion that seclusion from mainstream colonial society was the primary reason for the shift.\(^{62}\) The evidence of newspapers, in particular, suggests that the reality of cultural difference by no means halted interaction and integration with the colonial state and local society. In fact, Sikhs continued working in occupations that required regular contact with the general community.

Sikhs also continued to be employed in areas such as public works. Such employment required interactions with organisations such as the “Drainage Board” in local towns to secure contracts. These contracts were often lucrative but were also dangerous. Banda Singh\(^{63}\) put up a tender for “improving Matamata town outlet” by “1/3 per yard” during August 1919 which was approved by the Drainage Board. Over a year later, *The Auckland Star* reported on the death of Bahadura Singh\(^{64}\), who was working on drains in Matamata. He lost his life “while engaged on a drainage contract in Waharoa” as he was crushed while “blasting stumps”. Sikhs

---

\(^{60}\) ‘The Ballot’, *Auckland Star*, 4 December 1917, 7.
\(^{63}\) “Te Aroha News,” *Auckland Star*, August 8, 1919, 8.
\(^{64}\) “On The Doubtful List,” *Auckland Star*, 6 June 1921, 5.
also worked as cooks, as was the case for Kamal Singh in Auckland.\textsuperscript{65} Many occupations were noted on voter registration rolls, including brickyard workers, fruit and vegetable sellers, port workers, and dairy farmers.\textsuperscript{66}

Figure 4-5: Diversity of Occupations 1888-1920.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1888-1899</th>
<th>1900-1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawking</td>
<td>Hawking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confectioners</td>
<td>Confectioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road Contracting</td>
<td>Labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>Masseur, Hydropathist, Herbalist Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Magnetic Massage Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Port Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brickyard Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit &amp; Vegetable Sellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Restaurateurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scrub Cutters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saw Mill Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dairy farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{65} “Fifteen Thousand Drawn,” \textit{Auckland Star}, September 3, 1917, 7.

\textsuperscript{66} New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981, (1928).
Other Activities and Education

Sikhs also supported local organisations through donations. A. Singh gave funds to the Wanganui Garrison Band67 and Phuman Singh donated money to the local Jerusalem Home for orphaned children.68 Others supported local institutions, for example, an M. Singh gave objects—“Men’s shoes from Punjab; one pair of men’s hair combs and one lady’s comb”—to the Wanganui Museum.69 Such institutions that received charitable donations from Sikhs included non-Sikh religious institutions such as the Methodist Church.70

Sikhs were also involved with education, and this has led to the recording of children in the colony, including members of Phuman Singh’s family – Ranjit and Madge. Other children (before those of Phuman Singh’s family) included a “Lepa Singh” who attended an “Infant School” in Wanganui.71 The discovery of a reference to this child in a colonial newspaper in 1910 suggests that women may have arrived in the colony earlier than initially assumed by scholars such as McLeod. It also marks the recording of new Sikh families in the colony, especially in the Wanganui region. Sikh children attended local schools, and some went to secondary and tertiary education. On the West Coast of the South Island, the local newspaper noted Kaira Singh was enrolled in “Standard 6” at Runanga School.72 In Wanganui, Ranjit Singh took evening classes at Wanganui Technical College.73 Some Sikh students successfully entered literary competitions – Mr. Gwiba Singh of Stratford (Wellington) was recorded as winning a prize for an essay on “The Relations of the Islands of the Pacific to New Zealand”.74

68 “Correspondence,” Wanganui Herald, December 21, 1905, 7.
He was a joint winner with Florence Stevens from the “Literary Section of the Wellington Competitions Society”. These few references represent only a small snapshot of the Sikh children attending schools but indicate the value in which early Sikh migrants held education, and enhance our understanding of the nature of the early Sikh community.

**Travels and Mobility**

Colonial newspapers continued to record Sikhs who passed through New Zealand ports in the early 1900s. Numerous Sikhs entered the port of Lyttelton from Sydney, Australia. Among them were four individuals who arrived on 15 August 1900 travelling on the “S.S. Makoia”. By 1904, a Singh was recorded travelling from Picton in the South Island to Wellington in the North Island. Sikhs residing in New Zealand also moved overseas, for example, “H. Singh” and “Mrs. Singh” went to London on the S.S. *Turakina* that left from Wellington in June 1908. During 1909, numerous Indians were reportedly on the S.S *Aparima*, which was docked in the port of Wellington. The article criticised a Lal Singh for using immigrant labour over the local Waterside Workers Union. Lal Singh was described as wearing the “green turban of the Prophet”. It seems that the journalist mistook him for a Muslim. In 1910 there was a brief reference to two South Asians, probably Sikhs, entering the port of Wellington from Lyttelton, Christchurch. They are listed as “Singh” on a passenger list arriving on the S.S *Mararoa* on 2 April at 6.45am. A Mr and Mrs Singh also came to Auckland from Honolulu, the United States of America in 1920 on the S.S *Tahiti*. These travellers were followed by another individual by the name of “Mir Singh” who arrived from Tenerife in the Canary Islands in Wellington on S.S *Remuera*. His probable identity as a Sikh

---

75 “Lyttelton,” *Star*, August 15, 1900, 3.
77 “Late Shipping,” *Evening Post*, June 8, 1908, 8.
78 “Local & General,” *Hawera & Normanby Star*, October 22, 1909, 4.
is clearer as his occupation was given as a stableman and his birth place as “Punjab”. A “Singh” left for London from Wellington on the S.S. Ruapehu, on 27 June 1912. During this period, another “Singh” appeared to be travelling in New Zealand, from “Auckland to Gisborne to Napier” and then to Wellington on the S.S. Tarawera, in February 1913. These references to Sikh travels are repeated in many areas of the country such as Masterton, Wanganui, Invercargill and Bay of Plenty.

The traffic from Fiji to New Zealand also increased as Sikhs were met with a hostile reception in Australia. In November 1916, numerous Sikhs were recorded entering New Zealand from the “Islands” (likely Fiji). The men, named on the manifest of the S.S. Talune that disembarked its passengers in Auckland, were “Mansha Singh, Nagena Singh, Arjen Singh, Jeet Singh, Attma Singh, and Chinchal Singh” along with “Keshar, Parsu and Ehana”. More individuals followed as “H.P. Singh, A. Singh and B. Singh” arrived in Auckland during 1920 from Suva, Fiji. Among the Sikhs travelling from India through Fiji were some of the most well-known passengers, many of whom are noted by McLeod. They included “Lockman Singh” better known as Laxman Singh, and Phuman Singh of Rurki as well as Bikkar Singh whose descendants remain in New Zealand to the current day. Connections spread further to Tenerife in the Canary Islands as Mir Singh arrived from there in 1915. These trans-national connections expanded to Sikhs, who travelled from Vancouver, Canada, including two Singh’s who reached Wellington on 13 September 1920.

81 “Shipping Port of Wellington,” Evening Post, June 28, 1912, 6.
82 “Shipping Port of Wellington,” Evening Post, February 14, 1913, 6.
85 “Scene in A Council Chamber,” Northern Advocate, October 8, 1910, 5.
86 “Bay Of Plenty Times. Friday, July 14, 1911. Local and General,” Bay Of Plenty Times, July 14, 1911, 2.
88 “Auckland Area Passenger Arrivals 1838-1889,” Archives NZ, BBAO 5552/7a page: 325.
89 “Auckland Area Passenger Arrivals 1838-1889,” Archives NZ, BBAO 5552/7a page: 1385.
90 “Late Shipping”, Evening Post, 30 September 1920, 8.
Sikhs also went from Auckland and Wellington to Sydney regularly. One group left Auckland on 17 April 1917 for Sydney on the S.S. *Wimmera*. The group included “Isar Singh, Labh Singh, Chanda Singh, Gurdette Singh and Jagar Singh”, some of whom are noted by McLeod. The trans-Tasman voyage was repeated the next year as another group travelled to Australia this time with non-Sikhs on-board – “Bertap Singh, Rahmat Ali Sa and Bhagta” were all going together to Sydney on the S.S. *Victoria* in 1918. They were followed by another group two years later. The groups were going for a mixture of reasons including settlers, sojourners and people passing through to other destinations. The trans-Tasman route was a frequently used one to New Zealand and in return effectively functioned as an important gateway to India.

**World War I**

The post-1914 period provides a wider range of information on the Sikh community, even if many of the gaps and silences that characterise the records of the years before World War I – about religious practices for example – persist. The war and debates regarding race during the period propelled Sikhs into the limelight and became a critical part of the national conversation on citizenship. There were multiple reasons for this, first was the deteriorating situation in Europe with the rise of Germany and the onset of the First World War. Newspaper coverage of the situation was extensive, distracting attention from minor local events. Coverage also touched on India’s role in the imperial war effort. Official war-related acts, such as draft ballots, supply some the most accurate demographic information on the Sikh community, by

---

91 “New South Wales, Australia, Unassisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1826-1922” (State Records Authority of New South Wales. Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia. 1917), Series 13278, Reels 399-560, 2001-2122, 2751.
92 “New South Wales, Australia, Unassisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1826-1922” (State Records Authority of New South Wales. Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia. 1918), Series 13278, Reels 399-560, 2001-2122, 2751.
93 “New South Wales, Australia, Unassisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1826-1922” (State Records Authority of New South Wales. Kingswood, New South Wales, Australia, 1920), Series 13278, Reels 399-560, 2001-2122, 2751.
providing, names, locations and occupations on the Sikhs much of which had been thought lost. The ballots were aimed at providing reserve troops for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force as the war against the Central Powers continued to deplete colonial manpower.

Controversies in Canada relating to Sikh migration and questions of race also transfixed local media after 1914. The Komagata Maru incident, involving approximately four hundred Indians (mainly Sikhs), was covered day by day in newspapers across New Zealand. From the planning stages of the journey until its rejection from Vancouver, the incident reached national headlines. The Komagata Maru was to be used by Gurdit Singh to “test the recent court decision that Canada cannot exclude natives of India”. The situation was treated with the utmost urgency by both Ottawa and the Indian government. It was stated that there “is great anxiety in official circles concerning the voyage of an emigrant ship with Hindus”. These concerns about race and citizenship were not only felt by Canada but by Australia and New Zealand too. The Poverty Bay Herald stated that the situation had a “direct bearing on the problems that confront Australia and New Zealand” and if Indians asserted their right in entering Canada, then “they will equally desire to assert it in New Zealand”. Much like the growing anti-Asian sentiment of the time, the newspaper exaggerated the situation. It expressed the view that anti-Asian immigration law would stop the “tide of immigrants from the Old Country” which had now become a “full flood”. The exaggerated fears of non-white immigration in colonial presses reflected the situation on the ground in New Zealand. Attention to developments across the colonial world shows how the press paid more attention to Sikh

---

98 Ibid.
political activities as fear of war and immigration set in. This more extensive coverage also sheds light on the attitude of the colonial press toward Indian and Sikh migration into white British dominated colonies.

**Sikhs in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force**

Scholarship on the contribution and involvement of the Sikhs in the First World War has concentrated on their participation as members of the British Indian Army. Over eighty thousand soldiers fought and died for the British Empire during the fight against the Central Powers. Sikhs fought in the Indian Army alongside New Zealanders, under the Union Jack and for the British Crown, on battle-fronts in Africa and Turkey. Cross-cultural connections were formed on foreign battlefields across Europe and the Middle East.

Research on South Asian diasporic enlistment into the New Zealand Expeditionary Force has been limited though scholarship by Jane McCabe has extensively detailed the Anglo-Indian contribution to the NZEF.

Outside of McCabe’s research, further scholarship remains forthcoming for the wider South Asian participation. The lack of information for the Sikhs in the New Zealand case is partially due to the current state on the early period of Sikh history. Relatively small numbers and perceptions of seclusion from society have led scholars to assume very limited contribution was made within local communities.

Extensive research of military files and colonial newspapers reveals that the Sikh contribution to NZEF was small but significant. The information derived from these sources reflects how the Sikhs were incorporated into the force on similar lines to their majority European counterparts. Some were former British Indian Army while others were labourers.

---

working and living in New Zealand. Much like their European counterparts, Sikhs were drafted through the ballot system that randomly selected men for enlistment.

Sikh involvement in the New Zealand Army was limited as few volunteered and the numbers of Sikhs enlisted in the reserves by ballot was small. Sikh volunteers felt a responsibility to serve with New Zealanders and the greater British Empire. The Sikh involvement in the military was not unusual as Sikhs were already deployed worldwide as part of the British military machine. They were known for their military prowess and skills and considered a valuable asset in the British arsenal. Deployments from India were sent to many places and hence Indian troops had fought alongside their New Zealand counterparts in Africa, France and Gallipoli. Some of the Sikhs on these battlefields also became settlers in New Zealand.

The draft ballot system used during World War I recorded some Sikhs in the reserves for the NZEF. They came from both rural and urban areas of the country. One example was Gurdet Singh, a storekeeper in Napier who was called up in 1916. Another was Sohan Singh, from Taumaranui, who was drafted to join the NZEF in the same year. These would be followed by numerous other Sikhs, including Sham Singh, Suba Singh, Sunder Singh, Agiti Singh Arjan Singh, Maghar Singh (see Figure 4-6). These men came from throughout New Zealand.

Figure 4-6: Sikhs Drafted into the New Zealand Army during the First World War.100

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Army Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aebbar Singh</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agiti Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arjan Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banta Singh</td>
<td>Kaieteke</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhagat Singh</td>
<td>Makirikiri</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttah Singh</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinchal Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganda Singh</td>
<td>Makirikiri</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina Singh</td>
<td>Te Kuiti</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Appealed Draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurdet Singh</td>
<td>Hawkes Bay</td>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harnam Singh</td>
<td>King Country</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indar Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagt Singh</td>
<td>Manukau</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Active Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagat Singh</td>
<td>Te Awamutu</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasa Singh</td>
<td>Taringamutu</td>
<td>Scrub-cutter</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiwan Singh</td>
<td>King Country</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kahan Singh</td>
<td>Ongarue</td>
<td>Scrub-cutter</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnal Singh</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maghar Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Scrub-cutter</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mihan Singh</td>
<td>Matatoki</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohar Singh</td>
<td>Waikato</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munsha Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Bush feller</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranjit Singh</td>
<td>New Plymouth</td>
<td>Confectioner</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratan Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sham Singh</td>
<td>Waiarapa</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Active Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sohan Singh</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suba Singh</td>
<td>Whangarei</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunder Singh</td>
<td>North Otago</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thaman Singh</td>
<td>Makirikiri</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Drafted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weer Singh</td>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Active Duty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratan Chand Mehra</td>
<td>Taumarunui</td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>Active Duty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one Sikh and one Hindu served in direct combat overseas. According to his defence force record, Jagt Singh was a 27-year-old labourer from Te Awamutu (South of
Auckland) who volunteered in 1915. He had arrived in New Zealand only four months earlier from the village of Shankar, Punjab. His military service began with the Wellington Mounted Rifles where he was deployed on the battlefields of the Dardanelles (Gallipoli) and Egypt. At the battle of Gallipoli, he was wounded and evacuated to Egypt and was later attached to the Auckland Mounted Rifles. His service for New Zealand spanned almost five years, with over four of those years spent overseas. Due to his injuries, he was discharged on 5 December 1919. Three years later, Jagt received the Victory Medal for his service to New Zealand and Britain. Jagt Singh’s enlistment may not have been unique in the global context as Sikhs also attempted to enlist in both the United States and Australia. Another Punjabi Hindu by the name Ratan Chand Mehra was also enlisted into the NZEF. He was not a Sikh but his origin meant he would have been closely linked to Sikhs while living in India and New Zealand. Mehra was a Punjabi, who had lived near Bhati Gate in Lahore. He was the son of a patwari or a revenue official and was listed as working for John Maher in Taumaranui. He was deployed to Egypt, France and eventually in Belgium under the North Wing of the 2nd ANZAC (Australia New Zealand Army Corps) Regiment. Mehra fought in the battle of the Somme and was killed in Belgium on 8 December 1917. In 1922 and 1925 he was posthumously awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal respectively for his service in the force. The examples of these two men show the contribution that not only Sikhs but other Indians were making to New Zealand. They were born and raised in India but had migrated to New Zealand to try to start a new life. Instead, they joined the call to war which resulted in the ultimate sacrifice.

101 New Zealand Defence Force, Personnel Archives, ‘SINGH, Jagt - WW1 13/1011a - Army’, Box. 29, AABK.
Summary

The period between 1900 and 1920 was one of increased activity and continuing integration for Sikhs in New Zealand. The Sikhs were neither solely associated with “crude dwellings” such as tents nor isolated from broader society as McLeod and later scholars have suggested. They were fully engaged in all facets of society including colonial institutions and local organisations and lived within European dominated communities. Sikh life in New Zealand involved travel, work, sponsoring entertainment, sports, education, philanthropy, purchasing and leasing land, building businesses, engagement with the justice system and dealings with immigration, applications to local councils, joining the military, and engaging directly with the colonial authority– the Sikh community was very much part of New Zealand society. Sikh activities during the period built upon those of migrants of earlier decades and reflect an expansion and greater integration of the Sikh community, they were New Zealanders making the country their new home.
1920-1930 – Citizenship and Race

Introduction

The evolution of the Sikh community in New Zealand during the 1920s has been seen by scholars as minimal as a result of the implementation of the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920.\(^1\) Sikh life in New Zealand has been depicted as distinctly rural, secluded with few interactions within the greater New Zealand society.\(^2\) The Sikh community’s religious identity is understood as at least partially responsible for this relative isolation: it positioned Sikhs on the periphery of the larger South Asian groupings of language, caste and nationality. The catalyst for this argument has been in part due to oral histories recorded by W. H. McLeod. One of the preeminent scholars on Sikhs in New Zealand, McLeod, emphasized the linguistic and caste identities in his book *Punjabis in New Zealand*. According to McLeod, those who clung onto inherited Sikh practices did not quickly assimilate into colonial society, but most of the community, in his view, dispensed with Sikhi, instead pursuing worldly aims: “the devout few [were] striving to uphold the essential *rahit*,\(^3\) while the majority [of Sikhs] found other things to do”. Drawing on this narrow interpretation of the *rahit*,\(^4\) McLeod and scholars such as Leckie,\(^5\) Bandyopadhay,\(^6\) and Ballantyne have emphasised the Sikhs’ caste (e.g. Jatt, Saini, Chamar), language (in this case Punjabi) and nationality – as Indians – over religious identity.\(^7\) Leckie further expanded this conceptualisation of Sikh identity by placing Sikhs and other

---

\(^1\) William ‘Hew’ McLeod, *Punjabis in New Zealand*, 75.
\(^2\) Ibid, 59.
\(^3\) Rahit - Refers to the rahit maryada. An evolution of the rahitnams which defines the Sikh code of conduct as defined by the Akal Takht.
\(^4\) William ‘Hew’ McLeod, *Punjabis in New Zealand*, 131–133.
\(^5\) Jacqueline Leckie, *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community*.
Indians into a newer “Kiwi-Indian” identity. Thus, the existing historiography has de-emphasized the Sikhs’ unique community, viewing the community through the lenses of caste and nationality.

This chapter explores the complex dynamics of the 1920s, a period when Sikhs came under legal and economic pressures. It catalogues the range of opportunities that Sikhs grasped and their contested and shifting place in colonial society. The employment of Sikhs in New Zealand has been described as restricted to the agricultural sector mainly in the central North Island, with very few Sikhs venturing beyond these rural regions. The decade of the 1920s is a period where identity and citizenship were contested within the British Empire as issues of race; labour and economics created an increasingly hostile situation for non-white immigrants. The work of scholars such as McLeod and Leckie has been significant in this regard, engaging with this aspect of Sikh identity-creation, detailing how the Sikhs looked for cross-cultural support to fight prejudices and for equal rights.

While the political questions were undoubtedly significant, current scholarship has been framed by a perspective that neglects fundamental aspects of the community’s life and development. This neglect includes the continued migration of Sikh women and children who were exempt from of the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920, and ongoing engagement of Sikhs in the public life of New Zealand towns and cities, which included involvement with colonial institutions, sporting pursuits and education. Colonial sources, especially newspaper records, from the 1920s point to a history of cross-cultural participation and membership within New Zealand society that runs counter to ideas of isolation and seclusion. The aim of this chapter is to re-evaluate the 1920s period of Sikh history from the

---

perspective of such colonial records. An in-depth analysis will be undertaken in the public life of the Sikh community by analysing newspapers, shipping lists and official government documentation. The chapter will show that these sources give valuable insight into the structure of the community and offer important glimpses into daily life. The chapter will also shed light on the growth of the Sikhs, the geographic spread and mobility, as well as the effect of economic policy, and wartime and immigration legislation. The evidence will challenge current recorded history providing an enlarged picture of the period that reveals a diverse community integrated into New Zealand society.

**Challenges of Migration during the 1920s**

Sikh migration to New Zealand became particularly tough during the period between 1920 and 1930. This difficulty was in part due to public fears, which had been growing since the late 1890s, of a “flood” of Asian migration. The government had implemented various policies and legislation to prevent Asians from entering New Zealand, culminating in the 1920 Immigration Restriction Amendment Act. This Act allowed only people of “British birth and parentage” to enter into New Zealand without a permit. This provision specifically excluded “an aboriginal native of any dominion other than the Dominion of New Zealand” which applied to the Sikhs. This legislation was not unusual in the global context as Sikhs were already excluded from countries such as Canada, the United States of America and Australia.

British immigration was encouraged by government policies to support the intention of the Act. The support for British immigration was in line with the push for a “White New Zealand Policy” that was mirrored in other colonies across the Empire. The government re-

---

11 ‘The Immigration Act of 1899 and the Additional Amendments of 1910 Progressively Sought to Exclude Indians from New Zealand.’
13 “Continuous Journey Clause” – A part of the Canadian 1908 Immigration Act which stated “only immigrants coming direct from the land of their birth shall be admitted”.
14 Immigration Act of 1917. It was also known as the Asiatic Barred Zone Act.
implemented assistance schemes to encourage British immigration in the 1920s. Initially, immigration was restricted to close relatives of those already in New Zealand but was extended (in 1920) to family of any resident (of British descent) who could guarantee the migrant employment. The assistance scheme resulted in 90 percent of those arriving in New Zealand being supported migrants as opposed to independent migrants. By the end of the 1920s, approximately 60 percent (over 70,000) of all immigration from Britain to New Zealand was the result of some form of assistance. The immigration from Britain declined dramatically after 1930 as the global depression hit.16

The multi-pronged approach to make New Zealand ‘white’ created multiple problems for Sikh immigration. The new policy meant permits were determined by customs officers who were guided in their decision-making by legislation that was designed to exclude non-white migrants from India and Asia more generally. Many Sikhs were unable to satisfy permit requirements and got no further than Fiji while others who arrived in New Zealand ports were turned back.17 Sikhs resident in New Zealand were also affected, feeling the strain regarding decreased access to things such as turbans, and food from India as direct, personal connections with India and older patterns of inter-colonial mobility were curtailed.

The legislation dramatically slowed Sikh movement internationally. However, contrary to previous research (by scholars such as McLeod) that implied that Sikh migration stopped almost entirely, some Sikhs continued to move between ports in Australia, Fiji, Canada, the United States of America and Britain. Their numbers were small but significant with many recorded travelling in groups.

The mobility of individuals in the Sikh community was extensively recorded on shipping lists. An example of this was the number of Sikhs arriving at Australian ports. Australia was a transit point for ships from New Zealand bound for India. Sikh men often travelled in groups; one of many examples is “Messieurs Jassa Singh, Ganda Singh, Bikkar Singh and Chintu” who went from Auckland to Sydney on 30 June 1920 on the S.S. *Maheno* and were likely transiting to India. Cases such as this multiplied throughout the 1920s as Australian ports continued to be used as primary transit points for New Zealand Sikhs returning to India.

The routes taken by Sikhs migrants to New Zealand reveal a mobile community. Four years after strict implementation of the Act small numbers of Sikhs continued to arrive in New Zealand from Australia and Fiji. Groups travelling to the distant Dominion, included family groupings, and labourers. For example, according to shipping manifests on 18 March 1925, four Sikh workers arrived from Sydney. They were followed a few months later by another four Sikhs arriving from Suva, Fiji on the S.S. *Aorangi*. A week after the arrival of these four Sikhs, another much larger group (including a family) of nine arrived from Sydney. This group consisted mostly of men, but three women were also recorded. Some of these highly mobile Sikhs were likely passing through to other destinations but many intended to remain in New Zealand either temporarily or long-term. Those who had permits before the implementation of the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act 1920 were able to return to

---


22 “Passenger List - S.S. Aorangi” Archives New Zealand, August 17, 1925, 1037, BBAO 5552/12a.

New Zealand while others were brought in through the ‘adopted children’ loophole in the 1920 Act. This surge of temporarily absent New Zealand Indian residents returning from India boosted the Sikh population during the 1920s. In 1920, the arrival of new Indian migrants peaked at 225. The migrant inflow dropped dramatically a year later to only 137. By 1922, there were no more than 32 migrants arriving in New Zealand, suggesting that the 1920 Act had an immediate and telling impact. The sudden and sharp dip did not signal the end of Indian immigration; a year later numbers recovered. Indeed, in 1923, the numbers of Indian migrants increased by 400 percent; in 1924, migrants increased a further 38 percent.\textsuperscript{24} The flow of Sikhs appears to have remained stable throughout the second half of the decade, although information is fragmentary at times due to gaps in the data, the information shows the community’s continued growth and depicts how the Sikhs continued to be a very mobile community. Although the legislation was designed to be exclusionary and customs officers had considerable authority, some Sikhs were able to enter New Zealand permanently. These Sikhs comprised two main groups: those Sikhs who had secured permits before the enactment of the legislation and the wives, children and “adopted children” who were allowed to join those Sikhs already in New Zealand. Anglo-Indians were able to work around these exclusions for a time through the Homes scheme. According to McCabe,\textsuperscript{25} the scheme housed and educated the offspring of European men and South Asian women who were rejected by local communities and abandoned by British fathers. The children were made ‘fit’ for immigration, and some were sent to New Zealand to work as farm workers and domestic servants.\textsuperscript{26} By the 1930s, the acceptance of Anglo-Indians also waned as anti-Asian attitudes prevailed throughout New Zealand.

\textsuperscript{24} “White New Zealand,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 5 February 1926, 6.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 27.
Figure 5-1: International Travels of the Sikh Community in NZ According to Destination (excluding India) during 1920-1930.
The migratory flows of Sikhs in and out of New Zealand are verified by Indian migration statistics from New Zealand Year Books. These statistics represented those of distinctly Indian descent, including Sikhs. According to Figure 5-2, the enactment of the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act had little effect the numbers of migrants from India with the exception on 1922, the first year of its strict enforcement. Except for this year, the number of Indian arrivals remained above one hundred per year. The number reached 239 by 1926, a figure surpassing that of 1920, the year year before legislation was enacted. Arrivals also outpaced departures throughout the 1920s (again with the exception of 1922). The fluctuations in the number of arrivals after 1922 were largely influenced by the economic situation within the New Zealand economy, which began to grow after 1922. The recovery peaked in 1925-1926 before steadily declining into the 1930s with the Depression. The increase in arrivals during 1928 and 1929 was temporary; the collapse of the global economy resulted in sharp decreases in the 1930s.

There was also an increase in the number of Indians leaving New Zealand (as shown in Figure 5-2), although at a much slower rate than the overall rate of immigration. The departures increased substantially between 1923 and 1925, creating a lower net gain in the size of the community. This figure stabilized between 1925 and 1929 at approximately 150 departures per year. Those departing were probably newer arrivals unable to settle permanently in New Zealand due to restrictive legislation. What is also clear is that departure rate was well below the arrival rate resulting in a slow growth of both the Indian and Sikh communities in New Zealand during the 1920s.

New Zealand was a part of a wider global Sikh migration network that included colonies and countries such as Fiji, Canada, Britain and the United States of America. Even

though these nation-states had put in place restrictive immigration regimes, they never succeeded in entirely closing off flows of mobile Sikhs. On 29 October 1926, Dilbag Singh travelled from Wellington to San Francisco on the S.S. Tahiti towards his intended destination of Pasadena, California.\(^{28}\) Another Sikh, P. Singh, left Auckland on 1 July 1930. Mr Singh bound for Southampton, London, where he intended to stay at the “Strand Palace Hotel”.\(^{29}\) Records indicate that Sikhs also disembarked from the S.S. Tahiti in Auckland on 13 September 1920 from Vancouver, Canada.\(^{30}\) Sikhs also left Auckland for Suva, Fiji where a substantial Sikh community was well-established; these included Mr B.R. Singh\(^{31}\) and P. Singh.\(^{32}\)

Figure 5-2: The Arrival and Departure of Indians in New Zealand during the 1920s. The New Zealand Official Year Book 1931, Statistics New Zealand, 1931, Section V.\(^{33}\)

The demographic profile of Sikhs entering and leaving New Zealand was diverse; they varied in age and gender. A sample of sixteen travellers from Auckland during 1925 shows an

---


\(^{30}\) “Late Shipping,” Evening Post, 13 September 1920, 8.

\(^{31}\) “Aorangi’s Passengers,” Auckland Star, 6 May 1930, 9.

\(^{32}\) “Shipping,” 3 March 1923, 6.

\(^{33}\) The New Zealand Official Year Book 1931 (Statistics New Zealand, 1931), Section V.
age range between 4 and 57 years old was recorded (see Figure 5-3). The average age of thirty years old reflected the younger cohort that most likely supported families in India. As mentioned earlier, most had previously resided in New Zealand and had valid permits to enter and leave as they wished. Among the men were women and children who travelled with their husbands, fathers or close male relatives looking to settle permanently in New Zealand. Women rarely travelled alone; the cultural norm required that husbands or close male relatives accompany them. There were exceptions, however. A Mrs Singh went alone from Wellington to Melbourne on the “T.S.S. Ulmaroa” on 4 October 1920. Other women such as Miss Singh, Mrs [Bharosital] Singh and Mrs G. Singh were recorded as travelling with their husbands or male relatives to Australia. A mixture of children and teenagers also arrived throughout the 1920s including Gurdas Singh, who was ten years old when he came to Auckland from Suva, and S. Singh and Sera Singh, who were fifteen and sixteen years old when they travelled from Sydney. Teenage girls were also recorded in shipping manifests from the period.

Figure 5-3: The Age of Sikhs Arriving in the Port of Auckland (1925) “Passenger Lists” (Archives New Zealand, 1925), BBAO 5552/12a.

34 “Passenger Lists” (Archives New Zealand, 1925), BBAO 5552/12a.
35 “Passenger List - S.S. Ulmaroa” (Archives New Zealand, March 18, 1925), 457, BBAO 5552/12a.
Geographical Spread of the Community

McLeod argued that one of the primary concerns of Punjabis was “visibility,” especially with the implementation of the 1908 Immigration Act\(^\text{37}\) and later the 1920 legislation. McLeod suggested that in taking up occupations in the rural North Island, the desire not to be visible meant that Sikh men lived in conditions of “considerable privation”.\(^\text{38}\) As discussed in the previous two chapters, however, Sikhs were fully engaged with their local communities, casting doubt on the theory that “low visibility” was a major reason for Sikhs to favour settlement in rural areas. Low visibility was unlikely the sole or primary reason for the Sikh population shift from urban to rural areas as the number of Sikhs in rural regions grew with increasing economic opportunities.

The growing proportion of Sikhs in the North Island from the early 1900s reflected increased employment opportunities. As Otago was eclipsed as the colony’s financial centre and new agricultural frontiers opened up in the North Island, there was an increasing demand for labour. During the 1920s, this was particularly true in the King Country and Waikato where many Sikhs settled. These regions contained a better type of ploughable land for farming and with the introduction of inexpensive new chemicals (such as superphosphate) pasture growth improved. This extension of agriculture was accompanied by other scientific developments in the rural sector; for example, power-milking came into regular use, freeing up a considerable amount of rural labour including among women (who had previously helped with milking). The uptake of power-milking systems was extensive with the number in use increasing from two thousand in 1920 to ten thousand by 1930.\(^\text{39}\) The development of electric fencing and herd testing also contributed to controlled pastoral farming. The government of the day also

\[^{38}\] Ibid, 79.
\[^{39}\] Tom Brooking, *The History of New Zealand* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 110.
stimulated greater technological development by supporting the establishment of many institutions such as including the Massey Agricultural College (est. 1926) and the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (est 1926) and revamped by providing further funds for Lincoln Agricultural College to promote technological innovations in farming practice. These institutes engaged in research on fertilizers and soil quality to gain peak output from the land. Government support and scientific research stimulated an agricultural boom that, among other things, saw extensive sheep and cattle farming. The effects of agricultural development were marked in the 1920s; for example, the output of butter increased by three times per cow, a significant jump in a short period. The growth in the sector led to continued demand for labour which saw Sikhs migrate into rural regions to take up employment. The concentration of Sikhs in rural New Zealand was reflected in voter registration rolls\textsuperscript{40} and references in colonial newspapers. This Sikh preference for farm work was reinforced by the fact most of the Sikhs were from rural Punjab and rural labour suited their occupational backgrounds.

Thus, the Sikh community became further concentrated in the rural North Island as Sikhs took up occupations in various industries in the region. Sikhs settled in areas such as Hauraki in Auckland, Waitomo in Waikato, Palmerston North (in Manawatu), and Hawkes Bay on the East Coast of the North Island, as shown in Figure 5-4. These were important centres for primary industries where Sikhs pursued employment as brick makers, saw-millers, milking hands as well as scrub cutters. In the Waikato and Bay of Plenty, a few Sikhs acquired land in important provincial centres such as Hamilton and Rotorua. The acquisition of lands in the region reflected the growing sedentary nature of the Sikh rural community that was establishing itself for the long-term. The establishment of agricultural businesses insured that Sikhs became a permanent part of rural New Zealand. Still, many Sikhs remained highly mobile in their occupations, shifting into different areas with employment opportunities arising from the

\textsuperscript{40} New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981, (1928).
extension of farming, especially with scrub-cutting teams who played a crucial role in breaking
in the bush. These men had no permanent dwelling and instead lived in tents or temporary
housing.

Sikhs in major centres such as Auckland, Wellington, Napier and Wanganui belonged to the longest-established families within the community. All these towns were built around ports frequently visited by ships, which fuelled their growth and the emergence of Sikh communities. The Sikhs in these centres were engaged in activities and occupations that required constant contact with the surrounding local society. They also provided the first point of contact for new arrivals to the community. The extensive activities of Sikhs recorded in various print sources show a community that was thriving in these towns. Records of their involvement in various educational, sporting, business, occupational and entertainment pursuits provide detailed information on the integration, diversity and spread of the community. For example, an S. Singh from Palmerston North passed a written examination to become an electrical wireman in 1927, while an R. Singh passed the practical part. In the domain of sports, a “Singh” was described as achieving the highest score in a cricket match between Hawera Technical High School and New Plymouth Technical College in 1922. Other examples are shown in the entertainment arena. For example, Nairanjain Singh broke his arm in a wrestling match against Tom Allen in the Auckland Town Hall in October 1929. Sikhs also acquired businesses, buildings and land in and around cities such as Auckland and

41 “On The Doubtful List,” 5.
42 New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981 Record for Bhagwan Singh.
44 “Rifle Shooting,” Hawera & Normanby Star, 25 November 1921, 3.
46 “Cricket,” Hawera & Normanby Star, 24 March 1922, 7.
48 “Te Aroha News,” Auckland Star, 8 November 1922, 7.
49 “Wrestling,” Evening Post, 6 August 1929, 14.
51 “Cricket,” 24 March 1922, 7.
Wellington. By the 1920s, their presence in such major centres was well-established, reflecting the growth and spread of the New Zealand Sikh community.

In conjunction with the growth of the Sikh community in the North Island, the population in the South Island dwindled. Some Sikhs remained in areas such as the West Coast and Otago. One, named Sunda Singh, was recorded in Stony Creek, Otago. He had been in the South Island for approximately two decades. Ganda Singh and his family were settled near Greymouth where his children and nephew attended school. Other Sikhs, whose presence had been recorded in previous decades, are absent from various 1920s sources. The few Sikhs recorded in the South Island were involved in agriculture and labour like their brethren in the North Island.

Thus, the spread of the Sikh community reflected the changing economy in New Zealand. Growth industries such as dairy, meat and flax milling led to the expansion of the North Island economy. The increasing demands for labour provided Sikhs with employment opportunities in rural regions of the North Island and this work drew in some recently-arrived men. Sikhs, most of whom were from farming rural backgrounds in Punjab, were familiar with rural life, so it was natural them to take up occupations with which they were most familiar. This geographical redistribution of Sikh settlement and labour mobility is strong evidence of the extent to which they were intertwined with changes in New Zealand’s economy.

**Population and Growth**

Exact population figures for Sikhs are difficult to establish as the state in New Zealand collected and arranged migration data by national origin rather than religious affiliation. The way data was collected effectively meant that the state had no systematic way of measuring Sikh (or Muslim or Hindu) communities while they had a strong knowledge of the number of

---

54 “West Coast Schools,” Grey River Argus, 27 December 1920, 5.
resident Indians. At the same time when census data is used in correlation with all other sources, we can identify viable population and migratory trends within the community. These trends include information on arrivals, departures, permanent residence of the greater Indian community and comparing them to other documentary evidence such as electoral rolls, defence force archives and community records. The limited usefulness of census data is further exacerbated by the highly mobile nature of some individuals, who moved in and out of the country between census ‘snapshots’ and the repeated usage of names. It is also clear that not all Sikhs were recorded in official documentation. The numbers registered by the state are best seen as indicative and were by no means exact figures. Records are fragmented and are often fraught with spelling mistakes as well as variations in spellings across time. Many Sikhs are absent from records because they were sojourners, changed their names, perished in New Zealand, or because they were excluded from particular types of sources. One example is the 1926 records of the Indian Association, Country Section that noted approximately 122 Sikh adult men, a figure that is much larger than the electoral rolls. According to electoral rolls of 1928, there were approximately 65 enfranchised Sikhs in the whole of New Zealand. These men were officially recognized by the government and were able to vote, serve in the military, and work in New Zealand. The 1928 electoral roll figure represented an increase of approximately 40 percent on the figure in the 1919 electoral roll percent. The increase in the size of the Sikh population is supported by newspaper reports that note significant numbers of Sikhs arriving into local ports in the 1920s. According to the 19 April 1920 issue of the Poverty Bay Herald, eighteen “Hindoos” came on the S.S. Maheno from Sydney. The men were from “Punjab, India” and were described as the best physical type of Hindu ever admitted to Auckland. These men were to join others in the King Country who were “already working in

55 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 87.
the mills” throughout the region. Shipping manifests also recorded the return of many Sikhs from Punjab during this period, as noted above.

Figure 5-4: Geographical Spread of the Sikh Community in New Zealand 1920-1930.

Sikhs and the Justice System

The growth of the Sikh community also saw greater interaction with the justice system. The community’s involvement in the courts continued to be diverse and frequent. Sikhs were recorded in court reports as forensic doctors, prosecutors, defendants, offenders and witnesses. This pattern was consistent with the previous two decades; the only new addition was the introduction of the forensic doctor who provided evidence in various cases. Sikhs continued to use the courts in multiple ways, including settling disputes over wages (with Sikhs and others)
and contending with governmental institutions. Their detailed interactions provide perspective on the community’s general trust of the justice system. The sentences handed out to Sikhs during this period also reflected a measure of balance when compared to the wider community. The fairness of the courts was also reflected in the Sikhs use of the justice system. This fair approach was the likely reason Sikhs continued to use the justice system to pursue settlements for their grievances.

The frequent references to Sikhs in colonial newspapers reflected the increased attention on Asians in general during the 1920s, with the emergence of organized opposition against Asian migration to New Zealand. The racial hostility from organizations such as the RSA and White New Zealand League (detailed below) fed into the creation of a climate of fear by colonial newspapers. These fears did not always reflect a bias in the courts and did not prevent the Sikhs from engaging with the justice system. Essentially, the fear-mongering of politicians, entrepreneurs and colonial editors did not always translate into discrimination for Sikhs within the courts.

Litigation against Sikhs made up a significant portion of the community’s engagement with the justice system during the 1920s. There were several possible factors at play here: first was the increase in the size, and relative youthfulness, of the Sikh population. As more young Sikh men arrived into New Zealand free from the inhibitions of home, a few often fell on the wrong side of the law. Second, as noted above, Sikhs gained greater attention of broader society due to their external markers of their faith (such as the turban and beard), as well as exaggerated fears of an immigrant “flood”. Third, the worldwide recession created particular hardship for New Zealand, which relied on Britain for the bulk of its exports. This economic contraction

---

placed pressure on some Sikhs to seek other means of financial support in a competitive employment market. Such factors combined to make Sikhs easy targets for disaffected sectors of society, but litigation against them did not necessarily reflect behaviours of the wider Sikh community.

A sample of individual cases in the 1920s demonstrates that Sikh offending was generally at the low end of the scale of criminal behaviour. In 1920, Desai Dara (the nephew of Harnam) and Rosina Singh were charged with alcohol-related offences. They were suspected of “grog-selling” out of their soft drink business on Grey St, Auckland. A significant penalty was applied; they were both fined “£20 each” or “in default two months hard labour”. Sikh public drunkenness also attracted the attention of local authorities. “Banla Singh” was arrested and fined 20s for drunk, disorderly behaviour on Queen St (Auckland). The court report described him as “a tall Sikh wearing a dirty turban and mournful expression”. He had been in New Zealand for ten years. Other Sikhs also ended up in court as business dealings went awry. In 1921, a claim was made by a Grey St business against Poona Singh for the amount of “£51 5s”. Singh responded with a counterclaim of £50 but this was dismissed, and he ultimately lost the case. The original claim was made by two Europeans, and both hired lawyers to deal with litigation. Others Sikhs appeared in court for infringements including driving offences, assault, theft and fraud.

One major case that captured the nation’s imagination was the litigation against Baldev Singh Share. Baldev’s history has been recorded by McLeod in a relatively detailed account of

59 “Police Court,” Auckland Star, 20 August 1923, 6.
60 “Broken Bylaws,” Evening Post, 1 December 1927, 17.
his family and life. Baldev was the son of an influential Sikh politician in India named Giani Ditt Singh. He was a highly educated Sikh, who held multiple degrees from Europe in medicine and science. He had arrived in New Zealand in 1920 and became a prominent leader within the Sikh and larger Indian community. Singh engaged the colonial presses over issues of immigration and racism, lead delegations to the government and made public presentations about India. For over nine years he prospered in Auckland, working as a medical practitioner (from home and his office on Queen St) and also assisting the police as a forensic doctor.

During 1929, his life collapsed when charges were laid against him by the local police. On 2 October that year, he was charged with “indecently assaulting a woman aged 23”. The woman accused him of showing her “indecent photos” and performing an unusual examination of her. Due to his prominence in New Zealand, the case was picked up nationwide and caused a significant stir. Every attempt was made to prevent racial bias by the jury on the part of the judge; he was reported to have stated on one occasion that, “the jury should deal with Dr. Share as an Englishman and would not be swayed by the fact of his colour”. Baldev believed he was being framed, that someone was “trying to put one across him” and this perception was reinforced by letters held by the justice department. The trial resulted in the incarceration of Share, resulting in his family’s destitution. Share ended up doing hard labour in the central North Island for two years while his family remained in Auckland on a meagre income. In 1930, Baldev was officially struck off the medical register upon the application of the New

64 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 172–179.
69 “Indian Doctor Charged,” Evening Post, 14 October 1929, 11.
70 “Dr. Share’s Base Betrayal of Woman Patient’s Trust Sanctity of the Surgery Scandalously Abused,” NZ Truth, 14 November 1929, 7.
71 “Assault Alleged,” Evening Post, 8 November 1929, 6.
72 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 178.
Zealand Medical Council. On 16 January 1931, his son Dellawar Singh died of tuberculosis at the Auckland Infirmary at the age of 18. Baldev’s fall from grace was complete and in December the same year he was finally granted release after heavy lobbying from friends. He immediately returned to India (with his wife) after his release.

As noted above, Baldev Singh Share also served as a forensic examiner for the local police and courts. His skills were used on a regular basis by the local police. In 1922, he provided medical evidence related to the death of an individual, whom he declared have died of natural causes. In 1923, he was asked to provide information regarding the traumatic death of a victim of a car accident. During the same year, Baldev was called in again for evidence against a midwife. Baldev also provided evidence against another Indian “Salaman” for making false claims as a herbalist in Auckland. Baldev was one of a few Sikh professionals in New Zealand, and his activities provide a different perspective on Sikh life in the colony. Before his fall from grace, he had an extremely high standing in the local community and within law enforcement agencies.

Sikhs were also involved in the courts as witnesses and prosecutors. In 1920, Nagina Singh and Dalip Singh were called as witnesses in a murder case in Tokirima (near Taumarunui) and asked to provide evidence of what occurred at a “Hindu camp” during the murder case. In Auckland, Santa Singh was involved as a witness after an offender smashed the window of another Indian’s store. He provided evidence against the offender, describing

---

73 “Struck From Register,” Evening Post, 5 May 1930, 11.
75 “Natural Causes,” Auckland Star, 6 October 1922, 3.
76 “Motor Car Fatality,” 10.
77 “Police Court,” Auckland Star, 12 October 1923, 8.
78 “Indian “Herbalist” In Court,” NZ Truth, 6 December 1924, 5.
79 “Tokirima Murder,” Hawera & Normanby Star, 5 November 1920, 5.
80 “Police Court,” Auckland Star, 26 June 1924, 5.
what happened and how he chased him down. Santa was married to the daughter of Phuman Singh, one of the oldest pioneering Sikh settlers in the colony.

Sikhs also used the courts to address their grievances. Joala Singh, a “native of Punjab, India” claimed for compensation from his employer, for injuries he sustained as scrub cutter working in Mananui (near Whitianga). Others went to court as offences were committed against them. Harnam Singh and his wife acted as witnesses in the prosecution of a drunken individual who had entered their restaurant on Grey St, Auckland and abused Harnam’s wife. The courts placed a hefty fine of £9 11s on the offender, not a small amount for that time. Thefts were also a common occurrence in the 1920s, as many Sikhs were engaged in business, especially in urban areas. Joala Singh had a theft committed against him while in Auckland in 1923. Another Sikh named Rattan Singh was the victim of a theft by a local Maori man in Auckland during 1925. Some Sikhs were on the receiving end of assaults by drunken locals. Banta Singh was in court after a drunken man attacked him; the case resulted in a £1 fine.

Use of the courts by the Sikhs increased during the 1920s, building on experience over five decades. Despite the hostile environment of anti-Asian sentiment, Sikhs trusted the justice system and fully engaged with it. Racial discrimination did not appear to be a serious issue in the courts as judges enforced the law and some going so far as to discourage it. The inability to speak fluent English and religious customs (such as head coverings) were at times a barrier but were mostly overcome.

82 “Police Court,” Auckland Star, 31 December 1920, 5.
84 “Police Court,” Auckland Star, 30 May 1925, 13.
85 “Assaulted Indian,” Auckland Star, 3 January 1928, 3.
The Community Organizes

During the 1920s tensions continued to increase within local communities as race and citizenship became serious issues. Anti-Asian agitations had resulted in the implementation, early in the decade, of immigration legislation that attempted to bar Asians from entry to New Zealand. However, this was not enough for some sections of the white population that felt that a solution needed to be found for the “problem” of Sikhs and Indians already in New Zealand. Organizations such as the Returned Servicemen’s Association (RSA), New Zealand National Defence League, Anti-Asiatic League and the White New Zealand League wanted to remove those who were already in New Zealand. Their aim was to create a “White New Zealand” along the lines of similar initiatives in South Africa, Canada and Australia and were behind a concerted effort to marginalize the small community through attacks in the colonial press, public meetings, legislation and lobbying of government officials. Attempts were made to exaggerate fear through the dissemination of racial stereotypes and misinformation. Individual Sikhs and other Indians responded by using the press to challenge critiques of non-white migration and as the attacks joined with like-minded Indians to counter the assault.

The calls for a “White New Zealand Policy” had been mounting since the early 1900s, especially after the passing of the 1897 Immigration Restriction Act and amendments to it in 1908 and 1910. This early legislation restricted Sikhs’ entry into New Zealand. On 30 March 1902, an ex-Indian Army soldier named Juan Singh (a resident of Woodville, north of Wellington) attempted to travel to Singapore for business via Australia. He was told by the shipping companies in Wellington that “he would not be allowed to come back”.86 The Manawatu Standard reported that Juan had stated that he was a British subject and felt he had the liberty to go where he pleased. Juan was not the only Sikh to encounter problems with the race-based legislation. Australian law was implemented much more aggressively, and this also

had a knock-on effect in New Zealand. Due to heavy penalties levied for absconding passengers (especially Asian), many shipping lines refused to take on Sikhs in New Zealand. Australia was the shortest route to India and losing access to the trans-Tasman leg was especially difficult for those travelling to and from Punjab. Harnam Singh, a resident of Spring Creek, Blenheim was refused passage through Australia due to this legislation. He had been a resident of Australia and New Zealand for over twenty-five years and was married to an English woman. Harnam was forced to travel to Argentina through to London and then to India, which was a long and arduous journey.

Attitudes in New Zealand continued to harden towards Indians as a White New Zealand policy was advocated. In 1905, the Political Labour League passed a motion “favouring the principle of a “White New Zealand”.

The movement was intrinsically linked with contemporary Australian political movements. This connection was confirmed in an extensive article in the *Hawera & Normanby Star* advocating for a “White Australasia”. By 1906, the Prime Minister Seddon supported this policy, arguing that to accomplish the endeavour “party differences should be sunk”. During 1907, more groups began supporting the policy, especially within the labour movement. These included the Trades and Labour Councils in Wellington and Otago, the Palmerston North Rifles Social Club, and the Waterside Workers Union. The rapid spread of support for the policy saw local organizations form to lobby the government to prevent Asians from arriving. Organizations such as the Anti-Asiatic League and The White Race League sought to “make New Zealand white” and “maintain race purity”. The groups used colonial presses to attack Asians by instilling fear of them in local

---

87 Local and General,” *Wairarapa Daily Times*, 29 April 1905, 4.
communities. According to the Anti-Asiatic League propaganda, New Zealand was threatened by a “horde of heathen Asiatics in the near future” and white New Zealand should recognize the “impending danger”. Initially such campaigns singled out Japanese, Chinese and Assyrians, but by 1910 anti-Asian sentiment had come to include Indians.

After 1910, Indians became embroiled in the push for the “White New Zealand” policy. Lascars were targeted by the Seamen’s Union because of the perception that they were taking jobs away from whites. The New Zealand Truth newspaper described a group of lascars as “repugnant” while they were travelling around Dunedin. By 1913, the Dominion was covering sentiment towards “coolie labour” in New Zealand. The views and opinions detailed were cautious, describing indentured Indians as having “the right to live and find employment here,” but at the same time, there was a belief “coolies” were a danger in the rural regions. In Marlborough Express, newspaper complaints were made against the “lower standard of civilisation” brought to New Zealand by the Hindu. Newspapers were also well aware of “cram schools,” which tutored Sikhs in how to fill out applications in Fiji and Sydney to meet immigration requirements. The growing concerns about Indians expanded especially as events from across the world were reported in New Zealand. One such event was Mohandas K. Gandhi’s challenge to the authority of the South African administration’s white’s only policy. The New Zealand press paid close attention to the fact that he “actively counselled resistance” amongst the Indians in the colony. His agitation grew during the 1910s, triggering fears in other British colonies. The situation in South Africa worried New Zealand significantly. As Gandhi gained sympathetic voices in the British Parliament, the Auckland Star reported that

---

94 Ibid.
95 “Lascar or White Crews,” Thames Star, 30 December 1910, 2.
97 “Imperial Colour,” Evening Post, 21 August 1913, 7.
100 “Asiatics in Transvaal,” Dominion, 14 October 1907, 7.
“it was not inconceivable that the Liberal Government [felt] compelled to suggest to the South African authorities that they must take into account the claims of the Indian coolies”. 101 Other newspapers observed that giving credence to the claims of South African Indians was a “matter of extreme significance and importance to the people of New Zealand”. In 1913, the situation in South Africa intensified after Gandhi was arrested and Indians unified behind him creating further pressure for change. 102 The reports and other subversive activity were covered extensively by the New Zealand press. According to Ballantyne colonial editors were “concerned with imperial defence” and the impact and implication of “conflicts for New Zealand”. 103 Colonial newspapers detailed the activities of independence leaders and movements with specificity even providing first hand New Zealander accounts of the situation. The coverage fed into the wider debate on “Indian migration and the place of South Asians within New Zealand Society”. 104

During Gandhi’s protests in South Africa, a wealthy Sikh business person by the name of Gurdit Singh also sought to challenge imperial authorities. As noted earlier, Singh chartered the Japanese ship Komagata Maru to transport over three hundred Sikhs to Vancouver, Canada with the express intention of clarifying India’s citizenship in the Empire especially after the race-based legislation excluding Sikhs territories within the Empire. According to Gurdit, “what [was] done with the shipload of [his] people [would] determine whether we shall have peace in parts of the British Empire” and he went on to add that, “the main object of our coming is to let the British Government know how they can maintain their rule in India, as the Indian Government is in danger nowadays. We can absolutely state how the British Government may be made to last in India forever”. 105 Gurdit Singh’s direct challenge to imperial authorities

<references>
102 “Ghandi Arrested,” Wairarapa Daily Times, 8 November 1913, 5.
103 India in New Zealand, 97.
104 Ibid, 99.
105 “Hindu Immigrants,” Poverty Bay Herald, 29 June 1914, 7.
</references>
further simulated fear of non-white people across the globe. *The Poverty Bay Herald* noted in an editorial entitled “The Colour Line”\(^{106}\) that the “challenge to the Provincial Legislature” had a “direct bearing on New Zealand”. If Indians were to gain rights in Vancouver, it would be a “vital crisis” for all parts of the Empire.

The intensifying global situation was met with increased hostility towards Indians (including Sikhs) and other Asians. In New Zealand, the focus on Indians grew as both Gandhi and Gurdit Singh received extensive coverage in colonial newspapers. During 1914, an individual who called himself “White New Zealand” complained about Indian fruit hawkers in Wellington\(^ {107}\) “who [paid] no rent for their business premises” and “sold their goods at prices that respectable shops [could not] compete with”. The writer advocated the “removal of [the] undesirable immigrants from the country” and he believed politicians would “sure to receive thanks of all classes of white community” for doing so. These exaggerated fears had little basis in reality as, by 1912, Wellington city had licensed six Indians to sell in the streets. By 1913, this number had increased to twenty.\(^ {108}\) The external appearance of Sikhs also drew particular criticism from pro-white groups. According to an uncomplimentary article in the *Auckland Star*, it was “no unusual experience to see in Auckland…be-turbaned Indians who are allowed to land in New Zealand”.\(^ {109}\) Special mention was also made of rural Sikhs located around Taumarunui, who were described as living “at a very low standard” and would “lower the moral and standard of living for working classes”.\(^ {110}\) The effect of such press coverage, on the Sikhs, became apparent when many were deported or denied entry for being unable to meet immigration requirements, as shown in Figure 5-5. The exaggerated fears and heightened tensions pushed both the Sikhs and wider Indian community to react.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.
During the growing racial instabilities of the mid-1910s, Indians began actively creating organizations to represent their interests. In 1916, an Indian Association was first mentioned in the *Hawera & Normanby Star*\textsuperscript{111} in a letter from a New Zealand soldier in Iraq that stated that New Zealand troops had received “hard boiled lollies” and a “tin of milk each” from an Indian association. It is entirely possible that this could have been an organization formed by Indians or Sikhs living in Wanganui or Hawera. By 1920, multiple representatives from Indian-focused organizations were recorded in thirty centres from “Whangarei to Invercargill”.\textsuperscript{112} Two such groups were called the “British and India Association” and “The Home Rule for India League”. In 1920, these groups were merged and became known as “The New Zealand and Indian League”. This organization also included Europeans and advocated for the home rule of India. It also decried the erosion of press freedoms and exercise of censorships and advocated for the rights of indentured labourers in Fiji. The organization had strong links to Annie Besant, an Irish activist, who supported home rule of India and was imprisoned for doing so.

The New Zealand and Indian League joined the racial fray by addressing attacks against Indians in the local press. In July 1920, its honorary secretary Mr John Griffiths wrote to the *Dominion Post* defending Indians.\textsuperscript{113} He stated that “Indians [were] mainly of Aryan stock;” that it would be wise to “differentiate between Chinese, Japanese and Indians;” that Indians were citizens of the Empire; and that they had contributed in “blood and treasure” for the defence of the Empire during World War I. The organization was dominated by Europeans who supported of Indians and reflected the cross-cultural support for Indians that existed in the midst of hostilities during the period.

\textsuperscript{111} “Local and General News,” *Hawera & Normanby Star*, 11 October 1916, 4.
\textsuperscript{112} “India from the Indian Viewpoint,” *Maoriland Worker*, 21 January 1920, 4.
By 1920, the Indian community was already organized in different localities including Auckland and Wellington. As alluded to earlier, Indian Associations had already donated gifts to the New Zealand military in 1915 but their activities before this date remains unclear. Indians were organized in Auckland by 1918, where there was a significant community of Sikhs. The organization in Auckland was led by Chhotubhai Jivanji, who was a well-educated shipping clerk. After suffering discrimination from co-workers, he quit his position with the shipping company and found work as a clerk at a local jeweller. In 1919, Chhotubhai engaged the colonial press when, in a letter to the Prime Minister, he argued for the rights of Indians in New Zealand: “in my opinion this country belongs to all Britishers, who reside in it, and have equal right no matter whether black, white or red, as was shown in the Great War”. In the same month, a “Singh Sud” (an alias) wrote another letter to the *Auckland Star* emphasizing India’s contribution to the war effort in Europe. He stated, “I hold that [as] we were considered good enough to fight for the British Empire we are also good enough to live in it”. Another article reproduced sections of an interview with Dr. Baldev Singh Share one week after his arrival in Auckland, in 1920. He reportedly defended the Indians arriving in New Zealand as a “decent and law-abiding class” and they had the intention of becoming “reputable citizens”. Sikhs and Gujaratis were working together to counter prejudices against Indians. Their cooperative relationship unified the two communities behind a common purpose and soon spread across the wider Indian community.

By 1922, the Auckland organization was officially named the New Zealand Indian Association and was headed by J.K. Natali. Dr. Baldev Singh Share also had a close relationship with the group. The New Zealand Indian Association led high-ranking delegations

---

119 “The Asiatic Influx,” 2.
to both local officials and visiting dignitaries. The first example came with the visit of V.S.S Sastri, who led a top-level diplomatic delegation from India around multiple parts in the British Empire.\textsuperscript{120} Sastri was a member of the Privy Council and was a well-respected diplomat in the Indian Government.\textsuperscript{121} His delegation was met by the head of the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand along with Dr. Baldev Singh Share and J.K. Natali. Again, after the unification of the smaller Indian associations (in Auckland, Taumarunui and Wellington discussed later), Auckland continued to lead delegations to government agencies such as the Minister of Internal Affairs, to air their grievances about discrimination.\textsuperscript{122} The association openly challenged the White New Zealand League in the press,\textsuperscript{123} causing the organisation to defend itself.\textsuperscript{124} The Auckland association was the dominant and most influential organization during the 1920s.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{120} “Status of Indians,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 25 July 1922, 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} For further reading on V.S.S. Sastri please see Jacqueline Leckie, \textit{Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community}, 81.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Jacqueline Leckie, \textit{Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community}, 142.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} “Indians’ Point Of View,” \textit{Evening Post}, 20 April 1926, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} “White New Zealand,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 17 April 1926, 16.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In Wellington, on 133 Tory St., a group of Indians established “The Indian Association” in 1920. The Tory St. premises had an Indian connection from about 1915 and in 1920, was the address of a fruit selling business. This organization was dominated by the Gujarati community and was likely founded because of the growing hostility towards them, as noted in the local *Evening Post*. In 1920, the organization was influential enough to purchase advertising in the local newspaper calling on Indians in Wellington, to observe holidays in honour of pro-independence leaders in India. In Wellington another Indian individual named “Miru” (who may have had links to the Indian Association) detailed his views on the White New Zealand Policy. He believed that if New Zealand blocked Indian migration to New Zealand, India could adopt an “Indian’s India” policy.

---

The rural Sikhs had their own Indian Association in Taumarunui, where much of the Sikh population was concentrated. It is unclear how early this association was formed but by 1919, the Sikhs had established a centralized support base in Te Awamutu. The place was called the “Hindu Farm” by local Europeans, probably because of the high numbers of Indians located there. The farm, located “5 miles out of Te Awamutu,” near the township of Kihikihi, was acquired collectively by Sikh farmers (Indar, Harnam, Sumundu and Nandu Singh) for a “£1000” deposit (no small amount for the period). The purchase of land was much to the disdain of the local R.S.A, which had reacted angrily to its establishment.

The farm functioned much like a gurdwara (Sikh temple), providing a temporary residence for Sikhs, and a place for them to hold meetings, encounter other Punjabis and sing Punjabi songs. This practice was in line with other Sikh diaspora communities in the United Kingdom, Canada, Fiji, United States of America, China and Hong Kong. The “Hindu Farm” went into decline after the implementation of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1920. The steep drop in new arrivals resulted in fewer Sikhs seeking assistance, resulting finally in its eventual sale in 1922-1923. Its closure should be seen in the context of the broad geographical spread of the relatively small Sikh community in New Zealand. The “Hindu farm” showed that the Sikhs recognized the need for an organized support structure within the community and attempted to form this based on the conventional gurdwara system.

Along with the farm, Sikhs were challenging negative perceptions in the colonial press. Individuals such as “Singh Sud,” Baldev Singh Share and Indar Singh Randhawa argued for their citizenship in New Zealand and the Empire. As mentioned earlier, Singh Sud (likely an alias) responded to an article in the Auckland Star that attacked “a handful of Indians settling

---

129 “Local and General,” Evening Post, 7 August 1919, 6.
130 Ibid.
131 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 74.
132 “White New Zealand,” Auckland Star, 8 June 1926, 15.
in [New Zealand]”. He argued that “thousands of [his] countrymen went to France to fight for
the British Empire long before America entered the war”. He went on to refer to white New
Zealanders as “pakehas” in what was likely a reference to their foreign origins and attacked the
“capitalistic slave drivers, who [were] mostly white men”.133 Baldev Singh took a more
conciliatory stance when he was interviewed by the Evening Post. As mentioned earlier in this
chapter Baldev described the Indians immigrating to New Zealand in a positive light
commenting on their good behaviour and support for locals. Baldev expressed support for
European education and categorised Indians as members of the “Aryan family”. Baldev Singh
went to separate Indians from other “Asiatics” such as “Mongolian, Chinese and Japanese”
whom he believed “[infused] an entirely alien strain of blood into the countries in which they
[settled]”. Indar Singh Randhawa also responded to the White New Zealand League. He stated
that the League had “done some service to the Indian community” and, quoted Queen
Victoria’s stance on equality, requested the League respect the monarch’s position. Indar
provocatively asked whether the League had “any respect for the above-mentioned words?”
referring to the quote of Queen Victoria. He argued that the “true citizens of New Zealand [had]
not forgotten” Her Majesty’s words. He cited the welcome of these citizens and the “civic
reception” for the Indian Hockey team that toured New Zealand during 1926. These Sikh
writers were leaders within the community and provided a voice for rurally-based Sikhs, far
from the political centres of Auckland and Wellington. Baldev Singh was particularly proactive
(as mentioned earlier) and was closely linked to the Gujarati-dominated Auckland Association.

The Sikh community was organized by the 1920s and continued to evolve as the racial
threat grew. In the mid-1920s, the Sikhs and broader Indian community faced the threat from
a newly-formed organization. The White New Zealand League was established on 19

133 “Untitled,” Auckland Star, 3 April 1919, 7.
December 1925, after a meeting of “farmers and townsmen in peaceful Pukekohe”. The concerns of the League centred on the competition introduced by Asians into the local employment and business markets. Its members believed that Asians were gaining an “increasing hold” on the fruit trade and their “frugality of living made it impossible for a European to bring up his family indecency”. The first meeting of the organization focused on Chinese and to a lesser extent, Indian domination of the fruit market. The targeting of Chinese was partly due to well-established commercial businesses of the Chinese in Auckland. Indians were comparatively newer arrivals to New Zealand and, therefore, less established in the fruit markets. Due to this perception, the traders decided to form the League and attempted to block Asians from the supply chain. The first motion carried by the League was that “land owners and business men should refrain from dealing with [Asians]”.

The White New Zealand League launched attacks on multiple fronts in an attempt to push out Asians from the fruit trade and ultimately, New Zealand. Within two months of its formation, a League delegation met with the district member of parliament for the Pukekohe region and gained his support for their cause. The local parliamentary member for the Franklin area (south of Auckland), E.D. McLennan, assured the League that he would present its grievances to “parliament, the cabinet and the prime minister”. The League pushed its agenda further at the national level, attracting more people to their cause. It proactively targeted immigration legislation. It resolved to influence the local members of parliament and the central government to halt Asian immigration and their economic advancement. During this campaign, the Sikhs and the Indian community reacted by questioning the League in the colonial press. As noted above, Indar Singh Randhawa challenged the League’s loyalty to the

136 “Influx of Asiatics,” Auckland Star, 23 February 1926, 8.
Crown, quoting Queen Victoria’s views on equality of all in the Empire.\textsuperscript{138} The New Zealand Indian Association (based in Auckland) also challenged a biased article, describing it as “unwholesome and ugly” in a letter to the Auckland \textit{Star}. The letter described the League as a “handful of agitators”.\textsuperscript{139} The League responded to these criticisms by actively attempting to justify its activities, stating “the League [did] not want to take exception to [Asians] on the colour line, but purely from an economic standpoint”.\textsuperscript{140} This reasoning by the League was questionable as most of the organization’s attacks were racist in nature.

As the White New Zealand League gained traction—the local Pukekohe Council passed a resolution supporting the League’s objective “to restrict the emigration of [Asians] into [New Zealand]”.\textsuperscript{141} The Petone Borough Council near Wellington\textsuperscript{142} also expressed its support—and with growing support for further restrictive legislation, Sikhs began to organise a national body to deal with these challenges. In July 1926, before unification, three official associations existed in Auckland, Wellington and Taumarunui. The associations in Auckland and Wellington were both dominated by the Gujarati community while the Taumarunui association was a Punjabi Sikh organization. There was some level of coordination between the three agencies, but the recognition of wider national issues required the formation of a national body to respond. With the implementation of anti-Asian legislation and growing hostility from the League, the three were unified under the banner of the New Zealand Indian Central Association (NZICA).

The NZICA’s first meeting in Taumarunui on 24 July 1926 was attended by representatives from the three local Indian associations existing, and chaired by Dr. B.S. Share. The New Zealand Indian Central Association was officially formed at this meeting, which

\textsuperscript{138} “White New Zealand,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 8 June 1926, 15.
\textsuperscript{139} “White New Zealand,” 17 April 1926, 15.
\textsuperscript{140} “White New Zealand,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 22 April 1926, 16.
\textsuperscript{141} “Onehunga Borough Council,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 8 June 1926, 9.
\textsuperscript{142} “Untitled,” \textit{Evening Post}, 29 June 1926, 11.
unanimously elected Mr S.N. Mahraj (Auckland), Mr. Ravji Hira (Wellington), and Indar Singh Randhawa (Taumarunui) to the positions of president, vice-president, and the general secretary, respectively. A decision was also taken to register the association.143 This unified organization enabled the Sikhs and their Indian counterparts to challenge the prejudices of the League. It also provided a forum through which to lobby local leaders and central government for support in mounting a coordinated and efficient response.

The New Zealand Indian Central Association immediately set to work on multiple fronts to nullify the League’s attacks and gain political support at the same time. Among other things, it lobbied local politicians and Indian delegations, issued press releases, donated to local organizations and made public presentations. Political engagements were handled by Auckland-based Sikhs and Indians, such as Baldev Singh Share. As noted earlier, he had led a deputation to V.S.S. Sastri in 1922 and to the Department of Internal Affairs in 1926 to detail the community’s grievances at discrimination and unfair treatment by local politicians and the League. This outreach also occurred at a local level where the Association met politicians such as Dunbar Sloane (a reform candidate for Wellington Central) in Wellington. Sloane expressed support for Indians in the city, reported stating: “these Indians are British subjects, and electors of Wellington Central and thousands of their countrymen served the Empire during the Great War”.144 This statement was particularly significant given the prevailing attitudes of the period.

Along with such high-level political contact, the NZICA also looked to improve relations within local communities. Donations were made to organizations such as ambulance services, museums, hospitals and churches such as the Christmas Fund,145 the House of Compassion,146 Wellington Art Gallery and the Museum Fund,147 which won praise from local

143 “Indians Foregather,” Auckland Star, 2 August 1926, 10.
145 “Carved in the Hill,” Evening Post, 10 January 1928, 6.
146 “Motor Fatality,” Evening Post, 3 January 1928, 10.
leaders, and made contributions to individuals such as Reverend Fielden Taylor. In Auckland public presentations were also made to help the local community better understand Indians and India. Dr. Baldev Singh was often the presenter at these meetings, which were advertised in the local papers. These outreach attempts were often supported by those sympathetic to the plight of Indians, such as the Theosophical Society. The NZICA also continued to attack the League in colonial newspapers, challenging negative stereotypes and reaffirming Indian citizenship.

The NZICA’s role during the 1920s focused on fighting discrimination, especially from the White New Zealand League. Annual general meetings held at locations across New Zealand recorded that its principal concerns were fighting discrimination and defending Indian rights. According to resolutions passed in 1929, the organization wanted “better understanding between the races” and the New Zealand public “not to be hindered or misled by any of the basemindedness of the White New Zealand League”. The gradual development and unification of the Indian Associations were the product of a decade-old fight against discrimination. The growing hostility towards Sikhs, Indians and Asians in New Zealand caused the community to organize along a common Indian identity. The Sikhs were at the forefront of the challenge and were unrelenting in their political fight and attempts to win over the New Zealand public. The NZICA and local Indian Associations provided a voice for the Indian community in and beyond the 1920s.

Cross-Cultural Connections

Sikhs maintained a complex set of cross-cultural relationships within wider New Zealand society. The Sikh community’s spread and depth of integration meant these
relationships were various in nature constantly evolving. The constant evolution was especially true during the 1920s, as race and colour became concerns for British colonies and Anglophone countries. Relations varied considerably between individuals, as some Sikhs integrated into the majority European society while others were met with hostility. With the closing of immigration by 1920, and as the majority of Sikhs hoped to settle in New Zealand the community needed to adapt to the changing context; reinforce established relationship and create new associations, especially with the Gujarati community, which was facing similar issues.

For the most part, Sikhs worked, married, went to school, interacted with colonial institutions, and played sports with and for Europeans. This close integration is reflected in the numerous sporting pursuits in rugby, cricket and shooting as well as the cross-cultural marriage of Sikhs such as Harnam Singh and Rosina Virginia Singh.\(^{151}\) Sikhs were employed on farms throughout the central North Island,\(^\text{152}\) by local European landowners who provided them with pay, shelter, food and at times supported the men by writing letters and providing transportation. This help extended to children and, to a lesser extent, women who arrived during this period. Sikh children played with their European counterparts while women, who were still held to the cultural norms of Punjab, could only interact with each other or European women. Sikh entrepreneurs, both those who were settled and travelling individuals (hawkers), also maintained business relationships with Europeans. As many were grocers,\(^\text{153}\) confectioners,\(^\text{154}\) drapers,\(^\text{155}\) and sellers of general goods,\(^\text{156}\) an ability to communicate, negotiate and sell goods and services was required. Relationships could also disintegrate due to business dealings or disputes over working conditions, but this did not necessarily reflect

\(^{151}\) “Police Court,” 31 December 1920, 5.
\(^{152}\) New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981, (1928).
\(^{153}\) New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981 Record for Gurdit Singh.
\(^{154}\) New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981 Record for Phomen Singh.
\(^{155}\) Ibid. Record for Hakim Singh Jhooty
\(^{156}\) Ibid. Record for Bhagta Singh
race issues, but rather problems between certain individuals. These business-related activities were supported by the widespread advertising in local newspapers across the nation.

The European-dominated White New Zealand League attacked Sikhs and Asians virulently but their views by no means represented the majority of New Zealand’s. The Indian community was careful to note this when it attacked the organization, without using racist language or skin colour. Sikhs and Indians instead described the League as a “handful of agitators,” showing how they perceived the racist and hostile elements as a fringe minority in New Zealand society.

The Sikh relationship with the Maori community was similar to that with the European community in many respects, but hostility due to race and colour was not a central factor. This statement must be qualified as information on Sikh-Maori relations is fragmentary and does not give a clear or precise picture. From the information available, the relationship with the Maori community in the 1920s was as it had been in previous decades. Many of the initial connections with the Maori community began as a result of hawking. This highly mobile profession required Sikhs to travel into remote areas (including Maori tribal regions) to sell products such as jewellery, silks and foods. Sikhs apparently did not share the European aversion to dealing with local Maori.

Friendships were also formed as Sikhs closely associated with local tribes. One particular relationship was around the Taranaki region of the North Island. Hakim Singh Jhutti, a draper from Rotorua, was invited to speak on Te Whiti’s Day in front of the Ngatiawa tribe at the Waitara Pa based on his historical research into the origins of New Zealand’s Maori population in which he presented a theory that Maori had migrated from the Himalayas in India, an argument that was in keeping with the arguments of several leading colonial ethnographers.

---

157 “White New Zealand,” 17 April 1926, 16.
and historians. The close association of individual Sikhs also extended into personal relationships; thirteen marriages of Sikhs with Maori were recorded before World War Two. Examples of marriages included a daughter of Rua, the Maori Prophet, and Te Karinga Te Pou. Interracial marriage in the early twentieth century was a reflection of how Indians and Sikhs were viewed as acceptable marriage partners and members of whanau.

During the 1920s, the tensions between anti-migrant groups and the wider Asian community drew Indians together. The Gujarati and Sikhs had a friendly and cordial relationship before the 1920s, although Sikhs were concentrated in the rural regions while Gujaratis were in greater numbers around townships. This geographical separation was reflected in the meeting minutes of the Indian Association, Country Section, which recorded a handful of Gujaratis amongst a vast majority of Punjabi Sikhs. Clear divisions in culture, religion and language meant that Sikh identification with their Indian brethren did not extend beyond formal relationships. Shipping manifests do show that some Sikhs and Gujaratis travelled together, however. There are also brief newspaper records of Sikhs assisting Gujaratis, as was the case for Santa Singh in Auckland who testified as a witness to a robbery at a store owned by a Gujarati. The prominent Sikh Baldev Singh Share had a close relationship with the Auckland-based Gujarati community and was closely associated with the Auckland-based New Zealand Indian Association. He was involved in delegations to government ministers and presided over the unification of both communities in 1926. There were no recorded marriages or children between Sikhs and Gujaratis during and before this period, as the communities remained distinctly separate. The finer interpersonal details of particular Sikh-Gujarati relations are unclear as records are lacking in this area.

159 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 115.
160 Ibid, 139.
161 “Marriage Certificate - Munshi Ram & Te Koringa Te Pou” (Department of Internal Affairs, 1920), 1920/1136.
Overall the Sikhs adapted successfully to the increasingly hostile environment, maintaining relationships with the majority European population, the smaller indigenous Maori population and the Gujarati community. Their relations outside of the Sikh community expanded in areas such as employment, marriage, friendship, business, organization and within the military. Organizations such as the White New Zealand League may have dominated the press and much of the literature from the period, but their views did not represent majority perceptions. The lack of hostility from the wider European community was reinforced by the continued growth of the population and its widespread integration into local society. The Sikhs continued to be highly adaptable, culturally flexible and apparently determined to establish and maintain relationships across New Zealand with a variety of people.

**Occupations within the Community**

Sikh professions during the 1920s focused on New Zealand’s leading industry, agriculture. The occupational trend was a continuation from the 1910s, as Sikhs filled the labour shortages in areas such as King Country, Taumaranui and Waikato. The employment concentration into the central North Island was for multiple reasons: First, the loss of men due to World War 1 to both death and injury which created shortages of manpower across New Zealand; second the scientific advances and developments (especially in the areas of pastoral growth) that increased demand for scrub-cutters and farm hands (the drop in price and greater accessibility of chemicals such as superphosphates increased the yields especially around the central North Island); third the attraction of familiar occupations (the vast majority of Sikhs were from rural Punjab, so their skill set was ideal for rural professions). Sikhs did not solely work in rural regions of New Zealand. The community was also involved in other occupations, with newspaper reports recording a range of occupations for Sikhs including cooks, electricians, business owners, and doctors. The community’s occupational diversity reflected its firm roots and the ability of individuals to adapt to the local New Zealand society.
While Sikh employment during the 1920s encompassed other jobs, it was concentrated on rural labour. According to available information, 45 percent of the community was involved in rural work (including farm labour). Rural employment could include anything from assisting with cattle to general work on farms, including scrub cutting. As agriculture was one of the core parts of the New Zealand economy, it is not surprising a large portion of the Sikhs worked in the field. The second biggest occupation for Sikhs during the 1920s was working in the flax industry, which involved cutting, processing and preparing flax fibre for local use and export. The flax industry peaked a decade earlier at about 5 percent of national exports. During World War I, the fibre was in particularly high demand as nations needed resources for the war effort. By the 1920s, the industry began to decline due to disease, fluctuating demand and advancing technologies such as steam that made flax redundant in the shipping industry. Despite the challenges faced by the industry, Sikhs continued to work there till the late 1920s. By 1928, the flax industry accounted for 24 percent of Sikh employment.162

At the same time, Sikh economic development had grown significantly, allowing many to become self-employed in both urban and rural areas. Some Sikhs had acquired farms in regions such as Waikato, Bay of Plenty and on the outskirts of Auckland. The majority of the self-employed were farmers, owning, leasing or renting their land, while a few were listed as “sharemilkers”. Sharemilking was the sharing of costs and profits of a dairy herd between partners. Individuals such as Mela Singh and Bhagoo Singh used this model of dairy farming in Te Puke, Waikato. The Sikhs focused on the occupation of dairy farming due to their geographic location and because the land was only suitable for pastoral growth. The firm association with dairy farming was true for P.H. Singh, who acquired a cattle herd in Hawera during 1923.163 The acquisition of land also reflected the growing wealth of the rural Sikh

163 “Commercial,” Hawera & Normanby Star, 1 June 1923, 6.
community. By 1928, approximately 10 percent of recorded Sikhs were self-employed in rural areas (a broad breakdown is shown in Figure 5-6).\textsuperscript{164}

The increased numbers of Sikhs in the rural North Island did not stop them from continuing to work in urban centres.\textsuperscript{165} As we have seen, Baldev Singh Share became a respected physician in Auckland where he worked and served the local community. Some Sikhs were employed in developing fields such as Esive Singh, who worked as an electrician in Wanganui. Others like Hakim Singh Jhutti worked in drapery, providing services in Rotorua. Others owned local stores that sold general goods and confectionary. Sikhs owned stores in Wanganui, Kopaki, Waikato, Bay View Hawkes Bay and Whakarewarewa, Bay of Plenty. Sikhs also worked as confectionary manufacturers, merchants, public service workers, and drivers. Other Sikhs established businesses in the dairy, confectionery, and general goods industries. As the economic wealth of the Sikh community grew, the further entrenched many became. Increasing wealth also created an embedded rural support system for many Sikhs, as they suffered during the economic volatility and racial hostility of the period.

Other aspects of Sikh life in the 1920s indicate the depth of the community’s integration into local society. Sikhs were involved in sport and education. Children attended school all across New Zealand; Kaira Singh was a pupil in Greymouth (in the South Island).\textsuperscript{166} Education also extended to elder Sikhs, such as Esive Singh, who passed electrical wiremen exams in Northern Wellington.\textsuperscript{167}

\textsuperscript{164} New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981, (1928).
\textsuperscript{165} Fewer numbers resided in these urban areas than in rural regions. There were several reasons for this including the hostile anti-Asian sentiment and the lack of employment opportunities created by the economic turmoil after World War One.
\textsuperscript{166} “West Coast Schools,” 5.
\textsuperscript{167} “Electrical Wiremen,” 9.
Regarding sporting pursuits, Sikhs were involved in rugby, cricket and rifle shooting. For example, a Singh from Point Chevalier played for the Auckland Primary School’s rugby team. Another Singh was selected to play for the national New Zealand Rugby League team to play Dewsbury in London. Cricket also attracted some Sikhs; a Singh was recorded in New Plymouth playing in a match between New Plymouth Technical College and Hawera Technical High School, and another Sikh was reported in Auckland playing for the local Y.M.C.A. Rifle shooting was also popular in the Hawera region. All these sports were played in a team atmosphere requiring extensive interaction with the local communities.

---

172 “Rifle Shooting,” 3.
The Sikh community’s integration into the greater New Zealand society was extensive during the 1920s despite the relatively hostile environment of anti-Asian attitudes, especially in urban centres. As well as interacting with colonial institutions, Sikhs also contributed to local society. The Sikh community was not restricted to the European-dominated cities; its interactions also extended to Maori communities, and in some cases Sikhs becoming prominent members of them. Sikhs were well-integrated members of New Zealand society.

Deaths in the Community

Deaths within the Sikh community were a frequent occurrence. Contributing factors included the aging population, accidents, infant mortality and the psychological pressures of being away from home. A death within the community was a sombre affair as numbers were small and everyone knew each other. Funerals were handled in a variety of ways depending on financial resources and location of the community. Burial was typical and was sometimes combined with cremation, especially as full crematorium resources were often unavailable. By Sikh traditions, cremations were open air cremations, but because these did not always result in complete incineration, the rest of the remains were buried. Sikh cremations were detailed extensively in colonial presses.

During the 1920s, there was a higher mortality rate than in previous periods. Approximately nine deaths were registered by government authorities, among them children as young as fourteen years old. Balwant Singh, a fourteen-year old boy, died after committing suicide in Taumarunui. Suicide was rare in the community through the pressures of adjusting could be too much for some. Some Sikhs also died as a result of accidents in dangerous jobs such as drain digging. Bahadur Singh died in an explosion in Matamata while “he was engaged in a drainage contract”. Another Sikh, Waryam Singh, in Te Awamutu was also critically

174 “On The Doubtful List,” 5.
injured in a drainage explosion.\textsuperscript{175} Not all accidental deaths were work-related: Basant Singh perished after being struck by a train.\textsuperscript{176} Sickness also played a part in the deaths of Sikhs. Sunda Singh died in Te Awamutu after being in “poor health”.\textsuperscript{177}

The Sikh community dealt with death as best as it could, within the context in which it existed. Culture and religion were transplanted into New Zealand, and Sikhs attempted to hold true to traditions of their homeland as indicated by the preference for open-air cremation. Deaths were a part of the community and in the often severe conditions of New Zealand, the Sikhs ensured respects were paid to members they had lost.

\textbf{Global Interactions}

New Zealand connections with India increased dramatically during the 1920s, especially as race and citizenship with the British Empire became contentious issues. Unrest in areas such as South Africa, America, and Canada and to a lesser extent Australia, had caused high-ranking delegations to be sent to calm the diaspora and listen to its grievances. Alongside these delegations, India also sent out sportsmen to improve relations beyond official diplomatic ties. These official links allowed for not only direct interaction with the government but also with local communities, creating a bridge between Indians and the local Europeans.

\textsuperscript{175} “Gelignite Explosion,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 21 May 1925, 9.
\textsuperscript{176} “Killed By Race Train,” \textit{Evening Post}, 27 January 1930, 12.
\textsuperscript{177} “Indian Dies Suddenly,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 26 August 1926, 9.
The first notable diplomatic visit to New Zealand was that of Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri (V.S.S. Satri). Sastri, as pictured in Figure 5-7, was an influential Indian politician and a member of the Privy Council. He had travelled the Empire regularly, meeting the Indian diaspora and was sympathetic to the plight of the Indian community. Sastri was held in high esteem by various national governments and engaged directly with them when issues of Indian citizenship and rights arose. He arrived in New Zealand in 1922, after a world tour that included Australia and Canada. Sastri was met by the high-ranking New Zealand politicians and addressed parliament during his visit. He hosted a public meeting on 25 July 1922 in Auckland where he met Dr. Baldev Singh Share and members of the Auckland-based New Zealand Indian Association. Indians from all walks of life attended, from the “Madrasi to the dignified Sikh”. Sastri described the racial situation in New Zealand as “unfortunate” and a “bar to good understandings between peoples”. Sastri

---

178 “Status of Indians,” 5.
spoke directly to the Minister of Public Works and Labour about specific cases of
discrimination that had been related to him, and reportedly “receiving a most sympathetic
hearing”. The New Zealand government saw Sastri’s arrival as important, especially for trade
with India, and did its best to allay any fears to gain his favour.

V.S.S Sastri was not the only Indian dignitary to arrive in New Zealand during the
1920s. On 6 July 1925, Maharaja Rana Bhawani Singh, shown in Figure 5-8, of the princely
state of Jhalawar came onboard the Aorangi into the port of Auckland.179 His arrival was
described as a “health tour” as he was recovering from “serious illness”.180 The Maharaja had
studied at New College in Oxford, Britain and was an active proponent of education in his
state. He was also a keen agriculturist and wanted to enhance the productivity of his state. The
Maharaja was eager to see Australian and New Zealand agricultural techniques and animals,
some of which the Maharaja wanted to take back to India. As the purpose of the Maharaja’s
visit was to allow him to recover his health, he did not meet with local Indians or advocate for
the New Zealand Indian community. His tour of New Zealand was extensive but brief; he left
on 20 July 1925 for England.

Along with political diplomacy was sporting diplomacy that drew together Indian and
European within New Zealand. On 12 May 1926, the Indian Army hockey team, shown in
Figure 5-9, came to play seventeen games in New Zealand against various local teams and the
national side. The hockey team was composed mainly of Sikhs, but also included Gurkha,
Pathan, Madrasi and European soldiers from the Indian Army. The team’s interactions focused
on the local communities that hosted them across New Zealand and welcomed them with
applause and other support.

179 “Personal,” Auckland Star, 8 July 1925, 5.
The purpose of the team’s visit to New Zealand was a “mutual broadening of each other’s views of the Empire”.¹⁸¹ The cultural outreach was particularly poignant in the racially-charged climate in which it was played. Unlike the local Indians, the hockey players/soldiers were treated with the utmost respect by their hosts. Local dignitaries, such as mayors and ministers offered cordial welcomes in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. These dignitaries were often joined by officers of the Indian Army based in New Zealand, who were fluent in Hindi and Punjabi and spoke to the soldiers in their native languages. Fluency in Punjabi and Hindi was not necessary as the hockey players/soldiers themselves were fluent in English, making communication no real issue. The hockey players/soldiers resided with locals in various communities, including Indian (as shown in Figure 5-10), European and Maori. In Ohinemutu (near Rotorua), the Indian hockey team was given a Maori welcome and stayed at the local Maori Pa (village).¹⁸² In Auckland¹⁸³ and Wellington, the soldiers were stationed in

¹⁸¹ “A Civic Reception,” Evening Post, 2 June 1926, 11.
¹⁸³ “Indian Hockey Team,” Auckland Star, 5 May 1926, 12.
the military barracks. Local Indians were also well aware of the Indian hockey team’s visit and turned out to welcome it in various centres.

Figure 5-9: The Indian Army hockey upon arrival in Auckland (1926). Auckland Star, 11 May 1926, 10.

Figure 5-10: A Sikh hockey team member meeting a local Indian fruit seller in Auckland.

Auckland Star, 14 May 1926, 8.

Local organizations hostile to Indian immigration also extended a warm welcome to the Indian hockey players/soldiers. The New Zealand Returned Servicemen’s Association
invited them to its national conference. The RSA reaction was a far cry from the policy adopted by the organization five years earlier that affirmed a White New Zealand. The White New Zealand League had little to say about the team that toured in centres where the organization was strongest. There was a distinct and clear differentiation between Sikhs and Indians in New Zealand and those who were soldiers of the British Indian Army.

The bridging of the cultural divide through political and sporting diplomacy provided some support to local Indians fighting racial prejudices. Meeting of visiting dignitaries with Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and Indian Christian fluent in English, allayed many fears stirred up by the White New Zealand League. The presence of high-ranking politicians such as V.S.S. Sastri provided local Indians with an authoritative voice in front of the New Zealand government. The Indian Army hockey team allowed a local connection with New Zealand society, with members of the group hosted by Europeans and Maori throughout the country. The effect was significant enough to prompt organizations such as the RSA to extend a hand of friendship, in disregard of a five-year-old White New Zealand policy. The flurry of activity in public related to India during the 1920s strengthened Indian-New Zealand’s ties and gave mainstream New Zealand much needed exposure to Indian culture.

Summary

During the 1920s, the Sikhs were highly mobile and proactive members of New Zealand society. They believed themselves to be on equal footing as citizens of the Empire and wholeheartedly fought for their rights, especially as challenges arose from hostile organizations. The legislation had a profound impact on the Sikh community, causing a severe reduction in the number of newcomers and limiting its growth. Restrictions did not deter the

community from bringing out women, children and relatives to New Zealand to make the
country their permanent home.

The community’s involvement in New Zealand reflected a continuation from the
previous period. Sikh interactions with the courts were frequent and extensive, as individual
Sikhs acted as witnesses, prosecutors and forensic doctors. Sikh employment remained focused
on labour in rural regions, but there was greater diversity in urban areas. The community was
intricately intertwined with the domestic economic situation, and this was shown with the
gradual shift of development from the South Island to the North Island. The involvement of the
community expanded into other areas including education, sporting pursuits, public
presentations, interviews and letters to the editor in the colonial press. Such participation
increased significantly during the decade due anti-Asian organizations and the increased
attention from the general public.

Recognition of the increasingly hostile climate in New Zealand came from India, with
official moves aimed to reduce tension through diplomacy. Diplomacy came in two different
forms—high-level political delegations and sporting teams—but both were intended to ease
fears in local populations. Such moves provided support to the local community under growing
discriminatory pressure.

The Sikh community remained an integral part of the New Zealand society. The drive
to integrate, adapt and enforce its rights as citizens showed that the Sikhs were ready to face
challenges. At the same time, the negative perceptions of the media did not necessarily reflect
the actual situation on the ground, as Sikhs continued to interact with all parts of society. Far
from the seclusion assumed by many scholars, Sikhs were very much a part of the greater New
Zealand society. Much like their counterparts across the world, the Sikhs became New
Zealanders and continued to live successfully for coming decades.
1930-1945 – Continued Challenges and Independence

Introduction

The 1930 and 1940s were an unstable period in New Zealand, as a result of both local and global forces. The continued impact of anti-Asian immigration legislation, the growing independence movement in India, and deepening conflict in Europe began to weigh heavily on the Sikh community and its migratory and settlement behaviour. Economically, stock markets crashed and economies retracted in the early part of the 1930s with significant adverse effects: tens of thousands of workers lost their jobs; government welfare programs were cut; voluntary social programs were overwhelmed, and riots broke out in major centres as the pressure increased on the central government to find a solution. Economic instability was further compounded by the outbreak of World War II in 1939 that led to New Zealand and India to join the fight for the Empire. Sikh New Zealanders faced increasingly hostile racial attitudes towards minorities, especially Asians, which compounded the stressful impact of severe immigration restrictions that began in the early 1920s.

Like New Zealand, India was also under economic pressure, but the contraction of its economy was compounded by the attitudes of British administrators. These economic tensions exacerbated the deteriorating political situation as the calls for independence grew louder. India’s instability during the 1930s was marred by inter-religious communal conflict, famine and the call to war (during the latter period of the decade). The communal conflict between the Hindu and Muslim community caused many to grow wary of British attitudes. According to American diplomat William Phillips, the British were “permitting the [Hindu-Muslim] impasse
to continue”, by not facilitating dialogue between the two communities.¹ The then Prime
Minister of Britain, Winston Churchill, was described as having a “complex” over India
whenever political issues were discussed.² Politics outside of India became increasingly
racialised as definitions of citizenship within the Empire had come to exclude Asians. Colonial
newspapers disseminated discourses advocating the exclusion of Asians and legislation
attempted to prevent them from migrating, settling and partaking in wider colonial society.
Such discourses were fanned by politicians in countries such as Canada, South Africa, and the
United States of America. The inflamed tensions between Indians and the British festered
throughout the 1930s as various Indian groups defied the British, led by individuals such as
Gandhi and Master Tara Singh (on behalf of the Sikhs). Resentment also grew towards
continuing unequal economic policies that greatly favoured the British. An example of this was
in Madras where local factories were not allowed to use rubber to create tires for civilian
vehicles but instead had to ship the rubber to the Dunlop Company in London, which had
exclusive rights to tire manufacturing. These same factories were already creating tires and
rubber products for the military, showing the substantial bias of the regulations governing
colonial economy in India towards British corporations.³ India’s reluctant support for Britain
during World War Two became a problem due to insufficient consultation with local leaders
(both political and religious). This persistent gap between the colonial rulers and the colonised
masses created apathy towards supporting the British.

In Punjab, the Sikhs were proactive in challenging British authority. They sought
greater rights and representation especially in the discussion of independence.⁴ These debates

¹ Harold A. Gould, Sikhs, Swamis, Students and Spies: The India Lobby in the United States, 1900-1946
(California, SAGE Publications, 2006), 30.
² Ibid.
⁴ Grewal, The Sikhs of the Punjab, 167.
were fraught as unity within the Sikh leadership was volatile. These tensions within the Sikh community over the best strategies to protect the community’s interest within a context of mass anti-colonialism combined with an increasingly fractious relationship between the main religious groups, Muslims and Hindus. It was during the 1930s that the ideas of independence and partition gained significant momentum, and religion, as opposed to race, became a dominant theme in Indian political discourse. The previous decades of unity between the main religious groups in Punjab and India began to crumble as individuals and groups vied for dominance in anticipation of an eventual British withdrawal. The Sikh community in New Zealand also contended with local challenges as the political situation in Punjab became more volatile. Lower wages, lack of employment, and racially discriminatory politics, legislation and immigration policies placed additional pressures on the community. These challenges were clearly spelt out by the Sikhs and Gujarati community as they issued declarations under the banner of the New Zealand Indian Central Association, an organization formed in the 1920s in response to growing political and legislative movements against Indian settlement in New Zealand. Despite these pressures, Sikhs carried on with their lives. The community maintained its traditions of mobility, marriage, employment, activism, philanthropy and religious practices. This chapter looks at these activities during the 1930s, and highlights continued Sikh integration, adaptability and maintenance of identity. This image challenges previous scholarship that depicted a community in seclusion, both lacking integration into wider society and believing in a marginalised Sikh identity due to lack of adherence to the rahit. By

5 Ibid, 170.
6 Ibid, 168.
7 Ibid, 170.
10 William ‘Hew’ McLeod, Punjabis in New Zealand, 133.
emphasising the myriad of connections that the Sikh community and Sikh visitors maintained locally and which linked Sikhs and non-Sikhs across the globe, this chapter continues to argue that Sikhs were an important part of New Zealand society and history.

**Challenges of Mobility**

Travels to and from New Zealand remained a regular feature of the Sikh community during the 1930s. After almost ten years of the Immigration Restriction Act (1920), the Sikh community still pursued a combination of temporary and long-term settlement. The decision to settle temporarily or permanently in New Zealand was dependent on multiple factors including the socio-economic climate in New Zealand and geopolitical issues and events. By the 1930s, the Sikhs were familiar with the requirements for entering various destinations, including English language tests in New Zealand\(^{11}\), multiple European language tests in Australia, and customs duties in Canada. Such barriers changed the dynamic of migration. In New Zealand, sojourning or temporary settlement increased after the implementation of the 1920 Act, as the law essentially barred permanent settlement.\(^ {12}\) Depression and War also had a profound effect on migration as the opportunity of passage out of India were threatened; this was especially true with the onset of World War Two. Despite the turbulence of the period, passenger lists show that small numbers of Sikhs continued to migrate to various destinations from different ports.

The strongest influence on migration and mobility was the economy. The economic situation in New Zealand during the 1930s was severe with the onset of the Great Depression. The collapse of American prosperity and the saturation of the consumer goods market hit a country already laden with debt. By the 1930s, unemployment had reached 15 percent,

\(^{11}\) Jacqueline Leckie, *Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community*, 27.

\(^{12}\) Ibid. 75–77.
affecting approximately one hundred thousand people.\textsuperscript{13} High unemployment led to a drop in wages and income for those in agriculture and manufacturing, while many professional white collar workers were retrenched. Government workers were also not spared as they were forced to take a 10 percent cut in pay during September 1931.\textsuperscript{14} The negative impact of unemployment and falling incomes was mitigated in some areas of the economy. Decreasing costs for farmers with accumulated capital enabled them to invest in land improvement, increase their land holdings and the flock sizes. Such investment created demand for labour in rural areas, where the majority of Sikhs were. At the same time, lower wages and other costs enabled manufacturers to continue to produce goods at lower prices, all of which kept costs low for the business sector. Nevertheless, the overall impact of economic deflation was negative and flowed on the migration and travel for both British and Sikhs alike.

The dire economic situation compounded the already difficult political issues stemming from the implementation of the anti-Asian Immigration Restriction Act of 1920. The Act had slowed migration for over a decade, but by the end of the 1930s, the number of Indians arriving increased to pre-Act levels (shown in Figure 6-1). Scholars such as McLeod believed that the mobility of the Sikh community stagnated during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{15} This interpretation is grounded in the hostility towards non-white migration and anti-Asian sentiment, compounded by the perceived cultural divide between Sikhs and the majority European community. Contrary to previous scholarship, Sikh mobility into New Zealand shows a definite and gradual recovery after the enactment of restrictive immigration legislation in 1921. The vast majority of Sikhs who entered New Zealand did so temporarily, but a significant portion chose to stay and settle in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{16} The high mobility and reduced settlement of the community were due to

\textsuperscript{13} Brooking, \textit{The History of New Zealand}, 114.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} William ‘Hew’ McLeod, \textit{Punjabis in New Zealand}, 79.
two major reasons. The first reason was the tough barriers to new migrant entry of the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act (1920). This legislation gave considerable power to customs officers to exclude “non-white” migrants and, more broadly, clearly signalled the state’s increasingly racialised view of immigration. The second reason was the dire economic circumstances of the period as the world fell into depression affecting New Zealand directly (especially as Britain faltered as the number one export market). These mitigating factors (among many) made New Zealand a trying and unappealing destination for permanent settlement during parts of the 1930s.

It is important to note that the impact of the economic situation was also severe on broader British assisted immigration. Both the New Zealand and the British governments had reinstituted migration schemes during the 1920s. These schemes were intended to help young British subjects (both individuals and families) to migrate to New Zealand. It was hoped these Britons would help fill shortages in various areas, mainly in labour heavy industries such as agriculture where Asian immigrants had been in demand. The plan worked for a short period providing ample numbers of labourers for New Zealand. However, by May 1927, the scheme was mostly suspended due to the onset of depression. The suspension exempted single women under forty years of age, juveniles and the wives of immigrants who had arrived previously. The increasingly unstable economy, lack of employment opportunity, and hostility towards new British settlement (especially in urban areas) had halted further support for the scheme. A sample of the devastating impact of the Depression comes in a comparison of the unemployment rate between 1929 and 1932. The number of registered unemployed on 18 February 1929 was 2,429, a figure that had risen to 56,489 by 12 September 1932, an increase of over 2200 percent.\footnote{Census & Statistics Office, \textit{The New Zealand Official Year Book 1935} (Wellington, New Zealand: Census & Statistics Office, 1935).} This increase led to a significant drop in assisted immigrants from
Britain: for example, from the peak of 10,766 per annum in 1926, the numbers fell to just 489 in 1931.\textsuperscript{18} The decrease in assisted migrants reflected a steady rate of decline of approximately 50 percent per year. The economic impact was felt by British immigrants, but it also had a significant effect on the mobility of non-whites and Indians.

Much like the British, Sikh travel and movement into New Zealand was also negatively affected by the fraught economic situation. Indian mobility (of which Sikhs were apart) remained frequent during the 1930s, as many travelled to and from New Zealand, as shown in Figure 6-1. The exact numbers of Sikhs arriving are hard to determine due to the absence of a reliable data set. Shipping manifests record yearly arrivals of Sikhs, but the information has many gaps. As some data is missing, non-digitised and spread across multiple sources, it is difficult to get definitive picture. From what is available in fragmented information on the larger Indian community, it is safe to infer that Sikh behaviour mimicked the greater Indian community’s mobility. As shown in Figure 6-1, government statistics show that approximately 191 Indians travelled to New Zealand in 1930 and that this number decreased to 81 by 1933, coinciding with the collapse of global markets. At the same time, those departing New Zealand outpaced those arriving, creating two years of net population loss during 1932 and 1933. By 1934, the New Zealand economy had begun to recover and the numbers arriving increased. Within a year, arrivals surpassed departures; the rapid recovery was sustained for the rest of the decade. By the turn of the decade, the number of Indians arriving had risen above the 1930 level. The increasing number of departures grew at a much slower rate than arrivals and reflected the recovery of New Zealand’s economy. An exception must be made for 1938 where departures increased dramatically, perhaps due to the heightening international tensions and the threat of the passage to India being cut off. Many Indians chose to return home to loved ones to avoid being trapped in New Zealand, with relatively little chance of immediate return.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
The effects of economic instability affected multiple diaspora communities as the source of immigrants was the same for all, North America being an example.19

Figure 6-1: Indian immigrant arrivals and departures to NZ between 1930 and 1939.

Sikh Movements

The travel patterns of the Sikhs reveal a web of global connections. The global reach of the community included diasporic communities in Myanmar, China, Fiji, Canada, United Kingdom and the United States of America—some of the oldest Sikh populations outside of Asia. The growth and development of sea transportation (which became faster, more frequent and widespread) and increasing trade and economic opportunity led to increased Sikh mobility and movement. Increasing economic opportunity resulted in increased connections not only between India and diaspora communities but also between these communities throughout the globe. During the 1930s, the connections with other regions were represented by multiple Sikhs travelling between Fiji, Australia,20 Canada,21 USA22 and Britain23 and New Zealand. For

---

19 Mann, Numrich, and Williams, *Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs in America*, 45.
example, in 1931 Shiv Singh went from the port of San Francisco to Auckland on the *S.S. Mariposa*. Connections with Britain were also regular with both individuals and families travelling between London and Auckland. An example of connections with Britain included Mr. Singh, who went from London to Auckland on 11 January 1933 on the P&O ship *Moldavia*. The vast majority of arrivals came from Australia and Fiji as they were the closest international ports to New Zealand. The flows between these two countries and New Zealand represented a continuation of the trend from previous decades, as Sikhs used ports in cities such as Suva, Melbourne and Sydney as transit points to New Zealand. Sydney was the primary port of transit as it was the main shipping hub in the Pacific.

These migratory flows also saw some Sikhs settle multiple times in different countries. Multiple settlement meant those who migrated and settled in a country repeated this process at a later date. As outlined above, this was a phenomenon associated with Sikh migration to New Zealand from an early stage. From the 1890s, Sikhs migrated from different regions to either settle in New Zealand or move on to another country. An example of this was in 1892 when Phuman Singh and his brother Weer Singh shifted from Australia to New Zealand to settle permanently. During the 1920s, Ganda Singh and his family made a similar move from New Zealand to Vancouver, Canada. Shipping manifests show that Ganda maintained connections with New Zealand during the 1930s, likely taking care of his New Zealand interests and meeting with friends. As mentioned earlier, he was not the only Sikh travelling to North America from New Zealand; passenger manifests and shipping reports reveal that other Sikhs were also similarly maintaining connections across the Pacific.

---

Sikhs continued to visit New Zealand as part of trade delegations as well as sporting teams and diplomatic delegations. Such visits continued into the 1940s. In March 1945, an Indian trade delegation led by Sir Datar Singh (shown in Figure 6-2) arrived for a twelve-day visit to New Zealand after discussions in Canberra, Australia. The delegation looked to “study New Zealand’s methods of agriculture, poultry raising, and dairying, and would aim at securing increases of imports from New Zealand, particularly milk products…” Singh was a turbaned Sikh, and his activities were extensively recorded during his tour of New Zealand.

Figure 6-2: Indian trade delegates in Auckland (1945): Mr N. N. Wadia (left) and Sir Datar Singh (Right). New Zealand Herald, 4 April 1945, 9.

In combination with the mobility of the community, the size of the Sikh population continued to increase incrementally. The exact size of the community cannot be precisely distinguished from the greater Indian community due to the lack of information based on religious affiliation. McLeod estimated the number of Sikhs during the 1930s as approximately

28 “Indian Trade,” Evening Post, 13 March 1945, 5.
“200”, but this was heavily qualified. He pointed to multiple shortcomings in his figures due to missing individuals, name changes, and the task of distinguishing Punjabis from “Indians” which was the primary category employed by immigration officials.\textsuperscript{29} It is suggested that these numbers should be revised upwards: data from voter registrations, military records and shipping lists suggest that the community was as large as about five hundred people. Because of the fragmentary state of official documents and the impossibility of correlating various sources, similar qualifications must also be placed on this. For example, as shown in Figure 6-1 the arrivals in 1932 decreased rapidly as the global depression hit. Again, by 1939 departures had increased rapidly with the outbreak of the Second World War. The same events dramatically affected permanent settlement. In 1931 the numbers looking to settle permanently decreased by 85 percent over the previous year. The following year, the trend was reversed, and growth increased by 97 percent. In 1938 the size of the population shrank for the first and only time in the decade with an 118 percent reduction in growth.\textsuperscript{30} The direct correlation between global economic and geopolitical events and population growth was apparent especially for the Sikhs and the Indian community as a whole.

The Sikh community remained geographically concentrated in the North Island during the 1930s. This concentration was consistent with previous decades and the long-term shift in wealth from the South Island to the North Island. The vast majority of the Sikh population remained in rural areas due to economic opportunities, support networks, and familiarity with various rural-based occupations. These included farm work, scrub cutting, flax milling and other tasks associated with farm ownership and management. Some Sikhs who had settled in urban centres such as Auckland, Wanganui and Wellington were engaged in non-rural work. These observations accord with research undertaken by McLeod on Sikhs in the 1930s that

\textsuperscript{29} William ‘Hew’ McLeod, \textit{Punjabis in New Zealand}, 77–78.

\textsuperscript{30} Census & Statistics Office, \textit{The New Zealand Year Book 1941}. 
revealed where many of these men worked and lived. However, McLeod was unaware of some Sikhs who had settled in urban areas and who were more fully integrated into New Zealand society. At the time he undertook his research, no further records of Sikhs were found in the South Island. The absence of records does not necessarily reflect a non-existent community but rather pointed to a lack of activity worthy of noting in colonial records.

The shifting economic dynamic in New Zealand was bound to population movements. There were two significant such movements: the first was the rural to urban drift as many left farms and labouring jobs for opportunities in white-collar jobs; the second was the shift from the South Island that accompanied the collapse of mining to the North Island in search of land for agriculture. The roots of the drifts were firmly set in the 1880s when mining was declining, and agriculture became the dominant force. The South Island was dominated by large land holdings that were secured early on by certain individuals or families. The increasing availability of land especially after the breaking of large holdings at the beginning of the 1900s and the development of fertilizers in the 1910s (which allowed for the reclamation of unproductive land) attracted many to look north for the agricultural opportunity. According to census statistics, the drift was a gradual process that led the bulk of the population being in urban areas by the 1930s. As shown in Figure 6-3, the New Zealand population became concentrated in cities by 1921, and this increased to around 60 percent by 1936. The drift to the North Island over the same period was also a gradual process (Figure 6-4) with the North Island becoming the main population base by 1901. By 1936, the North Island accounted for 63 percent of the entire non-Maori population. Unlike the North Island drift, the urban drift did not have the same impact on the Sikh community as it did in the greater population. According to voter registration rolls, only a portion of Sikhs were resident in urban areas; the vast majority

---

32 Census & Statistics Office, *The New Zealand Year Book 1941*. 188
remained in the rural North Island. The rural concentration needs to be qualified by the fact that not all Sikhs were listed on voter registration rolls, and many were highly mobile within New Zealand. The attraction to the cities was not high for many Sikhs (though some undoubtedly did follow the national trend). The small presence in cities was due to multiple reasons including the extensively established networks throughout the rural North Island that had built up over half-a-century and the familiarity of rural professions with the bulk of Sikhs arriving from rural Punjab. Also, Sikhs were aware of the economic growth in the New Zealand agricultural sector and had become firmly entrenched in the sector as employers and employees.

Geographically, the majority of the Sikh community was concentrated in four regions of the North Island. The first and largest was the Manawatu-Wanganui region where the Sikhs had been present for almost forty years. The population in this large and mainly rural area made up 33 percent of the Sikh voting population. The second largest population was in Auckland, where approximately 17 percent resided in the rural regions.

33 New Zealand, Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981, (1938)
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
The largest portion of Auckland Sikhs resided in and around the Hauraki region, where they were active in farming and flax milling. The third and fourth most important areas were the Bay of Plenty (16 percent) in the central North Island and Hawkes Bay (14 percent) on the East Coast of the North Island. Other areas with smaller populations were Waikato (7 percent),
Taranaki (2 percent) and Wellington (1 percent). All these regional communities could be fluid at times as Sikhs moved between them with relative ease depending on some factors including employment. It must be emphasized that the figures only represent those Sikhs who were registered to vote which means that the actual population distribution may have differed.

The urban Sikhs were a smaller part of the larger Sikh community. They were located in Auckland, Wanganui, Napier and Wellington. During the 1930s, all these cities were major ports of call for shipping lines, with Auckland and Wellington being the largest. In Auckland, the largest population centre in the country, the community was spread across different areas. Individuals and groups were located in Auckland Central, Onehunga, Otahuhu and Franklin but the majority were in rural Hauraki. The geographical dispersion throughout Auckland was due to the availability of employment and residence. For example, Gajadhar Singh, who was described as a “civil servant,” needed to be based in Auckland Central near government buildings. The city presence was also reflected in the level of integration into local society as Sikhs were involved in business, sports and legal activities. Wellington and Manawatu-Wanganui also consisted of a combination of urban sprawl and rural lands where this general pattern was followed.

The majority of the Sikh population lived in rural regions across the North Island and were numerous in and around Rangitikei in the Manawatu-Wanganui region. Their heavy concentration there was due to the availability of employment in labour-intensive work including, flax milling, share milking and farming (as mentioned earlier). Sikhs also owned and leased farms, and became long-term residents of the area. Land ownership created a growing sedentary community around which new migrants settled. These long-term communities likely offered well-established economic and support structures for newly-

arriving groups. Land-ownership and the occupations mentioned above extended beyond the Manawatu-Wanganui into other regions and districts such as Waimarino, Waikato, and Waipawa on the East Coast. The concentration of Sikhs in the rural North was a phenomenon from previous decades and in line with the continued economic shifts into the rural North Island.

**Sikh Community life in the 1930s**

The growth of the Sikh population also meant its continued integration and interaction with broader New Zealand society. The Sikhs were well established among local communities, working, playing sport, entertaining, supporting and engaging with Maori and Pakeha. The interaction and integration in the 1930s showed a continuing pattern of Sikh development in New Zealand. The idea of integration runs counter to McLeod’s argument that it was the practice of Punjabis to choose “employment that minimized competition with Europeans and restricted informal contacts with European society”.37 McLeod over emphasised the seclusion and separation of Sikhs from the local communities in which they resided. They believed themselves to be full citizens of New Zealand and demanded the rights of British subjects. This perception and demand were reflected in their engagement with society, especially when it came to asserting their rights.38 The Sikhs continued to push the boundaries in daily interactions. Integration came about through judicial, political and employment and sporting activities. The multiple facets of two-way connections progressively integrated Sikhs into the larger (European majority) community. The myriad of Sikh connections in local communities revealed how comfortable Sikhs felt with Europeans and Maori.

---

The Justice System

The courts showed one aspect of continued Sikh integration into New Zealand society. Sikhs stood on both sides of the law as they faced judges and juries. They were convicted of crimes including theft, fraud, drunkenness, perjury as well as sexual offences. An example of theft was the case of Acchar Singh and Banta Singh who stole money from another (probably Punjabi) woman called Ram Chamkour. The criminal activity resulted in Banta Singh receiving a fine while charges against Acchar were dismissed because he was deemed too drunk during the offence. Another case was of Bachint Singh, who was found guilty of perjury in court. Again, it must be emphasized that the rate of Sikh criminal activity did not represent the community as a whole. There are few references to Sikhs in court reports, showing the infrequency of crime in the 1930s. At the same time, Sikhs continued to use the courts to deal with their grievances. An example was Nand Singh, who was sent to prison after committing crimes against Bachint Singh’s wife. Another was Esive Singh, who was in court to defend himself against unfair labour practices, a case he eventually lost. Court action required a broad understanding of how the criminal and justice systems worked. Sikhs were not unfairly treated and trusted the courts enough to use them for their ends. The judicial records provide some sense of how these Sikhs viewed themselves in New Zealand society as they acknowledged they had rights and at times looked to have them enforced.

Political Activism and Engagement

Societal integration was also apparent in the form of political activism. In the 1930s, Sikhs organized along political lines to defend their rights, building on experience from previous

40 “Up in Court,” Evening Post, 15 June 1932, 4.
42 “Relief Sought,” Evening Post, 19 November 1937, 18.
44 “Theft of Money,” 5.
45 “Relief Sought,” 18.
46 “Compensation Awarded,” Evening Post, 9 July 1940, 10.
decades. The largest organization was the Central Indian Association, which continued to grow as the Indian population grew. The growth of the community and political awareness was also reflected in the increasing size of the organizations. These included the Pukekohe Indian Association (1938) and an unnamed association based in Kuangaroa (Wanganui) during 1936.47 Smaller groups focussed their attention on local Indian communities as opposed to issues relevant to the wider Sikh population. Larger organizations in Auckland and Wellington continued to fight for the rights of Indians and Asians throughout New Zealand, as well as donate to local causes. During the 1930s, the Wellington Indian Association, which was linked to both Taumarunui and Auckland, lobbied continuously for Indian rights. It urged councils for more fruit selling permits48 and protested against the fingerprinting of Asians.49 The highly-organized Central Indian Association responded immediately to calls for fingerprinting through the colonial press and received a direct response from the Prime Minister.50 Prime Minister Fraser stated, “I am sure the committee never intended any slight or reflection on our Indian fellow-subjects”, and went on to say, “you can be certain that the Government will take into full consideration your representation and will not be party to any unjust discrimination against New Zealand’s Indian citizens”.51 The response was an indication of the influence of the Association by 1937. The Central Indian Association also continued to make donations to causes and organization such as the Ambulance Board52 and Patriotic Fund53, which were regularly promoted in local newspapers. Its contributions were made annually and comprised significant sums of money. Prominent Indians made contributions to such causes. The

47 “Relief Sought,” 18.
48 “Fruit Barrows,” Evening Post, 14 June 1933, 13.
49 “Finger-Prints - A Protest,” Evening Post, 7 May 1937, 8. - The New Zealand Fruit Marketing Board had advocated finger printing of Asians in an attempt to curtail the economic competition they posed.
50 Ibid.
52 “Free Ambulance Funds,” Evening Post, 17 March 1933, 12
President of the Indian Association, J.K. Natali, donated £100 to the Patriotic Fund.⁵⁴ In a letter attached to this donation, J.K. Natali the president of the Indian Association in Auckland described how he felt residing in New Zealand: “As an Indian who has settled in this country for the last twenty years who enjoys the benefits of the freedom and liberty under the British Constitution; who is proud of being a British Indian subject; who is conscious of the privileges enjoyed by a full citizenship in this country, and at the same time realizing that the privileges also must carry the responsibilities of a citizen, I herewith enclose my cheque for £100 towards the Patriotic Fund.” ⁵⁵ This stress on the importance of citizenship and India’s contribution to the empire was reinforced by a declaration by the New Zealand Central Indian Association that read: “the association deems it necessary to point out that India paid its share in the last war more than any of the Dominions by money, men and materials, and that again she is helping in the present war. The fact should not be overlooked that local Indians, being British subjects and also citizens of New Zealand, deserve British Justice”.⁵⁶ The declaration was supported by Vice President B.R. Singh from Taumarunui and auditor Sandhu Singh from Koapaki. The statement was made in Taumarunui, which had one of the greatest concentrations of Sikhs in New Zealand during the 1930s. The activities of such associations show how Sikhs and Indians saw themselves as full members of New Zealand society.

Employment

At the same time that Sikhs were involved in politics, they were also employed throughout New Zealand. Work provided face-to-face and regular contact with broader society, both rural and urban. During the 1930s, Sikhs continued to take up jobs under European farmers who

---

⁵⁴ For additional information on J.K. Natali see, Jacqueline Leckie, Indian Settlers: The Story of a New Zealand South Asian Community, 25.
⁵⁵ Ibid.
⁵⁶ ‘Indian Association,’’ 6.
were looking to hire cheap and reliable labour. The hiring of Sikhs occurred in an economically
harsh environment with high unemployment and few opportunities. The use of Sikh labour
provided fuel to the fire for those advocating anti-Asian policies within New Zealand. The vast
majority of Sikhs were farm hands and labourers, but a significant portion owned farms,
businesses and worked in non-labour occupations. The continued concentration of Sikhs in
agricultural work were for a similar reason as stated earlier in the chapter.

The impetus for many Sikhs to join the agricultural sector were the opportunities that
resulted from in dairy and wool being primary exports. By 1939, these commodities were the
most valuable of New Zealand’s primary exports. Growth in agricultural exports suggested that
the sector was immune from global instabilities. Over the 1930s, the value of dairy and wool
exports consistently increased. For example, the value of butter exports was £11.5 million in
1933\(^57\) a figure that rose 40 percent to £16.1 million\(^58\) by 1939. A similar increase occurred in
the export value of wool: between 1933 and 1940 the rate of increase was 46 percent. These
booming agricultural sectors provided ample employment for Sikhs, who flocked to rural
regions in large numbers. It also drove many to become farmers and sharemilkers themselves,
creating even greater opportunities for those newly-arrived Sikhs and the wider Sikh
community. Sikhs also won awards for breeding bulls\(^59\) and pigs.\(^60\)

Sikhs were also represented in other diverse areas of employment across the North Island.
They were electricians,\(^61\) drainage contractors,\(^62\) furriers,\(^63\) civil servants,\(^64\) taxi drivers,\(^65\) goods

\(^{58}\) Census & Statistics Office, The New Zealand Year Book 1941.
\(^{60}\) “Commercial,” New Zealand Herald, 2 November 1943, 5.
\(^{64}\) New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981. Record for Gurdit Singh.
\(^{65}\) “Page 10 Advertisements Column 1,” New Zealand Herald, 14 March 1945, 10.
transporters,\textsuperscript{66} dog breeders,\textsuperscript{67} and real estate agents\textsuperscript{68}—though such non-agricultural trades constituted a small portion of Sikh employment. Sikhs also proactively searched for labour through advertisements in local newspapers. For example, Narain Singh in Otorohanga sought a farmhand for his dairy farm consisting of “120 cows”.\textsuperscript{69} The notice stated that included was a “good house, good shed”. He advertised a year later for the same position.\textsuperscript{70}

During the 1930s Sikhs were also involved in businesses in both the commercial and agricultural sectors. Many Sikhs were storekeepers or confectioners throughout the North Island. Stores were typically grocery stores selling products such as tobacco or various foods to residents. Sikh storekeepers operated in Waikato, Wanganui, Rotorua and Waitomo, which were hubs of the Sikh community. Sikhs were also involved in occupations that connected them directly to the agricultural sector. These included market gardeners and fruiters who were based in Otahuhu and the Pukekohe area of South Auckland. The diversity of employment was also extended to the dealing of furs, as was the case for Santa Singh, who was based in Mt Eden, Auckland. Santa was the son in law of Phuman Singh, one of the earliest Sikhs to arrive in New Zealand during 1892.\textsuperscript{71} Santa also sold other goods and described himself as a merchant in voting rolls. The diverse range of Sikh occupations showed the flexibility and versatility of those willing to work outside of mainstream agriculture. The long-term settlement of the community in various areas naturally saw many Sikhs establish businesses in and around these settlements. In contrast, earlier Sikhs were established in larger centres such as Auckland and Wellington.

\textsuperscript{69} “Farm Hands Wanted,” \textit{New Zealand Herald}, 13 March 1944, 1.
\textsuperscript{70} “Farm Hands Wanted,” \textit{New Zealand Herald}, 4 June 1945, 1.
\textsuperscript{71} For further detailed information on Punjabi settlers see, William ‘Hew’ McLeod, \textit{Punjabis in New Zealand} (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1986).
Entertainment and Sports

Along with employment, sporting pursuits were also an important part of the way that Sikhs interacted with the local community. Sikhs had a well-established sporting tradition within New Zealand which dated back to the early 1900s. For example, newspapers reported Sikh participation in wrestling and gymnastics in 1904. Sikh involvement in sports included both males and females. For example, during Easter of 1938, M.D. Singh was involved in athletics in Otorohanga, South of Hamilton where a significant rural Sikh community resided. In Auckland, two schoolgirls, B. Singh and N. Singh, were involved in the Ellerslie Amateur Athletic Club. Sikhs were also involved in sporting pursuits in and around Papatoetoe and Papakura in South Auckland. The rarity of girls being involved in such pursuits has been noted, but it is also important to recognise that some families were comfortable with their daughters participating in the public sphere in a way that might have been unusual at home in Punjab. It also showed how integrated the community had become by the 1930s. Sikhs were interacting at the local level successfully in many regions. Sporting contacts represented only one form of shared interconnection in a wider web of continuous interactions and Sikhs openly embraced it.

Wrestling

During the 1930s, Sikhs athletes from overseas were involved in wrestling and hockey teams that came to challenge New Zealanders across the country. The most frequent visitors were Sikh wrestlers. The wrestlers came to New Zealand and fought locals in highly competitive matches throughout the country. Individuals such as Jaget Singh were famed for

73 “Cycling,” Auckland Star, 13 April 1938, 24.
their “Indian deathlocks” and prowess in New Zealand, Australia and America. Thousands would attend fights, and many were broadcast over radios across the nation. Local papers provided advertising, posted challenges between various wrestlers, and carried post-match commentary, and some of the Sikh wrestlers who came to New Zealand in search of fame had wrestled internationally. They included: Harbans Singh, Jagat Singh, Naranjan Singh, Prince Bhupinder Singh, and Brann Singh. A few wrestlers were of Punjabi Muslim descent, such as Tiger Duala and Faizal Mohomet. The popularity of wrestling meant that these men fought in towns such as Napier, Gore, and Wanganui and major cities such as Wellington and Auckland. The wrestlers used their original names, acknowledged their Sikh backgrounds and some even wore turbans as part of their costumes. Local Sikhs interacted with the wrestlers and attended the matches. Others played more significant roles; Santa Singh, for example, was in the ring as an interpreter for Tiger Duala and “took to the mat in a hug” after a match in Auckland.

Hockey

Hockey provided another avenue of exposure to the Sikhs as Prince Manavadar’s hockey team toured the country during the 1930s. Exchanges of hockey teams between New Zealand and India had started during the 1920s (with the Indian Army hockey team). Prince Manavadar’s hockey team, which included a Gurainn Singh, a Sikh from Khalsa College, Amritsar, toured New Zealand during 1938. The team played against local and national sides

80 “Notable Wrestling Match,” Evening Post, 19 August 1935, 3.
84 “Current Entertainments,” Evening Post, 31 August 1939, 6.
85 “Land and Water,” 55.
86 “Empire Wrestlers,” Evening Post, 14 September 1935, 22.
in matches that were attended by tens of thousands of spectators. For example, a crowd of “over ten thousand”\textsuperscript{88} was recorded at a match in Christchurch. Team members provided autographs in various centres and charged between “21 shillings” and “25 shillings” for them.\textsuperscript{89} Tours by Indian hockey teams and individual wrestlers added to the exposure of New Zealand society to Sikh and Indian cultures that interaction with resident Sikhs and other Indians offered.

Another brief reference was noted of a cricket team by the name of “Indian Sports” team in Auckland challenging the “Auckland Railways”.\textsuperscript{90} It remains unclear who was on this team and was amongst multiple other teams playing against each other.

Newspaper reporting of events related to Sikh athletes was unbiased and in no way culturally derogatory in tone. They were treated in the same manner as their European counterparts, and this reminds us of the importance of sport as a crucial cultural bridge and avenue to integration in New Zealand. With the racial tension of the period, questions must be raised as to how Sikh sportsmen were treated differently by local society at the time. It is abundantly clear that racial discrimination was evident in the media, local organizations and government policies during the 1930s, but there was a clear delineation between the visiting Indian and the migrating Indian. The different attitude towards the two groups suggests that the discrimination came from the unfounded perception that resident Indians constituted an adverse economic and social impact on New Zealand. The media bore much responsibility for misinformation related to the Indian community, in stark contrast with the respectful reception of Indian visitors. Newspapers praised these men for their athletic prowess and even wanted to learn various sporting skills from them.\textsuperscript{91} Large crowds gathered to watch matches, and local European athletes felt comfortable challenging these men, often for profit but also for the

\textsuperscript{89} “Page 5 Advertisements Column 2,” \textit{Evening Post}, 27 April 1937, 5.
\textsuperscript{90} “Business House Association,” \textit{Auckland Star}, 13 January 1944, 7.
publicity gained in doing so. The interaction provided continued and direct contact with Sikh and Indian culture that brought multiple communities together. The persistence of such connections, both external and internal, showed the Sikhs interacted with local society both as international visitors and local citizens and were open and willing to do so.

**Religion and Faith**

Religion and faith were important aspects of life in the Sikh community. It was at times challenging to reproduce culture and religion in a new cultural context in which the community was a small minority. Nonetheless, the community did not stop engaging in expressions of religious faith. As mentioned above, by 1919 the Sikh community had established a centre in Te Awamutu that locals called the “Hindu farm”. Two Guru Granths were in New Zealand during the 1930s. The first of these texts had arrived with Phuman Singh Gill in 1892 and the second was acquired by Phuman Singh Rurki for the wedding of his daughter in the 1930s. According to Madge Singh, Phuman Singh Gill’s daughter, “quite a few [Punjabis] seemed to pass through Wanganui before and after my parents were married. One gave my mother a bolt of pure silk of which her wedding gown was made. They were mostly hawkers I should think and it was before 1900 or just after. They would visit my father on Sundays and have a religious service there”. 92 This information was confirmed by the significant presence of Sikhs in the region. In the 1930s, the same applied to the marriage of Kartari Kaur (pictured in Figures 6-6 and 6-7) which took place in Waikato, South of Auckland. In that case, the text was specially acquired and used as a part of the wedding ceremony where it had a central place. The scripture remains in the hands of Kartari’s family to this day.

Marriages

Marriage was another area in which religion and culture were reproduced. Much like other pressures for the community, marriage also proved problematic as anti-Asian legislation made it difficult to find partners for both sons and daughters. Many marriages during the pre-1950 period were arranged marriages though there continued to be exceptions such as interracial marriages with the Maori and European communities. The Sikhs turned to transnational networks in the hunt for partners (relying on close friends and relatives in Punjab to find prospects). Those who were to be married to men and women in New Zealand were required to make the move to the distant land, to contribute to the success of their future family-by-marriage. For women, this was different from the norm in Punjab as tradition and culture dictated women were to move to the husband’s village. Cultural norms changed as parents of daughters did not feel comfortable sending children to Punjab, instead men and women were to go to New Zealand and contribute to the success of the family there as was the case for Kartari Kaur as mentioned earlier. Marriages in New Zealand were often undertaken on a similar line to Punjab. Extravagance, colour and fanfare were the order of the day which meant at times lavish settings and invitations to both Sikh and non-Sikh alike. The restrictions placed on marriages were financial; that is to say, the size of the wedding was defined by the amount of wealth a family had. Kartari, the daughter of Phuman Singh Rurki, had an extravagant, much-publicized wedding. A marching band, decorated cars and a procession marched through the streets of Te Aroha much to the delight of the locals and the press which covered the event. According to the *Auckland Star*, the wedding followed “customary marriage rites of their religion” which included “the bridegroom and his party [meeting] at the gate of his prospective bride’s home by her father and “the Granthis”.

Granth, which (as noted earlier) was brought in especially for this purpose. As shown in Figure 6-5, the public procession in downtown Te Aroha consisted of “20 cars” and the Municipal Band, which played appropriate selections.

Figure 6-5: The wedding procession in Te Aroha for the marriage of Miss Kartari Kaur, 1932. *Auckland Star*, 29 November 1932, 8.

The overseas weddings of New Zealand Sikhs were also covered by the New Zealand local press. In 1935, the *Auckland Star* carried an article relating that Dass Singh, a “former pupil of Te Aroha High School” who was “temporarily” residing in India for a “period of four years”, had been married.94 Singh described the details of his marriage at length including the Mehndi ceremony, the band and procession through the village and at sunset the journey to his bride’s residence, in a pattern similar to that of Kartari Kaur’s wedding. He also described the marriage ceremony protocol whereby the bridegroom would sit in front of the Guru Granth Sahib while waiting for the bride to arrive. The bride and groom then walked around the Holy Scripture four times as verses were read in line with the Anand Karaj or Sikh marriage ceremony. Details were also provided on the entertainment and celebrations that took place after the wedding ceremony. Dass’s father Phuman Singh owned a farm in Waihou.

Death within the Community

Sikhs also followed religious protocols for deaths in the community. Reporters extensively covered funerals within the Sikh community providing invaluable snapshots on religious reproduction within New Zealand. The fascination was embedded in curiosity as cremation during this early period was uncommon in New Zealand. The descriptions provide an outsiders interpretation how death rites were undertaken within the community.
To conduct proper funerals, Sikhs had to make do without proper cremation facilities. A descriptive account in the Wellington-based *Evening Post* emphasised that the method of cremation followed general practices in Punjab. According to the article, “Udham Kaur” wife of Harnam Singh had passed away in Taumaranui and a pyre was to be built for her. “The pyre of “chitta” was “half built and the body was brought from the hearse and deposited on the logs”. The author of the account goes on to describe how the body was “wrapped in fine linens and [covered] with a beautiful red cover of flowered silk”. Flowers, a wreath, perfume, cardamom seeds and spices were also placed on the body before being finally covered with 10lb of mixed nuts and 4lbs of sultanas. The author then states that the pyre would traditionally be set alight by a granthi (caretaker/priest) but due to the absence of one, the husband did so. Importantly, it is then noted that a “prayer” was made, led by Kaitar Singh, a friend of the husband. The meaning of the prayer was given as “everybody had to come to the same place-dust to dust and ashes to ashes. He asked God to forgive the sins of the deceased and take her to the place the Indians called “Surgh” (heaven)”. The quote was likely a very rough translation by the European reporter. At another funeral in Wanganui in 1936 after the death of Kehar Singh in a landslide a pyre was built “seven feet high and [the] body on a bier of green willow was placed on it”. “Rice, almonds and raisins” and a “box of butter” were also placed on the body. In this case, a chaplain read the service, but it remains unclear if this was about a Sikh granthi or a Christian minister. The ashes were then scattered in the ocean, as is the current day custom at Kiratpur. Another cremation also took place in Waverly, Taranaki in 1942. In what was described as a “Sikh ceremony,” Dyal Singh was cremated after falling ill and dying at Patea Hospital. According to the newspaper report, “the tenets of his faith required the burning of the body to be carried out as a religious rite,” for which purpose “a pyre of macrocarpa and pinus

---

95 “Funeral Pyre,” *Evening Post*, 13 June 1933, 8
insignis was prepared in a small paddock…” Cremation was not the only method utilized by the Sikhs. Some within the community were comfortable with cemetery burials. One example of a cemetery burial was Harnam Singh, who died in Thames Hospital in 1945. A service was held at St Georges Church and his body was interred in Totara Cemetery. Gurmail Singh, an infant, was buried at Te Aroha Lawn Cemetery as was Lashhman Singh Parmar, who passed away at Tauranga Hospital at the age of 47.

These instances show that the reproduction of distinctly Sikh religious and cultural ceremonies was an important part of the community’s identity both in India and thousands of miles away from their homeland. The Sikhs, restricted in multiple ways, maintained their identity and practices in a context that deemed them foreign and was at times hostile towards the community. Death, marriage, the maintenance of distinctly Sikh names, usage of multiple Sikh scripture in a European-dominated context showed a community that sought to retain its distinct cultural identity while also attempting to integrate into local society. Seclusion, isolation and fear were far from the minds of the Sikhs as they became “citizens” of New Zealand and remained “subjects” of the Empire.

Indian Independence

During the 1930s, the call for Indian independence grew louder from all corners of the Empire. From 1857, the British had genuine fears of another Indian uprising and the loss of its prized colony. Initially, these fears were based on movements in the Indian sub-continent, but as the Indian community spread globally, the threat to British imperialism also became an external one. The growing instability in Punjab reverberated in America very early. During the 1880s “Hindu” literature was being passed around New York, which local reporters labelled

100 “Deaths,” 3 October 1945, 1.
“seditious”. According to the American Correspondent, five thousand leaflets were handed out to local Hindus stating that “they could easily annihilate their British Masters”.

101 This incident was alarming enough to reach the New Zealand Nelson Examiner newspaper that covered the event. Such early events foreshadowed significant diasporic protest as Canada, Australia and later New Zealand began to move against Asian immigration. During the 1910s, individuals such as Gandhi fought for the rights of Indians in South Africa, while others such as Gurdit Singh challenged the colonial authorities for Sikh rights in Canada. These challenges went further as Sikhs actively confronted British rule in India with the establishment of the Ghadar Party in 1913. The Ghadar Party was a movement that sought to start an armed insurrection against the British. It ultimately failed, but the literature produced left an indelible mark on the global diaspora that continued to be reported by colonial presses for the coming decades. The reactions to anti-Asian immigration were led by the Sikh community globally as protests rang out for Sikh rights as British subjects. In New Zealand, the Sikh community also joined the growing movement of support for breaking away from the Empire.

Sikhs in New Zealand had already reacted to immigration policy designed to stop more Sikhs and Indians arriving in the country. In uniting politically to fight against the prejudices of a minority of locals, Sikhs would also contribute to the growth in support for India’s independence. The North American Sikhs had already added their voices to calls for independence, especially after the Komagata Maru incident of 1914 which resulted in the expulsion of Sikhs back to India from Vancouver, Canada. This fear was compounded by the efforts of colonial authorities to spy on the Sikhs and the continued pressure of anti-Asian immigration legislation across the globe. This mistrust towards the imperial administration led to a campaign globally to create a resistance movement against British rule. Publications were

102 Ibid, 2.
set up to support the cause and were sent out to known Sikh communities. By 1925 connections with political activity were apparent with the arrival in New Zealand of an individual named Lahori Ram, the designated leader of the New Zealand branch of the Ghadar Party. The Ghadar Party was proactive in diaspora communities in Hong Kong, North America and the United Kingdom. Most were run by local communities aligning with similar aspirations of Indian independence. Little is known about this individual’s activity but according to Ghadar Party records, he was a “poet” and co-founder of the Kisan Sabha in Punjab. According to voter registration rolls and Ram genealogical records, Lahori Ram continued to reside in New Zealand until 1938. In 1928, he was listed as a “drainer” living in Waitoa. The presence of a Party leader as well as the circulation of Ghadar Party literature within New Zealand produced an aggressive response from local authorities. In 1932, Harbans Singh, a 26-year-old Indian labourer from Mangawhare, was arrested for “causing to be brought into New Zealand and having in his possession seditious literature reflecting British rule in India”. Harbans stated that “he had received parcels of pamphlets from the Hindustani [Ghadar] Party in America”. The pamphlets contained various illustrations and headings that were deemed questionable by authorities including images showing “in what manner Indians were treated under British rule” and texts with titles such as “To martyrs who had given their lives for India”. Harbans professed his innocence stating he had not intended to distribute the pamphlets or incite sedition in the dominion. Harbans was convicted but received only a fine instead of incarceration. Organizations such as the New Zealand Indian Association (established in 1920) celebrated Indian martyrs, even declaring public holidays for them, much to the dismay of locals, but there is scant evidence of further subversive activities and involvement with the Indian independence movement in the 1930s. Minutes from the Central Indian Association and letters from

---

104 New Zealand Electoral Rolls, 1853-1981 Record for Lahori Ram.
105 “Seditious Literature,” Auckland Star, 17 September 1932, 11.
106 “Notes and Comment,” Maoriland Worker, 22 September 1920, 1.
prominent members of the community professed their “citizenship” of New Zealand, but this was prompted by local racial hostilities as opposed to loyalty to the Empire. Sikhs were becoming proactive in other political spheres that were not deemed seditious. One was a “Mr. Singh, Indian National” listed as a member of the New Zealand Society for Closer Relations with the U.S.S.R. In the context of the times, communism was a grave concern for the Empire and Russia was seen as hostile. Other proactively political Sikhs were W.S. Singh and H.S. Singh whose public lectures on democracy in India were promoted in local newspapers.107 W.S. Singh gave a lecture on “Mr. Gandhi & India” at the concert chamber in Auckland. Mr. H.S. Singh was far more vociferous in his challenge to British authority in a lecture at the Unity Centre in Auckland on “self-government for India”108 The caption for the lecture advertisement stated, “Hear what an Indian has to say on the question of self-government for his country – NOT what the British Foreign Office says”. The presentation was supported by the Communist Party. Other similar lectures were also given at academic institutions such as New Zealand Peoples University in Auckland.109 Such public lectures were a regular occurrence during the mid-1940s. With a jittery colonial authority actively seeking to suppress subversive or seditious activities, the wider Sikh community’s support for India’s independence was naturally understated in the public arena, and this was reinforced by local hostilities as Sikhs and Indians sought acceptance in the face of racial hostilities.110 Local Sikhs were fully aware of the global situation as New Zealand media covered the calls for independence and the activities of leaders such as Gandhi extensively.

World War II was another global challenge that raised questions for Sikhs about their loyalty to Britain and the nature of their connection to the Empire. The Sikh effort for New

---

110 “White New Zealand,” 8 June 1926, 15.
Zealand in World War II remains unclear. Records for this period are incomplete, but the fragmentary evidence does show that Sikhs were involved at some level. For example, Hari Singh from Otahuhu was called up for service in a draft ballot. He successfully challenged his selection on dietary grounds. E. Singh, who was called up for deployment to the Royal New Zealand Airforce camp in Levin and C. Singh, was called up in Fordell on the ballot. Further research is required to understand better the Sikh and Indian community’s contribution to the war effort.

Summary

The Sikh community in the 1930s and 1940s was integrated into local society in multiple ways from entertainment and sporting pursuits to court interactions and political activism. Alongside its active involvement with broader European culture, from the beginning, the Sikh community sought to negotiate its identity in the new context of New Zealand. This identity was expressed in multiple ways through practices related to marriage, death, and religion. The community was affected by the same issues as wider society including shifting economic dynamics and geopolitical issues and additionally subjected to local hostilities based on anti-Asian sentiment. Sikhs continued to be politically active during the 1930s as they joined their Gujarati counterparts in the fight against racially based legislation in areas such as the capital city, Wellington. The complex interconnections between Sikhs in New Zealand and the broader global Sikh diaspora were also supported by visiting entertainers and athletes. Such connections offered another layer of cross-cultural interaction with wider society, especially as thousands of New Zealanders flocked to see athletes and entertainers from India. Many wore turbans, used their original names and spoke to crowds through local Sikh interpreters. Publicity of these events through nation-wide radio broadcasts and regular newspaper

111 “Ballot for Overseas Service,” New Zealand Herald, 8 May 1941, 12.
112 “Food Problem,” Auckland Star, 31 July 1941, 8.
113 “Manawatu Area,” Evening Post, 5 March 1941, 15.
commentary provided another avenue of cultural immersion. The 1930s was a period of continued integration and growth for Sikhs in line with the previous decades of development. Ultimately the decades of the 1930s and 1940s reaffirmed long-standing Sikh traditions within New Zealand.
Conclusions

This thesis presents a new perspective on Sikh history in New Zealand, reaching beyond the memory of the community to reassess the emergence of Sikh migration to New Zealand and to reconstruct the development of the early Sikh community. It has been underpinned by the use of records from the colonial period, particularly newspapers, to explore the movement of Sikhs in and out of New Zealand, to reconstruct the extent of the community, and to assess the place of Sikhs and other South Asian migrants in colonial society. When these newspaper materials are brought together with shipping records, immigration files, and the details of military service, a fragmentary but suggestive series of images of Sikhs in New Zealand emerges. The materials presented here suggest that some established understandings that grew out of oral histories need to be reassessed in light of developing technologies and the large-scale digitisation of colonial records. This thesis is an attempt to collate these vast, if fragmentary records, to present a new set of perspectives on Sikhs in New Zealand. As the era of digitisation has only just begun, this thesis should only be seen as a suggestive outline, one which will be expanded, filled in and refined as more materials are digitised, and these are read alongside non-digitised archival materials.

This thesis has located those stories about Sikhs in New Zealand within a wider narrative of Sikh history, covering the period of the Gurus (1469-1708), the British relationship (1769-1870s) and the settlement of Sikhs in New Zealand (1900 to 1945). That broad perspective is necessary, not only because it is important to understand the motivations and values of religious communities, but because central elements of the Sikh tradition actively supported mobility. Thus, the research presented in this thesis challenges the argument that
Sikh mobility was primarily a colonial construct and demonstrates that mobility was, in fact, indigenous to the Sikh tradition and an integral part of the faith. The analysis highlights the deep integration of mobility within the Sikh tradition, from its foundation by Guru Nanak, who according to tradition travelled long distances (across India to the Middle East). Beyond the period of the Gurus, the importance of travel was illustrated through rules and guidelines codified within the rahitnama literature. During the post-Guru period, I have demonstrated that British explorers recorded evidence of the importance of mobility in the Sikhs recitation of prayers for travellers. Even though most of the sources we have for New Zealand are fragmentary, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that we need to understand the movement of Sikhs into and around New Zealand within the context of Sikh tradition.

I have also shown that the nature of Sikhs relationship with the East India Company and the British colonial state also promoted a willingness to travel and to seek out opportunities within the British Empire and beyond. Pre-colonial religious patterns, British appraisals of Sikh military prowess, and Anglo-Sikh political alliances were all influential in how the Sikhs became highly mobile within the British Empire. These factors continued into the colonial era of British rule and led to the international deployment of Sikh soldiers as the Empire expanded. Thus British colonial rule created new frameworks and opportunities for the Sikhs’ pre-existing inclination towards mobility. The dramatic shift of British economic investment into the Punjab provided Sikhs access to worldwide transportation, communication and economic networks. The difficult domestic situation in Punjab that resulted in Sikhs facing tougher taxation and increased indebtedness exacerbated these factors and contributed to the migration of the Sikhs across the globe during the colonial period.

Through the webs of the British Empire, Sikhs reached New Zealand during the 1880s. The dissertation notes that they were not the pioneering South Asians in New Zealand, predating their arrival was a small but bustling non-Sikh Indian community that was
demographically varied. Thus, I place the arrival of Sikhs during the 1880s within this deeper history of mobility and colonial engagement with India.

From the 1880s, Sikhs interacted with these non-Sikh Indians as they worked to find a place in New Zealand society. The new evidence presented in this thesis—particularly the discovery of individuals named “Miransen” and Harnam Singh in cities like Dunedin and Blenheim—counters the assumption that Phuman and Bir Singh were the first known Sikhs in New Zealand. This evidence suggests that the Sikh community was more widespread and settlement that began earlier than scholars have hitherto portrayed. More generally, I have also demonstrated that there were many more Sikhs passing through New Zealand than scholars were previously aware of: the power of digitised searches has not only uncovered a significant number of Sikhs in published shipping lists, but it also enabled me to identify groups of entertainers, sportsmen, and workers who spent some time in New Zealand as they moved through imperial circuits. While these mobile Sikhs did stay permanently in New Zealand, they are an important part of the historical engagement between Punjab and New Zealand.

One of the central arguments of this dissertation has been that although Sikhs were subject to some racist attacks and targeted in the drive to close New Zealand’s borders to Asian migrants in the early twentieth century, they were not marginal, secluded and inward looking. Around 1900, the Sikhs were involved in New Zealand society on many levels through their various occupations, interaction with colonial institutions, donations to charities, sporting pursuits, and their participation in the education system. The Sikh connections with the broader society were not unique to any particular regions in New Zealand, but common to Sikh communities all over the country. As shown in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, it was also engaged in public life in diverse ways, and the newspaper evidence also suggests that colonial institutions were frequently open to Sikhs in ways that earlier scholarship had not been aware of.
The thesis has treated the development of the Sikh community in the first half of the twentieth century chronologically, in order to be able to identify both continuity and change. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the size of the Sikh community grew. Sikhs were not marginalised on the frontier, associated solely with “crude dwellings”, such as tents, or isolated from broader society as W. H. McLeod had suggested.1 While they did settle within European dominated communities, the evidence I have gathered here suggests that the boundaries of race and religion were not absolute. The Sikh community was intertwined with wider New Zealand society as evidenced by daily interactions with local communities and government institutions during the early decades of the twentieth century. Sikh activities during the period built upon those of migrants of earlier decades and reflect an expansion and greater integration of the Sikh community. Sikhs were making New Zealand their new home and becoming part of the New Zealand society.

During the 1920s, there were some important continuities within the community as Sikhs remained highly mobile and proactive members of New Zealand society. They believed themselves to be equal citizens of the British Empire and wholeheartedly fought for their rights, especially as challenges arose from hostile organizations. The passage of the Immigration Restriction Act 1920 did mark a shift in government policy, and it may have also promoted a broader hardening of attitudes to Asian migrants. The legislation impacted on the developing Sikh community, causing a marked decline in the number of newcomers and limiting growth of the Sikh population in New Zealand. However, it was not successful in fully halting immigration: the Act did not deter resident Sikhs from bringing women, children and relatives to New Zealand to make the country their permanent home. The Sikh community was highly aware of the political context in which they lived. Speeches, interviews and letters to editors in the colonial press demonstrate that Sikhs also pushed back against discrimination and anti-

Asian sentiment. They were supported in so doing by official attempts to assuage tension through diplomacy. As the Sikhs saw their rights impeded upon by local hostile organisations and the government they reacted by organising themselves to defend their rights in New Zealand.

The 1920s also demonstrate the extent to which the domestic economic situation shaped the Sikh community in New Zealand and this was shown with the gradual shift of development from the South Island to the North Island, as the agricultural frontier offered some new opportunities and the growth of New Zealand towns also created new possibilities in growing urban centres. The economic shift caused Sikhs to diversify their occupations in both urban and rural areas.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Sikh community was further integrated into local society with increased participation in entertainment, sporting pursuits, court interactions and political activism, and sought to negotiate its identity in New Zealand, even as it continued to be subjected to local hostilities based on anti-Asian sentiment. Within the hostile context, the Sikh community continued to emphasize the importance of religious and cultural traditions and expressed them publically throughout New Zealand. Sikhs continued to be politically active during the 1930s as they joined their Gujarati counterparts in the fight against the racially-based legislation. I also demonstrated that the complex interconnections between Sikhs in New Zealand and the broader global Sikh diaspora through visiting entertainers and athletes offered another layer of cross-cultural interaction with the broader New Zealand population, and served to reinforce Sikh identity through cultural markers. Widespread publicity for visiting Sikh groups reaffirmed long-standing Sikh traditions within New Zealand.

The research in this thesis has provided new evidence on the Sikh community in New Zealand, reshaping our understanding of Sikh history in the country. Certainly the nature of the
materials I have uncovered means that we have an array of snapshots and archival fragments rather than a flowing narrative, but when these diffuse sources are taken together and read in the broader context of Sikh history, they push us towards new understandings. By demonstrating that while Sikhs were a community of small numbers they were an integral part of New Zealand’s history, this thesis generates a fresh set of perspectives that challenges long-held scholarly understandings and important aspects of the community’s sense of its history. New resources and technologies are opening up new vantage points on the Sikh past, and the materials discussed here will hopefully contribute to a new understanding of the global mobility of Sikhs and the ways in which these patterns of movement operated in particular countries, such as New Zealand.
Bibliography

Primary Source Newspapers

Ashburton Guardian, 1888-1914

Auckland Star, 1873-1945

Auckland Weekly News, 1901-1922

Bush Advocate, 1902

Colonial Times, 1839

Colonist, 1861-1915

Daily Southern Cross, 1867-1875

Daily Telegraph, 1892-1896

Dominion, 1907-1920

Evening Post, 1884-1945

Feilding Star, 1896-1907

Grey River Argus, 1875-1920

Hawera & Normanby Star, 1903-1923

Hawke’s Bay Herald, 1892-1895

Lyttelton Times, 1858-1864

Manawatu Standard, 1902-1907

Maoriland Worker, 1920
Marlborough Express, 1893-1911
Marlborough Express, 1904-1914
Mataura Ensign, 1890
Nelson Evening Mail, 1878-1907
Nelson Examiner, 1844
New Zealand Herald, 1940-1945
New Zealand Spectator and Cook’s Strait Guardian, 1846
New Zealander, 1846-1849
North Otago Times, 1899-1900
Northern Advocate, 1906-1910
NZ Truth, 1910-1930
Observer, 1919
Ohinemuri Gazette, 1920
Otago Daily Times, 1863-1891
Otago Witness, 1859-1904
Poverty Bay Herald, 1898-1920
Press, 1868-1914
South Australian Register, 1839
Southland Times, 1883-1901
Star, 1878-1900
Taranaki Herald, 1893-1903

Thames Star, 1901-1910

The Australian, 1839

The Perth Gazette, 1853

The Sydney Herald, 1835-1839

Timaru Herald, 1879

Tuapeka Times, 1888

Waikato Times, 1874-1876

Wairarapa Daily Times, 1905-1930

Wanganui Chronicle, 1895-1917

Wanganui Herald, 1909-1899

West Coast Times, 1888-1897

**Primary Source Texts**

Asiatic Society Calcutta. *Asiatic Researches: Or, Transactions of the Society Instituted in Bengal, for Inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences, and Literature, of Asia*, 1798.


Guru Granth Sahib


**Primary Source Archives**

Archives New Zealand. [archway.archives.govt.nz](http://archway.archives.govt.nz)


Defence Force Archives, New Zealand.

Department of Internal Affairs, New Zealand.

Family Search. [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

Library of Congress Digital Collections and Services, United States of America. [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

My Genealogy. [www.genealogy.org](http://www.genealogy.org)


State Records Authority of New South Wales, Australia.

Statistics New Zealand, [www.stats.govt.nz](http://www.stats.govt.nz)

Secondary Sources


Brookes, Barbara. ‘Gender, Work and Fears of a “Hybrid Race” in 1920s New Zealand’.

*Gender & History* 19, no. 3 (1 November 2007): 501–18.


———. *Sikhs of the Khalsa, a History of the Khalsa Rahit*. Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2003.


Territories, Great Britain House of Lords Select Committee on Indian. Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the Operation of the Act 3 & 4 Will. 4, C. 85, for the Better Government of Her Majesty’s Indian Territories ... House of Commons, 1853.


Thevenot, Jean de. Voyages de Mr De Thevenot, contenant la Relation de l’Indostan, des nouveaux mogols, & des autres peuples & pays des Indes. ches la veuve Biestkins, rue de la Harpe, a l’imprimerie des Roziers, 1684.


———. Sporting foundations of New Zealand Indians: A fifty year history of the New