

Sikh and Indian Australians

TEACHER RESOURCE 4 - LIFE OF SIKHS IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Source 1 Yaharra Singh - “Indian Recruit Rejected”

Some extraordinary rulings as to what nationalities may find a place in the [Australian] Expeditionary Forces have been laid down by the Defence Department. Recently an Indian named Yaharra Singh...volunteered at Horsham, and was accepted subject to approval at headquarters. Believing that he would have no difficulty in securing entry to the ranks Singh sold his cart and horses and surrendered his hawking business for the cause of the Empire. [He also instructed the recruiting officer to have one shilling a day from his pay set aside for the Red Cross.] Now, however, he has been informed from headquarters that he “is not sufficiently of European origin” to join the Australian Army. Of course, he makes no profession to being of European origin, but he springs from the same stock that is fighting beside British-born soldiers in the Imperial Army. Surely if an Indian is good enough to be given a pride of place in the British Army, a brother in Australia, if both fit and willing, should not be thrown out because of his birth. The public will sympathise with Yaharra Singh in his misfortune.

Horsham Times (Victoria) 24 March, 1916. p4.

Source 2. Otim Singh - A fine type of man

Otim Singh arrived in Australia in 1890 and lived there for the rest of his life. Migrating in search of prosperity, Singh worked originally as a hawker and later as the owner of a large general store in Kingscote on Kangaroo Island.

According to historian Margaret Allen, men such as Otim Singh, who were working to lift their family’s izzat (their honour) back in their home community, were at times seen as outcasts on the lower rungs of a hierarchy in Australia... “Indian hawkers, although they were British subjects, were marginalised (pushed aside) in emerging white Australia because of their race”.

Having migrated to achieve wealth for their family, sometimes at the neglect of their own family. Otim’s many years of work in Australia, as a hawker and as a shopkeeper, benefited his property group in his village. When Otim died in 1927 his estate was worth £10,000. His obituary noted that he ‘belonged to that fine type of Hindoo known as Sikhs’ and that he was very community minded. He ‘interested himself in local affairs, always being willing to assist in any movement for the good of the town and district’. Singh took part in social activities and was a member of the Freemasons in the Kingscote Lodge. In 1911, when the first Kangaroo Island Agricultural Show was held, he was on the committee and part of the group of leading citizens who dined with the Governor... He spoke at valedictory dinners for departing bank managers and other prominent citizens. Newspapers from 1916 and 1917 reveal that he was often a generous donor to fundraising activities.... During the war years, he made contributions to the Wounded Soldiers Club and the South Australian Soldiers Fund.

Margaret Allen in “A fine type of Hindoo” meets “the Australian type”: British Indians in Australia and diverse masculinities’ In (eds) Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, Transnational

Ties: Australian Lives in the World ANU E-Press, Canberra, 2008, pp. 41-58.

Source 3. Yerranderie shopkeeper Bud Singh

Bud arrived in Australia in 1899 and started working as a door to door hawker. As his finances improved he purchased a horse and cart and worked in the Yerranderie (around 300 km south west of Sydney) and Camden (approximately 70 m from Sydney) area. Yerranderie is about 300km from Sydney while the town of Camden is about 65 km from Sydney. Between 1900 and 1912 there was a silver and lead mining boom in Yerranderie and Bud bought the General Store in the town. He also invested in the several silver mines in the area. After 20 years in Australia Bud was a wealthy man with a General Store at Yerranderie, four houses at Yerranderie, four blocks of land at Fairfield, New South Wales valued at £500 (\$1,000), and fixed deposit at the Camden Bank of New South Wales, and £200 (\$400) at the Commercial Bank, Sydney.

Bud was assaulted in his store in 1923, resulting in the loss of his right eye. He was well respected in the area and was asked to present medals at the Cycling, Athletic and Rifle Clubs. He was a member of the Camden Red Cross Society and regularly donated cash, towels and other items to the Camden District Hospital. In 1919 he donated £10 (\$20.00), and continued his support of the hospital until he returned to India in 1926. He successfully applied for his nephew, Hardial Singh, to come to Australia to carry on Bud's business. Hardial arrived in March 1925 but due to failing health Bud returned to India around one year later. Bud died in India in December 1927. Government restrictions, as well as the end of the mining industry and loss of business in Yerranderie meant that Hardial had to wind up his uncle's estate. From the 1930s the town of Yerranderie was almost completely abandoned.

Most of this information comes from

“Australian Indian History, Bud Singh, Yerranderie, NSW”

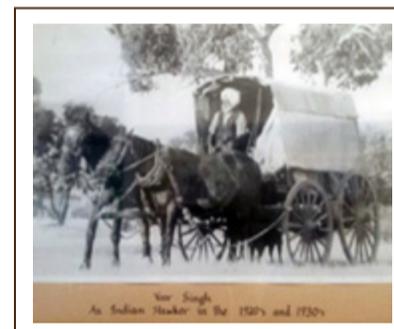
Also type in the following into your search engine to find out more about Bud Singh: Indian Sun the bud who came into bloom- first Punjabis in Australia.

Source 4 A popular man in Wandering (Western Australia)

Though he failed to blow out the 80 candles adorning his birthday cake, that interesting old personality Veer Singh, of Wandering, is still tall and straight and his physique recalls the handsome bearded young Sikhs who wear the Punjabi uniform that he once wore. It is over 40 years since Veer Singh gave up his hawking ... and settled down in the Wandering district where he is particularly popular. In fact there were 170 [people] at the tables when Mr and Mrs Dowsett threw a birthday party in his honour at “Corner Farm” Wandering. It was a great evening, and the proud old Sikh, who was once a soldier of the Queen[Victoria], thanked all his friends, and particularly the Dowsetts for all their kindnesses.

Mirror (Perth), Saturday 2 May 1936, page 14

- i. Use evidence from the four sources to describe
 - a. attitudes toward Sikhs living in Australia during the early twentieth century
 - b. attitudes of these Sikh men to fellow Australians.
- ii. In what ways do these documents reflect the problems experienced by Sikh men living in Australia at this time?
- iii. How do the documents show the opportunities facing Sikhs living in Australia in the early twentieth century?
- iv. In what ways did the Government's White Australia policy affect these four men?



The photograph of the Sikh hawker Veer Singh was displayed in Beverley, Western Australia. Veer Singh was a popular man among the farming community at Wandering for many decades. Credit: *Australian Sikh Heritage*