

Sikh and Indian Australians

TEACHER RESOURCE 1 - SARDOOL SINGH

A young Sikh, Sardool Singh was invited to study at the University of Sydney. He arrived in 1954 and made the following observations of his experiences in Australia.

“I couldn’t see any Indians, they were all Australians. I was getting all these funny looks because they’d never seen a Sikh I suppose – I always wore a turban and a beard. Every time I looked up there was somebody looking at [me]. That used to make me very nervous initially. At that age you’re very aware of yourself.

The first thing strangers would ask was, “When are you going back?” Gradually I discovered that only white people were allowed to stay and there was such a thing as a ‘White Australia’ policy. I went through this feeling that I wish I had known I was going to a country where there was discrimination. Maybe I would have changed my mind? But it was only short-lived. When you are in the university you are in a different atmosphere. There was nobody staring at me and I made some lovely friends.”

<http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/belongings/singh/index.html>

Student Activity. You could use the resource on Sardool Singh as a “See Think and Wonder” discussion. Instruct the students to individually read Sardool Singh’s memories. Ask them to write down:

- What do you learn about Australian attitudes toward Singh during the 1950s from his comments?
- What do you think he did to cope with his nerves and awareness of being seen as different by Australians in the 1950s?
- What do you wonder about Singh’s experiences and friends in Australia?
- Why do you think these students began to change attitudes about “Asians” held by many Australians?
- Then, ask students to discuss their answers in pairs. The discussion can then be opened to the whole class.