



SikhSpectrum.com Monthly
2003

Issue No.11, April

I Was Made For a Purpose



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Serving New York City

The Sikh Coalition has filed a federal suit against New York Police Department and the Police Commissioner Ray Kelly. Two months after being sworn as a traffic agent, in August 2001 Amric Singh Rathour was terminated from service. Rathour was “repeatedly pressured” by NYPD to trim his beard and remove the turban. These are articles of faith that every Sikh is required to wear. "I felt I was being punished because I am a Sikh," he admits.

Both Los Angeles County Police Department and Washington DC police chief have welcomed Sikhs in the force with an assurance that they could serve without compromising their religious practices. The refusal of NYPD to accommodate Rathour undermines the long established tradition of diversity that is unique to New York City. This wrongful termination infringes on his Right to “freely exercise religion” guaranteed to all American citizens by the First Amendment to the Constitution.

"We're looking for a policy change, essentially. If Sikhs can serve in other police jurisdictions, how is New York City different?" said Ravinder Singh Bhalla, the attorney representing Rathour.

An online petition to the Mayor and the Police Department requesting them to allow Rathour to serve as a practicing Sikh was ignored by the City. Repeated calls were left unanswered. "We've no choice. We've done everything we possibly can short of filing a lawsuit", Bhalla noted.

At a press conference in Manhattan attended by major news media Christian, Muslim and Buddhist leaders supported Rathour in raising concern over religious discrimination.

In Canada and the UK Sikhs are actively recruited without any restrictions. Sikh police officers were present at the press conference to answer questions and share their experiences.

“There is nothing about being a Sikh that stops or prevents one from being a great police officer,” said Pradeep Singh an Ontario police officer.



Sikh police officers from UK and Canada at the press conference.

Kashmir Singh from London praised the Met for recruiting people from all faiths. "The Met welcomes Sikh officers, is actively recruiting more Sikh officers. Not just Sikh officers, officers from all faiths because they want a diverse police service. They don't want a one-size-fits-all service. And that's why I'm here to support him. And I hope NYPD learns from London. Because on this field, I think we are years ahead of NYPD."

Chariots of fire

Chariots of Fire is a story of the triumphant British athletic team and two of its star athletes, a Scotsman and a Jew, at the 1924 Olympics in Paris. Harold Abrahams, a young student at Cambridge, must win the race to be accepted in a world where anti-semitism is widespread. A determined Abrahams is shown consistently working on improving his technique and speed.

Eric Liddell is a devout Christian and a toast of Scotland who is encouraged by his father to never compromise his faith, and to "run in God's name and let folks stand back in wonder." As the team sets out for Paris it is learnt that the heats are scheduled on a Sunday – the day of Sabbath. Liddell refuses to compete. To break the impasse Lord Birkenhead insists that Liddell meet the British Olympic Committee, which includes Prince of Wales, "your future king."

For Eric running is his passion and religion the guiding force, and separating the two would render him ineffective: "I believe that God made me for a purpose; He also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure. To give it up would be to hold Him in contempt; to win is to honour Him." Running on a Sunday brings dishonour to his faith; Liddell would not compromise. Finally, Lindsay (a team mate) offers an alternative solution that is acceptable to all.

The final race starts and the camera focuses on Liddell in slow motion as he runs to the finishing line. Both athletes are lit by the fire to succeed. Abrahams wants to prove his worth, and Liddell to honor God: "Where does the power come from to see the race to its end – from within."

I was made for a purpose

Born in poverty on June 02, 1948 in the village Khed-Satara (Maharashtra, India), Nishikant walked six miles to go to school, sometimes hungry. Out of compassion the village children would share their food with him. Yet, undeterred by the odds, Nishikant dreamt of joining the elite Indian Administrative Service for in it he saw a way to go back to the rural communities across India and help the underprivileged and the impoverished.

Following his dreams he moved to Mumbai to pursue BA in History and Political Science that never materialized. On failing to secure a place in the IAS, Nishikant did several jobs (including C.D.A Navy and Indian Airlines) until he found employment with Air India in 1976, and is presently Manager Inflight Services.

Untouchability was not prevalent in Khed-Satara as it was in other parts of the country and in general most villagers were kind to dalits. It was a situation unique to his village but it helped inspire Nishikant to devote his life to the dalit cause. In a nation badly ridden with castes and caste related discrimination it is not easy for the lower castes to move up the ladder. Nishikant decided to marry a girl from the upper caste. He recalls, "From the eleventh grade I decided I would not marry a dalit girl but someone from the upper caste. It would give me some kind of an opening in the mainstream and help me build my own individuality."

His wife, a teacher at the local High School, is a source of inspiration, and daughter Namrata, like her father, actively participates in community service. Namrata will soon be graduating with an MA in Psychology from Mumbai University and wishes to pursue advanced studies in HIV, Aids and counselling in the United States. A younger son Nirant, currently a Computer science major in Arizona State University (USA), bears testimony to the accomplishments of a poor boy from a small village having come a long way. Nirant's finds his father a powerful motivation in his life.

Nishikant is the first in his family to have risen from total poverty and lack of opportunity, of a kind almost unimaginable in his country, to senior professional career employment with Air India. More remarkable, Nishikant has focused all his available attention and energy on advancing the cause of peace and equality around the world in a dedicated effort to help raise others as he managed to raise himself.

Most specifically, Nishikant peacefully champions the cause of equality for the Dalit people, the so called "Untouchables" of India, who are still regularly treated in many contexts with the most heartrending pervasive discrimination and cruelty.

A Buddhist by faith and an admirer of Babasaheb Ambedkar, Nishikant was the first recipient of *Bhim-Ratna* Award in London on April 14, 1992 in a ceremony presided by many distinguished delegates including the Commonwealth Secretary General and MPs from Britain. As an NGO observer he was the first non-official Indian to attend the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Fifty Years Meeting in Bangkok, 1997.

Presently, Director- Asia & Pacific, Airline Ambassadors, a United Nations NGO, and Peace Representative, the world peace prayer society (UN NGO), he has traveled extensively promoting world peace. Called the "Roving Ambassador" of Buddhism, Nishikant has represented the Buddhist faith in inter-faith conferences including a recently concluded seminar in Los Angeles, USA. On several occasions he met His Holiness the Dalai Lama and knew Mother Teresa personally.

Mother Teresa in her letter wrote, "Dear Nishikant, thank you for answering the call to love through your gift for God's poor. God loves the world so much that He keeps on sendinggiving you and me to be His love in the world of today. God's love and our love is but a 'giving' until it hurts.

When asked what he would like to see in the future Nishikant replied, "One wish in life [is] that during my lifetime [the] caste system from Indian society must go, and all humans are treated as one. May peace prevail in India; may peace prevail on earth."

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