


Chapter 12



AN ECOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF AGONIES AND ECSTASIES OF MY LIFE

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*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

—*The Tragedy of MacBeth*
(Act V, Scene 5, lines 24-28)
by William Shakespeare
(from Mowat & Werstine, 1992)

SOME PEOPLE CALL life difficult. Others describe it as having no significance, calling it an idiot's tale. Despite all the ifs (the middle two letters in spelling life comprise *if*) and buts, I find *life* a precious gift from God. In the ocean of eternity, my existence as a human being does not even amount to a drop of water. However, on a personal level, my life story, studded with agonies and ecstasies, is my most cherished treasure. My life is full of memories and recollections; some of them are riveting and cherished, others are painful and avoided. However, good or bad memories are memories that become the prime legacy of one's life.

With thanks to Joseph Ponterotto from the core of my heart for this great opportunity, it is here that I venture to reflect upon my life. As an autobiography, it is a transparent recount of my life experiences through which I perceive it, unmediated and undistorted. I challenge the readers of this chapter to find in it many embedded messages that are culturally diverse from their own.

BIRTH AND PARTITION OF INDIA

I was born in 1943 in a small village called Sarhali which is now in District Faisalabad in Pakistan. My father, Gurmej Singh, and mother, Gurbachan Kaur, both belonged to Sikh families. It is hard to tell the exact day and month, since no official records are found after the partition in 1947. My parents knew days and months only by way of an indigenous calendar called Bikrami era, which is 57 years ahead of the Christian calendar. My elementary teachers made things easier, tentatively assigning my birth date as March 3, 1943. In the past, parents did not celebrate the birthdays of their children. It is a recent phenomenon in high- and middle-class families to celebrate birthdays of their children. Generally, people celebrate birthdays of some great persons.

My memory dates back when I was 3 and a half years old. Two major events flash in my mind which are authentic, verified by my parents. Unfortunately, these are very troubling and unpleasant memories. I still remember lying in a doctor's office; he was treating me for a high fever. I recall a tall, long-bearded, Moslem doctor, Dr. Fazal Ilahi, saving my life. I admire his broadmindedness treating a Sikh boy during the religious riots.

After winning independence from the British in 1947, India was partitioned into two countries on the basis of two major religions. The majority of Hindus were to remain in India and a new country called Pakistan (*a place for the pious people*) was carved for the Moslems. Hindus or Sikhs living in the newly created country were forced to leave. Similarly, the Moslems living in Hindustan (*a place for the Hindus*) were also made to leave.

During this partition, cultural conflicts and religious riots arose everywhere. Sentiments against Hindus and Sikhs became very high in Pakistan. Unfortunately, my parents had no choice but to leave their home, land, and all their belongings. They hurried to leave everything to save me and my younger brother who was only 2 years old. There was no other transportation but carts pulled by oxen. There was no other food but hastily prepared popcorn. There was no milk for babies, and even water was nowhere to be found. It was the hot month of August, with scorching heat over 100°F. We were not even lucky enough to drink muddy water from ponds because these ponds were filled with dead bodies.

I still can see myself on that ill-fated cart and my younger brother Dilbagh in my mother's lap crying for food and water. His cries and wails still pierce my heart. After several days of hunger and thirst, we reached our native town in Punjab (Punjab literally means five rivers), from which our ancestors had gone to search for more land. Within two weeks, my parents, who were born to rich families, became penniless refugees. The stay in the native village was temporary in the house of some ancestral relatives.

Unfortunately, my brother could never accompany us to the free land. He died of dehydration. Sadly, it was not even possible to cremate his dead

body. Politics, power, and prejudice became a deadly combination that turns decent humans into devastating demons.

After two years, the Government of India resettled my parents permanently in a small village, Gahndran, in Jalandhar District, with a population of 5,000. About 10 acres of land was allotted along with a mud house that one of the Moslem families had deserted before leaving for Pakistan.

INDIA WINS INDEPENDENCE

I respect Mahatma Gandhi and Jawahar Lal Nehru for their leadership and sacrifices to gain independence from the British. However, it is sad that many other unsung heroes who laid down their lives to free India from the shackles and atrocities of the British Government are not so well known in the West. I adore and respect Baba Gurdit Singh Sarhali, Shahid (martyr) Bhagat Singh, Shahid (martyr) Udham Singh, Lala Laj Pat Rai, and Subash Chandar Bose. I tend to agree with those who believe that the British left India not solely because of the nonviolent movement of Gandhi but also because British lives were made difficult by the so-called hot group. "When all pleas fail to get justice, it is cowardice not to use the sword" seemed to be the philosophy of this hot group. The Sikh martyrs, as saint-soldiers, already knew this advice of Guru Gobind Singh, who preached it to his followers in the late 17th century.

CHILDHOOD DAYS

I was raised as a lonely, sickly, and only child in a grieving parents' home. My mother's heart was and still is deeper than the ocean. She treasured all the sad feelings and never expressed them in my presence. She taught me how to read and write at home. I did not need any paper or an ink pen. My index finger became my pen, and the dirt on the floor was my never-ending paper. I could read and write in Punjabi before I went to school at age 7. Luckily, I was admitted to the second grade.

My childhood was not all that pleasant. There was deep parental affection from both parents, but there was crippling poverty at home. The mud house we lived in was without electricity and running water. During the heavy monsoon rains, it was very dangerous to live in the mud houses. Once during heavy floods in our area, we had to spend a night in a wooden box. Poverty is cruel and violently painful. I felt utterly empty and lonely as a child. It made me envious of others who had so many brothers and sisters, for I had neither. However, I made a friend with classmate Amar Chand, who belonged to an untouchable family.

When in high school I started writing plays in Punjabi, he would play the role of the comedian on stage. I used to be the stage secretary or the mas-

ter of ceremonies, since I could never sing or play any musical instrument. It hurt me deeply when Amar Chand died of tuberculosis in the prime of his youth at age 19. Mostly, my friends belonged to low-caste or poverty-stricken families. But all these friends were caring and full of compassion. I could never dare to reach out and make friends with peers from well-to-do families because I felt a sense of rejection from them. I still believe that there is an intense prejudice between the rich and the poor, regardless of race, color, and gender.

Primary school in our village was enjoyable. My teacher, Mr. Vazir Chand, was very challenging but kind and encouraging. His personal interest and encouragement meant a lot to me. I still believe that appreciation and encouragement at the lower level go a long way toward meeting the challenges in later life. I read Shakespeare's plays translated into Punjabi when I was in the fourth grade. I also read the life story of the great American president Abraham Lincoln in the same grade. They both became my life-long heroes.

During the elementary years, I started reading scriptures and learning more about our spiritual ten masters in Sikhism. At the inspiration of my mother, I recited Japji Sikh morning prayer and Rahras, a Sikh evening prayer, on a daily basis. I started building a strong faith in God and His Grace. I learned from the scriptures that if we pray to Him with sincerity, He answers our prayers. It may sound silly, but I wrote my prayer in a letter to Him that I am an only child and asked that He bless me with a sister or a brother. He was kind to listen. My little brother, Gurdial, 12 years younger than me, was born after a year. It was a miracle, considering my mother's age at that time. My parents believe that God gave us back our Dilbagh.

HIGH SCHOOL YEARS

The primary school in our village extended only to the fourth grade. The nearest high school in Nakodar City was three and a half miles away. It was a challenge to walk seven miles as an 11-year-old. In addition to walking, the weather proved to be a problem. It was most difficult when it rained. As a result, my clothes were drenched and my shoes were wet. However, I never worried about my clothes. Mom always hand sewed them.

School and home were both fun places. At school, I had several classmates and teachers to converse with. I made close friendships with many peers. Tarlok Singh Purewal became my fast friend and proved to be a life-long friend. Also, I had a baby brother to play with at home. On the weekends and during summer vacations, I helped my Dad with the farm work. It was very hard work, and I never thought any work could be harder than hoeing in a sugarcane field in the brutal hot and humid temperatures of 110-115° F. Due to the heat, it was unbearable to wear a shirt, and the sharp blades of the sugarcane plants cut the naked body like a dagger. With sweat

dripping into the fresh wounds, the pain was extreme. It made me determined to study harder, as I was convinced that I was unfit to work on the farm. The only part of the farm work I enjoyed was grazing the cattle with other boys of my age. But I always had a book in my hand to study.

During high school, I was deeply influenced by my English teacher, Mr. Baxish Singh. With his encouragement and that of school headmaster Faquir Chand Kirpal, I graduated from high school with highest honors. On the final examination, externally administered by Punjab University, I not only stood first in our school but also received the highest score among surrounding area high schools. It pleased me that my fast friend Tarlok stood beside me as one of the top two scorers on the examination. He was not only my friend, he was also a guide.

I was the first one to graduate from our village, and by placing first, it made me a hero in my village. It also won me a merit scholarship, enabling me to attend the college in Jalandhar City, about 20 miles away from home.

My interest in women also developed in those days when I was 16. In our culture, there is no dating system. If one even made an attempt to approach a girl, it meant trouble. Most likely, one would be humiliated or even murdered. Strong feelings like love and romance are not expressed. You are not allowed to marry someone from your village. This tradition is quite different from large cities. However, whenever possible, I managed to see this *unique she* passing through our fields on the way to her parents' fields. In my whole life, I might have spoken with her two or three times. I learned later on that this type of attraction is called platonic love. Undoubtedly, I felt that it was one-sided platonic love. I started writing short stories, poems, and even novels in Punjabi inspired by this one-sided love. My first poetry book, *Satranghi Pingh (The Rainbow)*, contained several poems addressed to her. I spent many sleepless nights troubled by thoughts about her and being love-sick.

COLLEGE DAYS

College days were extremely painful. It was not possible for me to stay in the dormitory. I had neither the money nor the desire to stand being separated from my parents. I decided to attend college by train. Unfortunately, the morning train left at 5:25 a.m. from Nakodar, which necessitated arising at 3:30 a.m. and getting ready to walk three and a half miles by myself to catch this train. The way was like a jungle. Thorny bushes and fear of deadly snakes made this journey hellish during the early-morning darkness. The rainy and chilly days during winter made life unbearable.

These living atrocities made me turn to God more and more for help. Out of fear, I prayed all the way going and returning from college for five years. Leaving home at 3:30 a.m. and returning at 8:30 p.m. was the daily schedule. I managed to find the time to study while at railway platforms

waiting for the train or while journeying in the train. At home, I burned the midnight oil. It was a kerosene oil lamp, which made my eyes watery and face quite dark with smoke. Mr. Ram Singh Sachdev, the principal of Lyallpur Khalsa, the college that I attended, was an extremely generous and compassionate person. He exempted me from paying the tuition and asked the librarian to purchase books for me through library funds.

CAREER CHOICE

I wanted to become a medical doctor, and therefore I studied required courses such as physics, chemistry, and biology. However, it was not meant to be. My parents did not have any money to pay the costly expenses at a medical college. Helplessly, I changed my major to English literature. At the time, to become an English professor was the second best thing. I was also influenced by the college's Vice Principal Harbhajan Singh, who taught undergraduate English poetry. A graduate of Oxford University, England, he became my role model. From him I learned about English romantic writers such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, and William Wordsworth. Shelley and Keats impressed me the most; their poetry had a lasting impact on my own Punjabi poems written in love for the *unique one*. In 1963, I received my bachelor of arts degree. Again, I stood first in the college. Despite all the financial hardships, I not only survived but I also prevailed.

At the prize distribution ceremony, Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, then Chief Minister of Punjab, encouraged me to continue my studies. He also pledged to help me financially. I joined the teacher training college in Jalandhar. Being so gracious, he sent me scholarship money from his personal funds on a monthly basis until I passed my bachelor of teaching degree. This degree was a requirement for teaching in public schools.

INTEREST IN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

During my college days, I also developed a keen interest in religion and spirituality. As I was born in a Sikh family, naturally I became deeply interested in Sikh gurus and the Sikh Scripture *Shri Guru Granth Sahib*. Unfortunately, the word "guru" appears corrupted in the Western world and is not held in high esteem. The word *gu* in Sanskrit means darkness or ignorance and *ru* means illuminator. So the word guru means the one who removes spiritual darkness or spiritual ignorance.

Sikhism is one of the youngest religions in the world. However, it is the fifth largest in the world based on the number of adherents. It has more than 20 million followers worldwide who reside in more than 21 countries. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism more than five centuries ago, preached the message of universalism. The very gist of tolerance for diversity is

expressed in the following *shaloka* (psalm) of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Holy Book of the Sikhs* (translated and annotated by Gopal Singh, 1978):

*Aval Allah noor upaya kudra ke sabh bande.
Ek noor te sabh jag upjiya, kaun bhale ko mande.*
God is the Father of us all; His reflection is in everyone of us,
Hence do not grade any person as inferior or superior. (p. 1349)

Also,

Sabhe ghat Ram bole, Rama bole, Ram bina ko bole re
In every heart there is God, none else than He speaks from there.
(*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 988)

I sincerely believe that the teachings of Guru Nanak are really the foundation of the present-day movement we call multiculturalism. In support of women, he writes,

So kiun manda akhye, jit jaman rajan!
Why demean them who gave birth to kings and prophets!
(*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 473)

Guru Nanak writes about God in his prologue to *Japji*, the path of devotional meditation. Translated from Punjabi into English, it reads,

*In the name of the One True Supreme Being,
Who is the Creator of all other beings,
Without fear and hatred;
of timeless form,
unborn, self-existent;
attainable
only through divine grace.* (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 1)

Guru Nanak's following line became an ideal for my life:

The truth is high, but higher still is truthful living.
(*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 62)

But, I hate to admit, it has been very difficult to practice truth.

Guru Nanak also preached three major commandments, *Naam Japna* (worship God), *Kirat Karni* (earn livelihood through hard work), and *Vand Shakna* (share with the needy). Presently, I am fascinated with Guru Nanak's five stages of spiritual journey as described in *Japji*. These stages are *dharma khand* (moral living and rightful action), *jnán khand* (divine knowledge), *saram khand* (spiritual beauty and effort to unfold), *karam khand* (divine grace), and *sach khand* (eternal truth) (Deol & Deol, 1998).

I was also deeply touched with the greatness of the 10th and last guru, Sri Guru Gobind Singh. He was the epitome of sacrifice. He, his father, mother, 4 children, and 15 close relatives laid down their lives for social justice and religious freedom. He is matchless in human history. I consider Guru Gobind Singh a true architect of democratic ideology, human rights, and multiculturalism. He fiercely rebelled against the cruelty and excesses of the oppressive regime of the Mogul emperor Aurangzeb. He instilled courage, gallantry, and ideals of principled living in his followers. He brought about a psychic conversion among the downtrodden and the oppressed. He also uplifted women to equal status and named them Kaurs or "princesses."

As an undergraduate student of English literature, I was influenced by Thomas Carlyle, whose 1937 book *Heroes and Hero Worship* guided difficult paths of my life. In religion and spirituality, it made a lot of sense to me when Carlyle (1937) wrote that a man lives by believing something, not by debating many things. I developed a strong belief in Guru Nanak's teachings. I am amazed how one line from literature could become a source of inspiration. Carlyle's (1937) advice that if a man says his time is not good he is there to make it better became my lifelong guiding principle.

GLORIOUS DAYS AT THE TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGE

I graduated from the government's Teacher Training College in Jalandhar with a bachelor of teaching degree, which was required to practice teaching. Despite all the traveling afflictions, I had a wonderful time at this college. I loved courses in philosophy of education, educational psychology, and teaching methods. Philosophy Professor Agnihotri and Psychology Professor S. B. Kakkar became my role models. Also, I developed a strong interest in aesthetics. At the encouragement of Professor Kakkar, I published my first paper in English, *Gleams of Aesthetics*, in the college's magazine. I also actively participated in declamation contests, poetry writing, and leadership activities. These were the glorious days of my education and youth in India.

MY FIRST TEACHING JOB

It was a big step down from a medical doctor to become a school teacher when I took my first job as a secondary school teacher at a private school. The pay and my morale were both very low. However, it was exciting to teach high school algebra, geometry, English, and chemistry. These students were barely five or six years younger than me as I started teaching at the age of 21. More than students, they became my friends. On the faculty, I had my former teacher as the headmaster, and five former classmates were

now my colleagues. I was also relieved from travel problems. The train would leave from my village directly to this village, and the time traveled was less than half an hour. With the little money that I made as a teacher, I started making my home situation better. Soon we had a better house, but it still was a mud house. It made me realize that more needed to be done to better our situation. When I got another job as a science teacher at the government's high school in Shankar, financially things began getting better. Not only did the job pay better, it was also a permanent job. It was my first time teaching women students who were preparing to become elementary school teachers. As a male teacher, I had the rare privilege to teach these young women, for there was a shortage of female science teachers. There were few coed classes at that time.

MY FIRST MARRIAGE

Most of the marriages at that time were arranged by parents, and mine was no exception. At age 23, I was married to Kuldip. My mother was the only one who saw her before the marriage. There is a belief that marriage is a matter of conditioning of two individuals to each other that requires several sacrifices. Based on life experiences and their wisdom, parents believe that they know better how to join together two people who are compatible. The young people are considered too emotional to make a good decision. Most Hindustani parents will agree with Arnold Lazarus's (1985) observation that "marriage is usually due to lack of judgment, divorce to lack of patience, and remarriage to lack of memory" (p. 33).

Kuldip brought many positive changes in the family in general and in my personal life in particular. We were married in December 1966 and were blessed with a daughter, Jaswinder, in October 1967. Generally, Indian parents prefer boys to girls, but Jaswinder came as a special gift from God as she was the first child born in our family. Also, the first daughter is considered *Lakshmi*, a prototype of the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi, a harbinger of prosperity.

Now as a family man, I continued my studies and earned my master's degree in English from Punjab University to become a college professor. However, on the encouragement of Kuldip's brother, Professor Baxish Singh Balam, we migrated to the United States for my higher studies. He became our prime source of financial help as the Indian government would not allow me to bring more than \$8 to the United States because of foreign exchange restrictions.

ACCULTURATIVE EXPERIENCES

We had a great family celebration when I was granted a visa to study for a master's degree in education in the United States. Every one was very

excited. Going to America was hailed as a great accomplishment, and I was congratulated by all near and dear. Even my travel agent remarked, "Sir, your life is made." On the day I departed for the United States, I felt very strong and mixed emotions. On one side, I felt exalted and ecstatic that I was going to the promised land, a land of great opportunities. On the other side, it was a day of severe sadness leaving my parents and my brother behind.

Several guests and relatives and people from my village arranged a hero's good-bye at the railway station. Even the train was delayed for 15 minutes to complete the seeing-off festivities. I was heavily garlanded. When the train was ready to leave, the whole scene became very melancholic. It was so difficult to separate from my family, especially from Mom. She kept crying, sobbing, and wailing. One relative, Piara Singh, remarked that leaving home for abroad is like living dead. When the train started, I became extremely sad. It felt as if Heaven had fallen or the whole earth had collapsed beneath my feet. Separation was so intense and unbearable. A line of separation was drawn forever. I kept looking back at my parents and relatives as far as I could see. I wanted to go back so bad that words cannot describe the feeling, but that was not possible now.

I landed in the United States on September 2, 1969. It felt like I arrived in a fairyland. Looking at beautiful scenarios, forests, parks, and long, clean highways with hundreds of cars, I was impressed. I had never seen such cleanliness anywhere. Meeting warm-hearted beautiful people, I became convinced that I was already in paradise. Kuldip, Jaswinder, and I became new members of Professor Balam's house. At that time, he lived in an apartment on the university campus where he taught chemistry.

After a week, this place started looking too lonely. Surroundings were so different from Punjab. There was no hustle and bustle. People never seemed to get out and mingle openly. There were no familiar songs, birds, fields, ponds, or lakes. Everything looked so different. Everything in America looked much bigger: people, cars, fields, bananas, spoons—you name it. I became impressed with the richness and vastness of the country.

But I still missed home, relatives, and parents. At age 26, in the bathroom, I cried many times like a baby. I was very lonely. All of a sudden, I had lost all my friends, parents, and other relatives. I also felt the guilt of leaving my parents behind in India. Arriving in America required my starting over to develop a new sense of myself. A multitude of life changes arose, resulting in a lot of psychological pain.

EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

My classes started on September 6. On the first day my brother-in-law took me to the college about 50 miles away from home. Despite having an M.A. in English, I felt embarrassed over not being able to communicate in English. My major professor admonished me to speak slowly. After more

than 30 years, I still remember his remark, "Sandhu, you speak English like Yankees." Sadly, I did not understand what he meant by Yankees at that time. Another professor asked, "Do you commute?" I did not understand what she meant. We never had a car in India, we just used bikes or traveled by train or bus. Communication became a problem for several years. I had to get used to the so-called Southern drawl. Sometimes, even simple greetings were difficult to understand. As I had studied British English, I was more accustomed to greeting someone with "Sir, how do you do?" Not too many people responded to this greeting. Similarly, I had to get acquainted with new spellings of colour, labour, programme, and so on.

Due to language difficulties, I neither fully understood professors' instructions, nor did I dare to meet with them after classes to ask them any questions. It was my fault that I studied diligently all 1,174 pages of a book on 17th-century English literature. Surprisingly, my professor administered her final examination on whatever she taught in the class, which was barely 200 pages of the book. I experienced more problems with spoken English than with written English. I started watching television shows such as *That Girl*, *The Price is Right*, *Family Feud*, *Sonny and Cher*, and *Gunsmoke* not only for fun but to improve my spoken English.

FOOD AND BEVERAGES

Food became a problem. I was not habituated to eating meat in India. Generally, meat is a special dish served on some festival days such as *Diwali* (festival of lamps) or *Holi* (festival of colors). My mother never ate nor cooked meat at home. If my father wanted to eat meat, he had to cook and eat it outside the home. Also, beef is forbidden in Hinduism and Sikhism. Since not many vegetarian foods were available in those days, I just ate french fries. Later on, I started eating eggs, fish, and chicken. However, I also started drinking occasionally with my new friend, Robert Lawson, a classmate at Delta State. I started getting Americanized.

GETTING CLEAN SHAVEN

After migrating to the United States, for almost 6 months I kept my beard, moustache, and long hair and wore a turban as a Sikh. Unfortunately, I experienced people's constant gaze, some out of curiosity and some out of hate. Because many Sikhs become victims of prejudice due to their religious identity and are denied jobs and other opportunities in the Western world, I decided to get clean shaven and remove my turban. It was a very troubling decision indeed. My identity was totally changed from outside and inside. It hurt more inside. The conflict was between my allegiance to

the Sikh religion and my desire to benefit from the American dream. Actually, it was a conflict between spiritualism and materialism. Even after more than 30 years, I have not been able to resolve it. I feel a big lump of guilt in my chest that I betrayed Sikh heroes like Bhai Taru Singh, who was beheaded by Moslem oppressors because they could not make him cut his hair and remove his turban to change his Sikh identity.

BECOMING A CITIZEN OF THE UNITED STATES

It was a difficult decision to relinquish my Indian citizenship. I was very excited to become a citizen of the United States, but I was much troubled to say good-bye to my motherland. An inner voice kept torturing me, "*Nobody gives up on one's mother if she is poor.*" I cried a lot. My tears were mingled with joy and sadness. Finally, I reconciled the conflict so as to obtain inner peace. I have two Moms: a real one, India, and an adopted one, America.

I was finally getting acclimated to American culture. Now I had a car, a teaching job, and a green card. We were also blessed with our son, Sukhwinder (Johnny). Then tragedy befell. Kuldip and her sister, Harkishan, went to buy groceries in a nearby town. They had a car accident in which both were killed instantly, leaving me a widower with two children and my brother-in-law with five children. It was the most depressing event in my life. I sustained the most excruciating psychological pain when I had to take Kuldip's remains after cremation in a box to India to put them in a pious river. How frail we are as humans who eventually are reduced to ashes!

I was engulfed by all kinds of problems. Without any social support system, I had to stay awake all night to take care of my children. Jaswinder was 5 and Sukhwinder not even 2 years old. It broke my heart when I had to leave Sukhwinder (Johnny) with the baby-sitter in order to teach in the morning.

The loss was also immensely painful. I became extremely depressed. I had only two choices: either return to India with two children or pick up the pieces again and accept God's will and move on with my life. Thinking of India's problems, I decided not to take my children back home. I knew that India's many problems—poverty, politicians, preachers, prejudice, police, population, and pollution—were not going to be easily solved. A common saying that India is a rich country lived in by the poor always haunted me. My flight from India was to give my children new opportunities. I decided to remain in the United States and face the adversities.

Persuaded by my ex in-laws, I returned to India to get remarried. Luckily, this time it was my choice. My parents did not like to impose any restrictions. I met Usha through a matrimonial ad in the local newspaper. It was our great fortune that Usha and I could see each other and talk before

deciding to get married. But we only had a couple of hours in the presence of her sister and brothers. She prepared tea and brought Indian sweets. Looking at her stunning beauty, I fell for her at first sight. She hesitated, but we were destined to be together. Usha's sister, Santosh, and her husband, Mr. A. R. Bharti, played a major role in facilitating our matrimonial bond. With the blessings of our parents, we married on July 22, 1974. I became an iconoclast again, for I broke the barriers of the caste system. We belong to different castes and religions. She is Hindu; I am a Sikh. She belongs to *Ksatriya* (warrior) caste; I belong to *Vaisya* (ordinary people) caste. Our marriage of more than 25 years now has taught us that *love* conquers all.

Usha brought new light (her name means morning light) in my life again. My dark melancholic life became worth living again, for Usha brought sunshine with her. Not only was I blessed with her deep love and caring, but God also blessed us with two more sons, Varrinder and Ravinder.

MY JOBS IN THE UNITED STATES

After getting my master's degree in education, I started to look for teaching jobs. I was offered an instructor's position at a predominantly Black college. I was recommended by the chair of the department and members of the selection committee. Unfortunately, the dean decided not to hire me because of my different accent. Sadly, after 30 years, I still cannot change my accent. I felt the pain of prejudice. I believe that skin color, accent, and facial features are some of the high indicators and inviters of prejudice. Unfortunately, they are very hard to change.

Consequently, I ended up teaching in public schools for more than 10 years. It was one of my most frustrating experiences to teach ninth-grade English classes. There were generally six classes everyday and more than 35 students in each. I was not happy. I was getting money to pay my bills, but there was little gratification. I was feeling guilty being paid when I believed that not many students were learning much from me. Also, due to daily discipline problems, I started having splitting headaches.

Luckily, I got a job offer from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to teach remedial English classes. The situation was better than that of the public schools, but I still was not happy. I believe that God does listen if you pray sincerely. My prayers were answered when Choctaw Central School decided to hire me as a guidance counselor. However, I had no training in counseling. I was provisionally hired as long as I became certified within three years. Because I was close to Mississippi State University, approximately 60 miles away, it was only an hour's drive to get this training. While completing certification hours, I became interested in earning a doctoral degree in counseling. I loved the counseling field. It was a welcome relief to study Carl Rogers and Albert Ellis instead of Beowulf and Chaucer. Also, I

enjoyed counseling at Choctaw Central School. It is interesting how I was exposed to many cultures and religions such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Moslems in India and African Americans, Native Americans, and European Americans in the United States.

Again, it was with mixed feelings that I left Choctaw Central to join Nichols State University in Louisiana. It was a long awaited dream to teach at the university level. I now became familiar with the French Acadian Americans. Coming to the University also spurred my interest in research and writings. It also gave me the opportunities to attend conventions and conferences. A new vista was opened.

INTEREST IN MULTICULTURALISM

With my personal experiences living in many cultures, speaking many languages (Punjabi, Hindi, English, and some Sanskrit and Urdu), and having familiarity with the many religions of India (Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism), my worldview had broadened, and my interest in multicultural issues had soared. To teach a multicultural counseling class, I became familiar with the works of several authors such as Paul Pedersen, Joseph Ponterotto, Derald Wing Sue, Clemmont Vontress, Fredrick Harper, and John McFadden. I loved their writings because the issues they discussed were also very close to my heart. Coming to the University of Louisville in 1991 provided me with many more opportunities to travel and make presentations nationally and internationally. I went to and spoke in Athens, Greece; Banaras and New Delhi, India; Beijing, China; Bratislava, Slovakia; London, England; Paris, France; and Vancouver, Canada. I also enjoyed meeting persons from different countries and cultures. I developed a cosmopolitan outlook on life.

Because universities still have the slogan "publish or perish," I had no choice but to write. Actually, it has become my passion. I am impressed with Paul Pedersen and Joseph Ponterotto both personally and professionally. Their book *Preventing Prejudice: A Guide for Counselors and Educators* stimulated my interest in the topic of prejudice. My first coauthored book with Cheryl Aspy, *Counseling for Prejudice Prevention and Reduction*, was the direct result of their inspiration. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement and support of Frederick Harper, presently Editor of *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*.

PHILOSOPHY BEHIND MY WORKS

Over the past century in psychology and for the past four decades in counseling, the focus has largely been on the individual and on personal development. I believe that now it is time for a paradigm shift. I would like to

employ counseling skills to address social ills. For this reason, most of my writings focus on such issues as prejudice, gender equity, and violence. I have already authored or coauthored *Counseling for Prejudice Prevention and Reduction*; *Empowering Women for Equity: A Counseling Approach*; *Violence in American Schools: A Practical Guide for Counselors* and *Faces of Violence: Psychological Correlates, Concepts, and Intervention Strategies*.

Of course, some writings are born from my own personal experiences. Such publications include *Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students*; *Asian and Pacific Islander Americans: Issues and Concerns for Counseling and Psychotherapy*; *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms*; *Ethnocultural Background of Asian and Indian Americans and Substance Abuse Treatment*; and my forthcoming book *Spirituality: A Multicultural Perspective*. Finally, I believe that issues relating to diversity, multiculturalism, and interculturalism are going to remain salient issues in the new millennium. I hope that authors like Casas, Courtland Lee, Harper, Ibrahim, Parham, Pederson, Ponterotto, Sue, Vontress, and many more continue to show us the way. They are really my heroes and beacons in the field of multiculturalism.

The United States is truly a land of opportunities. It has always been the land of milk and honey, and I am sure that it will continue to be so for many centuries to come. It is a country where hard work does pay off. Both my brother Gurdial and son Sukhwinder earned their M.D. degrees. Varrinder is preparing for one. Jaswinder became a chemical engineer. The youngest, Ravinder, plans to enter broadcasting or become a movie star. I tell them that the sky is the limit in this beautiful country if one works hard.

I still miss India, its culture, and of course my parents and my wife's family. Somehow, we have managed to visit India every year for the past 10 years. I like the physical comforts in the United States and the peace of mind in India.

I am very concerned about the cultural erosion of my children. It pains me to see this happening before my eyes through the loss of our Sikh religion, Punjabi language, interracial marriage, and other native cultural practices. In this case, I agree with those who feel that due to migration they have gained a lot but have lost a lot more. I agree with Kuldeep Kumar of the National Council for Research and Training Center in New Delhi, who, when introducing me to an audience before a presentation, said, "Dr. Sandhu's head is in America, but his heart is in India."

These were prophetic words, for I recently was awarded a one-year Fulbright Scholarship to complete a study during the 2001-2002 period on depression in India and its implications for counseling, training, and research.

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