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Blog Readers,

Everyday people get harassed for reasons of 'security'; but how many ethnicities CAN say they are shot at for being mistaken as Taliban? (Sac Bee Article 3-6-2011)  
I have ~~so~~ SO MANY ARTICLES of violence & hate against Sikhs (post 9/11);  
Shortly after a spurt of crimes against Sikhs, I saw & couldn't believe: A Sikh - CHANGING their name. Was it out of fear? Professional reasons of trying to sound UN-Sikh like?

Even in prison where I'm locked up, I face daily 'scrutiny', it's almost always from someone who is white and/or a Prison guard. Ironically, despite the 'high' incidents of violence against Sikhs (35,000 live in Sacramento Area), it only 'increases' the comments against me and/or others who 'appear' to be Middle-Eastern. On the Eve of the 10 year (9/11) anniversary, people in general ~~that~~ <sup>should</sup> be more educated, not more ignorant. Sadly, it's the loved ones of the Elderly Sikh victims of the drive by shooting who suffer the most from the ignorance & hate; this is misplaced onto a group who promote peace, justice & fairness.

We are Sikhs!

Manjot Michael Singh



# Shootings: Sikh says they're often seen as Taliban

FROM PAGE A1

nary notification" to the local FBI office.

Relatives and friends in the tightknit Sikh community to which the two men belong were not as hesitant to call the shooting a hate crime.

Singh and Atwal, like many Sikh men, had thick beards and wore turbans - traditions that have made Sikhs the target of bigotry and violent attacks since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"The turban is a big problem for us," said Gurjinder Singh Randhawa, chief editor of the Sikh newspaper Punjab Mail USA. "We look the same as Afghan Taliban - but we are not Taliban."

Randhawa recalled the beating of a Sikh cab driver four months ago in West Sacramento.

The driver told authorities that two passengers had uttered anti-Islamic slurs as they attacked him and then beat a female passenger who tried to stop them. Police have since arrested two men on charges of felony assault with a deadly weapon and commission of a hate crime in connection with the attack.

"A lot of people don't understand where we're from. They think we're Muslim. We're not," said Ram Singh, one of dozens of mourners who gathered Saturday at Singh's home on McGray Way.

Surinder Singh was a truck driver who had worked in both India and Libya before moving to the United States about five years ago, son Harvinder Singh said.

He had recently survived his fourth heart attack.

The senior Atwal moved to the United States in 2001, and the family settled in Elk Grove in 2003.

Both victims lived quiet, suburban lives.

Gurmej Atwal's days consisted of eating breakfast, walking the neighborhood for an hour or so, eating lunch and then walking some more, son Kamaljit Atwal said.

"They didn't even talk to anybody," said Harvinder Singh.

Kamaljit Atwal said his father is a retired civil servant who spent his career in the revenue department of north-west India's Punjab state.

"He is quite a gentle man," the younger Atwal said.

Even neighbors who had never met the victims remembered seeing the bearded, turban-wearing men walking around.

The victims were on East Stockton Boulevard on Friday when they were shot, said police spokesman Christopher Trim. A driver heading north on the frontage road shortly before 4:30 p.m. saw the two men lying on the sidewalk. The driver stopped and called police.

Kamaljit Atwal said skid marks at the scene suggest his father and Singh were victims of a drive-by-shooting.

Police would not confirm that detail.

The shooting took place across the street from a Park-n-Ride lot, and police hope that someone - perhaps getting off work and heading to their car - might have seen something such as a car speeding away or someone running through the area, Trim said.

A chain-link fence with slats separates the frontage road from Highway 99. It's possible a driver in a large vehicle such as a truck might have been able to see something, Trim said.

Randhawa, the newspaper editor, said his own father, an 80-year-old Elk Grove resident, called to say he was scared.



Sunday, March 6, 2011

## ELK GROVE

Surinder Singh, right, was killed, and Gurmej Atwal was injured.



Manny Crisostomo mcrisostomo@sacbee.com

and family Saturday at her Elk Grove home. Singh was the attack as a possible hate crime.

Surinder Singh's widow, Amarjit Kaur, was shot to death Friday while walking with



"My dad used to go every day for a walk - two to three hours," Randhawa said. "Now he's bound in his house."

"We have fear in the community."

Trim said police are working with the Sikh community "to try to ease their fears."

Anyone with information about the shooting is urged to call the Elk Grove Police Department Communication Center at (916) 714-5115 or Crime Alert at (916) 443-HELP (4357).

Call The Bee's Robert Lewis, (916) 321-1061.

# Shootings may be a hate crime

BY ROBERT LEWIS  
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Police said Saturday that they don't know why someone gunned down two men - frail from heart attacks and advancing years - as they slowly ambled through a quiet Elk Grove neighborhood during their daily afternoon walk.

Surinder Singh, 67, died Friday afternoon on the sidewalk along East Stockton Boulevard near Geneva Pointe Drive. Gurmej Atwal, his 78-year-old friend, was shot twice in the chest. His family said he was in critical but stable condition.

In a statement released late Saturday, Elk Grove Police Chief Robert Lehner called on witnesses to come forward and said, "We have no evidence to indicate there was a hate or bias motivation for this crime; however, the obvious Sikh appearance of the men, including the traditional Dastar headwear and lack of any other apparent motive, increasingly raise that possibility."

Lehner also said he had "made preliminary SHOOTINGS | Page A10



NAME CHANGE I, Karamjit Singh Bhule  
Camie Bhule s/o Gurdit Singh Giani  
henceforth be known as Camie Bhule

ELK GROVE SacBee 3-9-2011

## Feds helping out Sikh community

BY STEPHEN MAGAGNINI  
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As the U.S. Justice Department got involved in last Friday's shooting of two Sikh grandfathers out on their afternoon stroll through Elk Grove, investigators wait for the surviving victim, Gurmej Atwal, to recover from multiple gunshot wounds so he can be interviewed.

Atwal, 78, remains in stable but critical condition in an intensive care unit. He underwent a second surgery Monday after taking two bullets to the torso.

"Mr. Atwal has been intubated and has been unable to speak, so the information we received has been very limited," Elk Grove police spokesman Christopher Trim said Tuesday. "It depends on how quickly Mr.

Atwal heals."

Atwal's son Kamaljit said his father is gradually getting better.

The shootings of Atwal and his friend Surinder Singh, 67, who died on the sidewalk along East Stockton Boulevard, have generated an international outcry, said Sikh civil rights leader Darshan Singh Mundy.

The chief minister for the Indian state of Punjab - where Sikhs originate - will ask India's prime minister and foreign minister to ask the U.S. government to protect the estimated 500,000 Sikh Americans, about 35,000 of whom live in the Sacramento region, Mundy said.

The U.S. government's already getting involved: The Department of Justice on Tuesday sent Ronald Wakabayashi, Western regional director of its Community Relations Service, to help the traumatized Sikh families cope with the horrific crime.

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"I wanted to get here quick because what happened was so ugly," said Wakabayashi, whose job is to help the community access any federal or local resources they may need. "We don't know if it's a hate crime, but it certainly has raised people's anxieties that it is."

Wakabayashi - who is not a law enforcement official - has met with the victims' families, community leaders and Elk Grove police.

Sacramento U.S. Attorney Benjamin Wagner said he's assured Sikh leaders the FBI is working with Elk Grove police.

"I've offered our assistance with the investigation and prosecution if it turns out to be a hate crime, which is a federal civil rights violation," Wagner said. "I've also reached out to the Sikh community, who feel they may have been targeted, to participate in future events and try to assure them the DOJ is standing with them during this difficult period."

To try to find witnesses, Elk Grove police stopped vehicles Tuesday along East Stockton Boulevard near where the shooting took place.

3-9-11

## Shooting: Police stop cars

"We started around 3:15 p.m. and finished around 5:30, which mirrors the time of the shooting," said Trim. "There might have been someone that travels the route on a regular basis that might have seen something and filed it away, not thinking it's a big deal. With police officers out there, it might help them recall those details."

The reward for information leading to an arrest in the case is now over \$32,000, said Amar Shergill, an attorney helping coordinate the community effort. To contribute to the reward, contact Shergill at amar@shergilllawfirm.com.

The Local Sikh American Community has pledged \$17,200; the Sikh American Legal Defense & Education Fund, \$3,000; the Neighborhood Market Association, \$2,000; and the Council on American Islamic Relations, \$5,000. In addition, Crime Alert Sacramento has offered a \$5,000 reward for information leading to an arrest if it's determined to be a hate crime.

Anyone who has seen or heard anything that might pertain to the case should call Crime Alert at (916) 443-4357 or the Elk Grove Police Department at (916) 714-5115.

Call The Bee's Stephen Magagnini, (916) 321-1072.



# Reward increases to \$42,000 in Elk Grove Sikh's homicide

By STEPHEN MAGAGNINI  
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The reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for shooting two turbaned Sikh men on their afternoon stroll through Elk Grove on Friday is now more than \$42,000.

The Jewish Community Relations Council, the Jewish Federation of the Sacramento Region and area synagogues have raised more than \$10,000 to add to the reward, said Rabbi Mona Alfi of Congregation B'nai Israel.

The Jewish community remembers how Sikhs and Sacramentans of diverse faiths stood with them after the firebombing of three Sacramento area synagogues, including B'nai Israel, in 1999, Alfi said.

An interfaith prayer vigil will be held at 6 p.m. Friday, at the intersection of East Stockton Boulevard and Geneva Pointe Drive, where

Surinder Singh, 65, was shot to death and Gurmej Atwal, 78, was critically wounded. His condition was upgraded from critical to serious, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Singh's funeral will be held at North Sacramento Funeral Home, 725 El Camino Ave., at 10 a.m. Saturday and is open to the public, said Amar Shergill, of the South Asian Culture & Community Political Action Committee. Others who would like to contribute to the reward can contact amar@shergilllawfirm.com.

Anyone who has seen or heard anything that might pertain to the case should call Crime Alert at (916) 443-4357 or the Elk Grove Police Department at (916) 714-5115.

The Elk Grove Police Department set up a checkpoint on East Stockton Boulevard on Tuesday to try to jar commuters' memories in case they were driving by at the time of the shooting around 4:25 p.m.

Friday. "We got some limited information, nothing ground-shaking," said police spokesman Chris Trim.

John Boisa, a spokesman for Sacramento's Jewish community, said "our prayers and sympathies are with the families of Mr. Singh and Mr. Atwal, and the entire Sikh community during this time of grieving and loss.

"While it may be the case that the perpetrators imagined their victims to be Muslims," Boisa said, "we must denounce all hate crimes in the strongest terms, no matter who the intended victims are."

The Sacramento region has 30,000 Jews across an eight-county area, including 21 regional synagogues serving Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist members.

Call The Bee's Stephen Magagnini, (916) 321-1072.



The California Channel

Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, front, dons a Sikh headress Monday to show solidarity with the Sikh community after two turbaned Sikh men were shot last month in Elk Grove.

## SENATE WATCH 4/13/11

A handful of lawmakers donned traditional Sikh headress on the Senate floor Monday to honor two turbaned Sikh men shot while on a walk in Elk Grove last month. Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg said the gesture showed unity in the wake of the March 5 shooting, which left 65-year-old Surinder Singh dead and 78-year-old Gurmej Atwal critically injured.

- Torey Van Oot



## To dispel myths, Sikhs open up their homes

**P**olice still don't know who gunned down two elderly Sikh men in Elk Grove last month. One, Surinder Singh, died at the scene. The other, Gurmej Atwal, is still in serious condition. The shooter's motive remains a mystery.

Nonetheless, there is widespread fear among Sikhs that the two were targeted because of their turbans. Because they do not cut their hair and wear the distinctive turbans or dastars, Sikhs stand out. Since 9/11, they have sometimes faced taunts and violence from bigots who mistake them for Muslims and single them out for attack based on their appearance.

In an effort to demystify their religion, several members of Sacramento's Sikh community invited local journalists to their homes for dinner last week.

My editorial board colleague Pia Lopez and I accepted an invitation from the Parmindhar Mashian family. Born in India, the parents live with their children in a spotless house on a cul-de-sac in a brand new Natomas subdivision.

Our first surprise was the neat pile of shoes at the doorway. The family does not wear shoes indoors, so we shed ours as well. And then we sat down to learn about Sikhism.

The religion, our eager hosts explained, was born in the Punjab region of India in the 15th century. The founder, Guru Nanak Dev, rejected the rigid Hindu caste system. Sikhs - the word means student - believe in one God and the equality of all people, regardless of status or gender.

Besides the turban, male Sikhs carry a miniature curved sword that signifies they are defenders of the weak and the poor. They

wear special undergarments signifying chastity and they carry a comb which stands for grooming or cleanliness. All Sikhs wear a metal bracelet which serves as a constant reminder to do God's work.

Their temples or gurdwaras are open to all. There is no priest or leader. Anyone can read the sacred text. They serve meals to anyone who comes.

Our hosts volunteered an answer to a question some non-Sikhs are burning to ask: How long is the hair tied up in those turbans?

Answer: It grows to about mid-thigh and then stops.

The meal was vegetarian and Indian. It began with appetizers,

samosas, a potato vegetable mixture wrapped in dough, deep fried and served with several savory dipping sauces.

The main dishes included cauliflower and garbanzo bean casseroles, a fresh green salad, white rice, flat bread and homemade yogurt. And for dessert, rice pudding and fresh fruit - delicious.

The Sikhs we met that evening were a cross-section of America: small-business owners, a teacher, a lawyer, stay-at-home-moms and government workers.

I saw much to admire, their diet for one thing - fresh vegetables and fruits, no alcohol. None of the Sikhs we dined with was overweight. All looked remarkably fit.

I left with two thoughts. First, how American they seemed: friendly, family-focused and hard-working. And second, sadly, that it took a tragedy, the senseless attack on two innocent grandfathers, for this dinner to take place.



Surinder Singh



Saturday, April 16, 2011 |

ELK GROVE

## Second Sikh gunshot victim dies



Gurmej Atwal, 78, died Friday from injuries suffered in the March 4 shooting.

By STEPHEN MAGAGNINI  
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Gurmej Atwal - one of two elderly Sikh Americans shot March 4 on their afternoon walk through Elk Grove - died at 2 p.m. Friday after six weeks in a hospital.

His death devastated his family, Northern California's large Sikh community and Elk Grove officials, who have hit a wall in their search for the shooter.

"He's no more," said his grief-stricken son Kamaljit Atwal. "My dad was going to be a key witness to help make a sketch or look at some pictures."

Surinder Singh, 65, who was also shot, died at the scene. The two grandfathers were walking on East Stockton Boulevard when they were shot at 4 p.m. on a Friday.

Atwal, 78, was still intubated and unable to speak when he finally succumbed to two gunshot wounds, his son said. "First the kidneys went off, then the lungs and then brain. He was shot in the upper right chest, one bullet went straight to his lungs and the other to his pancreas, liver and intestines." His family had believed Atwal was going to pull through. But "from day one, he could not speak a word," his son said.

Gurmej Atwal, a retired civil servant in India's Punjab state revenue department, came to the United States in 2001 from the city of Pharala and became a U.S. citizen.

He was a hard worker who "emphasized good grades, and told us to be productive members of society," Kamaljit Atwal said. "He liked to watch news and talk politics - he was Democrat and voted for Obama."

Atwal also was a bookworm who liked to share his views on Sikhism and engage his friends with Punjabi news articles he'd gone through line by line, his son said.

The attack has drawn national attention, with some speculating the shootings may have been a hate crime because both men wore thick beards and turbans - traditions that have made Sikhs the target of bigotry and violent attacks since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Elk Grove police are investigating the shooting but have not declared it a hate crime.

"When you have no evidence, it's pretty tough to make a call on that," said Elk Grove Mayor Steve Detrick, who added that the shooting might have been an initiation into a gang.

The two Sikh men, who walked daily, provided "a very easy target in a remote location," Detrick said. "It's an L-shaped street blocked out by the soundwall on one side and a concrete barrier they use

VICTIM | Page B3

## Victim: No witness found

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along the freeways on the other."

Despite help from the FBI, random traffic checkpoints to ask motorists if they remember anything from that day and one tip about a tan Ford F150 pickup truck in the area, "nobody's been able to turn anything up," Detrick said.

Northern California's Sikh community has raised more than \$50,000 for information leading to an arrest and conviction, said community

leader Darshan Mundy.

Atwal, who had 10 grandchildren, is survived by his wife, who suffered a stroke and was paralyzed over four years ago, and three sons and a daughter, his son said.

Anyone with information about this case is asked to call Elk Grove police at (916) 714-5115 or Crime Alert at (916) 443-HELP. Callers can remain anonymous.

Call The Bee's Stephen Magagnini, (916) 321-1072.