

Tej Khurana

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I was born in Khugiani. I studied there for two years then moved to Jalalabad. I studied in Punjabi school and in primary and secondary school in Jalalabad. I was also the first person in class. I studied two years in one year. I finished class 12 and did the exam for medical university entrance. I did so well that I was offered a place in Kabul. I was also offered a scholarship in Iran funded by Americans. But because I was married, I was not allowed to go to Kabul. I did the degree in Jalalabad with high marks of 98%. I did a specialist course in University of Ningahar. Because of my results I was offered a lectureship, work in government hospital and work in my private clinic. I was on the committee of Khalsa Diwan. My father had also been. I was General Secretary for four years. I was the special rep of Hindus and Sikhs in the province. Because of that I went to Kabul for a Jirga. I met Dr Sahib there. From then on I often went to Kabul. Dr Najib invited. In 1990 I was appointed to the Loya Jirga. In 1990 I was given a gold medal. I am the first Sikh to be given a gold medal. I have the documents at home with Dr Sahib signature. Most people did two periods of military service. I only did two because many doctors had left. In 1991 the situation in Jalalabad was bad. In 88 the gurdwara was attached, in 89 it was hit by a rocket. During the way of Jalalabad I was there, I looked at patients in the hospital. I worked at night but went home in the day. The mujahidin fired rockets in the day. I worked early in the morning and late at night. If there was a need for blood I announced it in the gurdwara. In 1991 I went to Kabul. I went to Shafa Khana Jamhuriat because I was experienced. I was committed we will be successful. But unexpectedly the mujahidin entered Mazara and captured it. On 18th April Dr Najib said politicians come and go but you should stay and defend it. I realised then something was happening. UN people would come to Kabul and look after Dr Najib and there would be elections. None of this happened. You know the story. We remained in Afghanistan. The mujahidin said they would do nothing to PDPA members. I was committed I would be ok. I had been a general secretary of Khalsa Diwan and met all the mujahidin leaders apart from Hekmatyar. I congratulated them on coming to power and reminded them to look after us. I met Sibghatullah Mujadidi. I called him temporary leader he said he was upset because he was not temporary. He said he not only represented the mujahidin but also the Muslims. He promised me that he would let Dr Sahib [Najibullah] go. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan also came and promised to let Dr Sahib go. But unfortunately he remained in Afghanistan and he was killed in September 1996. Our hope in Afghanistan was lost. We had a hope in Dr Najibullah. We met Ahmad Massoud and Rabbani but were not listened to. In 1985 we were about 70,000 people in Afghanistan. On the arrival of mujahidin, there were 50,000 Sikhs and Hindus left. In the mujahidin time there were about 10,000 of us in Afghanistan. In Taliban there were 4000. In Karzai it was ok some came back but the number decreased. Now there are 7 or 8 in Afghanistan. There are 108 places of worship of Sikhs and 40 Hindu temples. But now they are empty and have no religious books. We had more than 400 Guru Granth Sahib in Afghanistan but now we have none. The situation in Afghanistan is bad for us. I do not think it will improve and the people are neither interested or hopeful in ever returning.

In addition to Islam, other religious were present in Afghanistan. There were Sikhs and Hindus. Sikhs and Hindus had strong relations with one another but are different from one another in religious terms. But in Afghanistan the distinction had not been realised. In 1918 reps of Sikh Lair came and saw there were many Sikhs, They established SKD in 1991. It had several periods. They tried to distinguish Sikhism from Hinduism and they did it. Fortunately, they were successful and established Sikhism. Amrit sanchar [Sikh initiation rite] they also established. On 12th Feb 1921 they did Amrit sanchar of 5 people. They were active in 1979 of which 13,031 of Sikhs in the country had undergone

amrit sanchar. This is a lot of people. If there were 60,000. 30,000 were Sikhs, of those many were children so it was 13,000 people of 15,000 who had been touched by Khalsa Diwan. They did many other things, particular in fields of women rights. Women were allowed to marry after being widowed. Until then widowed women had been forced to marry a brother of their deceased husband, Sikh Khalsa Diwan said the woman should have the choice who they marry. They started nagar kirtan [Sikh procession] in 1925. The first Sikh procession was on a holiday announced by Amanullah Khan. Two were appointed to Loya Jirga. Babar Mangal Singh Tara Sink. They were appointed in the LG, the parliament. 1925,1926 and 1928. They also established school. They also arranged group marriages that just costed 350 rupees on behalf of either family. The gurdwara paid for the food. They were recognised by the government. Every difficult faced the government asked Khalsa Diwan. In our religion divorce and second marriage is not allowed. When the committee was registered we faced no more marriages. The committee used to make them live separately and then bring them back together. In 1992 Khalsa Diwan Welfare Society was established in India. In 1997 it was registered. It has a large office and a guesthouse in Amritsar. Afghans also established gurdwara in India. One Gret Kalash which was originally Punjabi but now in the hands of the Afghans because they are in the majority and won positions in the elections. There are many in Tilak Nagar Gurjinder Gur Hara Sahib Manor Nagar there are three Khosti and two Qandahiri. If we put them together there are 10 gurdwaras. They address problems of the people. Funding comes to them from America and here. When people were killed in 2018 and in 2020, food, rent and things are sent to them. Most people have left India on their own money. About 100,000 Sikhs and Indians live in the world. About 10,000 and 50,000 in Europe, 2000 in America, 1000 in Canada, 1200 in Moscow, 300-400 in Dubai. The final people to leave Afghanistan are helped by Mameet Singh Poldar. He was a young MP in Canada. Sikhs in Helmand were told by the Taliban to become Muslims or to leave. He worked with the World Sikh organisations, and went to India and met Helmandis and decided to bring them to Canada. In Canada there is a scheme by which 5 families are able to sponsor one person to come to the country. They proceeded with this plan having consulted the government and World Sikh Foundation it was successful. 240 Helmandis went to Canada. Another 274 Afghan Sikhs who were in Afghanistan at the time of the Taliban takeover. They were at the airport and the Canadian government was requested to bring them and accepted. However, it was not able to bring them. We claimed that they should be brought and the government of Canada agreed. 100 have gone. Another 300 people are going. The Canadian government has requested 34 million Canadian dollars. We have gathered 17 million Canadian dollars and when the remaining dollars are gathered those people will also go to Canada.