


# PUNJAB SCHOOL: GIVING A GIFT OF HOPE

## Introduction

### Focus

The state of public education in Punjab, India, is shoddy by Canadian standards. This has prompted one generous Canadian, an expatriate Punjabi, to fund a village school in Nazamdipur. This *News in Review* story looks at the efforts of Buda Singh Lali to bring hope in the form of a quality education to children in a small Punjab village.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

Imagine a school system that is in such rough shape that the government is thinking of getting out of the education business altogether. Imagine a school system where teachers are absent over a third of the time. Imagine a school system that is so dilapidated that parents will pay almost anything to get their kids into a private school. The tragic reality is that one need not imagine this scenario: the premise presented basically describes the state of education in Punjab, India.

The Punjab School Education Board has investigated a number of different schemes to repair the state's school system. Recent efforts to consolidate the four-tier system into a two-tier model have managed to tighten administrative control over the school system and reduced education-related expenses. Other initiatives to improve access to education for the 36 per cent of students not attending school, and upgrades to facilities and vocational schools, show that the school board is trying to get things under control. However, Punjab's education woes go beyond any quick fixes. Some estimates put teacher absenteeism at almost 40 per cent, well above the national average. Efforts to reign in the teachers have proven futile. The perception is that the teachers earn high salaries for

doing very little to improve the minds of Punjab's youth. In essence, the state of education in Punjab will require tremendous expenditures and a generation of rigorous effort to bring the system up to an acceptable standard.

Meanwhile others refuse to wait for the government to rescue the young from a life without education. Buda Singh Lali, a feisty 78-year-old man from Edmonton, wants to give back to his country of origin. Lali has established the Indo-Canadian School in his hometown of Nazamdipur, India, in the hopes of giving village children the gift of education. According to Lali, "If you can get a good education, the whole world is open for you." For 1 200 rupees a month (half a month's salary for most people in Nazamdipur) children can attend Lali's school. Students learn the life skills of discipline and gratitude alongside the academic disciplines of English, science, and math. English in particular is seen by many citizens of Punjab as a ticket to economic prosperity. Meanwhile Lali, a man who put up \$100 000 of his own money and lobbied Alberta's Wild Rose Foundation for an additional \$140 000, hopes the Indo-Canadian School will continue to be affordable and allow its students to live their hopes and dreams.

## Analysis

1. Describe the problems within the school system in Punjab.
2. What effort is the government undertaking to improve the education system?
3. Why are some people unwilling to wait for the government to improve the education system?
4. Why is Buda Singh Lali's Indo-Canadian School a ray of hope for many people living in Nazamdipur?
5. What important life skills are students at the Indo-Canadian School learning?

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## *Video Review*

1. What is public education like in Punjab?

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2. How has Gurbinder changed since coming to his new school?

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3. Why did Gurbinder's father jump at the chance to get his son out of the government schools?

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4. What are the three principles on which the Indo-Canadian school was founded?

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5. What prompted Buda Singh Lali to start a school in Nazamdipur?

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6. a) How much does it cost per month to attend the Indo-Canadian School?

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b) Is this a lot of money for people living in Nazamdipur? \_\_\_\_\_

7. How important is learning English to people living in Nazampidur? Why?

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8. What other projects is Buda Singh Lali planning?

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9. In your opinion what else is needed in Punjab schools? Explain.

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10. In the video, Buda Singh Lali claims that, "If you can get a good education, the whole world is open for you." Do you agree or disagree. Explain fully in your notebook.

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## **Punjab Profile**

### **General Information**

The word *Punjab* consists of the two words *Panj*, which means five and *Aab*, which means water. This name was given to a region in northwest India to symbolize its five main rivers. Punjab is located on fertile land and, historically, has been subject to a fair amount of foreign influence. Persians, Arabs, the British, and Turko-Mongolians are just a few of the groups who have contributed to its development. Punjab has also been a fertile ground for several religious movements, including Buddhism, Sikhism, and several schools of Islam. The present borders of Punjab run from the east basin of the river Bias to the Indus in the west. On the north the state is bounded by the Kashmiri Himalayas and on the south it reaches the plains of Rajasthan and Cholistan. However, over time Punjab has seen its boundaries expand as well as shrink. The height of Punjab power occurred under the reign of Mughal emperor Babur and the empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. With the partition of India in 1947, the borders of the region shrank to the current size. Presently, Punjab is divided, with half its historical land mass in Pakistan and the other half in India.

### **Other Relevant Information**

**Area:** 50 362 square kilometers (Punjab occupies 1.54 per cent of India's total geographical area).

**Capital:** Chandigarh (population: 642 000)

**Population:** 23.51 million (1999)

**Rural population:** 16.56 million (70.45 per cent)

**Urban population:** 6.95 million (29.55 per cent)

The population of Punjab consists mainly of Punjabis and Rajputs.

**Labour force:** More than 80 per cent of Punjab is cultivated, and farming is the leading occupation. The major crops are wheat, maize (corn), rice, pulses (legumes), sugar cane, and cotton. Among the livestock raised are buffalo and other cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry. The principal industries include the manufacturing of textiles, sewing machines, sporting goods, starch, fertilizers, bicycles, scientific instruments, electrical goods, and machine tools, as well as the processing of sugar and pine oil.

**Languages:** The official language is Punjabi, which is spoken by about two-thirds of the population. Many people are also fluent in Hindi, English and Urdu.

**Currency:** Rupee

**State animal:** The black buck – Referred to by locals as the *kala hiran*, the black buck is a graceful antelope. The fawn's coat is yellowish but turns black at maturity. It is found on the plains and tends to avoid forests and hilly tracks. Herds of black bucks number between 20 and 100. With keen eyesight and speed, the black buck responds to alarm calls quickly. Other state mascots: State Bird – baz (eastern goshawk); State Tree – shisham

**Geography:** Punjab is found on the globe at 29' 30" N to 32' 32" N latitude and 73' 55" E to 76' 50" E longitude. Most of the state is an alluvial plain irrigated by canals. Punjab's arid south-



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## **Sikhism: The Faith**

### Did you know . . .

*Sikh* means student, or learner. There are 400 000 Sikhs in Canada. There are 23 million Sikhs in the world. Most Sikhs live in Punjab.

### Further Research

An interesting WebQuest activity on the *Komagata maru* incident is available at [www.webquests.bc.ca/wqs/ss/komagatamaru/new\\_page\\_2.htm](http://www.webquests.bc.ca/wqs/ss/komagatamaru/new_page_2.htm).

In the late 15th century, in a small town called Taswandi in the northern part of present-day Pakistan, a boy no more than 13 years old stubbornly refused to take part in a Hindu coming-of-age ritual known as the sacred thread ceremony. His parents were mortified, but this wouldn't be the last time the boy named Nanak would challenge Hindu tradition and his parents. One day the boy's father gave him money and sent him out on family business. Instead of doing what his father had asked, the boy gave the money away to holy men called *sadhus* who had taken a vow of poverty. Throughout his early life, Nanak demonstrated a tremendous capacity for compassion and generosity.

Nanak experienced a life-changing event when he was 30 years old. According to tradition, Nanak went to bathe in the river Bain one day. He submerged himself into the water and did not emerge again for three days. When he resurfaced, Nanak shared a revelation that has proven to be a cornerstone of Sikhism with the people of his village. He said, "There is neither Hindu nor Muslim, so whose path shall I follow? I shall follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and the path which I follow is God's" (*Exploring World Religions*, Oxford University Press, p. 363). This marked Nanak's departure from the physical realm into the spiritual realm of enlightenment as his followers began to refer to him as Guru Nanak. In a bold and courageous life of dedication to God, whom Sikhs refer to as *Waheguru* (which means "Wonderful Lord"), Guru Nanak both rejected the caste system of the dominant Hindu culture and established a

unique approach to monotheism that differed from his Muslim counterparts. He travelled throughout India and made his way to Sri Lanka, Tibet, Iran, and Iraq, preaching the truth and majesty of Waheguru.

Guru Nanak was followed by a succession of nine other gurus who strove to build the community of faith. The 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh, baptized many of his followers into the *Khalsa* (which means "the pure") and declared himself the final human guru. In an act of selfless dedication to the wisdom of Sikh scripture, Guru Gobind Singh declared the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred text of Sikhism, to be the final and wisest guru.

From the time of the gurus to the modern day, Sikhs have stood out as a distinct and devoted religious group. During the time of Guru Gobind Singh, Sikhs adopted the Five Ks to distinguish themselves from other religious groups. Many devoted Sikhs wear all the Five Ks as an outward sign of their devotion to their faith. These include:

- *kesh* – uncut hair (often covered by a turban) symbolizing a rejection of vanity
- *kangha* – a ceremonial comb that symbolizes neatness and cleanliness
- *kara* – a bracelet worn on the right arm that symbolizes strength
- *kirpan* – a short sword or dagger that symbolizes dignity
- *kaccha* – short pants; a physical reminder of the garment worn by some Sikh warriors of the past

### Sikhs in Canada

Sikhs began coming to Canada at the turn of the 20th century, settling mostly

## Further Research

For more about Sikhism, go to: CanTeach's Sikhism page: [www.canteach.ca/elementary/sikhism.html](http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/sikhism.html); Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance: [www.religionstolerance.org/sikhism.htm](http://www.religionstolerance.org/sikhism.htm); BBC Religion and Ethics: Sikhism: [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/); Sikhism: Thy Name is Love and Grace: [www.sriguru.granthsahib.org](http://www.sriguru.granthsahib.org); The Sikhism Home Page: [www.sikhs.org](http://www.sikhs.org); The Sikh Network: [www.sikhnet.com](http://www.sikhnet.com); The Sikh Faith: [www.sikhism.com](http://www.sikhism.com)

## Archives

*News in Review* covered the Air India Bombing in two stories: *Bitter End; The Air India Trial Verdict* (May 2005) and *The Air India Crash: A Racist Investigation*, September 1995

in British Columbia. Early Sikh immigrants were victims of prejudice and racial discrimination, with the story of *Komagata Maru* serving as a dreadful tale of how established Canadians treated people they deemed different. In 1914, *Komagata Maru*, a Japanese steamliner chartered by a rich Sikh man, arrived in Vancouver with 376 people on board. The passengers hoped to settle in Canada, living with members of Vancouver's Sikh community and finding work to help build a new life for themselves in a country they considered the land of opportunity. Instead of embracing these new arrivals, Canadian authorities refused to let the potential immigrants off the boat and, despite assurances from members of the Sikh community, they were summarily turned away and sent back to India. In a tragic epilogue to the story, many of the Sikhs turned away by Canada died in a battle with British forces upon their return to India.

Modern Sikh history has been dominated by a movement among some members of the Sikh community to establish an independent Sikh nation known as Khalistan in the state of Punjab in India. In a brutal twist of fate, the elation of victory in the Indian independence movement in 1947 was clouded by the division of Punjab between India and Pakistan. Despite some assurances that Sikhs would not be left out of the quest for independence, Britain agreed to establish a Muslim state in Pakistan alongside a Hindu state in India. The Sikhs of Punjab were considered a small enough minority to leave out of the equation. Since that time, some Sikh leaders have consistently called for the formation of Khalistan. This movement reached its height in the early 1980s when Jarnail

Singh Bhindranwale proved to be such a threat to the authorities in India that the Indian army decided to attack him and his militia. This proved to be more complicated than it sounded since Bhindranwale and his cohorts had sought refuge in the Akal Takht, part of the most sacred shrine of Sikhism—the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Nonetheless, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gave the orders for Operation Bluestar to proceed on June 8, 1984—with devastating results. While Bhindranwale and his militia were killed in the assault, so were thousands of pilgrims gathering at the Golden Temple to commemorate the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev. Sikhs around the world were both horrified and infuriated by the attack. Within a year, Indira Gandhi was killed by her Sikh bodyguards. Then the conflict assumed a Canadian connection when Sikh extremists were accused of perpetrating the worst mass murder in Canadian history—the bombing of Air India Flight 182—in response to the attack on the Golden Temple. Mainstream Sikhs were horrified by the event and support for the Khalistani freedom movement waned significantly.

Since the tumultuous days of the 1980s, Sikhs have emerged as a significant religious group on the Canadian social landscape. Buoyed by a tradition based on compassion and inclusion, Sikhs have welcomed Canadians into their places of worship (known as a *gurdwara*) and sought to spread their roots in Canada while maintaining as many links as possible with their fellow Sikhs in Punjab. In the end, Canadian Sikhs may be among the most devoted religious people in the nation.

## Inquiry

1. Who was Guru Nanak?

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2. Define *Waheguru*.

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3. Whom do Sikhs consider to be the final guru? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Identify and explain the Five Ks.

Identification of Five Ks	Explanation

5. Briefly describe the *Komagatu Maru* incident.

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6. What is Khalistan? What conflicts related to the Khalistan movement occurred in the 1980s?

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7. In your notebook, describe how Sikhs sought to include their fellow Canadians in their religious community.

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### Canadian Aid

When Buda Singh Lali wanted to start a school in Nazamdipur, a small town in Punjab, India, he knew where to turn. Besides drawing on his own resources (to the amount of \$100 000), he applied for funding from the Wild Rose Foundation, a lottery-funded philanthropic agency run by the Alberta government. The Wild Rose Foundation provides funding for volunteer-driven, non-profit organizations whose goal is to perform charitable and humanitarian work for people in need. Money is allocated in the form of grants to local groups within Alberta as well as foreign projects like Lali's Indo-Canadian School in Nazamdipur. To date, the Wild Rose Foundation has given over \$140 000 to the Indo-Canadian School as part of its International Development Program. The school has used the money for things like classroom reconstruction and essential supplies like desks and blackboards. According to statistics gathered in 2004, the Wild Rose Foundation typically gives almost \$6-million to various non-profit community service organizations as well as many Alberta-based non-government organizations.

The Wild Rose Foundation is just one example of the philanthropic work that Canadians do to help people living in needy communities around the globe. At the federal level, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) strives to share some of Canada's wealth with people in need of our assistance. Founded in 1968, CIDA has managed to establish itself as a reliable government aid agency, pledging and delivering almost \$4-billion dollars in aid to disadvantaged nations

in 2005 alone. Eventually Canada hopes to reach a target of giving seven per cent of our country's gross national income to foreign aid. The allocation of that money and the administration of foreign aid are handled by CIDA. Currently, CIDA is administering projects in Africa, the Middle East, North and South America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. One of CIDA's primary goals is to ensure that all children have access to education. While enrollment is up in most developing countries, CIDA still estimates that 100 million children do not go to school, while an additional 150 million drop out before the age of 10. Their goal is to dramatically improve this number by 2015.

The Wild Rose Foundation and CIDA are examples of how Canada strives to be a conscientious and generous global citizen. What sets Canada's aid for the needy apart from many other nations is the fact that, when Canada makes a commitment, it delivers on that promise. Canadians are also ambitious in their foreign-aid goals. This sentiment is captured in Canada's Millennium Development Goals, which are to:

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- achieve universal primary education
- promote gender equality and empower women
- reduce child mortality
- improve maternal health
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- ensure environmental sustainability
- develop a global partnership for development

These Canadian goals mirror the United Nations Millennium Develop-

ment Goals set out in 2000. With generous souls like Buda Singh Lali and the will of the Canadian people behind them, there is no reason why the Canadian government cannot meet its foreign aid targets by 2015.

Sources: The Wild Rose Foundation – [www.cd.gov.ab.ca/all\\_about\\_us/commissions/wild\\_rose/](http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/all_about_us/commissions/wild_rose/); Canadian International Development Agency – [www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/index-e.htm](http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/index-e.htm); The United Nations Millennium Development Goals – [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)

## Questions

1. What is the Wild Rose Foundation?

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2. How has it helped the Indo-Canadian School?

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3. What is CIDA?

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4. What education goal does CIDA hope to meet by 2015?

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5. Read the Millennium Development Goals. Do you think it is realistic for Canada to hope to meet these goals by 2015? Explain.

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6. Do you personally support Canada's Millennium Development Goals? Why?/Why not?

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# PUNJAB SCHOOL: GIVING A GIFT OF HOPE

## Activity

Watch the *News in Review* video and complete the following comparison chart and the discussion activity that follows.

Comparison Category	Typical Punjab Schools	The Indo-Canadian School	Your School
The role of the teacher			
The role of the student			
Funding for the school			
Description of school building			
Description of school resources (books, televisions, etc.)			
Discipline (what does the school do when someone misbehaves?)			

### Discussion

Using the chart as a frame of reference, answer the following questions:

1. How is education in the Punjab public system different from education in the private system (e.g. the Indo-Canadian School)?
2. How is education in Punjab—either public or private—different from education in your school?
3. Which system do you think provides the best education? Explain.