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From Guru Nanak to New Zealand: Mobility in the Sikh Tradition and the History of the Sikh Community in New Zealand to 1947

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Abstract:

Currently the research on Sikhs in New Zealand has been defined by W. H. McLeod's *Punjabis in New Zealand* (published in the 1980s). The studies in this book revealed Sikh history in New Zealand through the lens of oral history by focussing on the memory of the original settlers and their descendants. However, the advancement of technology has facilitated access to digitised historical documents including newspapers and archives. This dissertation uses these extensive databases of digitised material (combined with non-digital sources) to recover an extensive, if fragmentary, history of South Asians and Sikhs in New Zealand.

This dissertation seeks to reconstruct mobility within Sikhism by analysing migration to New Zealand against the backdrop of the early period of Sikh history. Covering the period of the Sikh Gurus, the eighteenth century, the period of the Sikh Kingdom and the colonial era, the research establishes a pattern of mobility leading to migration to New Zealand. The pattern is established by utilising evidence from various aspects of the Sikh faith including Sikh institutions, scripture, literature, and other historical sources of each period to show how mobility was indigenous to the Sikh tradition. It also explores the relationship of Sikhs with the British, which was integral to the absorption of Sikhs into the Empire and continuity of mobile traditions that ultimately led them to New Zealand.

In New Zealand, the research begins with an analysis of the early South Asian history in the country. The analysis provides a context for the arrival of the Sikhs and also reveals new evidence of a non-Sikh Indian community previously unknown to scholars. This has placed South Asian settlement decades earlier than documented in the current research. The research also uncovers new evidence showing an earlier arrival date of the Sikhs in the 1880s, a wider geographic dispersal, the presence of greater numbers, and extensive integration into local society before the twentieth century.

Research on the first half of the twentieth century brings forth new evidence on Sikh life in New Zealand. The information provides a detailed account of life in the public sphere including religious and cultural life, interactions with colonial institutions, political activities, and a multitude of connections in local communities. It also highlights Sikh contributions to local communities in areas such as military service, sports and entertainment. The information details the shifting attitudes and perspectives about the Sikhs and also Sikh perspectives towards greater New Zealand society as they sought to define themselves and their position in local society.

Ultimately, the research in this dissertation provides new evidence on the Sikh community in New Zealand, reshaping our understanding of Sikh history in the country. Though Sikhs were a community of small numbers, but they were a distinct and significant part of New Zealand's history.

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Nanak, Indian spiritual teacher who was the first Guru of the Sikhs, a monotheistic religious group that combines Hindu and Muslim influences. His teachings, expressed through devotional hymns, many of which still survive, stressed salvation from rebirth through meditation on the divine name. Emeritus Professor of History, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. Author of *Gurū Nānak and the Sikh Religion*. See [Article History](#). Nanak, (born April 15, 1469, Rai Bhoi di Talvandi [now Nankana Sahib, Pakistan], near Lahore, India—died 1539, Kartarpur, Punjab), Indian spiritual teacher who was the first Guru of the Sikhs, a monotheistic religious group that combines Hindu and Muslim influences. New Zealand was keen to show its loyalty to the British Empire and sent troops to fight for Britain in the South African War in 1899. It was the first war New Zealand soldiers were sent overseas to fight. New Zealand gains independence. It is marked with increasingly well-attended ceremonies. To explain the history of the day and its significance to New Zealand today, WW100 has created brief guides translated into 3 languages. [A guide to ANZAC day | WW100. World War II. New Zealand troops fought overseas again in the Second World War in support of the United Kingdom \(UK\).](#) However, the fall of Singapore shook New Zealanders' confidence that Britain could guarantee the country's security. New Zealand may be a young country, but it's not devoid of compelling traditions. A culmination of Maori customs and European-based quirks have helped this country carve out its own set of customs. To give you a better idea, here are seven traditions that only Kiwis will be able to understand and relate to. [Gumboot Day](#). Taihape is a small town in the centre of the North Island that prides itself on being 'the gumboot capital of the world'. Every year since 1985, the community celebrates Gumboot Day — a fun-filled family event that includes the town's famed gumboot throwing contest. The iconic Sikhism is the fifth most adhered to religion in New Zealand, with 0.88% of New Zealanders identifying themselves as Sikhs. Small numbers of Sikh immigrants from Punjab settled in New Zealand from the late 1800s. Large-scale Sikh immigration began after changes to immigration policies in the 1980s. The New Zealand Sikh Society was established in 1964 and first Sikh Gurdwara opened in 1977. The Sikh population in New Zealand more than doubled from 9,500 in the 2006 Census to 19,000 in the 2013 Census.[1] Sikhism is currently the fourth largest non-Christian religion in New Zealand, behind Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Sikhism is a world religion with over 27 million followers worldwide, with majority of their population in Punjab, India. [YouTube Encyclopedic](#). 1/2. There is a significant history of many Punjabis being dairy farmers throughout New Zealand,[citation needed] many of them being great pioneers. With the Sikh community in New Zealand increasing, the New Zealand Sikh Society was developed in 1964, and the first New Zealand Sikh Temple was built in Hamilton in 1977 and another in 1986 in Otahuhu.