

A Sikh from Norway

By MANOHAR SINGH GILL

He walked into the plush office of a refrigeration company in New Delhi and asked to see the managing director. His request was simple. Could they please build him a cold store in his native Jullundur? The managing director was surprised.

The man who sat opposite him was a small mild-mannered and soft-spoken Sikh. He seemed not the type who could order a cold store just like that. His dress was modest, his speech somewhat diffident.

"How much can you spend?" the managing director asked.

"About 20 lakh", answered the man, almost shyly.

"Where did you earn this?" the managing director could not help asking.

Phuman Singh explained: "I come from a Jullundur village and went to England for naukri as I had little land. I tried very hard, but could not find a job in England. So I went to Germany. Failing even there, I heard of the opportunities in Scandanavian countries and managed to reach Norway. For many days

I walked the streets of Oslo looking for work but found none. They have very strict rules, forbidding employment for foreigners.

"But the great Guru was with me. One day I found a 'help wanted' notice. The Saab was kind, and gave me a temporary one-week job, as a spray painter. I finished the job in three days."

SIMPLE TECHNIQUE

"How did you manage that?"

"Saab ji, it is very simple. Those people work with one spray gun. I saw no reason why I should not use two since God has given me two hands. So I worked day after day, a spray gun in each hand. The Saab was surprised and delighted. I had done the work of many men. He asked me to stay and sponsored me for a working visa.

"Seven years I worked with him — 18 hours a day, every day of the week. Here in India we have nothing but holidays. Not those people. I even worked on Saturdays and Sundays. Since there was

much work to be done, I called my Sardarni over, with the Saab's help.

We worked hard and lived a simple life. The food is good there and there is a lot of meat and butter. What more does a man need? We saved plenty, and looked forward to the day of our return to Punjab, for Norway is a strange country with bitterly cold winter, many times worse than ours. In the winter the sun never sets, and it is hard for a Punjabi to go to sleep. The land is all mountainous, and there are no wheat fields. So here I am with my savings and my request. Please build me a cold store."

SAD EXPERIENCE

The company took on the job, and work started in Phuman Singh's native village. It went on for many months, long past the scheduled date of completion. Phuman Singh was a harassed man, looking for cement, bricks, steel, and permits for other things. There was nobody to help him. Everybody wanted to take advantage of him. Some

were envious, others looking for opportunities to exploit his naivete.

At last the cold store was completed. Phuman Singh, having learnt the ways of the land, even managed to get a Minister to inaugurate it. But then one morning he was back in the managing director's office.

"What is it now, Phuman Singh ji?" enquired the managing director.

"Saab ji, I have come to say, goodbye. I am going back to Norway, with my gharwali."

"What on earth for?" asked the surprised managing director. "You have everything here now — money, property, status."

"That is true, Saab ji," answered Phuman Singh. "No doubt I have all these, but the people here are not good. This land is full of 'bhai bandi', 'sifarish' and 'beyimani'. I prefer Norway."

"But, Phuman Singh, won't you feel homesick for Punjab in far-off Norway?" asked the managing director.

"No, Saab ji, if the Guru is with me, how can I be lonely?"