

# A PUNJABI IN CAMBRIDGE

I heard of him as soon as I arrived in Cambridge. The one and only Mr. Singh. We met a few days later. It was not difficult. He stands out even when surrounded by mini skirts and long-haired intellectuals. Introduction was no problem. I just went up to him and greeted him in Punjabi. We met like old friends, with much embracing and back slapping, somewhat to the amazement of his friends. The occasion was obviously a special one.

It is not often that two Amritsarites meet in Cambridge. The friends were dismissed and we repaired to the nearest pub to slake our thirst, talk Punjabi and tell our respective Odesseys. Mine was a drab tale of the latest floods, famines and fights in India. His was more colourful. Three years in the West had seem to that.

During my stay I saw a lot of him and my admiration grew with each meeting. Mr. Singh certainly did not suffer from any complex. He marched into parties as if he were the VIP there. He expected people to stop in mid-sentence and look around. They always did. His striking appearance assured that.

A quick survey of the room and he glided off to the nearest beauty with his compliments. Within a few minutes of joining a group he would be in earnest conversation with the prettiest girl around — minor obstacles such as love-lorn Dons notwithstanding.

His technique was simple but effective. Invariably he guessed cor-

rectly the country which produced such a pearl! And then he launched into a rich paean of praise. He loved Paris in spring, the Alps in winter and Scandinavia in summer. To Norwegians he expressed his secret and nostalgic longing for the mountains. The English were assured that he came from the plains of India and loved nothing better than the Cambridge flatlands.

He had of course never been outside Cambridge but this did not detract from the genuineness of his enthusiasm. Rare was a heart that was not moved. He considered it

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his sacred duty to meet each and every lady in the party and thus glided around leaving behind hastily-scribbled telephone numbers and addresses.

A couple of glasses of sherry made him even more gallant. I remember a King's College research student who had been to India, laughingly warning his girl friend, "You are safe with any Indian except this one. Beware of him!" But she didn't seem to want to!

No social occasion seemed complete without Singh. The Cambridge Union invited the Miss World Contestants for a visit to the university. Undergraduates were charged princely sums of money for the privilege of escorting the girls. But when the 30 odd

beauties arrived Singh was somehow there, heading the official welcome.

He made his personal selection of the winner and calmly walked off to show her the town! In the evening there was a dance. He was there flitting around like an exotic butterfly in a garden full of roses. The poor organisers saw their party slip slowly but surely into Mr. Singh's hands. At 2 a.m. a happy but tired Mr. Singh stood at the door to say good luck and good night to each girl!

My friend loved the university and unlike most he was not partial to any one college. He treated all colleges as his own. It was his considered opinion that St. John's squash courts and showers were the best. Trinity could be proud of its washing and pressing facilities, but there was nothing to beat the King's College bar for a quiet evening.

He duly bestowed his patronage on the best in each college. The porters never questioned his rights. They were only too pleased and flattered if Mr. Singh was around. And so it boils down to this. Mr. Singh is the best ambassador of his country. In Cambridge at least every Indian is furiously trying to imitate his distinctive dress and manners. No one can tell about the next world but they certainly seem passports to success in this one. Mr. Singh is truly one among one and a quarter lakhs in Cambridge.