CHAPTER XIV - SIKHS ABROAD.

The Sikhs have settled in all the countries of the world. They are mostly found in Canada, South and East Africa, United States of America, England, Fiji Island (where out of a total population of approximately 1,60,000 Indians, about 1/4 th are Sikhs) and Malaya State. They have migrated from Punjab and Pepsu and have proved themselves as the best agriculturists and have taken to many industries. In California, they have established their reputation as a farmer, and in the Lumber Industry of Victoria in Canada they have acquired quite a notable position. In the U.S.A., a Sikh contested the elections and is now a member of the House of Representatives.

The Sikh population of California during the year 1952 was about 2,000 though it ranged between 15,000 to 20,000 about 25 years back. They had made great progress in the Imperial Valley, over there and are now owners of 2,500 acres of land in each case often, due to their distinction in the farming work. The improvement on land which cannot be carried out by a Mexican in six years is being done by a Sikh in six months' time. Formerly they had no citizenship
rights but now those who are settled there since the year 1824 have secured those rights due to the efforts of Bhagat Singh Thind and some other Sikhs.

In Iraq and Iran, there are about 100 Sikh families and are financially well off. The Sikh population in England is about 2,000. Their hard work has brought them dividends by virtue of which they are owning their own landed properties. In Malaya States they have their interests in the Rubber plantations. They have taken to Government services also in their countries of settlement.

There are about 100 Sikh families in Nyasaland alone in Central Africa. The majority of them went to Nyasaland with the British Army during World War I, and later, some of them settled there. When the Nyasaland Railways were being built, labour was brought from India, comprised mainly Sikhs from Punjab. Gradually, when the country developed, a few more people came. Chaudhri Bros. is the biggest planting firm. They have thousands of acres in the northern part of the country (Lilongwe) with property in Limbe and Blantyre. There is a handsome Gurdwara in Limbe which was also built with the efforts of the Chaudhri family. The majority of the Sikh farmers are in Lilongwe.

Sikhs and members of other Asian communities

arrived in the British East Africa about half a century ago. Mostly, the Sikh community was responsible for laying or starting Railway work from Mombasa to Kampala in the early stages and in very difficult times. During the last 50 years, the Sikhs have been well placed in all walks of life in this country, such as traders, millers, farmers, and civil servants. The first Asian Deputy Mayor for Nairobi city is Mohan Singh, Director of the well established firm of Naranjan Singh Brothers and comes from the village of Kangra in Jullundur district. Apart from this post, there are many Sikhs holding responsible positions in the Government, the civil services, banks and other institutions in the colony. As for sport, Sikhs have made a great contribution from the British East Africa, especially in Hockey, and comprised more than 50% of the team which went to the Asian games in Australia.

In Tanganyika and the Uganda, their contribution had been no less than that of other communities in every walk of life. In nearly all important towns of the country there is a Sikh Gurdwara and in big cities, there are more. In Mombasa, Nairobi, Kampala, Kisumu, Nakaru, Dar-es-Salaam, Dodoma and Mwanza there are Gurdwaras and schools for Sikh children. Attendance in these schools ranges from 100 to 2,000 (in Nairobi). Schools are run under proper management and trained

* Sikh Review - Calcutta -- April 1952
(an article by H.S.Gujral).
Staff, either from India or locally trained teachers are employed. In Dar-es-Salaam, Sikhs have opened a Boarding house for boys and girls from upcountry Tanganyika.

It is the prosperity of these Sikhs which is tempting some of the Sikhs in Punjab to seek employment abroad, as they are not able to have descent living in their new homeland and being of adventurous nature. Some information in this respect bears testimony to this.

During the year 1957, an interesting article appeared in the "Current" of 24th July - an English weekly newspaper of Bombay - with a headline in bold words, "EXPORT OF Sikhs". The author of this article blames the Government of India for the export of Sikhs to foreign countries. He says while on the one hand, directives are given to air-lines to discourage this migration, the Government appears to be doing nothing to stop it.

But why do these emigrating Sikhs, usually very poor, always travel expensively by air instead of taking the cheaper form of sea travel? "The reason is that if they travel by sea they need to have a certificate from the Controller of Emigration. But this certificate, someone has discovered..."
to the U.K., have been mortgaging or selling even their little plots of land to find the money for a one-way Bombay/London ticket (approximately Rs.1,000 tourist class). Through Sikhs already established in the U.K., they find labour as carpenters, electricians etc. chiefly in North England and earn approximately £12 a week. Out of this, they live on £52, save £10 and pay off their mortgage. When they have saved enough, they send for their wives and families."

The author quotes the case of one Mrs. Kaur, who figured in the Air-France incident, was a case of saving put into practice. Her husband works for an electrical firm in Coventry (England). The desire for an embargo on Sikhs is only on the side of the Government of India. The U.K. Government does not object to the Sikhs entering Britain. Short of skilled labour, British firms find these Sikhs very cheap to employ.

"Now, exporting Sikhs appears to have become a lucrative business", says the author, "and there are numerous travel agencies which appear to be doing good business in this form of export. It is evident that an uneducated Sikh in a village in the Punjab, or working in Amritsar, is hardly conversant with the complicated routine of passports, tax clearance certificates, inoculations etc., which are required for travel abroad. I understand that regular agencies are at work which, in the first place, try and sell the Sikhs to firms in England and which run a sort of employment Bureau
in India. When a man has been located for a job — or when a job has been located for a man — the machinery of shipping the Sikhs comes into action. All that the Sikh has to do is to find the funds for his ticket, for the agent’s commission and for the incidentals of travel. It is the agent who does everything else — and strangely, he also finds someone to sign the guarantee papers which are necessary before a passport is issued."

When the funds are found and the agent has collected his handsome profit therefrom, he proceeds to physically export the Sikh. The author continues that he learnt from a reliable source that there is even a school for exportable Sikhs in the Jungle. What do they learn in this School? It is a brief training of a week or two. The Sikh is told how to use a knife and fork; he is taught elementary hygiene, made to use toilets, pull chains and get a nodding acquaintance with the forms of life which he will meet in the U.K. Then, on the last day, he is actually given a special bath and groomed for his departure to the U.K.

The author continues "while this may sound amusing to some people, I find it almost pathetic that Indian nationals are virtually being shipped like cattle to countries and climates to which they are not accustomed, merely because there they earn a higher living wage than here. Amazingly, the Sikhs themselves appear to like it and want it and, though
actual figures are not available, there should be, according to my calculations, a whole colony of Sikhs already well established in the U.K."

It is evident from the above account that this moving of the Sikhs abroad is due to the economic considerations of better living than they are having in Punjab. They were being driven to leave India because, as a result of the Partition, they left behind their rich arable lands in the West Pakistan and in return they have got lands which are hardly cultivable. This also shows that they have not been rehabilitated to the extent they deserve which induce them to search for livelihood in foreign countries. They were leaving their country at their own accord, and if a man wished to emigrate to another country, he was entitled to do so.

To stop these emigrating Sikhs from going to U.K. or other countries as the author of EXPORT OF SIKHS advocates, without providing them proper means of earning their bread in Punjab or in other States of India, is wrong and not worth-while.

* All references from the article "Export of Sikhs" by D.F.Karaka, Editor "The Current" dated 24th July 1957 at p.1. and Current dated 7th August 1957, p.16.