

Dalip Singh Saund: From Stockton Gurdwara to US Congress

By Inder Singh

Congressman Dalip Singh Saund was the first Asian American and also the first among Indian Americans to be elected to the US Congress. Up until 2004, he was the only Indian American who had held highly visible elected position as a Congressman. To-date, he has the distinction as the only Sikh American who held that office. He was first elected in 1956 from 29th Congressional District comprising of Riverside and Imperial Counties of California. He was re-elected twice, in 1958 and 1960. While campaigning for a fourth term in 1962, he suffered a debilitating stroke and became incapacitated. Although he did not win a fourth term, he did set a precedent for many Asians to follow him in the U.S. Congress. He remains a beacon of hope and an example for many Indian Americans to follow his footsteps.

Early Years

Dalip Singh Saund was born on September 20, 1899 in village Chhajalwadi, Amritsar, Punjab. He grew up in a joint family, with seven children, four boys and three girls. By the time, he reached school age, “his father and his two uncles had become comparatively wealthy as government contractors constructing canals and other public works.” He went to a boarding school in Baba Bakala near Amritsar¹ and Prince of Wales College in Jammu. He graduated with B.A degree in Mathematics from Punjab University in 1919.

Saund, as a student, was impressed with Gandhiji’s leadership of India’s independence movement and became his ardent and active follower. At the same time, he became a profound admirer of the American president, Woodrow Wilson whose speeches he read over and over again. President Wilson’s inspiring ideas and ideals to “make the world safe for democracy” and to provide “self-determination for all people” appealed to Saund enormously. It was through President Wilson that he became familiar with President Abraham Lincoln. He read Lincoln’s life story and studied his writings, which made an everlasting impression on his young mind. In the preface to his autobiography, *Congressman From India*, he wrote, “My guideposts were two of the most beloved men in history, Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi”. Since Lincoln had influenced him so much, he wanted to come to USA for further studies despite opposition from his family.

Dalip Singh Saund came to USA in 1920 to study food preservation in the Department of Agriculture, University of California, Berkeley (U.C. Berkeley). He hoped to finish his education in two to three years and return to India to “start a canning industry, with the emphasis on canning of mangoes.” However, after a year, he switched to Mathematics Department and received MA in 1922 and Ph.D. in 1924.

While studying in Berkley, Saund lived in the two-story clubhouse established and maintained by the Sikh Temple in Stockton, California. The temple had bought the house for students from India who could live there rent-free. The resident students paid their gas and electricity expenses and ran the clubhouse on a cooperative basis, taking turns at cooking. During the summer vacations, Saund with help from his professor in the department of Agriculture, was able to get jobs in various canning factories in California.

By the time Dalip Singh Saund finished his education in U.C. Berkley, he had become enamored with the American democratic system and decided to make his home in America. However, he knew that there was considerable prejudice against the nationals of India living in America and very few opportunities existed for him, an immigrant from India. Nevertheless, he tried hard to find a suitable job, commensurate with his qualifications. At that time, most Indians in California made their living as farm workers and he also realized it to be the only conceivable opportunity for him. So, finally, "In the summer of 1925 I decided to go to the southern California desert valley and make my living as a farmer,"ⁱⁱ wrote Saund.

Farming Years

Saund started his first job as a foreman of a cotton-picking gang, a job that required little schooling much less a Ph.D. degree from a leading American university. His job required him to weigh sacks of cotton that the pickers had picked by hand, maintain the record and to make up their payroll at the end of the week. In between weighing, he would read books borrowed from the library. Many times, at night or early in the morning, he would continue his reading by the "dim light of a kerosene lamp."

Saund's "pay was based on the amount of cotton picked at the rate of ten cents a hundred pounds, and sometimes I made as much as eighteen to twenty dollars a day. This was a great deal of money then and to me it seemed a fortune." From his first job, Saund saved some money and decided to go into farming. But he could not buy or lease land as he was not a citizen of the USA. He leased it in the name of an American friend and "ventured into growing of lettuce" in partnership. At harvest time, the demand for lettuce was negligible, so he suffered a complete loss and incurred a debt that took him some time to repay. Three years later, in 1930, he again grew lettuce. This time, he was fortunate, made some profit and was able to clear up his debt. He also grew alfalfa for which he leased several hundred acres of land. "Even though the prices were low and it was not a very good bank crop, it was the least dangerous and the least speculative crop to grow. For several years, the soil-conservation payments and the payments under the Sugar Act of about three dollars per ton on sugar beets was the only profit that I made in my farming operations," wrote Saund.

Farming, however, did not prove a profitable venture for Saund. There was time when he could not pay his bills on time or meet his obligations. "I was deeply disturbed and for a while I thought the world would come to an end if people ever found out. I had lost my ranches and was in debt on all sides. I owed money for seed, fertilizers, gas, hardware, on top of what I owed the landowners," wrote Saund in his autobiography. He could file bankruptcy and clear up his debts, like his fellow farmers did. But he refused to file bankruptcy proceedings when he suffered losses due to harvest or market failures. For him, declaring bankruptcy was a matter of great shame and against the very principles that he had learnt from his parents. He had great difficulty getting credit when he was already in debt. He also could not take advantage of opportunities which his fellow farmers were enjoying. Slowly but surely, he paid all his obligations. "When I look back on my life, that decision to follow the dictates of my own heart was one of the best decisions I have ever made," wrote Saund.

While studying at U.C. Berkley, Saund had joined Hindustan Association of America which had chapters throughout the United States in different university centers. Two years later, he was elected national president of the association, which gave him many opportunities to make speeches on India and meet with other groups as a representative of the Indian students at the university. He was an ardent nationalist and never passed up an opportunity to expound on India's rights to self-government. He took part in several debates and spoke before many groups and organizations. After he moved to the Imperial Valley, he continued with his public-speaking engagements and took advantage of every opportunity to speak, debate and present India's side – a side of democracy and a side for humanity. Soon, he became a familiar figure, "speaking to California civic organizations and churches about such topics as the work of Mahatma Gandhi and the fight for Indian independence from Britain."ⁱⁱⁱ

Since Dalip S. Saund had become well known as a speaker, the Sikh Temple in Stockton asked him to write a rebuttal to Katherine Mayo's book, *Mother India*, which was a sensational book and had become a best seller. The author, Katherine Mayo had visited India only for a very short time and in her book "depicted India as essentially the abode of vice and ignorance. The book formed a part of British propaganda, designed to disparage India in the eyes of the world, on the one hand and to glorify British rule on the other."^{iv} The quarterly issue of December-January-February 1928 of *The United States of India* – a publication of the Hindustan Gadar Party – included an article from Mahatma Gandhi, titled "Drain Inspector's Report." It also printed an article from Lala Lajpat Rai and reprinted Rabinder Nath Tagore's "Letter to Editor" initially printed in "The Nation" condemning contents of Mayo's book. The Indians in California particularly resented the book's unjust and false interpretations of Indian culture.

During the hot summer months, when work was slow, Saund used to go to Los Angeles where he spent most of his time in the library, doing research to write the book, *My Mother India* which was published in 1930. In the preface, he wrote, “It was only fitting that the Pacific Coast Khalsa Diwan Society (Sikh Temple in Stockton), in its role as the interpreter of Hindu^v culture and civilization to America, should undertake its publication.”

Wooring Marian

One evening, Saund was invited to speak at the Unitarian Church in Hollywood where he met a young artist, Emil J. Kosa who invited him to visit his home, as his parents were interested in India. During the course of conversation with Mrs. Kosa, Emil’s mother, Saund found out that he was a co-passenger travelling from Europe to New York, on the same ship *S.S. Philadelphia*, with Mrs. Kosa and her eleven-year-old daughter, Marian. At Emil’s suggestion, Saund posed for a portrait by Emil Kosa Jr which required several sittings. Saund also agreed to wear turban which he had given up after coming to the United States. By the time, the portrait was finished, Saund had become a friend of the family and a frequent visitor to Kosa home.

Emil Kosa Sr. was an artist who had migrated from Hungary in 1907. Emil Kosa Jr was a famous Californian painter known for his landscape paintings. “He worked in the 20th Century Fox studios as a special effects artist. He won an Oscar in 1963 for his work on the film, *Cleopatra*, and worked on movies that included *Doctor Doolittle*, *The Sound of Music* and *John Goldfarb, Please Come Home*.”^{vi}

Marian Kosa, now nineteen years old, was a student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Saund had fallen in love with her but was not sure if he could marry “a very beautiful and talented college girl and daughter of a well-known artist.” He was a foreigner in a country where the laws prevented him to become a citizen or own a home, without a secure job and no clear future. Still, Saund carried on his courtship “with persistence and unsurpassed devotion.” Saund wrote, “The most persuasive weapon I had was the fact that I knew many passages of English, Hindu, and Persian poetry. I used to recite them to Marian and she would laugh and find great delight in them.” One Sunday afternoon, Saund proposed to Marian by writing in the sand at Laguna Beach, “If I prove myself worthy, will you become mine?” In 1928, Saund and Marian, born of immigrant Czech parents, were married. Saund remarked, “Our marriage was the big turning point in my life.”

Marian’s parents built a house immediately below their home on a hillside property they owned. She continued her studies “until the birth of their son in February, 1930.” When the baby – Dalip Jr. – was little older, Marian moved to Imperial Valley to their home on a ranch near Westmorland. The old ranch house had no

running water at that time or electricity. Saunds had two more children, daughters, Ellie and Julie.

Citizenship for Indians

After Saund moved to the Imperial Valley, he started taking an active role in the socio-political activities of his new homeland. He joined Toastmasters' Club and soon became its president. Later, he served as lieutenant governor and then as district governor. He and his wife also belonged to the tennis club in Westmorland. Saund wrote, "I had become a close part of the American life. I had married an American girl, and was the father of three American children. I was making America my home. Thus it was only natural that I felt very uncomfortable not being able to become a citizen of the United States. My social life may have been full and rewarding, but the political desire in me was sorely frustrated." He also started attending official meetings of County Democratic Party Central Committee. He was welcomed as a party worker and an active participant but not allowed to vote in the decision making process as he was not a citizen of the United States. His lack of citizenship of America prevented him to take active role in the political process of his adopted country. As such, he was disillusioned to see "the bars of citizenship shut tight" against him.

For Indian farmers, Alien Land Act was one of the most oppressive measures. A few Indian farmers had married American citizens and leased property in their wives' name. But some landowners did not like leasing land to an Asiatic's wife for fear of violating the Alien Land Law. Some Indian farmers had bought or leased land in the name of their American friends who sometimes exploited them and even deprived them of their harvest. The grant of citizenship rights would allow Indians to own or lease land and property and "nullify the effect of California's Alien Land Law," wrote Saund. It could also open opportunities as they existed for everybody else in America. He was convinced that it was time to gain U.S. citizenship and invest in a country that he and his family called home.

Saund, after consulting with the board of directors of the Hindustan Association of America in Imperial County, formed the India Association of America in 1942 with the main objective to mobilize Indians in California for citizenship rights. The headquarters of the newly formed association was established in Los Angeles and he was elected as its first president. It was not an easy task to obtain US citizenship rights when the Supreme Court of the United States, in 1923, had declared that natives of India were not eligible to U.S. citizenship. In rejecting an appeal of Bhagat Singh Thind (to whom Saund dedicated his book, *My Mother India*) about revocation of his U.S. citizenship, the judge held that while persons from India were Caucasians, they were not "white persons", and therefore were "aliens ineligible to citizenship". Thus, a legal solution was ruled out as a possibility. An amendment of the Immigration laws with a special bill to be passed in the Congress of the United

States appeared an alternative worth pursuing. Saund also knew that it was a major undertaking to convince the elected representatives of the American people to introduce a bill in the Congress for the grant of U.S. citizenship to a handful of Indian nationals.

There were about 2,000 or possibly 2,500 Indians who could benefit by becoming citizens of USA. They were very skeptical that the Congress would pass a major bill aimed at upsetting a historic decision of the U.S Supreme Court. "It wasn't that they didn't want citizenship rights, but they had suffered so many hardships and had been knocked about so much that it was very difficult for them to believe that there was a chance of our winning," wrote Saund.

Saund, after forming India Association of America, started editing a news bulletin to educate and to convince the India-born residents of California. Also, with the help of some dedicated Indians, he made several trips to all parts of California, mobilized the Indian community, mailed out thousands of letters in Punjabi language, and raised funds. The mobilization took some effort but soon it gained momentum and Indians in the USA were ready for all-out effort to re-gain citizenship rights.

Saund found Indian groups such as New York based Indian League of America headed by J.J. Singh and India Welfare League headed by Mubarak Ali Khan, which had objectives similar to his India Association of America. He supported their lobbying efforts in Washington and provided financial assistance with money raised from Indian farmers in California. These groups were able to convince Congresswoman Clare Booth Luce from Connecticut and Congressman Emanuel Celler from New York who jointly introduced a bill in Congress. However, selling this concept to the majority of the members in the U.S. Congress was an uphill task, more so, as the passage of the bill could open the door for other Asians who were similarly deprived of citizenship rights. Indians continued running into roadblocks in finding a powerful force to push it through. Luckily, in 1946, after four years of continuous struggle, President Truman took special interest in its passage and Luce-Cellar bill was finally approved by both houses of Congress and signed by President Truman on July 2, 1946. It was a great triumph and truly 2nd of July is the Independence Day for celebration by all Indians in the United States.

Saund as Judge

Saund had maintained a keen interest in the political situation in the United States ever since his arrival in 1920. He had studied the personalities and programs of the presidential candidates, both during the 1924 and the 1928 campaigns. He admits that "By 1932, I had positively and definitely become a Democrat by outlook and conviction." After he became naturalized citizen on December 16, 1949, he was ready to take more active part in the political process of his adopted homeland. The primary election was a few months away in June 1950. A close friend, Mr. Glen

Killingsworth who was a judge in Westmorland with whom Saund had worked unofficially for many years in Democratic Party affairs, encouraged him to run for a seat on the Imperial County Democratic Central Committee. Saund's first political victory was without any opposition. He continued participating actively in Democratic Party activities and rose to be a delegate in three Democratic National Conventions in 1952, 1956 and 1960.

A few weeks after the election, Judge Killingsworth died suddenly due to a heart attack. It was a great personal loss for Saund for he had watched him closely in his work as a judge for many years and had admired the office and the way his now deceased friend had performed in that capacity as a judge. Saund was persuaded to become a candidate for that office in the general election in November 1950. He personally knew nearly all the voters in the judicial district, and he started a vigorous and successful campaign by ringing doorbells, meeting people and asking for their support.

Dalip S. Saund was elected as a judge solely due to his exemplary grassroots campaign. No other foreigner had by then been elected to any high office in Imperial County. Saund's victory for judgeship in Westmoreland disappointed his opponent – a white candidate – who found a loophole in the election law. Saund was denied judgeship on the technicality that he had not been a citizen for one full year by the election date. Saund's friends started circulating a petition addressed to the County Board of Supervisors who were to appoint a judge. More than twice the number of voters than had originally voted for Saund signed the petition. Most of the mayors of cities in Imperial county, the presidents and leaders of different civic and professional organizations, including the chairmen of both the Democratic and Republican county central committees had signed a separate petition. The daily newspapers in the county urged the Supervisors through their editorials for appointment of Saund as a judge. But he lost his first political battle not because of lack of public support or popularity among voters but through that minor technicality.

Saund was disappointed but by no means discouraged. He wrote in his autobiography, "I harbored no bitterness against my opponent. Throughout 1951 and 1952, I continued my activities in support of Community Chest drives, the Boy Scouts, and particularly the March of Dimes for which I was the chairman for two years." Involvement in mainstream community organizations kept Saund in close contact with the people of his district. When he ran for the position of judge in 1952, he ran against an incumbent, appointed by the County Board of Supervisors, who was an established businessman and a member of the church board. The campaign also had taken a racial overtone; some people would not go for the "Hindu for judge". But most of the people had felt that injustice was done to Saund the previous time and now was the opportunity to correct it. Saund won the election and

served as judge for four years until his election to the Congress of the United States in 1956.

As a judge, Saund was credited with cleaning up the Westmoreland red light district. He awarded stiff fines and jail sentences. He also involved Border Patrol to “raid the houses and charge the prostitutes with vagrancy” as they were from the neighboring country, Mexico. To the "vice queen" of the town, he gave the “stiffest sentence” under the law, a fine of \$1,000.00 and a year in the county jail. Her husband, on the same charge, skipped bail and fled to Mexico. Within Saund's time, “the doors of the evil establishments were locked and boarded for good.”

Seeking Higher Office

In 1954, Judge Saund was elected chairman of the Imperial County Democratic Central Committee and became a member of the Democratic Executive Committee of the state of California. In the same year, Mr. Bruce Shangle of Riverside County became the Democratic nominee from the 29th congressional district. He knew that he had to campaign hard in Riverside County to win as 80% of the voters resided in that county. So, it fell on Judge Saund to manage the campaign of Mr. Shangle in Imperial County and speak on his behalf to various service clubs and candidates' forums. Mr. Shangle did not win but it gave Judge Saund a very valuable experience into the workings of a congressional office and the duties that a Congressman has to perform.

Judge Saund by now had become quite well known in Imperial County. In October, 1955, he decided to be a candidate from the 29th Congressional district. He was confident of loyal support from the County Democratic Party but was not sure of similar support from Riverside County. Mr. Bruce Shangle, who ran unsuccessfully in the last election, assured Saund of his full support.

Tom Patterson, a columnist and Riverside Historical Society Member, in his article, "Triumph and Tragedy of Dalip Saund" published in *California Historian* in June 1992, gave four major activities for which Saund had become a familiar name in Imperial county, namely “He was an active Democratic politician. He was Westmorland justice of peace and commonly referred to as Judge Saund. He was a major farmer and he also had a distributorship for chemical fertilizer, a business that was said to have grossed \$250,000 per year.”

Judge Saund's Democratic opponent was also a well-known Riverside County attorney, active in California politics and at one time had been a candidate for attorney general of the state of California. He tried to get Judge Saund disqualified on the technical grounds that he had not been a citizen for seven years before he could become a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. First the Appellate Court and then the Supreme Court of California dismissed the petition on the

grounds that the sole judge of the qualifications of a member of the House of Representatives is the House itself.

In Riverside County, Judge Saund had not yet become a familiar name to the voters. But they read his name on the front pages of every newspaper in the district, not one time but three times, first when the appeal was filed, second time when it was turned down by the lower court and third time when the Supreme Court rejected it. No amount of money could have bought him as much publicity and name recognition as these news reports. But his Democratic opponent did not give up. He, in his newspaper and radio advertisements, attacked Saund of his being an Indian and not an American and quoted passages from Saund's book, *My Mother India*, out of context. Even his name "Dalip Singh" was boldly printed and last name "Saund" in small letters to draw attention of the voters that Judge Saund was really not an American. All the tactics used against Judge Saund apparently did not hurt him. He won the primary with a tremendous majority which enhanced interest in his candidacy beyond California's borders.

In the general election, Saund faced Jacqueline Cochran Odlum, recipient of many prizes in the field of aviation, leader of women fliers during World War II and wife of a multi-million financier. She was contesting from a district that has always elected a Republican in its entire history of the congressional district. She had rich supporters and was a personal friend of the President of the United States. At her barbecue rallies, people not only would come to see the invited celebrities, such as Bob Hope but her also, a celebrity in her own right. She even had the Vice President Richard Nixon come to Riverside to speak for her.

Judge Saund received endorsement of US Senator John F. Kennedy who said, "Judge D. S. Saund has proved conclusively his understanding of and devotion to the basic meaning of our American ideals. After reading the moving story of his tireless and patient struggle to attain full citizenship rights for his countrymen and for himself, you will understand a measure of the love he bears for his America and for her people. We need this man's wisdom and loyalty in the Congress of the United States. The election of Judge D. S. Saund will promote international goodwill and greatly advance the cause of world peace."^{vii}

Judge Saund faced formidable handicaps but was not intimidated. With the help of Democratic groups in Riverside County, his friends and neighbors began to sponsor a series of free barbecues which gave him an opportunity to meet people and communicate his message. His whole family, his wife Marian, three children (Dalip Jr, Julie and Ellie), his son-in-law Dr. Frederick Fisher and daughter-in-law Dorothy Saund and scores of volunteers kept busy ringing doorbells and handing out literature. He did not have funds to buy space on commercial billboards, so his volunteers made homemade billboards on 4-foot by 8-foot plywood sheets. He put

up these billboards throughout the district and they apparently turned out to be very effective. His wife and daughter organized and carried out an intensive campaign of registration of voters and “passed out 11,000 Saund circulars” before the election. They had visited thousands and thousands of homes with the help of dedicated volunteers and made a definite impact on many voters. Much after the election, people would come up to Saund and say, “I met your daughter”,.....or “your son-in-law called at my house..... and that is when I decided that I was going to vote for you.”

In the Preface of his autobiography, *Congressman from India*, Saund wrote, “Two of the greatest satisfactions in my professional life came first, when my children, together with my daughter-in-law and son-in-law, volunteered to ring doorbells for me in the campaign in 1956, and second, when in that same election the citizens of my own small home town of Westmorland, my neighbors of thirty years, voted over 80 per cent in my favor as an expression of their confidence.”

There were very few Indian Americans registered to vote in the 29th congressional district. There were not many ethnic voters either; the large majority being Caucasian Americans. He did not adopt a new religion in his new country nor did he Americanize his name to sound less ethnic. His opponents repeatedly tried to exploit his being an Indian. But he had completely integrated with mainstream America while maintaining his heritage. He represented grass-roots philosophies and identified with middle-class values, the values of the people he lived with. They were the people he depended on for support.

Judge Saund had farmed for twenty-five years in Imperial County and was thoroughly acquainted with the problems of the farming communities in both counties. He believed that farmers needed government’s protection in order to get a fair share of the economic reward. So the farmers in the 29th district were confident of his representation of them in the U.S. Congress. But, it was from the cities that he was trying hard to get a fair share of votes. His hard work did bring him enough votes that in the general election, in November 1956, “the first native of Asia” was elected to the prestigious United States Congress with a 3% vote margin. Today, Indian Americans, seeking political office invoke Saund’s name, much the same way, as Saund himself invoked Gandhi and President Lincoln’s name. Like them, he is a source of inspiration and a worthy role model to look up to.

Saund as Congressman

As a new congressman, Saund wanted to obtain an appointment on a good committee. His district contained three of the largest irrigation districts in the United States and his preference was to be placed on the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, which had charge of all reclamation and irrigation projects. He knew Congressman Cecil R. King from Los Angeles who was a good friend and mentor to

Saund and in charge of committee appointments. However, Congressman King told him that there was no chance for him to get an appointment there. Saund had a strong knowledge of foreign affairs which could have been a reason that he was “appointed and confirmed as a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee,” a rare opportunity for a freshman in the US Congress. In his second term, he was appointed to the Interior and Insular Committee. He succeeded in amending the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 which led to the creation of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the entire reorganization of how the U.S. distributed Foreign Aid. Saund’s amendment gave the U.S. more control on how its foreign aid money was spent by reducing the lifespan of foreign aid agreements. This was meant to keep American foreign aid money out of the hands of governments that were unpopular or hostile to the U.S.

Saund, while campaigning for election to the US Congress, promised to the voters that he would visit India and the Far East and present himself – an Asian elected to the US Congress – as a living example of American democracy in practice. “In the winter of 1957, I was able finally keep the promise I had made in the campaign. I was making this tour as an official representative of the Congress of the United States. I had been designated by the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives as a one-man subcommittee to tour the countries of Southeast Asia and study the working of the mutual-security program in the area.” wrote Saund.

Congressman Saund was welcomed by various Asian countries, including Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines and India as an official emissary of the House of Representatives. In Japan, Saund visited Tokyo and Riverside's sister city, Sendai. In Indonesia, he met with President Sukarno who was “an intense, dedicated nationalist, the kind of man who wanted power and enjoyed exercising it.” There was unlimited jubilation and large crowd greeted him everywhere he went in India. In Calcutta, he was given an elaborate and heartwarming reception. In New Delhi, he was accorded “enthusiastic reception from thousands of people at the airport.” Saund addressed audiences at several colleges and of business groups. He also addressed a meeting of the Foreign Policy Association.

The most outpouring of enthusiastic people was in Amritsar where he had graduated from the University of the Punjab, and in Chhajalwadi, his birthplace where some eleven thousand people were seated in the school grounds. The poem that was read at his reception, moved him so much that he could not hold back the tears. Saund spoke in Punjabi and appreciated the people for the tumultuous welcome. His wife Marian also spoke a few words in Punjabi and got a tremendous ovation.

While in New Delhi, Saund addressed the joint houses of Parliament, an honor which is normally reserved for visiting heads of states. At the end of his talk, he

said, "If democracy and freedom are to survive in this world, there must be a close liaison between the two greatest democracies of the world, the Republic of India and the United States of America."

In May, 1962, Congressman Saund suffered a severe stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body.^{viii} He was not able to regain his speech but he could walk with a walker. He died at the age of 74 on Sunday, April 22, 1973, in Hollywood, California and was cremated in Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California. His ashes were interred at Forest Lawn Memorial Park.^{ix}

Saund was survived by his wife, Marian who took care of him during his prolonged illness; daughters, Julie Fisher and Ellie Ford, both teachers after graduation from UCLA; son Dalip Saund Jr. who graduated from California Institute of Technology in mechanical engineering and then earned a doctorate in anthropology at UCLA; later served as a lieutenant in the Korean War. All three of his offsprings had their spouses and children.

Dalip Singh Saund was born in a Sikh family and preserved his religious beliefs and practices by keeping beard, long hair on his head and wore turban when he arrived in the USA. According to Peterson, Saund was "wearing a turban"^x as a part of his religious belief system when he started his farming job in 1925. Sometime thereafter, he gave up the distinguishing marks of his faith, although he continued to be a Sikh. Many Sikhs in those days, traveled hundreds of miles on important occasions to attend services in Stockton Sikh Temple – the only Sikh temple in the United States. These gatherings not only served as a reassuring link with their religion but also provided welcome opportunities to meet and socialize with other immigrants. Saund, also served as temple secretary from Jan 18, 1948 to December 26, 1949. He could read and write Punjabi in Gurmukhi script – the script in which Sikh sacred book, Guru Granth Sahib is written. He recorded minutes of meetings of the temple committee in Punjabi in Gurmukhi script in the Minutes Register.^{xi}

Saunds face Discrimination

Saund wrote, "There is no room in the United States of America for second-class citizenship." However, he himself was treated as second-class citizen for most of his life. He wrote about the prejudice and discrimination that existed against all Asiatics, including the Indians and has mentioned this several times in his autobiography. He says, "There is no denying the fact that there were persons in Imperial County who were prejudiced and antagonistic toward me." On page 36 of his autobiography, he writes, "I was cruelly discriminated against many a time because of the place of my birth." Again on page 45, he writes, "I was aware of the considerable prejudice against the people of Asia in California and knew that few opportunities existed for me or people of my nationality in the state at that time. I was not a citizen and could not become one. The only way Indians in California

could make a living at that time was to join with others who had settled in various parts of the state as farmers.” Even as farmers, they could not buy land and property. The California Alien Land Law of 1913 banned the ownership of land and property to “aliens ineligible for naturalized citizenship.” The Naturalization Act of 1790 stated that only whites were able to obtain naturalized citizenship. There were ten other states that passed land ownership laws similar to this during 1913 to 1923. As a result, Asian immigrants found themselves subjected to this racially discriminatory law.

Tom Patterson described some incidents of discrimination which Saund and his family faced^{xii}. Patterson’s uncle by marriage, Enoch Gullett, an associate of Saund in the Westmorland Chamber of Commerce and some other members had made reservation at a hotel in the Grand Canyon. Both Saund and Gullett slept in an automobile after the hotel denied admittance to Saund. In 1991, Marian Saund told Patterson about an incident which happened in Stockton. She registered in a hotel for herself, Saund and their son, then their only child. When Saund arrived after the meeting, he wasn't admitted. All three left the hotel.

According to Patterson, the family life of the Saunds was altered by what was described as Marian Saund's allergy for the pollen of Bermuda grass. She and the three children moved to Los Angeles in 1942. The real reason was the racist treatment of the children in the Westmorland schools where they were taunted as “half breeds.” Saund never complained of, or even mentioned, discriminatory treatment against himself, much less made an issue of it.

Saund had known a person for fifteen years and this person had also worked at times for Saund. During the campaign in 1950, this person told a friend, "I agree that Saund would make a good judge, but I just can't go for a Hindu for judge." About his 1952 campaign, Saund wrote an anecdote. "One day, just three days before the election, a prominent citizen who was opposing me bitterly saw me one morning in the town restaurant and said in a loud voice: ‘Doc, tell us, if you're elected, will you furnish the turbans or will we have to buy them ourselves in order to come to your court?’ ‘My friend,’ I answered, ‘you know me for a tolerant man. I don't care what a man has on top of his head. All I'm interested in is what he's got inside it.’ All the customers had a good laugh at that and the story became the talk of the town during the next few days."

In his campaign for Congress, his opponents in the primary and general election made an issue of Saund's race in order to whip up anti-immigrant and racist sentiment. His Republican opponent, Jacqueline Odlum, linked Saund with communists and the left-leaning government of India.

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 declared "All men are created equal." But The Naturalization Act of 1870 did not apply to "all men" but to Asians. It was a piece of discriminatory legislation, denying Asians the right to become naturalized citizens. Another discriminatory legislation was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, initially meant for Chinese but later applied to all Asians. In 1907, there were race riots against Indians in Bellingham and all Indians were expelled from the city. Similar incidents took place in some other places. The police provided no security to Indians. The Asiatic Exclusion League and the labor unions used violence and riots, as an effective method of excluding the Indians from jobs and residential communities. They also kept incessant pressure on elected officials and politicians who, in 1917, succeeded in getting an immigration law passed by the United States Congress over the veto of President Woodrow Wilson. The new law prohibited immigration from virtually all of Asia.

According to the Cable Act of 1922, any American woman who married an Asian alien lost her U.S. citizenship. In 1923 the Supreme Court had issued an opinion that Indians, although considered as Caucasians, were ineligible for citizenship because they were not "white." Anti-Asian sentiment was running rampant across the country at that time. Success was not easy for any Asian. Saund's election to the US Congress as the first American of Asian origin was an extraordinary accomplishment. Saund, a farmer in Southern California and born of uneducated parents in a small village in Punjab, became the first, and so far the only Sikh member of United States Congress. It was a landmark achievement of epochal proportion, in the history of not only Sikh immigrants, but also that of other Indians and Asians in the U.S.

Recognition comes to Saund

Phil Tajitsu Nash, in his article on Saund published in Asian Week in September, 1999, says, "Saund's main accomplishment is the pride he gave future generations of politicians and activists." He was a groundbreaker and broke the color barrier for Asian American participation in U.S. politics. Mr. Nash also raised a question, "Why isn't Saund better known?" He then answers the question by saying, "Perhaps the lack of knowledge reflects the greater lack of awareness of Asian American pioneers and history in general." In 1999, Don Nakanishi, head of the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA, said, "He (Saund) is the unsung pioneer of Asian American electoral politics. On his 100th birthday, I hope we shine a bright light on his political career and the lessons we can learn from his remarkable achievements."

However, no organization, whether Sikh, Punjabi, Indian or Asian, organized any event to celebrate Saund's 100th birthday. Three years later, in 2002 in Los Angeles, three organizations, Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (Inder Singh), Indian American Friendship Council (Dr. Krishna Reddy), and Global Punjabi

Diaspora (Dr. H Sahota), took initiative and jointly organized a tribute seminar and banquet to celebrate the 45th anniversary of election victory of late Congressman Dalip Singh Saund. Many “firsts” of the Indian community, including Ujjal Dosanjh, former premier of British Columbia and then Federal Health Minister in Canada, Kumar Barve, Majority Leader in the Maryland State Assembly, Satveer Chaudhary, Minnesota State Senator, and Dr. Joy Cherian, former commissioner of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, participated in the event.

The tribute banquet, being the first of a kind, was highly publicized and promoted. Several Indian newspapers in the US including India West, India Journal, and India Post, and News India Times, published articles about the late Congressman. Some newspapers in India, such as Times of India and Tribune, and a few American newspapers including Los Angeles Times and Orange County Register also published articles about Saund and his contributions. The awareness thus created about the Indian pioneer encouraged some community activists in the United States to organize seminars, prompted college students to write term papers about Saund and motivated some organizations to institute awards in Saund’s name.

The Indian American Heritage Foundation (Inder Singh) petitioned the U.S. Postal Service in Washington D.C to issue a commemorative stamp on November 6, 2006 in honor of the first U.S. Congressman of Asian origin, the India born Dalip Singh Saund, at the fiftieth anniversary of Saund’s victory in 1956 congressional election. Several congressmen also wrote to the Stamp Advisory Committee, supporting the cause. Congressman Joe Wilson, Co-Chair of India Caucus, wrote, “It would be a matter of pride for the entire Asian American community to see the life of Congressman Saund honored with a commemorative U.S. postal stamp.”

In the US Congress, Congressman Darrell Issa (R-California) introduced a bill, H. R. 120, the Dalip Singh Saund Post Office Building Designation Act, which would designate the United States Postal office at 30777 Rancho California Road in Temecula, California, as the Dalip Singh Saund Post Office Building. The resolution was unanimously passed and signed by President George Bush on July 21, 2005. Congressman Isa officially renamed the building at a formal ceremony on Feb 21, 2006 in the presence of a large gathering in Temecula. Inder Singh, the writer of this article, was officially invited to attend the renaming ceremony and was presented with US flag for his initiative.

Congressman Joe Wilson (R-South Carolina) introduced a bill, H. R. 753 on July 22, 2004 (reintroduced on January 4, 2005 as H. R. 31), which called for the placement of a portrait of former Congressman Dalip Singh Saund in the US Capitol Building or inside a House office building. After approval, Congressman Wilson continued to work with the House Office of History and Preservation to finalize the portrait details.

On November 7, 2007, under the dome of the capitol building, Saund was honored in the Rayburn Room of the US Capitol when her 6-year-old great-granddaughter pulled back a blue curtain to uncover the official portrait of the late Dalip Singh Saund. Over 200 Indian-Americans from across the country, including several Sikhs in colorful turbans, along with several US lawmakers, filled the room during the unveiling ceremony. Saund's daughter, Ellie Saund Ford, five grandchildren, including the eldest grandson Eric Saund and several great-grandchildren participated in the ceremony. Eric Saund said, "It is our hope that through this portrait, the life and service of Congressman D. S. Saund will continue to inspire others to their own form of great work."

Jon Friedman, a portraitist, landscape painter and sculptor who sketched this official portrait of Congressman Dalip Singh Saund, acknowledged that he educated himself about the Indian-American community, the immigrant experience of the Sikhs who came to the US over 100 years ago and the struggle Saund had waged to stave off discrimination. This artist has painted many miniature figures on the side panel to detail the progression of journey of his life. With the Sikh symbol of *Khanda*, from his farming family in Punjab, young Dr. Saund in turban, Gandhi, Lincoln who had influenced his thinking, Judge Saund for Congress and his distinguished service culminating as a Congressman in the magnificent dome of the Capitol Hill, are painted with great finesse.

Congressman Wilson said, "From a small village in India to the halls of Congress, Dalip Singh Saund demonstrated that a person with perseverance and optimism can overcome tremendous obstacles and achieve remarkable successes. He became a political pioneer of the Asian American community. His relentless dedication is an inspiration for all Americans. Now, when Indian American families visit Congress, they can see Saund's portrait, which will serve as a reminder of his legacy and proof that all Americans can achieve their dreams."

"By permanently placing his portrait on Capitol Hill, we will commemorate his service and recognize America's unique culture, which enables all Americans regardless of race, religion, or national origin, to reach the very heights of success," Wilson said.

Speaker Pelosi, although she could not make it for the event, released official statement, which also described it as "truly a historic day. It is my pleasure to welcome to the Capitol of the United States, the People's House, the portrait of the first Asian-American member of Congress, the Honorable Dalip Singh Saund." She continued, "Dalip Singh Saund's life is the American dream. An immigrant from India, he came to this country to further his education and worked hard to build his life and care for his family, despite the discrimination that many Asians faced during the 1920s."

Congressman Jim McDemott, co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian-Americans, said, “Hon. Saund, was a trail blazer and his sense of purpose flowered when he became the Congressman. His power to make the difference regardless of whether you have turban or brown skin was amazing.”

Congressman Mike Honda, chair of Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, said, “Saund’s legacy lives because even as he represented his constituents, he never forgot that he was also a voice for his culture and the South Asian community. Because of his consciousness and advocacy on behalf of the Asian American community, he broke down barriers through the Luce-Cellar Act, and provided the way for the millions of future Asian Americans to participate politically as citizens in this country.”

Congressman Robert Brady concluded that the portrait of Hon. Saund would be a beacon of hope and inspiration for the generations to come.

The portrait shows Saund in the Cannon House Office Building, on the upper level of the Cannon Rotunda. On the right of the portrait, a series of images, painted as it is carved in stone, trace Saund's life-journey. Saund's oft-quoted remark, "There is no room in the United States of America for second-class citizenship," appears below the portrait and visual narrative. It is rendered illusionistically using a conceit of gold carved letters on multi-colored marble.

At the state level in California, Assemblyman Rudy Bermudez moved resolution AJR 1 calling for an annual day of recognition to honor the late Dalip Singh Saund on his birthday September 20, for his outstanding achievement as the first native of Asia to be elected to the US Congress. Resolution AJR 1 officially became law when it was “chaptered” on July 6, 2005 by California Secretary of State.

The bust of late Congressman Saund was installed in the American Center Library in Delhi and unveiled by former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral on May 6, 2008 at an elegant ceremony.

In August 2000, the Government of India appointed High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora headed by Dr. L. M. Singhvi who submitted a comprehensive report in December 2001. Inder Singh sent Saund’s picture and insisted on it being included in the published report. At the first Pravasi Bhartiya Divas in New Delhi in 2003, the government named one of the conference halls as “*Dalip Singh Saund Hall.*”

It all started with a question from Phil Tajitsu Nash, “Why isn't Saund better known?” In order to create more awareness about Saund, a seminar and tribute banquet was organized in January 2002. Since then, due to the steadfast efforts,

clout, resources, time and energy of well-wishers of Saund's legacy, a hard-earned recognition in a variety of ways was secured for the forgotten US Congressman of Indian origin. Today, Late Dr. Dalip Singh Saund, the first Asian Congressman in the United States and a pioneer of the Asian American community, has become an iconic figure for Indian Americans, particularly those seeking a political office.

Inder Singh regularly writes and speaks on Indian Diaspora. He is Chairman of Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) – an international body of overseas Indians. He was president of GOPIO from 2004-2009, president of National Federation of Indian American Associations (NFIA) from 1988-92 and was the founding president of Federation of Indian Associations in Southern California. He can be reached at indersingh-usa@hotmail.com.

ⁱ Roopinder Singh, Dalip Singh Saund - America's Lawmaker

ⁱⁱ D.S Saund, Congressman from India, p 45

ⁱⁱⁱ D.S Saund, Congressman from India, p 38

^{iv} The United States of India – published by Hindustan Gadar Party –December-January-February 1928 Issue, p2

^v Indians in the United States were collectively called “Hindoos”, (“Hindus”) irrespective of their faith. The overwhelming majority of Indians were Sikhs who preserved their religious beliefs and practices by keeping beard, long hair on their head and wore turban.

^{vi} Roopinder Singh, Dalip Singh Saund - America's Lawmaker

^{vii} D. S. Saund, What America means to Me – Campaign Brochure, p 8

^{viii} <http://www.saund.org/dalipsaund/cfi/epilogue.html>

^{ix} <http://www.politicalgraveyard.com/geo/CA/farmer.html>

^x Tom Patterson, Triumph and Tragedy of Dalip Saund, 1992

^{xi} During my visit to Stockton temple on Sunday, June 3, 2012, Prof. Amrik Singh of UC Sacramento, showed me a register in which minutes of meetings of the temple committee were recorded. At page 142, it was recorded that “Dalip Singh was elected secretary of the temple on Jan 18, 1948.” He was succeeded by Ajmer Singh Mahalpur on Dec 26, 1949.”

Prof. Singh also mentioned that Stockton Sikh Temple arranged \$1500 research grant to Dr. Saund to write rebuttal to Katherine Mayo's book, Mother India.

^{xii} Tom Patterson, Triumph and Tragedy of Dalip Saund, 1992