



DISCUSSION GUIDE

# A DREAM IN DOUBT

BY TAMI YEAGER

It was the first hate-based murder in the wake of September 11, 2001—one of thousands of reported and unreported hate crimes in the years that followed. The victim: a turbaned Sikh man in Mesa, Arizona, where his family had sought religious freedom, searching for the American Dream. Meet a family still determined to believe in that dream, even as the nightmare continues for many religious and ethnic minorities in a climate of xenophobia and fear.



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## FROM THE FILMMAKER

A DREAM IN DOUBT began in the dark hours following the flood of images featuring 9/11's turbaned and bearded terrorists. My Sikh-American friends—who also wore turbans and beards in accordance with their faith—immediately felt the backlash of misdirected anger but no one was truly prepared for Balbir Singh Sodhi's murder on September 15, 2001. This was America's first post-9/11 revenge killing, a Sikh gas station owner shot to death in Mesa, Arizona. Though many Americans recall hearing about this story, it was ultimately a blip in the media amidst the chaos of the 9/11 attacks.

Over the next two years, I watched as an epidemic of hate crimes received almost no national analysis or significant media coverage. If we didn't address this issue, how many other tragedies like Balbir's would we suffer? I wanted to make A DREAM IN DOUBT to humanize post-9/11 hate crimes by bringing the Sodhi family out of the shadows.

Although I am not Sikh, I had previously produced an educational media project for the Sikh-American community, and felt I could gain access to the Sodhi family to tell their story. When I contacted the Sodhis, Rana shared that another member of the Sikh community had recently been shot in a hate crime. At this point, with support from a Sikh-American co-producer, Preetmohan Singh, and many friends, there was no turning back. As I began chronicling the Sodhi family's experience, I realized that Rana's enduring faith in the American Dream was at the heart of the story.

One delicate issue in A DREAM IN DOUBT pertains to the fact that Sikhs are not Muslims. This misunderstanding so clearly represented the degree of ignorance behind the blind hatred but it also forced Sikhs to walk a fine line when distinguishing themselves from Muslims. It was important to educate about their differences without seeming to say that it was, in fact, appropriate to assign the blame for 9/11 to all Muslims. As Rana says in the film, he doesn't want anyone of any ethnicity to be hurt by hate.

I have often been asked why it matters whether a hate crime is called a hate crime. Isn't a murder victim who is killed for any other reason considered as important as someone who is murdered out of hate? Of course, the individual's life has equal value, but labeling a hate crime is important because this single act terrorizes an entire group.

I hope that A DREAM IN DOUBT helps viewers create a meaningful dialogue about identity, immigration, the impact of hate crimes on communities, and what it means to be American. Most importantly, I hope it can bring people of different backgrounds together to build new relationships. In many ways, Phoenix provides a model because law enforcement, local media, interfaith groups and the justice department rallied around Rana and his community to show their support and build friendships. I would love to see this model replicated far and wide.

--Tami Yeager



Tami Yeager



Preet Singh

**THE FILM**

A DREAM IN DOUBT is an immigrant story in which patriotism has morphed into murder. The hour-long documentary features Rana Singh Sodhi, a first generation immigrant from India who has wholeheartedly embraced the United States as his homeland. Having fled ethnic violence in India, Rana, four of his brothers, and their families were enjoying the fruits of their hard work when their story of American success was forever altered by the attacks on September 11, 2001.

In the wake of 9/11, many Sikh men found themselves bearing the brunt of American anger; their turbans and beards—articles of the Sikh faith—now symbolized America's enemy. The first post-9/11 revenge murder victim was a Sikh—and Rana's eldest brother. In August 2002, another of Rana's brothers was murdered in mysterious circumstances while driving a cab in San Francisco. More than a year after 9/11, Rana and many of his friends are still shot at, assaulted, harassed, and threatened.

**Featured Members of the Sodhi Family**

**Balbir – Rana's eldest brother, murdered in front of his Chevron station in Mesa, Arizona, the first post-9/11 hate murder victim.**

**Harjit – The first brother to come to the United States, he was followed by Rana, Balbir, Jaswinder, and Sukhpal, in that order. He and Rana opened a restaurant together.**

**Rana – The primary storyteller in the film.**

**Satpreet – Balbir's nephew, Rana's son, and brother to Rose and Navdeep**

The film follows Rana as he seeks vindication for his brothers' murders. His "revenge" consists primarily of demanding that America live up to its ideals of freedom, equality, and justice for all. To guard his own school-aged children from bullying and harassment he visits their school to answer questions about Sikhs. He acts as the spokesperson for his family and the Sikh community, working to educate fellow Phoenix-area residents about hate crimes. His dignified presence speaks to the power of courage, optimism, and leadership to overcome hate.

Rana's journey to reclaim his American dream and fight the hate that continues to threaten his community presents viewers with contrasting definitions of patriotism. While attackers see themselves as proud defenders of America, Rana insists that their actions contradict the core values of his new homeland. Guided by his belief in Sikh teachings and in America, Rana challenges his fellow citizens—and the film's audience—to think deeply about individual responsibility in the face of bigotry and what it means to be a true patriot.

**Sukhpal – The final brother to arrive in the U.S., he was shot to death while driving his taxi cab in San Francisco. His murder remains unsolved.**



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Sikhs

There are an estimated 23 million Sikhs worldwide. Approximately 250,000 are now living in the United States. According to Harvard University's Pluralism Project, there are 255 Sikh temples and centers in the U.S.

### The Sikh Religion

Founded approximately five hundred years ago in the Punjab region of India, Sikhism is the youngest of the world's major religions. The monotheistic faith is based on the teachings of the Ten Gurus, studied through their writings, which have been unified in the sacred text, the "Siri Guru Granth Sahib."

Sikhism's founder, Guru Nanak, explicitly rejected the caste system and religious sectarianism common in fifteenth century India. Instead he acknowledged that there could be many paths to consciousness of the divine and taught his followers to respect all people. The Sikh path rejected monastic life, emphasizing instead a practical daily life dedicated to family, honest work, and service to humanity. Guru Nanak's Hindu and Muslim followers began to be called "Sikhs," which can be translated as "learners" or "disciples," hence the name of the religion.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that stresses the importance of doing good actions rather than merely carrying out rituals. Sikhs believe that the way to lead a good life is to: Keep God in heart and mind at all times; live honestly and work hard; treat everyone equally; be generous to the less fortunate; and serve others. In an effort to promote equality, Sikhs give boys the name Singh (Lion), and girls the name Kaur (Princess)

In an effort to lead a pure life, initiated Sikhs commit to reading scriptures daily. They also undertake specific practices such as wearing the "Five Ks" –articles of faith that begin with the letter "k." The "Five Ks" include uncut hair (including children's hair) and garments to remind individuals of their obligation to live up to Sikhism's highest moral standards. These five articles of faith, along with a turban (which is mandatory for men and optional for women), distinguish a Sikh.

The Gurdwara is the Sikhs' central place of worship and is open to people of all faiths. There they seek guidance from the Siri Guru Granth Sahib, which is considered a source of divine wisdom.

Sources: sikhnet.com and bbc.co.uk

### Hate Crimes

Specific definitions of hate crimes vary by state and locality. The FBI describes a hate or bias crime as "a criminal offense committed against a person, property, or society which is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin."

The Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990, which mandates that the FBI compile data tracking hate crimes, defines a crime as a hate crime if it manifests "evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, including where appropriate the crimes of murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, arson, and destruction, damage or vandalism of property."



## THINKING MORE DEEPLY

### General

- Describe a moment in the film that you found especially disturbing or especially inspiring. What was it about that moment that touched you?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a question, who would you approach and what would you ask them?
- If you could talk with Rana or his family, what would you say?

### Examining Bigotry

- Prior to viewing the film, what did you know about Sikhism and the differences between Sikhs, Muslims, and Arabs? What are/were the sources of your information? Thinking back, how reliable were the sources you used to form your ideas? Which sources were most or least reliable and why?
- Police quote Frank Roque (the man who shot Balbir) as saying, "I'm a patriot, I'm an American." As continuing attacks make clear, Roque was not alone in his belief that assault or harassment of people identified as "different" or "other" are appropriate expressions of national pride or patriotism. What are the roots of this idea? How is it that Rana sees the attacks as inherently "un-American" while others see such attacks as patriotic?
- In addition to being tried for murder and attempted murder, should Frank Roque (the man who shot Balbir) be tried for a hate crime? Why or why not? What about responsibility of co-workers or people at the bar who witnessed Roque's anger and racism prior to the murder? In your view, are there ways in which those who witness, but don't challenge racism should be held accountable? If so, how? Be specific.
- After his conviction, Frank Roque says that he wished the news had not shown the destruction of the September 11th attacks. In your view, do news reports bear any responsibility for Balbir's murder? In what ways might media incite the kind of violence experienced by the Sikh community? What could media do to help prevent such violence?
- As attacks and harassment continue, Rana asks, "Why do people want to hurt my family?" How would you answer him?
- One way that the Phoenix community responds to Balbir's murder is with a Unity Walk. Co-organizer Bill Strauss explains, "When you are part of a group that has been victimized by a hate crime, the most important thing in the world is to know that you've got friends, supporters, people that are willing to stand with you." Why is public support important? What is the difference between support given in private and publicly demonstrated support?

- People around Frank Roque heard him use the term "towel-heads" to describe people who wear turbans. What derogatory names have you heard to describe Muslims or Arabs or those perceived to be Muslim or Arab? What did you do when you heard them? Did your response help reduce prejudice in your community? If not, what could you have done differently?
- Responding to the conviction of his brother's murderer, Harjit says, "This justice brings peace to everybody, and we can walk on the street without any fear." What role do trials play in our ability to achieve "liberty and justice for all"? How would you have felt if, at the end of the film, you found out the Frank Roque had been acquitted?
- The Sodhi brothers disagree about whether George W. Bush or John Kerry would make the better president. In your view, which political party best addresses the issue raised in the film? What has that party done or said to make you think so?
- Bill Strauss of the Anti-Defamation League, a co-organizer of the Unity March, describes racism and bigotry as "a disease that is always looking for an opening, a virus that's always looking for a host." What do you think he means? What could you do to help prevent or treat this "disease"?
- Rana says that the Sikh faith taught him to "stand up against injustice." What does your religion or culture teach about responding to injustice?
- The film quotes Martin Luther King Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." What are the threats to justice in your community and what could you do to help address the situation(s)?

### Examining Bigotry

- In Rana's experience of America, "You work hard and enjoy the life. There is a lot of opportunity. And you can make your own dream." How does this description compare to your experience of life in the United States?
- It is clear that Rana's brothers and other Sikhs have been attacked because of their appearance. What does a "real American" look like? What are the roots of the notion that "true" Americans are Caucasian and Christian, and why has that notion persisted despite the fact that the majority of current citizens are immigrants, the descendants of immigrants, or descendants of African slaves and, in several major cities, the majority of residents are not Caucasian?
- The U.S. Department of Justice reported having investigated over 750 post 9/11-related crimes. The actual figure might be more than 15 times higher than that because of non-reporting. How does this square with the teacher's vision at the end of the film that the United States is the guarantor of freedom of religion and freedom of speech?

- Rana sees the Unity Walk as a representation of the “real” America, where people of different religions come together. Does your experience of life in the U.S. measure up to Rana’s ideal? What kinds of things does your community do to help people come together across differences of religion, race, or culture? What kinds of things serve as obstacles to that unity?
- In the film, the Sikh community’s response to attacks is mixed. Consider the following points of view:
  - ~ “Being Sikh means to be strong, but being Sikh does not mean that we intentionally put ourselves in harm’s way.”
  - ~ “Our job should be to inform people, advise people, but not be confrontationalist.”

How do these viewpoints contrast with Rana’s position that people should speak up and report threats to the police? In the face of racially or culturally motivated violence, why might some people choose to make themselves less visible while others choose to speak out? If you were a leader in this community, what would you advise your followers to do and why?
- List the ideas you hear as Rana’s community discusses how best to respond to continuing attacks (e.g., wear a flag pin or display an American flag in your window, install cameras and security systems at home, meet with a police liaison, etc.). Evaluate each suggestion in terms of its potential to protect people from harassment and for its potential to demonstrate the community’s patriotism. If you had been present at the meeting, which idea(s) would you have endorsed and why?
- Rana says, “Every citizen of the United States has a responsibility to make this country heaven.” What does fulfilling that responsibility look like? If you were writing an instruction manual describing how a citizen should act to ensure that the United States lives up to its ideals, what would it say?



## SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

Together with other audience members, brainstorm actions that you might take as an individual and that people might do as a group. If you need help getting started, you might begin your list with these suggestions:

- In the film, Rana visits his children's new school. Find out what your school district does to help integrate new students and/or to teach students about classmates' cultures. Work with teachers and administrators to arrange for guest speakers or information sessions where needed.
- Work with representatives from local immigrant communities and students from global studies classes to train "cultural docents" who make community presentations to explain basic practices and beliefs of the ethnicities, nationalities, and religions of the people in your town.
- Work with local news directors to create a feature series explaining the differences between Sikhs, Sunnis, Shi'ites, Hindus, Buddhists and other religions or ethnicities in your community. Be sure to include representatives from each religion or group in your planning and allow members of every group to speak for themselves. As a follow-up, invite the people involved to form an ongoing task force to monitor local media and challenge stereotypes or misinformation.
- Track pending hate crime legislation (federal, state, and local). Let your elected representatives know how you want them to vote on that legislation.
- Convene a study group to look at the parallels between American ideals and Sikh teachings.
- In the film, the police department assigns a special liaison officer to the Sikh community. Find out whether or not your police department has similar liaisons to communities that are vulnerable to hate crimes. Where needed, facilitate conversations between at-risk communities and the police. As a community, brainstorm ways to help those who are vulnerable to feel safe.
- Create a memorial to hate crime victims in your community. Solicit input from the widest possible variety of groups in your community to determine the design and content of the memorial.

For additional outreach ideas, visit [pbs.org/independentlens/getinvolved](http://pbs.org/independentlens/getinvolved). For local information, check the website of your PBS station.

Before you leave this event, commit yourself to pursuing one item from the brainstorm list.



## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY & ACTION

### To Start

[www.adreamindoubt.org/](http://www.adreamindoubt.org/) - Information about the film as well as a great set of links related to hate crimes.

### Sikhs and Sikhism

[www.sikhnet.com/Sikh](http://www.sikhnet.com/Sikh) - This educational non-profit organization dedicated to providing information to and about Sikhs is a good starting place for general background information on Sikhism.

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/sikhism/) - A good site for general information about the tenets and practices of Sikhism as well as links to news stories about or especially relevant to Sikhs.

[www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php?title=Main_Page) - This wiki on Sikhism provides a more advanced look at the religion.

[www.pluralism.org/](http://www.pluralism.org/) - Harvard University's Pluralism Project provides excellent background information on religious diversity in the U.S., the role of religion in current public policy and a comprehensive set of links to religious websites searchable by state or by religion. It also includes a research report on Sikh participation in American civic life: [www.pluralism.org/research/profiles/display.php?profile=74099](http://www.pluralism.org/research/profiles/display.php?profile=74099).

### Hate Crimes

[www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/civilrights/hate.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/civilrights/hate.htm) - This site provides hate crime statistics collected by the FBI as mandated by the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1990.

[www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-1592](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-1592) - This site allows you to easily check on the text and status of federal hate crime legislation.

### Community Dialogue & Anti-Bias Education

Those looking to facilitate interracial community dialogue might want to seek training or trainers from organizations such as: Center for the Healing of Racism - [www.centerhealingracism.org](http://www.centerhealingracism.org); National Conference for Community Justice - [www.nccj.org](http://www.nccj.org); or National Coalition Building Institute - [www.ncbi.org](http://www.ncbi.org).

[www.adl.org](http://www.adl.org) - The Anti-Defamation League (represented in the film by Bill Strauss) offers a variety of anti-bias education materials, including downloadable lesson plans and tip sheets. The organization also offers facilitators and trainings through its World of Difference project.

[www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org) - The Teaching Tolerance project of the Southern Poverty Law Center provides basic information and ideas for anti-bias education strategies, including "Ten Ways to Fight Hate Crimes." Recommended for beginners. Those ready for more advanced work might contact Facing History and Ourselves, [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org).

[www.saldef.org/](http://www.saldef.org/) - The Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) is the oldest and largest Sikh American national non-profit civil rights and educational organization. We empower Sikh Americans through legal assistance, educational outreach, legislative advocacy, and media relations.

[www.adc.org](http://www.adc.org) - The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a civil rights organization committed to defending the rights of people of Arab descent and promoting their rich cultural heritage.

[www.interfaithalliance.org/](http://www.interfaithalliance.org/) - Founded in 1994 to challenge the radical religious right, TIA remains committed to promoting the positive and healing role of religion in public life by encouraging civic participation, facilitating community activism, and challenging religious political extremism.

A DREAM IN DOUBT WILL AIR NATIONALLY ON THE EMMY AWARD-WINNING PBS SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON MAY 20, 2008. CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS.

A DREAM IN DOUBT is a co-production of TRY Productions and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), in association with the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM), with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). The Emmy Award-winning series *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ITVS COMMUNITY is the national community engagement program of the Independent Television Service. ITVS COMMUNITY works to leverage the unique and timely content of the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* to build stronger connections among leading organizations, local communities and public television stations around key social issues and create more opportunities for civic engagement and positive social change. To find out more about ITVS COMMUNITY, visit [www.pbs.org/independentlens/getinvolved](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/getinvolved).

