

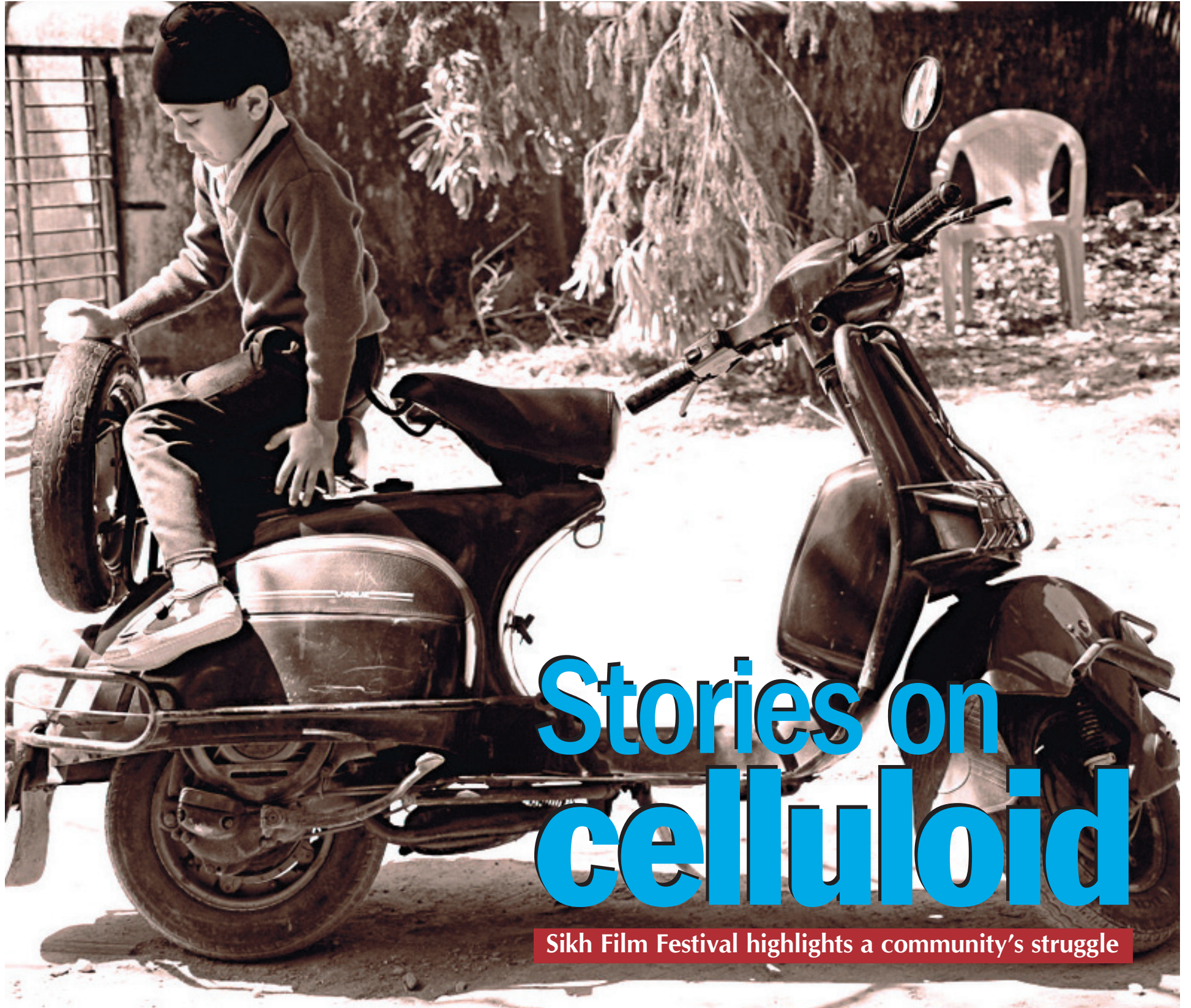
India *in* New York[®]

A GUIDE TO EVENTS AND ENTERTAINMENT FROM INDIA ABROAD

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Stories on celluloid

Sikh Film Festival highlights a community's struggle

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A scene from *Jagjeet*, which tells the story of two friends against the backdrop of Delhi's 1984 anti-Sikh riots

Stories on celluloid

New York-based entrepreneur Teji Singh Bindra has his hands full this month with organizing a film festival, an awards gala, the release of a couple of books on Sikhs, and a business summit for the youth.

The Sikh International Film Festival is just one of the many community activities the Bindra family in New York is involved with. Teji is the president of the Sikh Arts and Film Foundation, which holds an annual festival of Sikh feature films, documentaries and a children's film festival.

This year the festival to be held October 14-15 at Asia Society in New York, will be preceded by the first Sikh leadership summit. Speakers include Mohanbir S Sawhney, the Robert R McCormick Tribune Foundation clinical professor of technology and director of the Center for Research in Technology & Innovation at Kellogg School of Management, Evanston; film-maker Gurinder Chadha and Gurvendra Suri, the founder of Optimal Solutions Integration, Inc., a Texas-based technology consulting firm. Over 500 people were expected at the business summit, film festival and awards gala.

The Bindra family has established the \$50,000 Guru Nanak Interfaith award, given once in two years through the Hofstra University. Last year Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president, the Appeal for Conscience Foundation, a worldwide multi-religious coalition, received the award. Ishar

The Sikh film festival in New York highlights a community's struggles, reports **ARTHUR J PAIS**

Bindra, Teji's father, established the prize in 2006.

In recent years the Sikh film festival has shown interesting features and documentaries like *Ocean of Pearls*, directed by Dr Sarab Singh Neelam, about a young Sikh doctor struggling with the inequities of the American health system and his own identity. The documentary *A Dream in Doubt* directed by Tami Yeager profiled the aftermath of 9/11 in which Sikhs were singled out and mistaken for the Taliban. *The Sky Below*, by Sarah Singh, took a contemporary look at the 1947 partition of the sub-continent. *Pahelwani* by Navdeep Singh Kandola lamented the dying art of Punjabi wrestling. Other memorable films were director Michael Singh's *Rebel Queen*, the story of the last Sikh emperor Ranjit Singh's widow pitted against the British Empire and Indian actor and lawmaker Raj Babbar's 15-part saga on Ranjit Singh.

Cash prizes are also given to films in a handful of categories during the festival.

'It is amazing the number of phone calls and letters we get from film-makers, a large number of them are not even

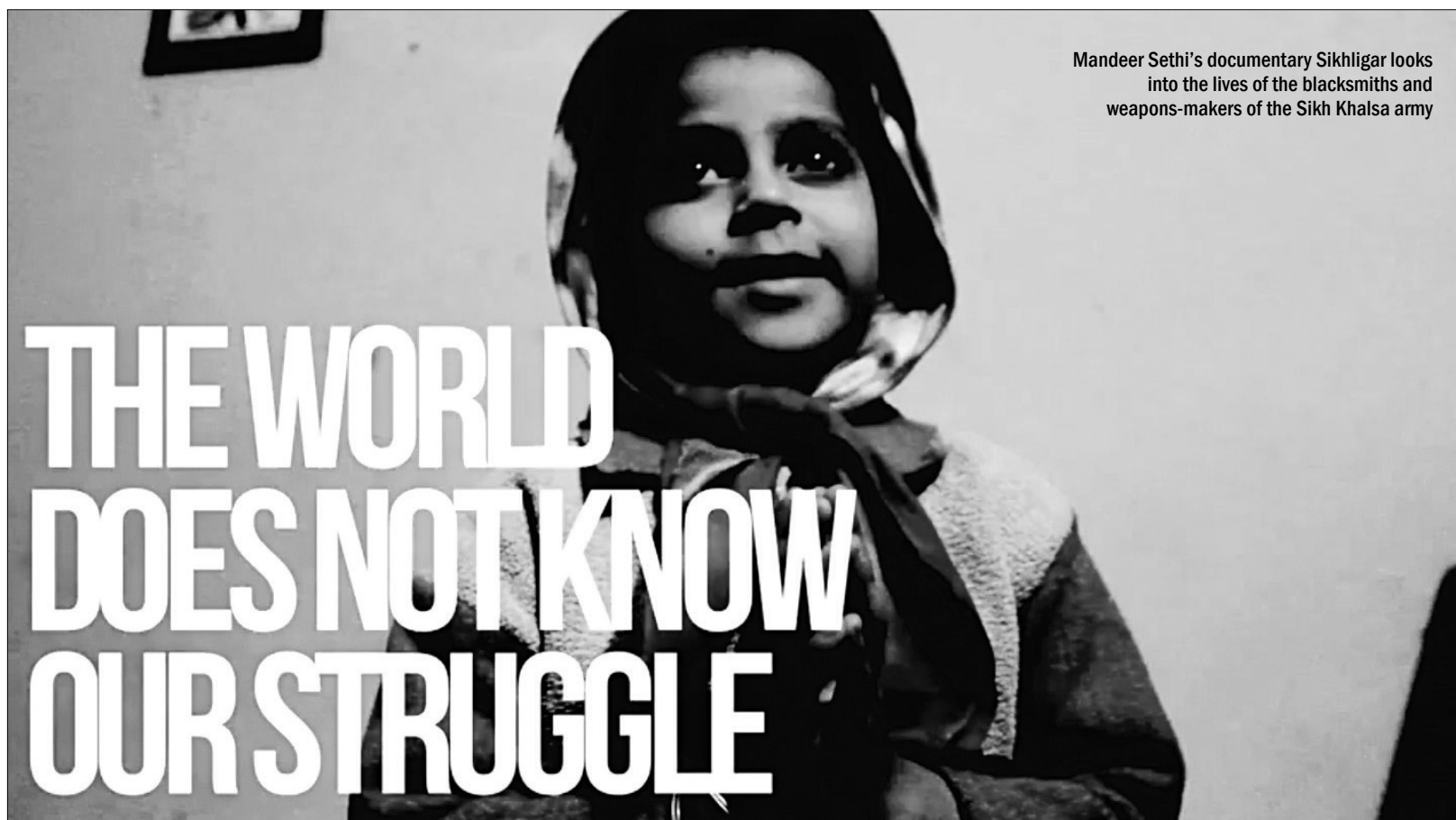
Indian let alone be Sikhs, who want to bring their short films or features to our festival,' says curator Paul Johar, who is also a member of the extended Bindra family. 'The primary goal of this Festival is to create awareness and pride in the diversity, culture and history of the Sikhs and highlight the contributions made by the Sikhs in America, India and other parts of the world.'

Teji Bindra and Johar say they continually hear from Sikh artists, filmmakers and activists in India that they should create a similar film festival in the country. 'Truly, there is not anything like this in India,' Bindra says. 'We get calls and letters from not only Sikh institutions across America but also from libraries, schools and colleges who show interest in the films we show.'

The Bindras, who made America their home three decades ago, believe their activities are not just aimed at older Sikhs but also the second and third generation. The films ought to reach out to non-Sikhs and non-Indians too, Bindra says, adding that some filmgoers accompany their Sikh friends while others, having read about the festival in a mainstream publication, stop by the venue at Asia Society.

The festival seeks to play a role in educating people about Sikhs 'We are committed to promoting Sikh art and culture in America so that misconceptions about our community are erased,' he adds.

Films about the dark, and the light



ARTHUR J PAIS

Teji Bindra, president, Sikh Art & Film Foundation and the curator of the festival Paul Johar, a New York surgeon, are not afraid of showing films, which may not send you home in a happy mood.

The idea is to showcase movies chronicling different aspects of Sikh life across the world, they say. There are films this year dealing with drug problems of young men in Punjab, a film about stranded Sikh men in a Spanish enclave in Morocco for over a year and an uplifting film about the great humanitarian work carried out by Gurmeet Sodhi at Pingalwara.

There are over a dozen feature films, documentaries and short films from Asia, Europe, Africa and North America. From noted directors like David R Gray, Canada's leading documentary film maker, to novices like high school and college students, the festival showcases films by a varied group.

The films were to be shown October 14 through October 15 at Asia Society & Museum, New York City.

In *A Little Revolution - A Story of Suicides and Dreams*, filmmaker Harpreet Kaur travels from villages of Punjab to New Delhi with children of farmers who've committed suicide. She confronts Sharad Pawar, India's agriculture minister, demanding help to rehabilitate the bereaved families.

She admits that like many crises facing the world there is no single, complete answer to the farmers' suicides in India. However, there is a general consensus that a farmer takes his own life due to high interest loans, taken to fulfill pro-industrial farming policies, she points.

Curator Johar says Kaur gives the farmers' children a fine chance to share their stories with the world. Their letters to the government too offer raw but insightful stories of a struggle they are facing with determination.

A Little Revolution is produced by Baltimore-based Manmeet Singh whose documentary *Pingalwara* is also being shown at the festival. "This is a story of hope, empow-

erment and simple dreams," Kaur says.

Sikhligar, a documentary by Mandeer Sethi looks into the lives of the blacksmith and weapons-makers of the Khalsa army of the Sikhs. Very little is known about the Sikligars in and outside India, as they have been displaced through years of colonization and government oppression, Sethi notes. Originally named *Sikligar* by the 10th Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh, they now live in shantytowns in Delhi, Agra and a few cities in Rajasthan. Though most of them have been illiterate for the last 300 years, there is a new awakening among them, Sethi says, adding that his film is seeking to capture the new spirit of the community.

Gulshan Singh, a freshman at the University of Michigan studying engineering physics, is interested in philosophy, music and filmmaking. In his first serious film venture, Singh deals with bullying and harassment that have become a worrisome phenomenon in American colleges and schools.

His music video *Let It Out* is the story of a Sikh boy who with the help of counseling learns to handle the humiliating situation without resorting to violence.

Hew McLeod: A Kiwi Sikh Historian, the story of a New Zealander, the son of a sheep

farmer, who has spent a lifetime researching the Sikhs of India is another interesting film at the festival. Directed by Jasmine Pujji, the film is about the research McLeod conducted into Sikh immigrants in New Zealand. The emeritus professor, who has inflamed controversy and blazed a trail for other scholars to follow over four decades, speaks for the first time, says Pujji. "Living in Punjab, as a Christian missionary with his wife and child in the 1950's had a really profound effect on him. Leaving the church, McLeod went in pursuit of what became a life-long passion for understanding the colorful, but little known group - the Sikhs."

Some of the films shown at the festival have been recognized at other film events but many others shown in New York will get a new recognition and will

make their way to other festivals and specialized showings, Bindra says.

"The films we have chosen this year cover a very wide spectrum ranging from school bullying to drug addiction," says Johar.

Earlier the festival had shown a feature on the beleaguered Sikhs stranded in Ceuta, a tiny Spanish city, now it is offering an hour-long documentary called *The Ulysses*. Directors Alberto Garcia Ortiz and Agatha Maciaszek say they have made a film about how the 57 immigrants have made a united family as they wait to cross 9 miles into Spain. In Ceuta between the border fence and the sea, all they can do is wait, while the Spanish authorities attempt to negotiate their deportation back to their home countries. Thousands of miles away, their real families in Punjabi villages receive the messages from their sons, filmed by the directors.

In *(Ex)Changed*, director Angad Singh, a teenager, says he has taken the message of friendship and building bridges to an international level. His third short film is about friendships forged when he and his American classmates hosted 32 French exchange teens for two weeks at the Milton High School, Alpharetta, GA.

Director Kavanjit Singh's short film *Jagjeet* tells the story of childhood friends, Kuldeep Singh and Jagjeet

Schedule

October 14

Red Carpet Reception (6:00pm-7:00pm)

Feature Session (7:00pm-9:30pm)

moderated by Safina Uberoi

A Little Revolution

The Ulysses

After Party, 10:00pm-1:00am

October 15

Short Films Session (11:00am-1:00pm) moderated by David Gray

Let It Out

(Ex) Changed

Jagjeet

The Reunion

Jeevika

Pingalwara

Documentary Session (2:00pm-5:00pm) moderated by Dr I J Singh

Glut - The Untold Story of Punjab

Canadian Soldier Sikhs

Hew McLeod: A Kiwi Sikh

Historian

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Venue

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www.sikharts.com

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Jaspal Bindra



Navtej Sarna



Gurinder Chadha

ARTHUR J PAIS

British-Indian director Gurinder Chadha, who is working with Academy award winning music director A R Rahman and lyricist Stephen Schwartz on Dreamworks Animation's first musical set in India, was to be honored at the Sikh Heritage Gala, October 15, in New York.

Chadha, who is looking forward to taking her best-known film *Bend It Like Beckham* as a musical to West End in London (and also eyeing Broadway), was to be honored in the arts category. Indian diplomat and author Navtej Sarna was to be recognized in the vision category and Jaspal Bindra, chief executive officer, Asia, Standard Chartered Bank, was to receive the leadership award.

Chadha began her career in the United Kingdom as a

news reporter for the British Broadcasting Corporation and made documentaries for the British Film Institute and Channel Four. She directed several documentaries and the popular 1995 two-part drama *Rich Deceiver* for the BBC.

Bend it Like Beckham was a coming of age story about friendships formed outside racial barriers. It made a star of Keira Knightley in no time.

Chadha's other successful films include the Aishwarya Rai Bachchan starrer *Bride and Prejudice* that fused Jane Austen with Indian and Western musicals, and the teen comedy *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging*.

The gala event was to take place at Ciprianni at 55 Wall Street. Sarna's book *The Zafarnama*, a translation from Persian to English of Guru Gobind Singh's letter to Aurangzeb, was to be released at the festival. Sarna studied commerce and law at Delhi University and joined the

Indian Foreign Service in 1980. He is India's Ambassador to Israel and has served as a diplomat in Moscow, Warsaw, Thimphu, Geneva, Tehran and Washington D C. His book *The Exile* is based on the life of Maharaja Duleep Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, one of India's greatest Sikh rulers.

Bindra, group executive director and a member of the board of Standard Chartered, is based in Hong Kong. He joined Standard Chartered in 1998 and has held senior positions in the Group such as global head of client relationship for Wholesale Bank and CEO for India. Before joining the bank Bindra was with UBS investment banking. He began his career with the Bank of America in 1984 and worked with them across treasury markets and consumer banking in India and Singapore. He has received a lot of media attention for his work as chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Council at Standard Chartered.

Bindra, who has a master's degree in business management from Xavier Labor Relations Institute, Jamshedpur, has actively sought out better positions for women at the bank.

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Films about the dark, and the light

Singh, living as neighbors in New Delhi. Kuldeep has always looked upon Jagjeet as his younger brother. The film set in 1984 shows a day in the life of the friends during the 1984 riots in which one friend is killed.

In another short film, *The Reunion*, directors Angad Bhai and Ethan Russell show what happens when two friends who share a common background reunite after several years. One is a Sikh who cuts his hair after being brutalized during a hate crime, and the other has kept his hair since birth. The film deals with issues Sikhs face when trying to assimilate into American society.

Angad Bhai, who has a degree from Cornell University in English and Economics, is a special education teacher at a NYC public school. He plays the turbaned Sikh in the film.

In the short film *Jeevika*, director Anureet Kaur looks at a segment of the Punjabi population unaffected by the information-technology revolution as they are immersed in shepherding and making jaggery.

In the hour-long documentary *Glut The Untold Story of Punjab*, directors Smaran Sahu and Sahil Bhagat say 73.5 percent of Punjab's youth is addicted to drugs.

David R Gray's films on Arctic explorations and early Sikh immigrants in Canada are titled *Searching for the Sikhs of Tod Inlet*, *Beyond the Gardens' Wall* and *Canadian Soldier Sikhs*.

In *Canadian Soldier Sikhs: A Little Story in a Big War*, Gray focuses on ten Sikh men



In the hour-long documentary *Glut The Untold Story of Punjab*, directors Smaran Sahu and Sahil Bhagat say 73.5 percent of Punjab's youth is addicted to drugs

who are enlisted, trained, and transported to France in World War I.

'This film will bring to life the fascinating and unknown story of a group of Sikh men who enlisted in the Canadian army,' Gray says, adding these 'volunteers fought for a country which denied them even the basic rights of citizenship. It follows one injured

soldier back to Canada on a hospital ship. Images of his war grave and the story of how his war medal has survived bring a personal touch to the film.'

There was no information published on the role of Sikhs in the Canadian armed forces in World War I. In order to assess the potential for creating a documentary film

on the Canadian Sikhs in WWI, Gray and a small group of researchers spent several weeks at the Library and Archives Canada, the Directorate of History, and the Canadian War Museum archives.

The search was tough and it took nearly a year to gather basic information for the documentary.