

Congressman from India:

The Remarkable Story of Dalip Singh Saund

What we would like is not to be considered foreigners or strangers at all, but to be accepted by Americans as friends. . . . We would like to be merely members of the family and not feel we are strangers or foreigners. D.S. Saund

In 1956, Dalip Singh Saund, a lettuce farmer in Imperial Valley and local judge, originally from India, ran against Jacqueline Cochran Odlum, a world famous aviator, winner of many aviation prizes, leader of women aviators during World War II, and wife of a multimillionaire, for Congress from the 29th District of California. And he won by 3,300 votes—the first Indian and Asian to be elected to the United States Congress.

He narrates his eventful life in his autobiography *Congressman from India* (1960), which offers a fascinating account of post-War California on the edge of dramatic transformation and just before the great migrations from Asia and other parts of the world. Saund was born in Amritsar, India, in 1899 during the British Raj, received his undergraduate education in India. After graduating from the University of Punjab (A.B., 1919), he came to the United States in 1920 to attend the University of California, Berkeley, and graduated in 1922 receiving M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. He settled down as a lettuce farmer in the Imperial Valley of California in 1930 and became a citizen of the United States in 1949. Elected as a judge of the Justice Court, Westmorland Judicial District, Imperial County, he served from 1952-1957. He was elected as a Democrat Congressman to the Eighty-fifth, Eighty-sixth, and Eighty-seventh Congresses (January 3, 1957-January 3, 1963).

His life, public service, and achievements are a remarkable chapter in the richly varied history of this global village called California and provide a fascinating insight into the ongoing narrative of diversity, assimilation, and coexistence that informs the very fiber of California culture and society.

In the last several decades, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the Chinese and Japanese immigrants in California—understandably so. Stories like that of Saund reveal that Indians from India have also played an important role in the development of California and have enriched the life of the state but have not received the same attention. Such a study is therefore necessary and timely.

This research project is only the first step towards a more detailed and comprehensive study of the role and contributions of Indians in California. In this project, I will focus only on the life and career of Dalip Singh Saund.

For this project, I propose to study Saund's autobiography, the Congressional Record, local newspapers, and histories of southern California to learn about his life and achievements and about the relationships among some of the prominent ethnic groups during Saund's professional and public life.

This research will lead to the following tangible and specific results:

1. A unit on the role of Indians in the culture of California in the Literature of California course (English 9) that I regularly teach.
2. Revision of the unit on Indians in American culture in the Asian American Literature course (English 41), the next time I offer the course.
3. A database of Indian-Americans, like Saund, who have played a significant role in the culture of California. This database will be the foundation of a website on Indian-Americans in California that I plan to create for students and the general public.

This research project will proceed according to the following schedule.

Winter 2018: Objective 1: Overview and Review

Activity 1: Re-read Saund's autobiography and compile a working bibliography of primary and secondary sources, including Karen Leonard's *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (1992) and Jayasri Majumdar Hart's *Roots in the Sand* (2000).

Spring 2018: Objective 2: Study Saund's life—professional and public. (February-April)

Activity 2.1: Take detailed notes from his autobiography; websites, such as www.saund.org and www.pbs.org/roots in the sand.

Activity 2.2: Read and take additional notes about his career as a judge and his congressional campaign and career in newspapers, such as the Los Angeles *Times*, and in historical records of southern California available at the Huntington Library and in the public records of the city of Westmorland, CA.

Objective 3: More study of the historical context and preparation of a lesson plan (April-May)

Activity 3.1: Continuing to read histories of some of the ethnic groups of southern California.

Activity 3.2: Preparation of a one or two-week unit on Saund and Asian Indians in southern California for use in my Literature of California course (English 9).

Activity 3.3 (June-July): Preparation of presentations on this subject to professional organizations (local and statewide) and the report to be submitted to the Sabbaticals and Fellowships Committee. Revision of the unit on Indians in the Asian American Literature course (English 41).

Fall 2018-: Compiling the database of Indian-Americans who have played a significant role and beginning work on the creation of the website.

2. Benefits to Students: I regularly teach a course in Literature of California that transfers to UC, CSU, and other colleges. A historical survey of the literature of California from indigenous beginnings to the 1970s, the course does pay attention to the various ethnic groups who have made significant contributions to California culture, especially in the decades before and after World War II. Thus, this study will be directly relevant to the curriculum and will open a fascinating window into a relatively neglected area of California culture.

In addition, my study of primary and archival materials will provide interesting lessons about research methodology for my students in English 1, which I also regularly teach.

As a result, this research will satisfy the following three ILOs:

The students will acquire the self-confidence and self-discipline to pursue their intellectual curiosities with integrity in both their personal and professional lives.

Obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to access, evaluate, and interpret ideas, images, and information critically in order to communicate effectively, reach conclusions, and solve problems.

Respect the inter-relatedness of the global environment, engage with diverse peoples, and acknowledge the significance of their daily actions relative to broader issues and events

3. Sharing the research with the SMC community: I plan to present my findings and share the story of Dalip Singh Saund with students and colleagues in a lecture during the Activity Hour on a Tuesday or Thursday in Fall 2018 or Spring 2019. I am also willing to visit any classes to discuss my research if any of my colleagues would like me to.

Thus, the project is consistent with one of the Supporting Goals of the institution:

Innovative and Responsive Academic Environment

Continuously develop curricular programs, learning strategies, and services to meet the evolving needs of students and the community.

4. Documenting and disseminating the research: I would like to present my research in talks to professional organizations (local and statewide) as well as to community groups organized by local public libraries. In addition, I hope to write a short article on Saund for popular magazines, such as *Los Angeles Magazine*. An important goal is to compile a database of significant Indian-Americans in California, such as Dalip Singh Saund and Bhagat Singh Thind, and create a website to make information about their role in and contributions to California history and culture available to students and the general public.