



# SALDEF

Sikh American Legal, Diverse and Education Fund



The new name of the Sikh Mediawatch And Research Task force (SMART)

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## Bhagat Singh Thind Community Empowerment Award

The *Bhagat Singh Thind Community Empowerment Award* recognizes contributions by a Sikh in keeping with the Sikh spirit and tradition of seva (selfless service). The award is named in honor of Dr. Bhagat Singh Thind (1892-1967), a pioneering Sikh American soldier, scholar, and activist.

Dr. Thind was born in Punjab and came to America in 1913. A year later, he was paying his way through the University of California at Berkeley by working in an Oregon lumber mill during summer vacations. When America entered World War I, he joined the U.S. Army. He was honorably discharged in 1918 and in 1920 applied for U.S. citizenship from the state of Oregon. Since several applicants from India had thus far been granted U.S. citizenship, Dr. Thind was also approved by the district court. A naturalization examiner, however, appealed this court's decision and his case eventually made it up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1923, America's highest court denied his petition in a landmark ruling declaring him a "nonwhite Caucasian" ineligible for citizenship (*United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 US 204). Ironically, Dr. Thind applied for and received U.S. citizenship through the state of New York within a few years of being turned down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Dr. Thind remained in the U.S., completed his Ph.D., and authored 15 books on various subjects. He delivered lectures in metaphysics across the nation basing his lessons on Sikh philosophy. Dr. Thind enriched his teaching with references to the scriptures of several religions and the work of Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau. He also campaigned actively for the independence of India from the British Empire.