

The London School of Economics and Political  
Science

# ‘Home’ in Sikh Polity

Understandings of mīrī pīrī in contemporary Britain

Jaskiran Kaur Bhogal

January 2022

A thesis submitted to the Department of Anthropology of the  
London School of Economics and Political Science for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

## Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. Quotation from it is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This thesis may not be reproduced without my prior written consent.

I warrant that this authorisation does not, to the best of my belief, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that my thesis consists of 94,627 words.

## Statement of use of third party

For editorial help I can confirm that sections of my thesis were copy edited for conventions of language, spelling, grammar, and transliteration by friends and family.

## Abstract

Although past anthropological research on Britain's religious minority communities, such as Sikhs – and also Sikh Studies research – has principally focused on exploring issues of 'identity' and 'assimilation' within (public) religious practice, since 9/11 and the 7/7 bombings, practising Sikhī (the vernacular for the Sikh faith) in public has become increasingly problematic, not just for Sikhs, but also for Britain's wider society. Indeed, these increasingly problematic public practises of Sikhī compound problems with past research's focus on Sikhs' public identity and assimilation. To provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of this increasingly problematic practice, my research takes an 'anthropology at home' approach – and focusses on both public and private forms of Sikh expression deployed in contemporary Britain. From this dual focus of working from the inside outwards – as well as taking seriously a longer history of the making of the complex relationship between Sikhs and Britain – I argue that because the British public sphere has a religious and racialised hierarchy, public expressions of minority religions, such as Sikhī, are frequently problematic for those who practise it.

Sikh ideas of 'home' are multi layered and for my interlocutors, Sikhī is the thread that runs through each of these layers of what home means. My thesis explores how one '*becomes*' a Sikh and the different ways of becoming a Sikh in various sites from the most private setting of the home to the most public arena in the form of sevā (selfless service). Importantly, as a result of the development of Sikh history a 'multiplicity of identities' (Werbner, 2013) has developed leading to a 'spectrum of Sikhs' that still maintain a significant link to Sikhī through the practice of the interrelation of kinship and religion (Cannell, 2013; Cannell, 2015; Cannell, 2019; McKinnon et al., 2013; Orsi, 2010).

Christian and post-Christian legacies in anthropology create default categories such as spirituality, politics, and religion. The perceived tension of religion and politics frames our

understandings of those that we study and impacts our interpretation of their beliefs and praxis. My thesis is primarily about understanding how Sikhs in Britain comprehend the relationship between the religious and political through the lens of *mīrī pīrī* (the vernacular understanding of the relationship between spirituality and politics). Ultimately, my thesis argues that whilst Sikhī was a faith that emerged as one to “dismantle structures of oppression and hierarchy” (Kaur, 2020, p. 8) it has been appropriated in the British context to allow for acceptance into a non-compatible nation and is not without compromise and sacrifice.

## Contents

<b>Declaration</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<i>Statement of use of third party</i> .....	2
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>A note on language</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<i>Names</i> .....	14
<b>List of figures</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<i>Multicultural Britain</i> .....	21
<i>Secular Britain</i> .....	29
<i>Positionalities of minorities in Britain</i> .....	32
<b>Chapter 2: Panth</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<i>What is Sikhī?</i> .....	47
The 'Divine Revelation' .....	49
<i>Sikhs and Britain</i> .....	51
The Sikh Empire (1801 – 1849) .....	52
The rise of the Sikh empire: Māhārājā Ranjit Singh (1780 -1839) .....	53
The Fall of the Sikh Empire .....	53
The Annexation of Punjāb .....	54
Sikhs and the Partition of the Indian Sub-continent .....	57
The Green Revolution .....	60
June 1984 .....	61
<i>Sikh activism: the desire for a sovereign state</i> .....	66
<i>Literature review of Sikhs</i> .....	67
<i>The West Midlands</i> .....	71
The story of migration .....	73
Sikhs and the West Midlands .....	76
<i>Methodology and reflections on fieldwork</i> .....	79
'Native' anthropology .....	80
Key interlocutors .....	83
Multi-sited, urban ethnography .....	86
<i>Chapter Outline</i> .....	87
Sangat .....	87
Home .....	88
Gurdwārā .....	88
School .....	89
Sevā .....	90
Conclusion .....	90
<b>Chapter 3: Sangat</b> .....	<b>92</b>
<i>Mīrī pīrī</i> .....	97
Sikh ethnicity .....	100

Sikh(?) guardsman .....	104
Actors of the state? .....	108
Sangat or community? .....	113
'Britishness' vs. 'Sikhness' .....	117
<i>Sikhs in Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Spectrum of Sikhs</i> .....	118
<b>Chapter 4: Home</b> .....	<b>120</b>
<i>Politicisation of the house</i> .....	121
<i>What is home?</i> .....	123
<i>Marriage holds the key</i> .....	129
<i>"Home is where one starts from." - T.S. Eliot</i> .....	132
Language of the people .....	138
<i>Sikh homes in Britain</i> .....	143
<i>Home is not a place...it's a feeling</i> .....	145
'The old shaping the new' .....	152
<i>'Modern traditionalist' vs. 'traditional modernist'</i> .....	153
Girls' night: how public is private? .....	157
<i>What makes a Sikh home in Britain?</i> .....	159
<b>Chapter 5: Gurdwārā</b> .....	<b>161</b>
<i>What is a Gurdwārā?</i> .....	164
<i>Spirit of the Eternal Gurū</i> .....	169
<i>The institution of langar</i> .....	170
<i>Kīrtan</i> .....	173
<i>Gurdwārā as 'mīrī pīrī'</i> .....	174
<i>Gurdwārās in Birmingham</i> .....	177
Guru Nanak Gurdwara (GNG), Smethwick .....	177
Mīrī pīrī in the public sphere .....	190
Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) .....	198
<i>Public or private? Sacred or secular? Political or religious?</i> .....	213
Mīrī vs pīrī? .....	213
<b>Chapter 6: School</b> .....	<b>216</b>
<i>Schooling in Britain</i> .....	219
Free schools and faith schools .....	223
<i>Sikh schools: an impossible situation</i> .....	225
<i>The Nishkam project</i> .....	227
Kar sevā .....	228
Nishkam schools .....	230
Faith, values, and social mobility .....	242
<i>'Home from home'</i> .....	251
<i>An 'awkward mediator'</i> .....	259
<b>Chapter 7: Sevā</b> .....	<b>263</b>
Sevā as mīrī pīrī .....	265
<i>Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS)</i> .....	268
'Good' diaspora? .....	274

<i>Sikh Youth UK (SYUK)</i> .....	280
A multiplicity of identities .....	285
<i>Sikh Performativity</i> .....	292
<i>The ‘right kind’ of Sikhī</i> .....	297
<b>Chapter 8: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>300</b>
<i>Why do Sikhs make Sikhī public?</i> .....	301
<i>Theoretical Contributions</i> .....	304
<i>Sikhī as an emic category</i> .....	306
<i>Vernacular Sikhī</i> .....	307
<i>Britain as home?</i> .....	309
<i>Public visibility of Sikhī during the Covid-19 Pandemic</i> .....	312
<i>Propositions from this research</i> .....	312
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>315</b>

ਤੂੰ ਕਰਤਾ ਸਚਿਆਰੁ ਮੈਡਾ ਸਾਂਈ ॥

Ṭūn kartā sachīār maidā sāñī.

You are the True Creator, my Lord and Master.

ਜੇ ਤਉ ਭਾਵੈ ਸੋਈ ਥੀਸੀ ਜੇ ਤੂੰ ਦੇਹਿ ਸੋਈ ਹਉ ਪਾਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Jo ṭao bhāvai sōi thīsī jo ṭūn dēh sōi hao pāī. ||1|| rahāo.

Whatever pleases You comes to pass. As You give, so do we receive. ||1||Pause||

(Sri Gurū Granth Sāhib 11)

This thesis is dedicated to the Khalsā panth



Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness  
That most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves  
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.  
Your playing small  
Does not serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking  
So that other people won't feel insecure around you.  
We are all meant to shine,  
As children do.  
We were born to make manifest  
The glory of God that is within us.  
It's just not in some of us;  
It's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
We unconsciously give other people  
Permission to do the same.  
As we're liberated from our own fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others.

- (Williamson, 1992)

ਜਾ ਤੂ ਮੇਰੈ ਵਲਿ ਹੈ ਤਾ ਕਿਆ ਮੁਹਛੰਦਾ ॥

Jā tū merai val hai t̄ā kiā muhchḥandā.

When You are on my side, what do I need to worry about?

ਤੁਧੁ ਸਭੁ ਕਿਛੁ ਮੈਨੇ ਸਉਪਿਆ ਜਾ ਤੇਰਾ ਬੰਦਾ ॥

Fudḥ sabḥ kiḥḥ maino sa<sup>u</sup>piā jā t̄erā bandā.

You entrusted everything to me when I became Yours.

(Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib 1096)

## Acknowledgements

My thesis has been an absolute labour of love from its inception until the final word was written. My own faith, listening to kīrtan and going to the Gurdwārā, is and always will be my source of strength. I have been on a personal journey throughout this thesis, with so much support from family, friends and friends who have become family throughout this process. I will forever be indebted to my family as this thesis would not have happened without them. My Nani (maternal grandmother) has paved the way for me to be where I am today, and this would not have been possible without her love, support, and knowledge. My parents have always supported every decision I have ever made. Thank you, dad, for all of the laughs and pushing me to make those breakthroughs! My mum has been my best friend and my constant rock throughout my life, and it was no different throughout my PhD journey. Following in her (ironically) huge footsteps, she encouraged me to keep going whenever I felt like I was drowning. Something that she said to me that will always stay with me, 'on some days the writing will just flow, and you will love every minute of it. On other days it will be just like eating an aloo wālā prōthā (potato stuffed chapatti) on a full stomach; you just have to keep

going. At the end you will just be glad it's over.' Thank you, mum, for always being there and pushing me up that mountain.

I am grateful to the Anthropology Department at LSE for welcoming an economist with open arms and teaching me how to be an anthropologist! Thank you to my supervisors, Laura Bear and Fenella Cannell. Fenella helped me to not fall into the traps of 'native' anthropology and taught me the meaning of the phrase, "make the familiar, unfamiliar and make the unfamiliar familiar." Somehow Laura managed to read my jumbled thoughts and understand precisely, the point I was trying to make – thank you both for supporting me on this journey and making me a better anthropologist. I would also like to thank all of the departmental staff, particularly Yan, who somehow has the answers to every question! I cannot write an acknowledgements section without thanking David Graeber; when I was one of his Masters' students, I asked him, "David, how do you write the way you do?" His response will stay with me forever, and guide all of my future writing, "I write for my mother." I am grateful to the LSE Anthropology Department for being awarded the Gell Scholarship which helped significantly in the final months of the thesis.

To all of my friends who have been there along the way, you know who you are and thank you for being there and sharing the highs and the lows. A huge thank you to Matt Lane from the Researchers Development Programme who came from nowhere and was like a third supervisor for me. Thank you for telling me that looking after my health and wellbeing was just as important as writing this thesis. You got me through the 'disgusting writing' stage!

I will remain indebted to the Sikh Education Council who gave me the confidence to pursue Sikhī academically and for giving me the platform to speak and write. You taught me how to think outside of the box and never stop fighting for what is right.

This thesis would not have been possible without my wonderful interlocutors who welcomed me into their community, their homes, and their families. I will forever be grateful to my Bhūā who was crucial in me gaining access to the field – thank you for treating me like your daughter. Thank you to all of my interlocutors for letting me be part of your sangat and helping to tell your story.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner in crime who wasn't here with me for the beginning of thesis but has more than been there for me throughout these final stages. Without his encouragement, support and sitting with me after we had both finished work, this thesis would not be where it is today. "This is important because" you gave me the confidence and strength to produce this thesis – thank you.

P.S., Dad, yes, I've finally finished my thesis!

## A note on language

During my fieldwork, most of my interlocutors spoke in English however there was a significant use of Punjabi vernacular terminology to bridge the gaps where English words could not evoke or express their feelings. Significant Punjabi colloquialisms were also used such as 'hunnā', similar to the English expression, 'yeah.' Where possible, I have used vernacular terminology throughout my thesis with brief English interpretations marked in brackets. Some of my interlocutors, particular older people and earlier generations spoke to me in Punjabi or a mixture of English and Punjabi. Where I have recounted conversations with them, I have provided an English interpretation whilst sometimes including vernacular terms where necessary. Throughout my thesis I refer to the Sikh faith as Sikhī rather than 'Sikhism' as it is how my interlocutors referred to it in the vernacular. There is a fuller explanation of this in Chapter 3: Sangat.

Sikhs have a long history with language that has been associated with oppression and hierarchy. The Punjabi Subā Movement which sought to protect the Punjabi language in Punjab was denied, resulting in many Sikhs seeing this as a dismantling of Sikhī in its homeland and therefore why Punjabi is so important for Sikhs in the diaspora. I have chosen not to follow the traditional convention of italicising non-English words in an attempt to honour my interlocutors and not to further marginalise them in terms of language. My interlocutors recounted allegories, stories, and proverbs in a combination of Punjabi and English foregrounding their particular understandings. While I realise that this might make readability more difficult for a non-familiar reader, I believe that it is important to reflect my interlocutors use of language as accurately as possible. The politicisation of language is not a new phenomenon (Rafael & Bolton, 2008, p. 167) and I cover the importance of language throughout my thesis and specifically in Chapter 4: Home.

In Punjabī, plurals are generally marked through changing vowel endings into an ‘eh’ sound or consonant endings usually have an ‘ah’ added. Where I have used vernacular terms in my thesis, I have created ‘false plurals’ (Cannell, 1999, p. xxv) for ease of reading in English. For example, **Gurdwārā** has been written as **Gurdwārās** in plural rather than the correct form of **Gurdwāreh**. This is fairly standard practise for my interlocutors when using vernacular terms themselves in English.

Whilst there are no standardised spellings in English of Punjabī terms, I have used commonly used spellings and also included the use of symbols to aid pronunciation for the reader. For example, **Sikhi** is written as **Sikhī**, and **Guru** is written as **Gurū** so that the reader is aware to elongate the marked vowels.

Throughout the thesis I refer to each Gurū as Gurū Nānak I to X in order to highlight that Gurū Nānak was succeeded by nine human form Gurūs and each one was recognised and met as the incarnation of Gurū Nānak (Singh, 1926). This is an important underpinning in Sikh philosophy; Gurū Nānak is one Gurū and so is the lineage that follows.

## Names

Pseudonyms have been used to protect my interlocutors’ identities unless they are public figures. In some cases, I have split or combined stories or slightly altered contexts to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.

## List of figures

Figure 1 - Gap advertisement featuring Sikh actor Waris Ahluwalia .....	38
Figure 2 – Map of sixty-nine wards of Birmingham (Birmingham City Council 2021) ...	72
Figure 3 - Percentage of residents in Birmingham born overseas (Birmingham City Council 2021).....	74
Figure 4 - Employment by industry and birth country in 2017 (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva, 2017).....	75
Figure 5 - 2019 English Index of Multiple Deprivation in Birmingham (Birmingham City Council 2019).....	78
Figure 6 - West Midlands 2019 IMD rankings (Birmingham City Council 2019) .....	79
Figure 7 - Charanpreet Singh Lall wearing his turban as a Guardsman .....	105
Figure 8 - Images used by the Sun newspaper to report on Lall’s failed drugs test ....	106
Figure 9 - Statue of a Sikh soldier outside GNG Smethwick .....	109
Figure 10 - Vandalism of the Sikh statue .....	111
Figure 11 - Sobha Singh Painting of Gurū Nānak.....	138
Figure 12 – My kinship structure showing the consanguineal relationship to my grandfather.....	146
Figure 13 – My grandfather’s siblingship highlighting two sisters .....	146
Figure 14 – Two sisters married two brothers who had a sister, my Bhūā’s mother ..	147
Figure 15 – Bhūā and Fufar’s kinship structure .....	147
Figure 16 - Pālkī, golak and stage area .....	165
Figure 17 - langar being served to sangat sitting in pangat.....	172
Figure 18 - Layout of Darbār Sāhib complex.....	175
Figure 19 - Guru Nanak Gurdwara – Smethwick .....	177
Figure 20 - Emergency meeting held at GNG lecture theatre .....	180
Figure 21 – Gutkā .....	188
Figure 22 - Christmas trees as decoration in the Darbār Sāhib .....	189
Figure 23 - Poster advertising GNG Freshers Fair .....	193
Figure 24- GNNSJ, Soho Road .....	198
Figure 25 - map of Sikh schools in England (GNNSJ 2018).....	226
Figure 26 - Nishkam High School Birmingham (Nishkam school trust 2021).....	229
Figure 27 - Interior of Nishkam High School Birmingham showing the reflection space .....	232
Figure 28 - A depiction of the three floors in Nishkam High School Birmingham from the Nishkam School Journal (2014) .....	234
Figure 29 - Theresa May’s visit to the school from her Facebook page .....	240
Figure 30 - Nishkam school’s vision (Nishkamschooltrust.org 2019) .....	246
Figure 31 - Nishkam Passport .....	248
Figure 32 - MLSS homeless feed in Birmingham .....	271
Figure 33 - SYUK poster advertising a presentation on the dangers of grooming at university .....	281

## Glossary

Akhand pāth	A continuous recital of the Gurū Granth Sāhib.
Amrit sanchār/ Khande de pahul	A ceremony to initiate Sikhs into the Khalsā.
Amritdhārī	An initiated Sikh who has participated in the amrit sanchār ceremony
Akāl Takht	The political centre for Sikhs situated on the Darbār Sāhib complex
Dharam	Derived from <i>dharma</i> - Sikhs use dharam in Punjabī to identify religious world views as well as to denote the day-to-day practice of living in the world.
Dharamsāl	Original name for a Gurdwārā
Darbār	Court
Dastār/pagh	Turban
Gurdwārā	This is commonly referred to as the Sikh place of worship understood as the Gurū's home.
Gurbānī	Lyrical compositions from the Gurū Granth Sāhib, lit. word of the Gurū
Gurmukhī	The script of Punjabī
Gurū	Denotes a teacher or enlightener. Derived from the word <i>Gu</i> meaning light and <i>Rū</i> meaning darkness. The title is used to refer to the highest authority of the Sikh faith.
Jathā	An organised community / group of people sometimes referred to as a 'contingent'
Kar sevā	A traditional 'not for profit' construction methodology
Kesādhārī	A Sikh who does not cut their hair (can refer to initiated or non-initiated).
Khalistān	The term given to a separate Sikh state



Khalsā/ Khalsā panth	The order or 'army' of initiated Sikhs created by Gurū Gōbind Singh in 1699.
Kīrtan	Singing verses of Gurbānī to musical accompaniment
Langar	The institution of communal donation, preparation, serving, consuming, and clearing up of food. The term also refers to the food itself.
Mīrī pīrī	Temporal and spiritual authority
Misl	'Clans' from the time period of Māhārājā Ranjīt Singh
Munnā	A colloquial term for someone that cuts their hair
Panth	Literally 'path' or 'way', commonly used as a term to describe the Sikh collective
Sakhī	Story
Sangat	Congregation or community
Sehajdhārī	A non-initiated Sikh who cuts their hair
Sevā	Commonly understood as selfless service or philanthropy
Sevādār	Someone who performs sevā
Shabad	Gurū's word/ poems from the Gurū Granth Sāhib
Shaheed	Martyr
Sikhī	The Sikh faith referred to in the vernacular
Smāgam	Gatherings where people sing selections from the Gurū Granth Sāhib together

ਪੂਤਾ ਮਾਤਾ ਕੀ ਆਸੀਸ ॥

Pūtā mātā kī āsīs.

O son, this is your mother's hope and prayer,

ਨਿਮਖ ਨ ਬਿਸਰਉ ਤੁਮ੍ਹ ਕਉ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਸਦਾ ਭਜਹੁ ਜਗਦੀਸ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Nimakh na bisarao tumh̄ kao har har sadā bhajahu jagdīs. ||1|| rahāo.

that you may never forget the Lord, Har, Har, even for an instant. May you ever vibrate upon

the Lord of the Universe. ||1||Pause||

(Sri Gurū Granth Sāhib 496)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Anthropology is a discipline that I discovered through my desire for understanding the role of religion in peoples' lives. My background is in economics, yet I found that for me, something was missing in terms of being able to truly understand human behaviour. When I undertook my postgraduate study in anthropology at the LSE, I knew it would be the right discipline to further my academic study of Sikhī and importantly for me, Sikhs. Growing up as a Sikh in Britain, I have constantly seen Sikhs categorised as either 'militant warriors' or 'peaceful, good diaspora', both of which I know from personal experience to be misrepresentations of this community. I hoped to conduct my own research to show that Sikhs fit into neither category neatly, rather they are situated somewhere on a spectrum with a 'multiplicity of identities' (Werbner, 2013). My own upbringing is certainly the fundamental reason for carrying out this research, however my years of reading and learning about Sikhī from different lenses inspired me to conduct this particular research.

The anthropology of religion is a vast subsection of the discipline, and when I first developed an interest in anthropology, I was surprised to see such limited research on Sikhs. As Fesenmyer, Liberatore and Maqsood write, “Anthropology is uniquely situated to shed light on contemporary religiosity, its histories and the many forms it takes, because of its attention to how people live their religion, that is, ‘what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how, in turn, men, women and children are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making’ (Orsi 2003: 172, emphasis in original; Marsden 2005; Ammerman 2007; Janson and Meyer 2016a).” (2020, p. 387) I firmly believe that anthropology is perfectly suited to help shed light on the position of Sikhs in Britain.

During my postgraduate studies at the LSE, I had numerous ideas for my potential PhD thesis and over the years I had considered each of my different interests from religion, gender, theology, and politics and saw them culminate into my research proposal which was ultimately focused on how Sikhī was practised in the public sphere and claims for recognition in Britain. Given the political context of Britain at the time of my fieldwork in late 2017 through to 2018 (Brexit and rising levels of explicit racism and xenophobia), I have seen my thesis evolve from being solely about the Sikh diaspora to also speak about minority faiths and importantly, about Britain itself.

Finishing my thesis coincided with pivotal moments in both global and Sikh history. The final year of my write up was engulfed by the Covid-19 pandemic which further shed light on the racial inequalities that exist in Britain, particularly in relation to healthcare. Marginalisation, historical, structural, and institutional racism were brought to the fore in challenging ways through government policy which unintentionally discriminated against households that did not fit into the Office for National Statistics (ONS) category of a ‘household’. As will become apparent, my thesis shows that Sikh lived experiences and understandings of these terms are

not necessarily the same as these 'official' definitions but rather they are much more complex and fluid.

As I began the final phase of writing my thesis, the farmer's protests taking place in Delhi<sup>1</sup> that commenced towards the end of 2020 could not be ignored as they draw significant parallels for my work, in respect to the treatment of Sikhs as a minority community. Sikh activists and scholars have been drawing attention to the similarities with events such as the Green Revolution that are not a distant memory for many. In the final few months of 2020 and in early 2021, the world saw an uprising of (primarily) Sikhs fighting for their farmers' rights in India. Mainstream media coverage was sparse and social media was overwhelmingly dominated by censorship for example in December 2020, Facebook removed a page named 'Kisan Ekta Morcha', an official news source from the farmers' protest and in February 2021, Twitter removed over five hundred accounts that criticised Modi's government leading to social media sites being deemed aligned with India rather than the farmers. The hashtag Sikh (#Sikh) was also blocked on numerous occasions on Twitter and Instagram, with no real explanation other than that the hashtag had been misappropriated and inappropriate images such as pornography were tagged with it. Sikh activist accounts were blocked and deleted. In February 2021, the protest gained worldwide coverage through celebrity supporters suggesting the ways in which religious minority causes require particular forms of communication in the public sphere. No-one could have predicted that popstar Rihanna would be the name that every Sikh was talking about. Her tweet about the protest went viral and prompted other prominent celebrities such as Greta Thunberg, John Cusack, Meena Harris among others to follow suit.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55793731>

My research has developed over a time period where Sikhs are undergoing a generational change and expressing their faith in a seemingly more explicit and controversial manner. I uncover some of this context and explore what these changes are and why they are occurring at this moment in time. My thesis is embedded in an emic understanding of Sikhī and in my research, I am taking Sikhī seriously to understand the Sikh diaspora in Britain. Ultimately, I show how Sikhī is transformed and adapted within a liberal and racialised public sphere through positioning the Sikh experience within Britain and the wider landscape of minorities in Britain, but also in relation to the wider literature.

### Multicultural Britain

The political climate of Britain and the position of religion in the public sphere have an impact on the everyday goings on in my interlocutors' lives. I am privileged to have been able to carry out fieldwork during this particular time where there were significant competing discourses and peoples' understandings of their lives and behaviours were being disrupted in unprecedented ways. There was a prominent aura of precariousness and feelings of not belonging. The impacts of political issues such as Brexit have caused a rethinking of many people's faith and belief in citizenship rights in Britain. Knowledge of what Brexit actually means has created a sense of political insecurity. The previous context that my interlocutors, particularly my older interlocutors had to navigate, was purposefully more inclusive through New Labour's government policy and legitimised multiculturalism as a response to structural racism, emphasising celebrating cultural diversity through government policy (Hoque, 2019, p. 12). However, Hoque (2019, pp. 12-13) argues that this period actually cemented divisions and preconceptions of communities such as British Muslims which has remained to the present day. As a result, groups such as British Muslims and Sikhs in Britain became identified among ethno-cultural lines (Hoque, 2019, p. 13) Historically, Sikhs in Britain have been "portrayed as the pioneers of British multiculturalism" (G. Singh, 2005, p. 157) however, the events of 9/11

and the July 2005 London bombings publicly marked the end of multiculturalism. My interlocutors have to tread a much more unstable atmosphere of Brexit, anti-migration, anti-immigration, Prevent and fears of radicalisation that are now being applied more widely to Sikhs and in particular Sikh activists. Sikhs are being defined through a binary of being either peaceful or militant, evident in recent events such as the case of British citizen Jagtar Singh Johal (discussed later in this chapter and further in Chapter 4: Home and Chapter 5: Gurdwārā) which have fed into this more publicly shifting narrative of the relationship between Sikhs and Britain.

Dewdney, Dibosa and Walsh (2010) argue that Britain has been experiencing a crisis in liberal thought relating to cultural diversity, allowing for a critique of “cultural welfarism”. They say that there is a desire “to maintain the legitimacy of cultural value based upon a nationalist and Eurocentric model of arts heritage coupled with cultural entrepreneurship” (Dewdney et al., 2010, p. 1) which, instead of reducing, ends up reproducing boundaries between mainstream and the margins. Although their work focuses on Britishness and visual culture, their argument speaks to a wider debate about multiculturalism in Britain more broadly. Following increasing levels of migration from the commonwealth, Britain has been identified as a multicultural society since the 1960s (Warikoo, 2020, p. 5). The dominant theoretical form of multiculturalism in Britain has been described as the ‘Bristol School’ of multiculturalism (Brahm Levey, 2019). This form of multiculturalism has been centrally concerned with Muslims in Britain and so my ethnography seeks to provide an insight into the context of multiculturalism from an alternative perspective namely of Sikhs in Britain. Despite the focus of this variant of multiculturalism on Muslims in Britain, my thesis provides important implications for taking seriously the importance of religious minorities when theorising and formulating theories that relate to multiculturalism.

My thesis analytically foregrounds the lens of the Sikh faith as a domain through which my interlocutors lived in order to engage with the literature on multiculturalism. Modood (2016) explains that “multiculturalism in Britain grew out of an initial commitment to racial equality in the 1960s and 1970s into one of positive self-definition for minorities” after the Satanic Verses affair. Additionally, in 1965, the Race Relations Act made racial discrimination illegal in public spaces, in recruitment, housing and education. It also provided Local Authorities with resources to promote equity, largely on the basis of multicultural education for school pupils (Meer & Modood, 2009). Rather than acting as a ‘one size fits all’ policy, British multiculturalism has been employed at a local level taking a less structured approach. Multiculturalism in Britain is not acknowledged as a policy that is encompassing, rather it has been argued that it leads to a fractured society, unsatisfactory for minorities because it does not prioritise socioeconomic mobility and encourages competition amongst groups to win funding and grants for their areas (Hoque, 2019, p. 13; Joppke, 2009; Kundnani, 2002, p. 69; Prashad, 2002; Statham et al., 2005). Since the late 1990s and particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, multiculturalism was explicitly criticised (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010).

Following the backlash of multiculturalism, one such concept, “community cohesion” was adopted, with former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown stating in 2007 that “what was wrong about multiculturalism was not the recognition of diversity but that it over emphasised separateness at the cost of unity.” (Meer, 2006; Warikoo, 2020) As a result of the introduction of the concept of community cohesion there have been several attempts to define British identity particularly in contrast to multiculturalism (Warikoo, 2020, p. 7). Alongside immigration from Commonwealth countries, Britain has also seen increased devolution of its power as they also seek to define their own national identity and political decision making. England has lost some of its power in being the primary definer of British identity and has therefore resulted in less clarity in what it means to be ‘British’ and what it means to be ‘English’ (Brahm Levey, 2019, p. 204).

Through a qualitative study with students at Oxford University, Warikoo (2020) shows that on the ground understandings of multiculturalism are very different from academic or political conceptions of the term. As a result, she states students were more likely to express positive views about multiculturalism and they were also less likely to refer to social policy when defining the term. She acknowledges that many of the students in her study are either 'elite' or emerging elites and it is interesting to note that even this group of students does not define or describe multiculturalism in a manner similar to academics and politicians. Warikoo notes that a minority of the students were dubious about their understanding of multiculturalism, and this was mainly because they were worried about a decline of traditional British culture and lack of social integration which is in line with some of the critiques of British multiculturalism which are often supposedly aligned with those who are working class, older and white. For this group, she describes that they believe that multiculturalism has "gone too far", perhaps to some extent contributing to a declining white privilege showing that despite a relatively secure social position, these students are not fully supportive of multiculturalism. Warikoo suggests that young elites' perspectives on multiculturalism may not be so different from older, less privileged whites that have previously been suggested by significant events such as Brexit. To some extent, this aligns with the intersections of race and class and how these intersections also permeate through generations. One of the key intentions of this thesis is to show how an in-depth exploration of Sikhs in Britain shines a light on issues around multiculturalism and minority religious identities in Britain. In the chapters that follow I show how a perceived discursive divide between culture and religion impact how this community navigate these narratives of issues of identity and belonging in relation to a majority society.

In an ethnographic study of Hindu Punjabi families in London, Dhooleka Raj (2003) explores how common understandings of ethnicity that equate community, culture and identity limit the complexities of understanding migrant minority communities in Britain. Through an



engagement with British multiculturalism and policy, she argues that British multiculturalism has created a tendency to reify and naturalise minority identities. Raj critiques the traditional academic approach of “longing and belonging” for a homeland or the “tension between the homeland and land of adoption” (2003, p. 185) as “unsatisfactory” (2003, p. 170) as it was not reflective of her interlocutors’ lives. Raj argues that in Britain “multiculturalism has developed into a concern for disadvantage and advocating a pluralist model of democracy that is *tolerant* of minorities.” (2003, p. 188, original emphasis) She describes multiculturalism in Britain as the official policy for minorities and that this policy places a specific spotlight on cultural difference. Raj argues that while these policies attempt to grapple with minorities, they do not erase cultural differences but instead solidify them and in some ways enshrine them in the nation state (2003, p. 188).

The fundamental problem with this conceptualisation of multiculturalism Raj tells us, is that the constant construction, negotiation, and reconstruction of the sense of identity is not acknowledged. Multiculturalism ultimately describes cultural difference of minorities as a problem that needs to be addressed in Britain. Raj takes the example of education in Britain, referencing the report of the United Kingdom’s Advisory Group on “Education for Citizenship” and the “Teaching of democracy in schools” from 1998 (2003, pp. 190-191). She describes this as an example of the bureaucracy around difference with an emphasis on the main qualities required to be taught by the end of compulsory schooling, which focuses on equality and diversity. The specific focus on multiculturalism and to some extent citizenship, is something that I explore further in Chapter 6: School. In a similar manner to Raj’s approach, I take seriously these constructions, negotiations, and reconstructions of both a sense of identity and belonging of my interlocutors. Through the different points of view of my interlocutors, I show how these constructions, negotiations and reconstructions are not produced or performed in one single way for this community. Rather, there are both inter and intra community

differences as well as generational shifts, some of which are considered based on where individuals and families were either born and/or raised.

Brexit has given rise to a polarising political storm that has massively impacted migrant communities. Interestingly, it is reported that fifty-two per cent of Sikhs voted to leave the European Union (EU) (Lambert, 2016). Birmingham has a predominantly migrant population and also very narrowly voted to leave<sup>2</sup> the EU (Abbasi, 2016; Lambert, 2016). However, according to the British Sikh Report in 2016, before the referendum, fifty-seven per cent of Sikhs wished to remain in the EU and twelve per cent wanted to leave. A significant thirty-one per cent were undecided (BSR, 2016). The British Sikh Report from 2017 has suggested that the majority of the thirty-one per cent that were undecided ultimately chose to vote to leave the EU (BSR, 2017).

Back et al suggest that this kind of alliance with majoritarian nationalism is an attempt to fall into line with “hierarchies of belonging” that distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants. They describe a situation whereby “[immigrant] presence is tolerated as long as it doesn’t challenge the hierarchy”. (2012, p. 140) The British Sikh Report (2017) shows that sixty-five per cent of Sikhs were in favour of Britain remaining in the EU, twenty-three per cent wanted to leave and twelve per cent did not vote. Voting by age group shows that the older the voter, the more likely they were to vote. Millennials had the highest proportion of voters wanting to stay in the EU, which is reflective of my interlocutors’ attitudes. One of the most interesting findings from this report is that if there were to be a second referendum, an overwhelming seventy-three per cent of Sikhs would vote to stay in the EU and only twenty-one per cent would vote to leave (BSR, 2017). Of the nine constituencies in Birmingham, seven of the MPs voted in favour of remaining in the EU and are all members of the Labour Party. In former

---

<sup>2</sup> Overall, in the 2016 referendum, Birmingham voted for Brexit with a small majority of 50.4%

Prime Minister, Theresa May's January 2019 Brexit deal, all of the nine MPs for Birmingham voted against the deal.

Baumann's (1996) pioneering ethnography of Southall shows how the community tries to forge a common youth culture through Bollywood film and Bhangrā (Punjabī folk dance and music) in the 1990s. This ethnography was conducted during a moment of multiculturalism in local authority politics where the Labour Party and local authorities attempted to build a seemingly mutually beneficial relationship with ethnic minority communities. The Labour Party were able to secure political rewards and minority communities were able to gain access to public goods and also sometimes representation in local structures of power (Singh, 2006, p. 158). The context in which I conducted my fieldwork grew out of this era of multiculturalism and its transformation under David Cameron's 'Big Society' political ideology. Big Society argued for civic and community virtue, but removed most of the funding for this, arguing for volunteers and communities helping themselves. I build upon Suzanne Hall's theory of 'super-diversity' (2017) to take seriously Sikhs' experiences of difference rather than assimilation with other groups.

Suzanne Hall (2017) moves beyond Vertovec's notion of super-diversity and the 'idea of multiculturalism', to allow for more nuanced understandings of migrant and diasporic communities. I consider the position of Sikhs in Britain whilst reflecting on Hall's core argument that "the state of contradiction is caught between a sustained economic appetite for migrant labour from elsewhere, and a political commitment to a national authenticity in which hierarchical notions of 'race' and ethnicity are core." (2017, p. 2) Sikhs in Britain are left in a precarious position where they are traversing the boundaries of selective inclusion and the 'othering' that they have become subjected to whilst also being implicitly complicit in the 'othering' of other minority groups which Kaur claims is "how racialized people are forced to engage in conversations about which aspects of themselves they are willing to strip away for

inclusion into a limited definition of the human." (2020, p. 8) These conversations must often take place when deciding how to perform 'in' public rather than simply 'being public' which Hall argues "involves negotiating places that are available or restricted to us;" (2017, p. 9) although the latter is also relevant. As mentioned earlier, a key example of these performances is the case of Jagtar Singh Johal. Johal is a British citizen who had been in Punjab for his wedding, whilst out with his wife, he was arrested by plain-clothes police officers in November 2017. At the time very little to no information was publicly available about why he had been arrested with only speculation on social media that as well as his arrest, he had also been brutally tortured. Over time, and through Sikh activism by Sikh organisations, spearheaded by Johal's brother, information slowly started being shared on social media sites and stated that Johal was involved in funding terrorist activity. Many of his family members, primarily his brother, had been appealing to the British government and media to try and help understand what was going on. His MP Martin Docherty had also continually been petitioning the government to do something for his constituent. Scottish media also covered the news story and spoke of the importance of Britain to protect its citizens. The media was largely in favour of Johal and supported him and Docherty's fight to help Johal, however, the story received little coverage on mainstream or English media.

It took approximately a year for concrete information to be formally released and widely circulated as to why he had been arrested. As I write this thesis more than three years later, this case is still on going and Johal remains detained. In addition, many Sikhs and Sikh organisations had stated that the West Midlands Police, based on intelligence supplied by the Indian government (allegedly obtained through Johal's torture), had conducted raids on Sikh homes in Britain (See Chapter 4). This marks a key shift in the understanding of the relationship between the British and Indian governments and consequently, the impact for Sikhs living in Britain.

## Secular Britain

Alongside this turbulent political landscape in Britain, it is also important to understand and consider the context and relationship of Britain and secularism. Understanding the ways in which Britain is secular is important for acknowledging the implications of this for my interlocutors. Broadly, secularity has been understood in two ways; firstly the decline of religious beliefs and practise and secondly as the privatisation of religion (Casanova, 1994; Taylor, 2009). Whilst the first position is seemingly evidenced, for example through the British Social Attitudes survey (Curtice, 2019) and the national census, the situation is much more complex with many choosing not to formally identify with a religious group yet maintaining some forms of religious beliefs and practices. The second position features two dimensions (Casanova, 1994), firstly, that religious belief and practice are subjective and personal which is in line with what Charles Taylor's refers to as a post-Durkheimian dispensation, where following a religious path that you do not truly believe in is seen as 'wrong' (2007, p. 489). Secondly, religion is increasingly confined to the private sphere and therefore largely performed in private spaces and not present in the wider public sphere. Charles Taylor refers to the "conditions of belief" and suggests that we live in a "secular age" where secular authorities and institutions such as political, cultural and educational institutions provide the dominant and 'public' social and political order (2007, p. 3).

Different forms of secularism have different impacts for how minorities will navigate their lives. In a study of Muslim women in France, Fernando (2014) shows how her interlocutors make an effort to have their cultural and religious difference to not be acknowledged or recognised, this is something that she terms as a "right to indifference" in the public sphere. The "right to indifference" allows for an opportunity to pursue equality that is not associated with these identifying characteristics. This right allows minorities to perform their own sovereignty outside of the confines of the rules of the state and by extension, the public sphere (Fernando, 2019). In Chapter 5: Gurdwārā and Chapter 7: Sevā, I highlight two

seemingly contrasting Gurdwārās, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) and Guru Nanak Gurdwara (GNG), and two seemingly contrasting groups, Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS) and Sikh Youth UK (SYUK). I demonstrate how GNNSJ and MLSS could to some extent be seen to be adopting the “right to indifference” as a means of asserting their sovereignty in the public sphere. This is more implicit than how GNG and SYUK perform in the public sphere and navigate their positions as both ‘religious’ and racialised.

As Cannell explains, the definition of the terms “secular” and “secularism” are constantly shifting in the literature (2010, p. 86). In Britain, ‘secular’ is a concept that is inescapable and one that cannot be ignored, as a historically produced idea, it impacts the way that we understand concepts such as religion and modernity. However, despite the prominence of secularism, it was not a term that was used by my interlocutors. It is important to note that in Punjabī, there are no specific words for religion and secularism; they simply do not exist as categories in the language or in Sikh philosophy. Although it is worth noting that some of my interlocutors who have been in Britain for generations and have assimilated, do refer to Sikhī as a ‘religion’ though there is very limited discussion of the secular. The most appropriate Punjabī term is ‘dharam’ which “has various meanings, including religion, righteousness, duty, virtue, merit, honesty, sect, justice, and faith.” (Jhutti-Johal, 2019, p. 2) It is an all-encompassing term similar to Pool’s Bengali Muslim interlocutors where “*dharmā* encapsulates their ontological conceptions of being human and their ideas of life and society.” (2020, p. 1, original emphasis) This is where “*dharmā* encompasses ethics of justice and order” (Pool, 2020, p. 1, original emphasis) . Language is central as it assists with the vernacular understanding of religion, politics, and the secular. Vernacular secularism as Pool (2016) describes is the “official discourses of secular and religion that follow a pattern of colonial history which comes from the primarily Protestant understanding of religion, secular and politics.”

Secularisation theory and how this can be considered alongside the praxis and understanding of *mīrī pīrī* is crucial for understanding of the Sikh experience in contemporary Britain. Simplified to its most basic level, secularisation theory was “understood as both sign and consequence of an inevitable modernity.” (Cannell, 2010, p. 87) Cannell explains that the debate has developed from this understanding where the binary of the religious and secular is not so stringent. As noted earlier in the chapter, whilst there is still a widespread dislike of the term religion, this does not mean that religion itself is diminishing, rather our understanding and classification of it seems to be shifting. One of the key figures in developing the secularisation debate, Casanova (1994, 2006) suggests that previous secularisation theory had ideas that were not necessarily true. Firstly, religion should not be separated from domains such as politics and economics. Secondly, religion becoming ‘private’ and so not in the public sphere through modernity. Finally, that religion will disappear through modernisation (Casanova, 1994, p. 7). In his book, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova (1994) shows precisely how these claims are false through his case studies of various forms of Christian religious activity in Europe and America. He argues that the decline of religion in the public sphere has been exaggerated and there are cases where it is central, for example in Soviet Poland where he shows that forms of Christianity are actually growing but in new ways. In his later work, Casanova (2006) also acknowledges how other religious traditions not classified as Western Christendom do not necessarily have an inherent tension of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ which is also demonstrated through the Sikh concept of *mīrī pīrī*. Casanova’s assertion is echoed by Asad (1993, 2003), who argues that the binary of religious and secular is a false binary produced by the West, which is crucial for Sikhs who do not see a separation of these domains either.

Asad considers “secularism” against understandings of the nation state and “modernity” particularly in relation to human rights such as for Muslim communities challenging notions of “European identity”. He writes that secularism “is an enactment by which a political medium

(representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion." (2003, p. 5) He further argues that "'the secular' should not be thought of as the space in which real human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of 'religion' and thus achieves the latter's relocation. It is this assumption that allows us to think of religion as 'infecting' the secular domain or as replicating within it the structure of theological concepts. [...] Secularism doesn't simply insist that religious practice and belief be confined to a space where they cannot threaten political stability or the liberties of 'free-thinking' citizens. Secularism builds on a particular conception of the world." (2003, p. 191) Asad's work is particularly important because it demonstrates the problem of categories such as "secular", "religious", "the West" and others as not only an analytic problem. He shows that by defining these categories in certain ways can also have impacts at a political level that contributes to misunderstanding and violence which I demonstrate in my thesis through the perspective of Sikhs in Britain.

Following this complex context of secularism and Britain, Liberatore (2017) shows how her British, Somali Muslim women interlocutors are not only adapting Islam to 'fit' the British context, they are effectively problematising what it means to belong, be recognised as 'different', who is considered a citizen and opposing the binary of 'Islamic versus secular.' Similarly, my Sikh interlocutors are engaged in a project that draws parallels as they implicitly oppose the binary of 'Sikhī versus secular'. Through the discussion of my interlocutors' views, I show how Sikhs navigate the problem of belonging and recognition.

### Positionalities of minorities in Britain

In general, Britain is understood to be a secular society but it is also "plural, multicultural and multireligious." (Sealy, Forthcoming, p. 7) In 2000, after New Labour entered into office, the Runnymede Trust commissioned a report on "the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain" (Parekh,



2000) which was chaired by Bhikhu Parekh. The report, commonly referred to as the 'Parekh report', followed the Human Rights Act of 1998, the MacPherson Report of 1999 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 2000 (the latest update of the Race Relations Act 1965). These had been implemented to address historical legacies of racism particularly against Commonwealth citizens and migrants which provided legislation for Britain's multicultural population (Shilliam, 2018, p. 122). The third iteration of the Race Relations Act was established in 1976 ("Race Relations Act," 1976) (the first Race Relations Act was established in 1965 ("Race Relations Act," 1965)) to prevent discrimination on the grounds of race which extended to race, colour, nationality, ethnic and national origin in the fields of employment, the provision of goods and services, education, and public functions. The Act also established the Commission for Racial Equality (see Chapter 3 – Sangat) to make sure that the Act was followed and also outlined more clearly what direct and indirect discrimination was. Following the Macpherson Report which fundamentally concluded that the Metropolitan Police force was institutionally racist, the Act was amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000 ("Race Relations (Amendment) Act," 2000) which imposed a statutory duty on public bodies to promote racial equality and to demonstrate that procedures to prevent race discrimination were effective. In 2010, the Equality Act ("Equality Act," 2010) was introduced to consolidate and update the prior Acts and Regulations relating to anti-discrimination law in Britain; this included the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and also covered gender and disability (which previously had their own separate Acts).

The Parekh report attempted to explore the current state of Britain at the time and provided recommendations to counter racial discrimination by embracing its diversity. The report ultimately concluded that although Britain had made progress which was significantly greater than other European countries, there was still more progress to be made. The report stated that racial discrimination was still an issue in Britain and that ethnic minorities were not provided equal or equitable opportunities. The key findings from the report noted the legacy

of institutional racism associated with “Britishness”. Based on its findings, the report makes several recommendations including urging that Britain should formally declare itself as a multicultural society with the intention of outwardly expressing acceptance and not just tolerance of the diversity within Britain and a sense of belonging for ethnic minorities. The Parekh Report suggested that Britishness has racial connotations and therefore the country should move towards embracing an identity as a “community of communities” (Warikoo, 2020, p. 6). Essentially this defines British culture as a collective national culture based on shared values including mutual respect, dialogue and peaceful resolution of differences whilst acknowledging respect and equal worth for all British citizens. The report characterises Britain as a national community that consists of different communities that operate in a shared moral framework. The report was foundational and influential because it “reinvent[ed] a category of belonging, Britishness, that de-racialized the filiation to an English genus.” (Shilliam, 2018, p. 122) Upon its publication, the report generated significant media response with many front page headlines (including the Daily Telegraph) implying that the report characterised ‘British’ as a ‘racist’ term (Holloway, 2015).

The report also explicitly initiated discourse about the “‘national story’ of Britain” (Zavos, 2009, p. 883) and also highlighted the “intimate relationship between the Anglican Church and the state sustained in varying forms since the late sixteenth century” (Zavos, 2009, p. 883).

However, as discussed, Britain is also constructed on secular characteristics primarily concerned with the legal and judicial system. This domain is supposedly distinct from religion and culture, emphasising the ‘private realm’ of religion and the secular nature of the public sphere. The vision that the report illustrated has not been and could not be achieved in the last twenty years because it understood British identity as something that could be applied to all of its citizens. Zavos describes this tension as the “double narrative in the story of Britishness.” (2009, p. 883) This is problematic for religious (and racialised) minorities in Britain because the public sphere is presented as “neutral, beyond religious identities, and yet it is

institutionally bound to Anglicanism.” (Zavos, 2009) Zavos provides a number of understandings for this double narrative including a residual presence of religion in the process of secularisation or alternatively, citing Jennifer Taylor’s (2001) argument that in the context of multiculturalism, there is a new public role for religion, where religion is considered as a discourse. Taylor’s argument centres on religion being something dynamic in a public context whereby it has different meanings in different contexts. Taking this understanding, dominant Anglicanism is seen as residual, however it is not as a result of the process of secularisation. This is a useful argument to think with as it provides a context to consider that minority forms of religion (that is not the dominant Anglicanism) could be “integrated into narratives of Britishness.” (Zavos, 2009, p. 883) However, as suggested in a previous section, multiculturalism is complex and not necessarily encompassing of all communities. Major changes in the political and social context have had significant effect for minority racialised, and religious communities, meaning that this ‘integration of minority forms of religions’ has had to be closer to ‘assimilation’ or ‘transformation’ for those that associate with them. The assumptions that were debunked in the Parekh Report had been overturned through the events of 9/11 and the consequential ‘war on terror’. The ambition to eliminate forms of institutional racism associated with Britishness had failed. I explore the negotiations of these transformations throughout the different sites in which my field work took place in the chapters that follow and consider the impact for Sikhs as a racialised, religious community in Britain.

The increase in securitisation, anti-multiculturalism and islamophobia provides the context of my field site in Britain. Liberatore (Liberatore, 2013, 2017, 2018) writes about the increased scrutiny of Muslim women in Britain and the experiences of her interlocutors in relation to questions around belonging, identity and religiosity which draw parallels to the experiences of my interlocutors. Similar to Liberatore’s interlocutors, Hoque (2019) shows that young, Muslim men in Luton challenge what it means to be ‘British’ through shaping ‘being British’ with their

'Muslim identities'. The perceived incompatibility of Islam and British national identity is something that my interlocutors had to face in instances of occasional mistaken identity or a lack of knowledge of Sikhs in the broader public sphere. The anti-Muslim sentiment has increased since 9/11, the July 2005 London bombings and the growing threat from ISIS.

Considering this context, Modood and Meer (Meer, 2010; Modood, 2012, 2017) argue that Islam and Muslims face a double exclusion in Britain and Europe because of their status as a religion and religious group as well as being a negatively racialised group. This draws parallels to my interlocutors, although this can be less severe than for Muslims, often as a result of either a mistaken identity or simply because although Sikhs are lower down the racial and religious hierarchy, there is still a longstanding relationship between Sikhs and Britain and a closer alignment by some members of the community with a good diaspora narrative. Sealy (Forthcoming) writes about the experiences of Muslim converts in Britain and shows how an understanding of this community that does not necessarily have a rigid association of religious identity, race and ethnicity can shed light on the hierarchies that exist in the public sphere. He explains that if "ethnic identities are welcomed in the public space, there is much more unease about religion" (Meer, 2010, p. 200) and particular religions. This is something that could be explored further on the basis that there may not be a double exclusion for Muslim converts in the same sense as born Muslims (where a majority are racialised) but there are other forms of exclusion from the broader public sphere (Sealy, Forthcoming, pp. 207-208).

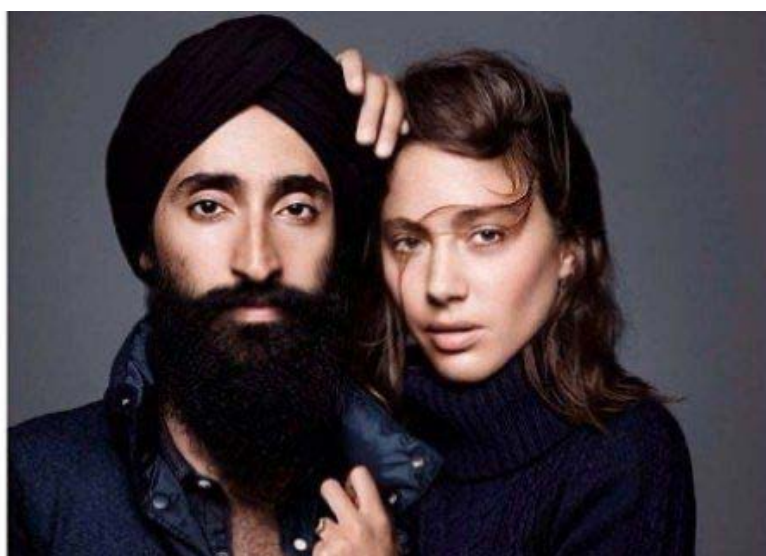
Sikhs have been seen as martial figures that served the British (Fox, 1985), however, this is not how Sikhs experience that identity. Sikhs are reclaiming their identity in Britain and no longer 'serving' the British but rather they are serving their own community. This seems problematic as Sikhs no longer neatly fit into the 'good diaspora' (Liberatore, 2018) narrative. Sikhs are now in a position that is oppositional to British state ideas of what it means to be a 'good' citizen and are therefore subject to securitisation policies such as Prevent. The hypervisibility of Sikh

identity that is commonly mistaken as a Muslim identity (resulting from media coverage of 9/11 and the image of Osama Bin Laden wearing a turban and therefore representing 'terrorists') has meant that Sikhs are often victims of Islamophobia. It is crucial to note that in the majority of cases, Sikhs are not being targeted for being Sikh, but they are being targeted for being 'Muslim' who are the most othered minority group in Britain (Singh & Shani, 2015, p. 271).

In 2013, an advertisement from the fashion company, 'Gap' featured an image of Sikh actor Waris Ahluwalia with the slogan "make love" (Figure 1). It was famously defaced, and the slogan was changed from "make love" to "make bombs" implying a connection between Sikhs and terrorists. Following the incident, a Sikh blogger in Britain, Singh Street Style produced a YouTube video titled "Don't Freak, I'm Sikh"<sup>3</sup> in an attempt to explain Sikh identity and clarify and misperceptions of the turban. However, an unintended consequence of the video resulted in an inadvertent distancing from Muslims who were the intended audience of the defamation. Singh Street Style later addressed this on his social media accounts and acknowledged that any form of discrimination, whether it be aimed at Muslims, or any other community is not acceptable.

---

<sup>3</sup> The "Don't freak, I'm Sikh" video can be found on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZkAo7EkYPI>



*Figure 1 - Gap advertisement featuring Sikh actor Waris Ahluwalia (Hafiz, 2017)*

Sikhs are not in the same structural position as Muslims in Britain and to some extent, this mistreatment of Muslims, rather than the actual abhorrence towards Muslims explains why in some instances, there is a desire for distinction between Sikhs and Muslims among my interlocutors (as opposed to the common narrative of historical tensions between Sikhs and Muslims discussed in Chapter 2: Panth). Harleen Kaur (2020) argues that "Sikhs' visible identity made us [them] "mistaken targets" of Islamophobia. However, this rhetoric ignores that the racialized experiences of brown religious people, Muslim, and Sikh alike, are structured on a foundation of white supremacy and anti-blackness, which simultaneously constructs a paradigm of limited acceptance and variant tactics of exclusion to maintain the racial hierarchy." (2020, p. 1)

Going beyond the unsatisfactory lens of 'multiculturalism' which assumes a kind of cultural purity that does not exist (Prashad, 2002), I follow a similar approach to Liberatore (Liberatore, 2013, 2017, 2018) and Hoque (2019) and try to uncover what it means to be Sikh in the British context. Liberatore and Hoque both show how Muslims are not merely shaping Islam to fit the

British context, rather, they are opposing the standard 'us versus them' narrative or the 'Islam versus secular' dichotomy by actively dealing with notions of belonging, difference, and citizenship. For Hoque's interlocutors, being South Asian posed no contradiction to being British (2019, p. 45) hence why Hoque refers to his interlocutors as 'British Muslim.' However, I refer to my interlocutors as Sikhs in Britain to denote the common problematic relationship between Sikhs and being British. Hoque argues that despite surveillance policies targeted towards Muslim communities, young Muslim men continued to be drawn towards Islam. Rather than adhering to a more 'traditional Islam' however, Hoque's interlocutors adopted a variation of Islam that aligned with their experiences and aspirations. This was the case for some, but not all of my interlocutors.

As a result of migration into countries such as Britain, Sikhī became visible in new ways. An explicitly racial and class politics coupled with a new minority and diasporic citizenship identity emerged. Ballard's research with Sikhs in Leeds in the late sixties found "several young people who have readopted the turban, not because of any resurgence of religious belief, but rather as a means of reasserting their pride in their Sikh identity." (1972) He also claimed that young people had to develop two separate identities with Sikhs having to maintain an 'English' identity and behave in an 'English fashion' whilst with English people, (especially at work and if they worked in non-manual labour) and would often then revert to a 'Punjabī' identity at home. For early migrants, Gurdwārās were spaces "to alleviate the loneliness, heartache, and sense of unease that came from being in an alien land" (Helweg, 1979). Ballard (1972) claimed that this was also the case for Sikhs who were born in Britain and draws parallel to the 'multiplicity of identities' suggested by Werbner (2017) that her diasporic Pakistani interlocutors have had to contend with. Werbner discusses the importance of anthropology for studying migrant and diasporic communities and describes how for her interlocutors, "the identities evoked in the narratives – of nation, local community, religion and diaspora – are at times fused, at times kept strictly (and situationally) separated." (2017, p. 9) This 'multiplicity

of identities' is precisely the way in which diasporic communities 'perform' their identities in different contexts.

Describing migration processes of women moving to Pakistan from England and vice versa, Werbner discusses the idea that for diasporic communities, leaving one's homeland can result in a sense of loss that is never truly assuaged. Werbner builds on the ideas of Stuart Hall, who argues that one can never 'return home' and is therefore left in a situation that requires constant navigation. Werbner proposes considering this navigation through the lens of 'simultaneity' which is a kind of "experiential force defining migrants' sense of self and subjectivity." (2013, p. 43) The gap between Sikhs born in Britain compared with those who had migrated was a prominent factor in how my interlocutors view their Sikh identity in Britain. This leads to different experiences of 'Britishness' and how this is realised in their daily lives. Interestingly, a large number of my younger interlocutors that were born in Britain feel less of an affiliation to the British state. Some of this is partly because they feel as though Sikhs and India never really became 'independent' from British rule. One of my interlocutors, Sukhdev Singh, a young, initiated Sikh man who works for a Sikh organisation based in Canada, described that he still feels like a victim of colonisation and the way in which he practises his faith in Britain is heavily censored. He feels as though Sikhs have to make more effort than other minority groups to assimilate. He used the adoption of vernacular language or lack thereof to illustrate his point; "you never hear a Mosque or Mandir being referred to as a temple but how many people know what a Gurdwārā is?"

To fully understand how Sikhs in Britain are becoming more public and either 'fitting in' or challenging the 'norms' of the British public sphere, it is important to consider this current context. Carrying out fieldwork in such a precarious moment in global political history has been illuminating as I was able to have conversations about current debates surrounding politics, society, and the economy. Following Brexit, Britain remains in an uncertain position as to its



future and its relationship with Europe and other trade partners. The increase in fears surrounding terrorism and the heightening of securitisation policies further add to the challenges that minorities face in Britain. Gillian Evans explains that the Brexit movement led to an “increasing ‘ethnicization’ of Britain [that] was to be understood in relation to Europe, where various movements of far-right cultural nationalism were turning ideas about postcolonial resistance on their head.” (2017b, p. 90) The incorporation of the Counterterrorism and Security Act (2015) passed by David Cameron has meant that the Prevent policy has become part of British Law. Prevent, initially part of CONTEST<sup>4</sup>, was developed from Tony Blair’s New Labour government in 2003. It was expanded following the July 2005 London bombings and revised in 2011 by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government (Hoque, 2019; Liberatore, 2017).

This policy has made research in Britain and of Britain more significant. The Prevent policy requires local governments and frontline workers (including those in education, prisons, social services, and health) to report potential threats (and those at risk) of ‘non-violent extremism’, radicalisation and ‘all forms of terrorism’. They are to be referred to the government’s deradicalisation programme, Channel. The Counterterrorism and Security Act requires authorities and institutions to be aware of “the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism” (section 26(1) (2011)). This is a highly controversial policy that simultaneously makes it both impossible to identify and not identify each of these threats because of stereotyping and stigmatising particular groups of British citizens as ‘threats.’ This is quite a shift from New Labour’s ‘winning hearts and minds’ approach. Given the increase in populist and right-wing movements that seem to have an emphasis on a xenophobic rhetoric, also

---

<sup>4</sup> CONTEST is the counter-terrorism strategy in the UK post 9/11. It includes Prevent, Pursue (stopping terrorist attacks), Protect (strengthening protection against terror attacks) and Prepare (mitigating the impact of any successful attack) (Home Office 2011). The focus is stopping people ‘becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism’ (2011)

evident in the Brexit campaign, has made this even more politicised. This rhetoric and campaign have presented diversity as something that is dangerous and harmful to Britain and the British national identity. Primarily, Islam has been seen as the biggest threat to cohesion and as a result of this, any other group that seems to match the basic description of Islam is also subject to this persecution (Hoque, 2019, p. 95; Rana et al., 2019, p. 2). I consider how “this legislation shapes and reforms religious subjectivities in particular ways” (Liberatore, 2017, p. 21) and the effects this has on how the Sikh diaspora presents itself as a result.

There is a history linking ‘Britishness’ and ‘British culture’ and there is an obsession with categorising that it is difficult to pinpoint why. It could be attributed to colonialism and other historical legacies where the power relationship of the coloniser and colonised operated through a hierarchy where belonging is based on race (among other factors) (Kaur, 2020, p. 4). Back et al. explore what they call a “new hierarchy of belonging” where “the fantasy of white restoration is replaced by a racial reordering, a differential inclusion that is selective and conflict-ridden.” (2012, p. 140) The outward appearance of Sikhs and their hypervisibility has allowed them to forge belonging through selective inclusion. However, this selective inclusion has limits which, Harleen Kaur argues comes from “devaluing other members of the Sikh community, or, in relation to the devalued bodies of other racialized communities marked as deviant.” (2020, p. 8) In Britain, in the context of heightened Islamophobia, there is an incidence of ranking of religious communities where some migrants are described as “contingent insiders” (Back et al., 2012, p. 140) at the expense of hate and derision on other migration groups; in this context, usually Muslims. These “contingent insiders” are only able to exist as long as they do not challenge the hierarchy. It is this spectrum of Sikhs that I seek to explore in my thesis.

Whilst the relationship of Muslims in Britain (and Europe) provides useful parallels to understand the context of my interlocutors, it is also helpful to explore the position of other

minorities in Britain (and Europe), especially those defined as 'South Asian'. There is a long history of South Asians in Britain and it has only increased particularly in the post-war period (Ballard, 1994, pp. 5-8). Ballard's *Desh Pardesh: The South Asian Experience in Britain* (1994) features a collection of ethnographic essays that describe various experiences of 'South Asian' groups in Britain. Most of the contributions focus on the experiences of first-generation migrants into Britain and the maintenance of a distinct ethnic identity. This book usefully highlights the impact of being in Britain for these communities and acknowledges how each of these groups negotiate their day to day lives, including the impact of racism. Building on this work, I seek to show the inter-generation and intra-community negotiations of what it means to be Sikh in Britain in the current social and political context. This collection explores the 'South Asian Experience in Britain' and so it is therefore useful to consider how this experience may have developed and changed since its publication in the early 90s. Following the Rushdie Affair as a key moment that brought religious identity, particularly of Muslims, into the public and political sphere, there was also an emerging and significant Sikh identity and Hindu identity. This was partially as a result of inter-community dialogue through an engagement with new multicultural policies but also in response to political events in South Asia such as in Punjāb (see Chapter 2) and Ayodhya (Zavos, 2009, p. 888).

Based on research with Hindu activists in London in the 1990's, Raj argues that Hindu leaders in Britain promoted a "Hindu identity as the primary identity" (2000, p. 536) that was felt globally and transcended an identity that would be labelled as 'British Hindus' (Raj, 2000, p. 540). She argues that Hindus in Britain are therefore moving towards a universal Hindu identity with resistance to racialised categories that young Hindus perceive of as conflating them with groups of "Asians" that are stigmatised (e.g., Muslims) or marking them as foreigners despite them holding British citizenship. Affiliating to faith or religion, could potentially allow Hindus to have an identity that they feel represents them more accurately (Jones, 2016, p. 57). Raj concludes that presenting an overtly religious identity can be seen as a strategy for South

Asians to live in a plural society because it “includes all the positive associations of belonging to a nation-state without actually living there” (2000, p. 552) as well as allowing them to present themselves using an “authentic, workable identity that is easy to comprehend.” (2000, p. 551) In *Where are you from?* Raj writes about the experiences of middle-class Hindu Punjabis in London and finds that what it means to be Hindu is dictated by the intergenerational experiences that show how this is not a fixed identity, but one that is processual, impacted by space and time (2003, pp. 103-104). Through my interlocutors who feature in my thesis, such as the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ), Sikh Youth UK (SYUK) and my host families, I show how understandings of Sikhī are transformed and adapted within a liberal and racialised public sphere through these different ‘points of view’ as well as generational shifts and key moments in one’s life such as choosing a marriage partner.

Jones presents the case that for some Hindu, Tamil migrants in Britain, affiliation to a Tamil identity is as important as a Hindu one because “being Hindu was closely bound with a sense of ethno- linguistic identification” particularly in cases where Hindu Tamils were small in number (Jones, 2016, p. 54). Jones explores the complexity of having both a Hindu and a Tamil identity whereby “Hinduness and Tamilness remains inseparably intertwined” (2016, p. 56) drawing similarities for my interlocutors where a Sikh identity and Punjabi identity are also to some extent “inseparably intertwined.” I explore this further throughout the thesis and specifically in Chapter 4: Home. This type of complex identity, especially in a migrant or diaspora context allows for a “nexus for interaction” (2016, p. 56) for community creation and access points to resources which will be highlighted in the later chapters of my thesis. Particularly given some of the shared history of Sikhs and Hindus in the UK, there are also notable differences between the communities in Britain. Hindus in Britain are highly diverse communities with variation in language, ethnicity, association with caste, history, and cosmological and philosophical belief. As will become apparent, the Sikh community in Britain is by no means homogenous, however, there is concrete, unwavering agreement in the

underpinning philosophy. Jones's study with Tamil Hindus in the West Midlands highlights how the lack of infrastructure based on a minority status means that Tamil Hindus must assert their character of devotion through "small-scale performance of ethnicised Hindu ritual in non-institutional settings." (2016, p. 70) Whilst I would argue that my Sikh interlocutors in the West Midlands drew some parallels to this assertion, it would appear that this was a public performance not through ritual but rather through praxis of Sikh institutions (such as the institutions of langar and kīrtan) but in a non-traditional setting of the centre of Birmingham or Walsall. This assertion falls into a simultaneous action of performance according to an understanding of Sikh ethics as well as transforming Sikhī to 'fit' into the broader liberal and racialised public sector. I explore this further through the praxis of sevā in Chapter 7.

Exploring the positionalities of minorities in Britain shows the complexities that these communities have to contend with and the matrices that they negotiate in their everyday lives. Model and Lin ask, "what is the "cost" of being a non-Christian immigrant in a Christian nation?" (2002, p. 1061) In a quantitative study, they compare economic outcomes for Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims to white Christians in Britain and Canada. They note that their study has some limitations based on the data, however, they ultimately conclude that in all cases, in both Britain and Canada, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims are economically worse off than their white Christian counterparts. This study and the Parekh Report show that there is still progress to be made in Britain in relation to improving the context for minority religious and racialised groups. Additionally, the examples from Raj and Jones also show how religion becomes an important factor in one's public identity which is pertinent in the context of Britain as Anglican and Britain as secular.

In my thesis, I prioritise my interlocutors' voices in debates that are happening in the public sphere because they are theorising about the same issues as academics, but at grassroots level. For my interlocutors, there is suspicion around the agenda of cohesion; is this about the

allocation of resources or is it about the surveillance or restriction and policing of certain groups that do not seem to conform to the expected 'norms?' How does the state react to organisations that act as agents of just violence without approval of the state itself? Categorisation and securitisation are important for the policing of the boundaries and "intersection" (Werbner, 2017, p. 7) between race and religion. These imposed and enforced categories lead to an increase in self-categorisation as a kind of reclamation of identity that fits with the divisive rhetoric encapsulated by new definitions of Islamophobia and other forms of hate crime.

The argument that emerges throughout the thesis is that Sikhī is transformed and adapted within a liberal and racialised public sphere. I explore this in each of the following chapters in thesis and show the ways in which different groups and individuals transform their praxis of Sikhī. In the next chapter, I describe the context of my field site, the history of Sikhs, the position of Sikhs in Britain and more specifically in the West Midlands. I also highlight the methodology, provide reflections on my fieldwork, and include a chapter outline for the remainder of the thesis.

ਮਾਧੇ ਹਮ ਐਸੇ ਤੂ ਐਸਾ ॥

Māḍḥo ham aise tū aisā.

O Lord, this is what we are, and this is what You are.

ਹਮ ਪਾਪੀ ਤੁਮ ਪਾਪ ਖੰਡਨ ਨੀਕੇ ਠਾਕੁਰ ਦੇਸਾ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥

Ham pāpī tum pāp kḥandan nīko ṭhākur desā. Rahāᵝo.

We are sinners, and You are the Destroyer of sins. Your abode is so beautiful, O Lord

and Master. ||Pause||

(Sri Gurū Granth Sāhib 613)

## Chapter 2: Panth

*"Having that red passport doesn't mean anything anymore."*

*- Jagdeep Singh*

### What is Sikhī?

To understand how Sikh ideology and the idea of spirituality and politics (mīrī pīrī) have evolved, a necessarily broad overview of the origin of Sikhī is required. In this section, I attempt to describe Sikhī somewhat atemporally, as a constant, as it is recognised by practitioners, particularly my interlocutors. Sikhī and the relationship that exists between a Sikh and Gurū is unique and is sustained throughout Sikh history. Uberoi describes Sikhī and Sikh history as "a sacred and joint construction of the guru and the Sikh, and it is not a pragmatic or a contingent one; it has a history of freedom and not of determinism." (1999, p. 99) The notion of 'panth' typifies this and not only describes a 'collective', but it also describes a transition of responsibility to the Khalsā commonwealth (explained below) giving birth to a new form of society: 'the Sikh way' (Singh, 1993b, p. 15).

Sikhī originates from Gurū Nānak and his 'Divine Revelation' and this revelation is expanded upon throughout the Gurū period of Sikh history. In order to fully understand Sikhī and its formation, it is important to contextualise the environment of the 'Indian subcontinent' and more specifically the Punjāb in which Gurū Nānak existed. India as we understand and recognise it today sits on many political boundary lines. Common conversation in my field site depicts the Indian subcontinent as harmonious and peaceful prior to British imperialism and colonisation, however, this was not the case. It had rulers in the form of principalities, kingdoms, and colonies; some of these kingdoms remained even under British rule and to this day (Hunter, 1895, p. 24; U. Singh, 2008). The prevalent social order of the time was entrenched in rituals and customs that dictated social actions which limited individual agency. Gurū Nānak's desire was that people could be "free, fearless and moral being[s]" (Singh, 1993b, p. 1), however, he believed that this could not exist within the prevailing social order. The most striking examples of this were the religious and social persecution during some periods of the Mughal Empire and the embedded hierarchy within the caste system in the form of control and power of the Brahmins.

Caste was a fundamental component of the construction of the social order of the time (Dhanda, 2017; Grewal, 2009, pp. 189-205). It provided a set of rules for key and important institutions such as marriage and commensality. This system inherently denotes that one has no choice in life as to how one lives; it is dictated by one's birth status (Dhanda, 2017; Grewal, 2009, pp. 190-191). Whilst my thesis' primary function is not to explore caste, it is important to acknowledge it because it provides the relevant context for the conception and especially self-conception of Sikhī.



## The 'Divine Revelation'

All of my interlocutors agreed that the basis of Sikhī is the philosophy of Gurū Nānak and the ensuing legacy of the following human Gurūs and eternal scriptural form of Gurū. The philosophy stems from what some of my interlocutors, and Sikh historians, term the 'Divine Revelation.' Gurū Nānak's 'Divine Revelation', passed down through oral tradition, is 'nā kō Hindū, nā Musalmān' (S. Singh, 2004, p. 24). Whilst most lay Sikhs, and several of my interlocutors would interpret this statement as meaning that 'there is no Hindu, or Muslim', some would contend that there is a deeper meaning associated with it. Aligned with what Khera (2015, p. 2) writes, Gurū Nānak's ideology influenced his devotees and formed the foundation of the Sikh faith. His ideology, termed Nanakian philosophy, is the most accurate term to describe the original teachings of Gurū Nānak (Chahal, 2008) can be summarised as:

*Sat, Santokh, vichar: truth, contentment and reflection;*

*Daya, dharma, dan; compassion, righteousness and charity;*

*Sidak, sabra, sanjam: faith, tolerance and restraint;*

*Khima, gariba, seva: forgiveness, humility and service;*

*Gyan, kirt: knowledge and work*

(Khera, 2015, p. 2)

The main intention of this revelation was to wipe out an association to an identity which is not necessarily to wipe out an identity in terms of what we might consider identity politics but rather the idea of questioning 'what am I?'. A mainstream Sikh response to this question is 'we are all one'. There is a recognition that all come from Parmātmā (The Divine). Therefore, all of these other identities exist in our minds which does not mean that they are not important but more that they are a context for understanding our perceptions of the world and are labels or associations that can be utilised and mobilised. As Shackle and Mandair write, "... this

statement not only gave a glimpse of the political implications of Nanak's religious experience vis-à-vis the idea of a religiosity beyond social and cultural boundaries, but also indicated the futility of a way of thinking based on the construction of the 'other' in opposition to the 'self'. Exemplified in his own day by the tendency to define oneself as 'Hindu' in opposition to 'Muslim' and vice versa, the process of 'othering' was fundamentally opposed to Nanak's understanding of Oneness." (2005, p. xiv) For a Sikh, truly being Sikh means giving yourself entirely to the Gurū which is never in relation to anyone or anything else. This is the dominant view of my interlocutors, particularly the young Sikhs who work or volunteer for Sikh based charities and organisations.

Sikhī is not a 'religion' that is in opposition to Hinduism or Islam, rather it is the beginning of a socio-political, economic movement with the aim of reconstructing the established norms (Devinder S Chahal, 2002, p. 17; Devinder Singh Chahal, 2002); Chahal (2008); (Mujeeb, 1969, p. 1). Singh and Singh state that "Sikhs do not believe in a separation of religion and politics, nor in their conflation." (1999, p. 16) Sikhī is a new praxis that has an idea of spirituality that is both individual and social. For Gurū Nānak, the spiritual stood for the Divine and not the 'Church' (P. S. Singh, P, 1999, p. 17). This is the idea that changing the individual can create a societal change that can be fostered to create a better environment (Singh, 1982, p. 20).

Gurū Nānak was succeeded by nine human form Gurūs and each one was recognised and met as the incarnation of Gurū Nānak (Singh, 1926). This is an important underpinning in the Sikh philosophy; Gurū Nānak is one Gurū and so is the lineage that follows. Before his passing in 1708, Gurū Gōbind Singh, the tenth incarnation of Gurū Nānak, declared the Gurū Granth Sāhib as the eternal Gurū. The inauguration of a scripture as Gurū instead of a human-form Gurū had been developing from Gurū Angad (Gurū Nānak II) when he began compiling the philosophy of Gurū Nānak. "At the succession of GGS [Guru Granth Sahib], the outer appearance of the Guru was merely transformed, whereas the interior 'spirit' remained the

same." (Myrvold, 2007, p. 131) Alongside the Gurū Granth Sāhib, the Gurū panth was inaugurated as the eternal Gurū. The creation of the Khalsā panth epitomised the Sikh revolution. It was the creation of a unit that was independent, freethinking and without hierarchy or a worldly allegiance. It was designed to combat oppression universally and not only in the homeland of Punjāb (Grewal, 2009, pp. 38-39).

## Sikhs and Britain

I trace the history of Sikhs and Britain and show how this impacts my interlocutors' understandings of what it means to be a Sikh in today's current climate. This history is important because "history is not simply the past; history is process. To understand history is to understand movement - forward over time (i.e., diachronically) or in time (i.e., synchronically)." (P. D. Singh, M, 2014, p. 19)

Much existing literature outlines the impact of British colonialism on the migration of Sikhs from the Indian Sub-continent to Britain, whether directly to Britain or through a process of "twice migration" (Bance, 2007; Bhachu, 1985, 2015; Dosanjh, 2016; Nesbitt, 2016; Singh & Tatla, 2006; Tatla, 2005). Given this context, my research seeks to uncover how my interlocutors understand *mīrī pīrī* in relation to a political identity that has seemingly been imposed on them by the wider, dominant, British public sphere. The latest generation of Sikhs in the West Midlands, where I carried out my fieldwork, face different stakes, priorities, and positions of power as there are now more Sikhs holding visible positions of power and responsibility in the British public sphere (for example in British politics) than ever before (Hall, 2017, p. 2).

Public political cases such as the Windrush scandal of 2018 and the 2019 revocation of ISIS Bride, Shamima Begum's citizenship have led to a supercharging of responses and emotions,

particularly in relation to immigrant communities. This political unrest has led to a questioning of identity and how to be 'British' in a more intense and explicit way. The impact of political leaders such as former US President Trump, Indian Prime Minister Modi and the political situation in Britain including the effect of Brexit have meant that the experience of Sikhs in the public sphere has been magnified. Following these events and others specific to Sikhs such as the arrest of Jagtar Singh Johal (discussed in Chapter 3: Sangat), many of my interlocutors felt that holding a British passport no longer possesses the power and sense of security that it once did, reflected by the statement at the beginning of this chapter about a red passport no longer having the power and security that it once had. This was further compounded through Brexit where Europeans with British passports or permanent residency have also to an extent been 'othered' in British politics showing how no-one is 'safe.' This history has shaped Sikhs' contemporary understandings of *mīrī pīrī*. It also provides a rich resource for my interlocutors' reflection on the relations between politics, identity, and religion. To help the reader understand this history, some of its meanings and to provide the lens from which my interlocutors spoke to me from, I provide a brief summary section below.

#### The Sikh Empire (1801 – 1849)

My interlocutors describe the Sikh empire with pride and nostalgia as one of the pinnacles in Sikh history and Māhārājā Ranjīt Singh is regarded as one of the greatest leaders of all time. The empire is referred to as an example of the sovereignty of Sikhs being practised to its highest potential—perhaps the greatest representation of the realisation of *mīrī pīrī* (P. D. Singh, M, 2014, p. 484). The Sikh Empire, under Māhārājā Ranjīt Singh developed into an authority with a Sikh ethos yet encapsulated a secular *Darbār* (court). It was a political formation in which Hindu counsellors and Muslim princes, and later, European soldiers were key participants. However, the empire remained fully dedicated to the Gurū as Ranjīt Singh always maintained that "he was a humble servant of God, dedicated to the service of the

people.” (Khera, 2015, p. 6) It therefore stands as an exemplar to my interlocutors of the realisation of Sikh politico-religious ideals.

#### The rise of the Sikh empire: Māhārājā Ranjit Singh (1780 -1839)

Ranjīt Singh was the son of the leader of the Sukerchakia misl (clans from the time of the Sikh confederacy that ruled in the name of the Gurū). When his father died, he became his successor at the age of twelve and expanded Sikh territory and created alliances and despite being caught in the middle of two empires (the Afghans and Marathas), he managed to create a large state with its own administration known as the ‘Sikh Empire’ (Singh, 1993b, pp. 187-197).

When the British came to India, Ranjīt Singh had a good relationship with them because Punjāb held a crucial position in lowering the threat from Afghan and Russian forces (P. Singh, 1999, p. 115). In 1809, Ranjīt Singh signed the *Treaty of Amritsar* with Charles T. Metcalfe of the British East India Company. This treaty laid out that Ranjīt Singh would not have supreme rule over the south of the Sutlej river and that the British occupation would be limited to these regions (P. Singh, 1999, p. 115). This alliance with the British was rarely referred to by my interlocutors because instead they chose to emphasise periods of nostalgic purity of mīrī pīrī or else to give accounts of struggles against the British and later, the Indian state.

#### The Fall of the Sikh Empire

The fall of the Sikh empire is regarded by some of my interlocutors as the ‘beginning of the end’ for Sikhs as sovereigns. After the death of Ranjīt Singh in 1839, the Sikh Empire began to crumble as it fell afoul of a monarchical structure which ultimately resulted in its demise (P. Singh, 1999, p. 138). As a result of contested successorship of Ranjīt Singh, the kingdom was

left in an insecure position and open to invasion. During this time the British East India Company had been strengthening its military power leading to tensions with the Sikh forces. Cunningham (1918, p. 258) writes that the British were worried for their own territories following the death of Ranjīt Singh which also included the threat from Afghanistan. In 1845, the Sikh forces broke the treaty signed in 1809 and crossed into their allies' territories. British troops advanced towards the Sutlej and into Sikh territory. This marked the first Anglo-Sikh War (Baldwin, 1845; Featherstone, 1968).

### The Annexation of Punjāb

Further battles between the Sikhs and British took place and eventually culminated in the second Anglo-Sikh War between 1848 and 1849. This saw the Punjāb finally being taken by the British. In 1849 the Punjāb was annexed, and Māhārājā Duleep Singh (the youngest son of Māhārājā Ranjīt Singh) was made to sign all of his rights over to the British. Māhārājā Duleep Singh was also exiled to Britain as a seemingly compensatory strategy but ultimately this was a strategy to forge Duleep Singh's loyalty to Britain and assurance that there would be no revival of the Sikh Empire as it once was (P. Singh, 1999, pp. 173-174). My interlocutors who are well versed in terms of Sikh history (often the oldest generation and the youth) describe this as a period of betrayal in Sikh history. During this time, some Sikhs became essential to the British army in India and were crucial in quelling rebellion against the British empire, and on a global stage in the Second World War. Younger Sikhs involved in decolonisation movements reflect on this history as a time where the British took advantage of Sikhs and used them for their benefit. However, there are those that describe this period of history as the beginning of a 'special' relationship between the Sikhs and the British. They reflect fondly on the formation of specific Sikh regiments and highlight this as an important part of Sikh history. This is a topic of debate for young Sikhs today because it can be seen as complicity with rather than struggle against the British state.

Following the fall of the Sikh Empire and the resulting annexation of Punjāb, Sikhs began a period of reform similar to that of Indian religions under British rule. This involved greater codification and militarisation of religion, as identities were threatened by British missionaries and the broader politics of the Empire, although Sikhs held an ambivalent role in this as they were important recruits to the British army and defended colonial rulers from attack. The reform period which included the Singh Sabhā Lehar (a group of reformers dedicated to solidifying the Sikh identity distinct from any other group), the Chief Khalsā Dīwān (a group of intellectual Sikhs wanting to protect Sikhī and the Sikh identity), the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandak Committee (SGPC) (an organisational body to represent the rights of Gurdwārās) and the Akali Dal (later known as the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) which was a Sikh political party) emerged.

Gurdwārās became a site of contention during the reform period in Sikh history from 1873 to 1920. This time period was a revival of Sikhī in order to ensure the persistence of a Sikh way of life when it was under threat from colonial British rule and Christian missionary activity.

Gurdwārās have been central to the Sikh faith since its inception. During the Gurū period, Dharamsāls were instituted as places where the message of the Gurū would be shared. During the time of Gurū Hargōbind, the dharamsāl became known as a 'Gurdwārā' (Grewal, 1996, p. 280; Jacobsen, 2012, p. 107). The Gurūs would be responsible for these institutions, and these would act as focal points of the Sikh faith within their respective localities. After the inauguration of Gurū Granth Sāhib as the Gurū in 1708, the position of Dharamsāls changed. "The means of grace and guidance was now located within some sangats places of assembly. Where this happened the place of assembly, formerly a dharam-sala, thus became known as a gur-duara." (McLeod, 2003, p. 228) According to McLeod "places associated with the Gurus acquired particular sanctity and as such imparted a special blessing. In this way the single word

gur-duara came to be applied to Sikh places of pilgrimage (place, which today are marked by the so-called 'historic' gurdwaras)." (2003, p. 228)

These reforms were led through the Singh Sabhā Lehar also known as the Singh Sabhā Movement, which was a response to the entry of proselytising Christian and Hindu groups into Punjāb following its annexation (Mandair, 2013, pp. 82-83). The Singh Sabhā movement has gained attention in Sikh studies and is a point of difference for scholars from within the faith and those who study Sikhī from the outside. My interlocutors who are familiar with scholarly work on Sikhs and Sikhī often disagree with the argument that the Singh Sabhā movement was a dilution of Sikhī and a pivotal moment of change; they would rather describe this as a moment of revival of Sikhī. Sikhs began to demand political and religious rights in relation to the colonial authorities (Singh, 1989, p. 193). As part of this movement in order to represent the rights of Gurdwārās, an organisational body was formed. This resulted in the formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) which was recognised in the statute of law. One of its legal victories included the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 which gave the SGPC control of Gurdwārās which were previously run by the British and supported by the mahants (proprietors) (Singh & Fenech, 2014, pp. 28-31). Prior to the Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925, a number of Sikhs participated in morchas (non-violent agitations) to liberate these Gurdwārās. The morchas led to the death of four thousand Sikhs, two thousand being wounded and thirty thousand being jailed (Mandair, 2013, p. 95). Another group, The Akali Dal (or Immortal Army) emerged in 1920 with the aim of being a task force for the SGPC. The Akali Dal later known as the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) became a Sikh political party in 1920 that also controlled religious bodies such as the SGPC. Gurdwārās became institutions with legal rights that were recognised by colonial administration which resulted in them having legitimacy and being more than simply religious institutions.



In 1913, the Ghadar (lit. revolt) movement against British imperialism began in California and Seattle as a form of internationalist resistance to Empire and demand for labour rights led by Sikhs from the Punjāb in America and Canada (Ogden, 2012, pp. 164-197). The Ghadar Party consisted of young men who travelled to North America in order to try and make money. They took Sikh ideas and applied them to labour relations and exploitation as well as self-governance seeing that those that were oppressing them in Punjāb were also oppressing them in North America (Oberoi, 2009; Ramnath, 2005). The movement encapsulates a relatively recent historical pre-cursor to current understandings of mīrī pīrī. These organisations reinterpreted mīrī-pīrī into a religio-political project of internal reform and self-governance in relation to the colonial state. My interlocutors did not emphasise this complex reinvigoration of Sikh ideas of mīrī-pīrī in relation to British rule and other competing religions. Instead, they chose to emphasise the original era of Sikh kingdoms in their purity and uncompromised 'difference' from British state forms. Ironically, perhaps, this was a somewhat interpretive move of nostalgia that partially grew from the history of colonialism itself.

### Sikhs and the Partition of the Indian Sub-continent

2017 was a significant year for Sikhs as it marked seventy years since the Partition of what are now India and Pakistan. This impacted many Sikhs because Partition occurred through the state of Punjāb. This saw families being torn apart and people needing to flee their homes choosing whether they wanted to live in the newly formed states: India or Pakistan. Some of my interlocutors describe that partition was not actually partition of India but rather, a partition of the states of Punjāb and West Bengal. Many other groups were celebrating this as a time where India and Pakistan obtained independence from Britain, but few Sikhs shared this sentiment. Instead, partition was remembered as a tragic sacrifice that the Punjāb and West Bengal made for the independence of India.

Whilst the partition of the Indian sub-continent formally took place in 1947, it is important to note that this was not something that happened overnight. For Sikhs, partition was a crucial moment in history because the state of Punjāb was literally divided between the two nations of Pakistan and India (Kaur, 2020, pp. 108-109). As Talbot and Singh write, "The death toll remains disputed to this day with figures ranging from 200,000 to 2 million." (2009, p. 2) Pakistan encapsulated the dominant area of Punjāb, and India took on the most prosperous parts of Punjāb leaving the Sikhs displaced from their homeland. A story commonly told by my interlocutors was of a farmer whose land is split between the two states. As a result, he is allowed to cross the border from India to Pakistan once a day to tend to his land. This story is an allegory for how Sikhs have lived since partition not only across India and Pakistan but also having no real sense of 'home' or belonging. At multiple levels, it shows how Sikhs have therefore had to compromise their way of living since the state of Punjāb was divided, both literally and figuratively. Partition is remembered by many of my interlocutors as another painful moment in the recent history of Sikhs.

In the lead up to partition, political debates developed about the composition of the Punjāb and its political future. These involved questions about the place of Sikhs in a newly predominantly Hindu nation of India, as a minority within it. It led to political demands for both self-sovereignty within a distinctly Sikh state and claims that this was against Sikh *mīrī pīrī* values that emphasised diversity and secularism. The Chief Khalsā Dīwān asserted that Sikhs had an individual identity but believed that all parties could cooperate to build a collective nation. Baba Kharak Singh, the leader of the SGPC opposed the Moti Lal Nehru Report<sup>5</sup> as it meant that there would be dominance of one people over others in Punjāb which signified a

---

<sup>5</sup> This was a report drafted by the Congress leader, Moti Lal Nehru (father of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi) and was presented in the fourth session of the All-Parties Conference in August 1928 (cf. Nehru Report 1928)

direct contradiction to Sikh ideology (S. Singh, 2005, p. 152). In 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah called for a separate Muslim state, which later became Pakistan.

Three years later, in 1943, Gianī Kartar Singh, an Akali leader called for Azād Punjāb (lit. free Punjāb). Following this, the Shiromani Akali Dal passed a resolution for the creation of a separate state for Sikhs in March 1946 (Singh, 1989, p. 6). However, this was too late, as during this time the boundary lines for the new states of India and Pakistan had already been drawn by the British administration (Singh, 1989, p. 23).

Post-Partition saw many Sikhs move into what had become Indian Punjāb and so it was filling up rapidly (Singh, 1989, p. 292). Khushwant Singh writes that,

*The government showed little imagination in dealing with the Sikhs. Road transport, over which Sikhs had a virtual monopoly, was nationalised. In Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, Sikh settlers were regarded with suspicion natural toward more virile strangers. In Calcutta their control over taxi and bus services had to be ended to provide employment for Hindu refugees coming from East Pakistan.*

(Singh, 1989, p. 293)

In 1957, Punjāb was declared a bilingual state. This resulted in the demand for a Punjabi speaking state, the Arya Samaj (a Hindu nationalist group) countered this demand by instructing Punjabi-speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue. As a result, The State Reorganisation Commission Report declared that there was no justifiable case for Punjāb to become a Punjabi speaking state (Singh, 1989, p. 156). My interlocutors describe that the culmination of these actions and the decision not to make Punjāb a Punjabi speaking state, as the instigation of the dismantling of the embedded foundations of Sikh ideology and polity in the homeland of the state of Punjāb. Mīrī pīrī had been made a new kind of aspiration, for a

form of self-sovereignty of individuals within a Sikh community unlinked to control of a specific regional territory and also for the community itself. However, this left unresolved the question of political control and self-governance, which had been split off from this ideal in reality. Sikhs were in a sense, now without the possibility of political self-governance and confined to community self-governance. This was a split that later led to further tragic consequences in relation to later movements for an independent Sikh state. Aside from mentioning 2017 as marking seventy years since partition, there was not much reference to it from my interlocutors.

### The Green Revolution

In 1966, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, the Green Revolution commenced. The Green Revolution refers to a period when agriculture in India was converted into an industrial system due to the adoption of modern methods and technology such as the use of high yielding variety (HYV) seeds, tractors, irrigation facilities, pesticides, and fertilisers (Shiva, 1991). This led to an increase in food grain production, especially in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. The Green Revolution was introduced first into Punjab and led to significant increases in the state's agricultural output, supporting India's overall economy (Sandhu, 2014, pp. 1192-1199). Given the nature of its land, Punjab (lit. the land of five rivers) will always be controlled by its agricultural output.

Despite its apparent success, many Sikhs do not refer to the Green Revolution as a success story. In Punjab, as a result of the green revolution changes, ten percent of rural households controlled seventy five percent of total agricultural wealth whilst seventy percent of the poorest possessed seven percent (Purewal, 2000). Unemployment started to increase, and inequality became more apparent (Deol, 2003). For many of my interlocutors, the negative effects of the Green Revolution were felt by their families directly through a lowering of their

socio-economic status and relative economic power. The maintenance of land in Punjāb only became possible through an influx of 'valetī' (British or foreign) money from diasporic Sikhs. The implementation and impact of the Green Revolution in Punjāb became synonymous with the state. Shiva argues that "Religious resurgence of the Sikhs that took place in the early 1980s was an expression of a search for identity in an ethical and cultural vacuum that has been created by destroying all value except that which serves the marketplace." (1991, p. 69) During this period, Sikhs had started to move permanently to Britain to work in steel and mill towns, especially younger sons who were not required in family trade but could still help to provide for their families and villages in the form of remittances. After my fieldwork, during my write up in 2020 and 2021, The Green Revolution was topical because of the links to the Farmer's Protests taking place in Delhi.

June 1984

Whilst my interlocutors tended not to discuss partition frequently, the events of 1984 were discussed much more commonly, particularly among my younger interlocutors. For many, 1984 was the reason that they followed Sikhī with so much passion. Following rising tension, particularly as a result of the Green Revolution and its fallout, in 1982, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale launched the 'Dharam Yudh Morcha' which were peaceful protests to support the implementation of the Anandpur Sāhib Resolution (a document laying out the demands of Sikhs). During these agitations, thousands of Sikhs were arrested and over the two years that they lasted, two hundred Sikhs were killed (Pettigrew, 1995, p. 33). Negotiations with the Indian government failed and resulted in the Akali Dal withholding the grain distribution to the rest of India (Pettigrew, 1995, p. 33). Instead of reaching a settlement with the Sikhs, under the instruction of then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, the Indian government launched a military operation called Operation Bluestar that had been planned a year in advance (Pettigrew, 1995, p. 8).

## *Operation Bluestar*

In June 1984, the Indian government implemented 'Operation Bluestar' which was an attack on forty Gurdwārās in Punjāb and centred on the Darbār Sāhib (sometimes referred to as the Harmandir Sāhib or 'Golden' Temple<sup>6</sup>), which is an extremely important place for Sikhs as the central seat of authority both spiritually and temporally (Kaur & Singh, 2009, p. 23) (see also Chapter 5: Gurdwārā). The government stated that the reason for the attack was an attempt to root out 'Sikh terrorists', led by Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who had sought refuge at Darbār Sāhib (Leonard, 1990; Mandair, 2015, pp. 267-270). Anthropologist Joyce Pettigrew writes "The army went into Darbar Sahib not to eliminate a political figure or a political movement but to suppress the culture of a people, to attack their heart, to strike a blow at their spirit and self-confidence." (1995, p. 8)

On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1984, a thirty-six-hour curfew was imposed on the Punjāb that closed down all modes of communication and public travel (Brar, 1993, p. 52). There was media censorship and a total blackout which resulted in the state being totally cut off (Brar, 1993, pp. 82-83). The army's assault included the deployment of tear gas, army tanks and seventy thousand troops (Singh & Fenech, 2014, p. 74). The attack was also scheduled for the beginning of June which is a time where many Sikhs gather at Darbār Sāhib to commemorate the shaheedī (martyrdom) of Gurū Arjan (Pettigrew, 1995). The number of people murdered in the operation remains unknown but the unofficial number according to a senior police officer in the Punjāb, totals twenty thousand (Pettigrew, 1984, pp. 116-117).

---

<sup>6</sup> Darbār Sāhib is commonly referred to as the 'Golden Temple' in English but this is seen as disrespectful by many Sikhs, and I therefore refer to it by its proper name throughout my thesis to best indicate proper usage.

## *Operation Woodrose*

Operation Woodrose was the sister event that happened alongside Operation Bluestar in June 1984. Not much is known about Operation Woodrose as it was a covert operation, but writers of this time period believe it to have been very similar to Operation Bluestar (Kießling, 2016; Pettigrew, 1995, p. 36). The armed forces aimed to prevent the entrance of other citizens into Amritsar. Many Sikh leaders and activists outside of Amritsar had been identified and would eventually meet the same fate as those within the Darbār Sāhib complex. Woodrose is believed to have lasted for months and provided a cover for the attack on intellectual individuals with the aim of denying any public discourse and allowing for successful anti-Sikh propaganda (H. Singh, 2014, p. 86). The most significant example of this is the creation of polarising views of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale particularly among some of my interlocutors who relied on British coverage of the events.

Sikhs who were already permanently settled in Britain and had relatively limited interaction with their homeland, relied on information from British media about the occurrences in India. Media coverage of Operation Bluestar depicted Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as a ‘terrorist’ figure although that was not the sentiment of Sikhs who arrived in Britain shortly after the events of 1984. One of my interlocutors, a young Sikh man who was born and raised in Britain told me how his mother who was also born and raised in Britain described Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale as a ‘terrorist’. His father, who came to Britain from Punjāb after the events of 1984, had been in the court of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and explained that he was not a ‘terrorist’ but was a living embodiment of Sikh sovereignty in modern times, deemed a threat to Indian rule, therefore resulting in him being vilified and portrayed in the media as a ‘terrorist’.

## *November 1984*

On 31st October 1984 Indira Gandhi was killed by her Sikh bodyguards in response to the massacre at the Darbār Sāhib complex in June. After the announcement of her death, attacks immediately started taking place against Sikhs, however no Sikhs were killed on the actual day of her assassination (Das, 2006). Her assassination sparked anti-Sikh pogroms and targeted killings throughout India but was centred in Delhi. According to my interlocutors, if this were a spontaneous attack resulting from anger, then this should have been the day where most of the violence took place. However, the worst violence actually took place on the following two days (Garvin, 2016).

Prior to the Indian Government regaining some sort of control on 3rd November 1984, many Hindus continued carrying out attacks on Sikhs. Cars and trucks belonging to Sikhs were looted and set on fire, while their owners were beaten up. Hundreds of people were burned alive, in their homes or where they were caught in the streets. Thousands of Sikhs went into hiding with sympathetic Hindu or Muslim neighbours, Gurdwārās or in relief shelters set up around the city. In total, approximately three thousand people were killed (Das, 1996, 2006). Survivors of the attacks described the sexual violence that targeted Sikh women and the torture and killings of men and children, demonstrating an agenda to wipe out the Sikh nation (Appadurai, 2006; Das, 1990).

The aftermath of the November attacks led to “a fiercely militant nationalist movement which pursued a guerrilla war against the Indian state that lasted until 1992.” (Mandair, 2015, p. 267) Thousands of lives were lost, and many people were tortured even at the hands of the police. Mandair describes this series of events as “one of the darkest episodes in post-independence India, and one that many Sikhs still find difficult both to remember and to forget.” (2015, p. 267) Many Sikhs refer to the events of 1984 as the ‘third ghallūghārā’ or third Sikh holocaust



(Tatla, 2015). The impact of the events of 1984 is still prominent for many of my interlocutors and their families today as many of them have either been directly or indirectly affected. Tatla (2015, pp. 311-313) shows how the Sikh community's psyche (as described by my interlocutors) was shattered by the resulting trauma, how it reacted initially in anger and eventually with remorse and extended mourning which for many continues unabated (Mandair, 2015).

The 1980s witnessed a new mobilisation of Sikh identity, particularly in the diaspora centred in the religious nationalist fight for Khalistān – or a Sikh independent state in the Punjāb. Many authors argue that this religious nationalism originated in diaspora communities in Britain and elsewhere as a result of their longing for a homeland and exclusion from majority society (Axel, 2001; Dusenbery, 2016). More recently, there has been an increase in support for Khalistān in the Sikh diaspora in Britain, particularly from young Sikhs who, most often were born in Britain and are exposed to information detailing the attacks that have taken place against Sikhs. Tatla (2015) has described Sikhs as a 'victim diaspora' mobilised by Operation Bluestar. Referencing Axel (2001) and Tatla (1999), Shani (2002, p. 15) argues that the state of a Sikh diaspora is contingent on the existence of a 'homeland' and 'forced dispersion' from it. He argues that this is crucial in Sikh nationalist discourse in the Sikh diaspora. Axel (2001) testifies that the notion of Punjāb as the Sikh homeland is one that has been constructed in the diaspora and not in India. This is not a view that is shared by the majority of my interlocutors or even many Sikh scholars. He argues that since 1983, images of tortured bodies of Sikh 'militants' and Khalistanīs (those who believe in and fight for a sovereign Sikh state) are the main medium for the creation of social relations among the Sikh diasporas. However, this was not supported by my fieldwork as some of those who would not identify as Khalistanī also described Punjāb as the Sikh homeland. The Khalistān movement is one that has been controversial, particularly since the events of 1984. As a result of the nature of this debate, many Sikhs feel that they have a history tied to the land of the Punjāb but do not associate with the overtly political

agenda of the Khalistān movement. Whilst there are links to the land of the Punjāb through a collective memory, there is not necessarily a desire for a sovereign Sikh state which is usually termed 'Khalistān'.

Despite the cessation of civil war in the Punjāb in 1965, Khalistān and its religious nationalism remain and are perhaps, increasingly important to the Sikh diaspora in Britain. In particular since 2014 the number of Sikhs that are wearing clothing and sporting paraphernalia in support of the Khalistān movement has rapidly increased, particularly among young Sikhs (Singh, 2017). Many Gurdwārās also have much more information and photographs of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Since 2014, where documents have been released confirming Britain's collaboration with the Indian Army<sup>7</sup> where then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met with Indira Gandhi's advisor about Operation Bluestar; many Sikhs, including my interlocutors, now feel a sense of betrayal from the British government. Speculation that all of the documents have not been released and fear that former Prime Minister, David Cameron did not carry out a proper investigation has led to further disenfranchisement of Sikhs and their affiliation to Britain.

### Sikh activism: the desire for a sovereign state

Currently, there is a significant amount of Sikh activism that is taking place predominantly across the Sikh diaspora. Britain, and particularly the West Midlands has somewhat been a hub for this activity and as Mitra explains, the events of 1984 were an "assault on the dignity of Sikhs and a reminder of the group's subordinate position in India." (2015, p. 324) Before 1984, the Sikh diaspora, was a somewhat marginal player in terms of its engagement with the Sikh homeland (mostly through the formation of the Ghadar party in California) with most of its

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/et-explains/the-secret-behind-operation-blue-star-britains-dilemma-explained/articleshow/64569757.cms?from=mdr>

contribution through transnational remittances and occasional visits. The narrative surrounding Sikhs in the diaspora and particularly in Britain has become dominated by the discourse of a supposed 'Sikh radicalisation'. As Jasjit Singh (2017, p. 5) writes, Sikh activism in Britain changed after the events of 1984. Sikhī became reinvigorated in a way that is similar to the effects of other key moments from Sikh history such as the misl confederacies and the reform movement which was a revival of Sikhī through the survival of the Sikh way of life. Sikhī had evolved from its origins of a socio-political economic movement into a republic under Banda Singh Bahadur, distinct from other competing forms of power. The reform period, formally beginning with the Singh Sabhā Lehar managed to solidify a more 'authentic' Sikh identity following the impact of the arrival of missionary and proselytising groups into Punjāb after its annexation. The events of 1984 triggered Sikh activists in the diaspora to take action as a result of the threat to the Sikh homeland and Sikh way of life.

1984 marks a significant year for Sikhs both in Punjāb and in the diaspora. If they had not already migrated to Britain, many of my interlocutors came to England as a direct result of these events. Britain admitted more than two thousand Sikhs following 1984 however, only a few were granted asylum, the majority were permitted to stay indefinitely (Tatla, 2005, p. 1085).

### Literature review of Sikhs

My thesis provides a description of the total schema of the relationship between religious and political action from the viewpoint of my interlocutors. This is also present in indigenous texts written by Sikh authors writing about Sikhī, who see the relationship between the religious and political in similar ways. This is an indigenous theory of the political and the religious that can have implications for our interpretations of other cultures and societies, as well as the difficulties and potentials for public expression of religion in contemporary Britain. I used these

sources to give an overview of Sikh history as my interlocutors understand it earlier in the chapter. Below, I provide a non-exhaustive literature review of Sikhs and the schools of thought in Sikh studies.

Sikh studies is different from studies of Sikhs in anthropology, partly because Sikh studies as a discipline was developed as a political move and as a means of creating an interdisciplinary approach primarily to the study of Sikhī as a faith rather than of Sikhs' lived experiences of Sikhī. Sikh studies emerged in the 1960s as a distinct field to increase the study of "non-western cultures in the university system." (Ahluwalia, 2005, p. 1) It also emerged alongside the growth of religious studies as a discipline that not only focused on "Christian and Judaic traditions." (Ahluwalia, 2005, pp. 1-2) Sikh studies was initially concerned with Sikh theology, literature, and history and later became focused on migration and diaspora in the early 1990s and then on to issues of identity in the mid 1990s (Ahluwalia, 2005, pp. 3-4).

Often, Sikhī is misrepresented in Western academia which Lewis (1989) suggests is as a result of three primary issues: errors of fact, notions of supposed Sikh 'syncretism' and supposed 'pacifism' of early Sikhī and the representation of 'militancy' of later Sikhī. He claims that much of this misrepresentation (particularly the second and third issues) are due to scholarship that stems from the British Raj. He states that this impacts the research and work for present scholars and that it provides a secondary and therefore inaccurate account of Sikhī. In terms of Sikh scholarship, there are generally two schools of thought: 'mainstream Sikhī' and the 'McLeodian' school of thought. Mainstream Sikhī generally takes the starting point that Sikhī and Sikhs are sovereign, and their writings are aligned to the teachings of the Akāl Takht (the political centre for Sikhs). The McLeodian school of thought which is the dominant school of thought in Sikh studies, stems from the academic writings of the Christian missionary Hew McLeod (Fenech, 2010; McLeod, 1999, 2003, 2008; McLeod, 1989). His academic scholarship on Sikhs and Sikhī is generally a historiographic and 'objective', 'western' approach

to studying Sikh history. Many Sikhs take issue with this school of thought as they would argue that Sikhī cannot be understood from the outside in. The most problematic conclusion that McLeod drew is that Sikhī evolved from a saintly tradition with the first four incarnations of Gurū Nānak to a military one from Gurū Nānak V (Gurū Arjan). Sikhs take issue with this interpretation of Sikhī because it fundamentally contradicts the concept of mīrī pīrī and the philosophy that Gurū Nānak I to X are the same spirit.

Most of the existing literature about Sikhs in Britain provides historical and socio-political accounts of the Sikh community in Britain. This would include Singh and Tatla's *Sikhs in Britain: The Making of a Community* (2006) which analyses the history of the Sikh community in Britain. The book focuses on community issues such as caste (specifically in relation to caste specific Gurdwārās) though the book does not focus on the lived experiences of Sikhs in Britain. Bhachu's *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (1985) is an ethnographic account of Sikhs in Britain that migrated via East Africa. She describes religious and cultural practices around caste, arranged marriage and dowry in the context of Sikhs who arrived in Britain in the 1960s, primarily those from the Rāmghāriā clan (from the Misl period in Sikh history). Jasjit Singh has written extensively about the Sikh community in Britain primarily in the discipline of sociology. His work generally focuses on cultural and religious transmission among Sikhs in Britain (Singh, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; J. Singh, 2014b; 2018, 2020b) and more recently he has written about the incidence of Sikh 'radicalisation' (Singh, 2017, 2020a, 2020b) (2017) which he argues has become more visible since the events of 1984 and is actually a rise in Sikh activism rather than Sikh 'radicalisation' which is misrepresented as a threat to the British state.

In *Lions of the Punjab*, Fox (1985) argues that Sikh identity became solidified in a new way during the colonial encounter. Fox claims that the British colonial government's cultivating of a supposed 'orthodox', separatist, and martial Singh identity (the "Punjab Lions") to serve their

own military agenda at the time, and also one that to some extent resulted in a rebellion against them. Similarly, Cohn (1996) explores the political importance of clothing such as the Sikh turban in the history of colonialism and anticolonialism. He argues, “British rulers in nineteenth-century India played a major part in making the turban into a salient feature of Sikh identity.” (Cohn, 1996) As my thesis shows, there is debate about the extent to which identity became politicised solely as a result of the colonial encounter (Ballantyne, 2002), yet it is significant to consider that both Cohn and Fox’s arguments are concerned with the changing forms of the public sphere and how this altered the ways in which the Sikh faith has been made public.

Van der Veer (1994) also argues that the colonial public sphere made the Sikh faith into an explicitly antagonistic communal identity. He argues that “The Sikh case is an excellent example of the influence of British colonial policies on the development of a communal identity.” (1994, p. 55) The number of people entering the Khalsā (initiated Sikhs) increased under colonialism, therefore re-enforcing a ‘Sikh identity’. This increase was due to two pressures: first, the fact that those who were not initiated into the Khalsā were identified by the British colonial regime as Hindu, which forced symbolic identity markers between religious groups. Secondly the counter-movements (reform movements such as The Singh Sabhā Lehar and the Ghadar movement) against British rule and Christianity or Islamic reform (Deobandi) and Hindu reform (Arya Samaj) in north India, put more pressure on other religious groups to take on new agonistic politicised identities. Van der Veer (1994) claims that by the end of colonial rule in the 1940s, the Sikh faith had a very different public form. Sikhs had become a modern ‘community’ demanding political rights and identified with a masculine martial spirit.

In contemporary Britain, Singh (2016) argues that the youth engagement with being Sikh is often different from their parents which is contrary to earlier studies on Sikh youth (Hall, 2002). Kathleen Hall (2002) provides an ethnographic study of Sikhs in Leeds and considers

Sikh immigration in Britain through the lens of citizenship, education, and identity formation. Hall describes Sikhs living in Britain as having identities that are neither 'purely' British nor Sikh but as 'translations' that challenge these boundaries. However, my research presents the context of the next generation of Sikhs, some of whom are now beyond this "third space" that Hall describes. My interlocutors were more complex than this ethnography suggests as I encountered a 'spectrum' of ways of being Sikh in Britain. Hall's primary interests are related to an idea of family honour relating to caste which I did not find in my fieldwork. In my research, the most prominent tension was of being a Sikh in Britain and what that actually means evolving beyond previous understandings such as multiculturalism and its impact, one such example being Baumann's pioneering ethnography in Southall (Baumann, 1996) which shows how minority communities try to forge a common youth culture through Bollywood film and Bhangrā. Arguably, among the youth, there is now an attempt to create distance from other minority groups, particularly resulting from rising tensions surrounding Islamophobia and interests in forms of religious revival and expression.

Given this history of study of Sikhs in South Asia and Britain, my thesis draws on elements of exploring the Sikh diaspora in Britain and levels of Sikh identity. However, it also extends our understanding of the Sikh diaspora in context of Sikh emic understandings of the religious and political, using the Sikh framing of *mīrī pīrī* to make sense of these broader categories. It breaks away from a traditional framing of Sikh identity as being constructed primarily from the colonial encounter and through a simplified discussion of identity politics as a result of applying western understandings of rational religion.

## The West Midlands

The West Midlands is one of nine official regions in England and the largest city in the region is Birmingham (Figure 2), which is where I carried out most of my fieldwork. After London, the

West Midlands is Britain's second most ethnically diverse region. The 2011 Census estimated Birmingham's population at 1,073,045. Approximately twenty percent of the West Midlands population are in Birmingham. According to Birmingham City Council, 1,141,400 people live in Birmingham according to the 2018 mid-year population estimates which is an increase of 4,300 (0.4%) people since 2017. 22.8% (259,000) are children, 64.3% (731,500) are of working age and 13.0% (147,900) are pensioners (2021).

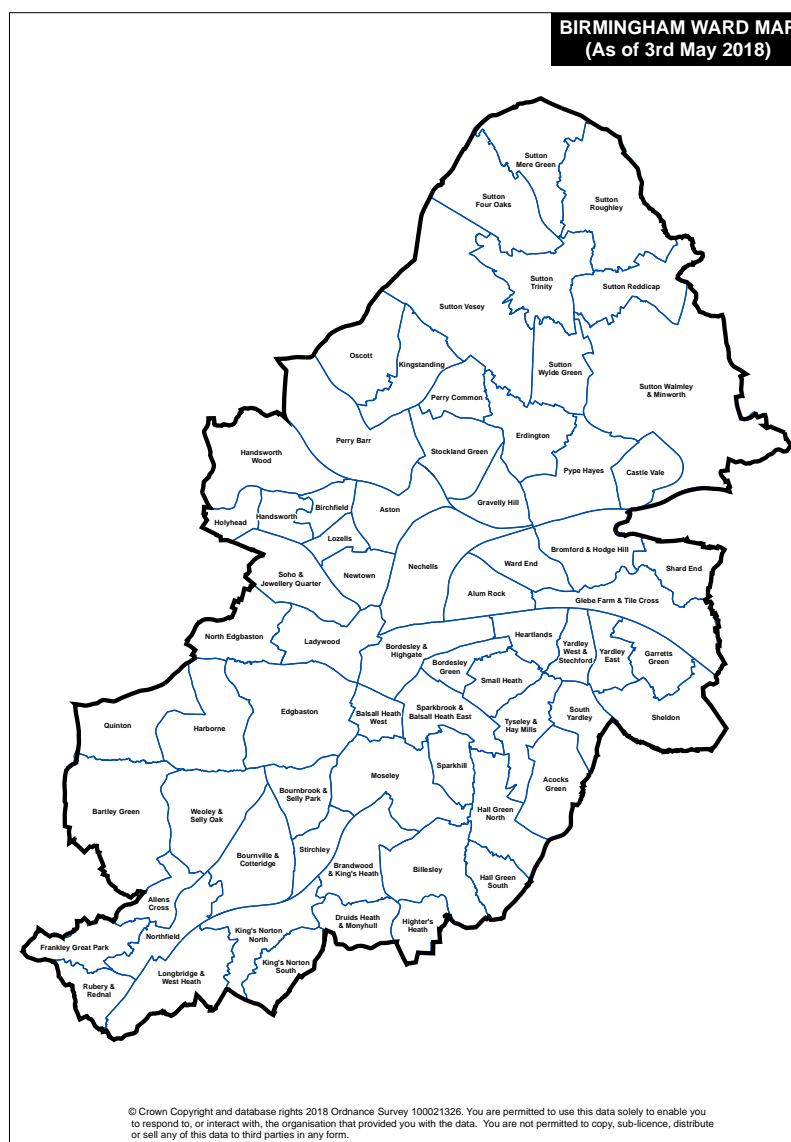


Figure 2 – Map of sixty-nine wards of Birmingham (Birmingham City Council 2021)



## The story of migration

Sikh migration to Britain took place in three waves with the majority taking place post-partition with the largest influx during the 1950s and 1960s (Ballard & Ballard, 1977, pp. 22, 29-30; Shani, 2002). Most of the Sikhs settled England, in the inner-city areas of the North and Midlands, in towns such as Bradford, Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham, where they found jobs in the textile and manufacturing industries (Ballard & Ballard, 1977, pp. 21-56; Kalra, 2019). Like most other South Asian migrants, early settlers were largely men, and had the intention of returning home, however, many ended up remaining in Britain and their families joined them later. Subsequent immigration restrictions in the 1960s and the political climate 'back home', meant that many felt that they could have a better life in Britain (Hoque, 2019). The developing 'chain migration' meant that many women were brought over through arranged marriages (Ballard & Ballard, 1977, p. 33; Dosanjh, 2016; Hoque, 2019, p. 44). In general, the first Punjabī migrants were highly skilled labourers in industries such as farming and craftwork (Ballard & Ballard, 1977, p. 25; Bance, 2007). The second wave of Sikh immigrants also known as 'twice migrants' (Bhachu, 1985, 2015) came from East Africa in the 1970s due to political changes as a consequence of independence movements (Ballard & Ballard, 1977, pp. 41-47; Bhachu, 1985, 2015; Tatla, 1999). Many of the Sikhs who migrated from East Africa were educated and therefore were able to undertake more senior jobs but still faced the same difficulties of discrimination in the workplace (Bhachu, 1985; Nesbitt, 2016). The third wave of migrants came to Britain to flee India during the events of 1984, in a process with parallels to Liberatore's Somali, Muslim interlocutors who fled their homeland due to political unrest (Jhutti-Johal, 2019, p. 8; Juergensmeyer, 1989, 1993; Liberatore, 2017).

A significant part of the industrial revolution began in Birmingham and the Black Country area of the West Midlands and so was one of the places that migrants settled when arriving to Britain. Overseas migrants arriving between the 1950s and 1980s were mainly from southern

India and the Caribbean. More recent trends see people arriving from many different parts of the world, including Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Countries new to the twenty most reported countries of birth for Birmingham residents since 2001 include Iran, Zimbabwe, the Philippines, and Romania. In Birmingham, Pakistan, India, and Republic of Ireland were the most frequently recorded countries of birth outside of Britain in 2001 and 2011 (Birmingham City Council 2021 - Figure 3). According to the 2001 Census, in the Midlands, major areas of Sikh population were Birmingham (28,592; 2.9%), Sandwell (19,429; 6.9%), Wolverhampton (17,944; 7.6%), Coventry (13,960; 4.6%), Leicester (11,796; 4.2%), Walsall (7,717; 3.0%), Derby (7,151; 3.2%), and Nottingham (3,321; 1.2%).

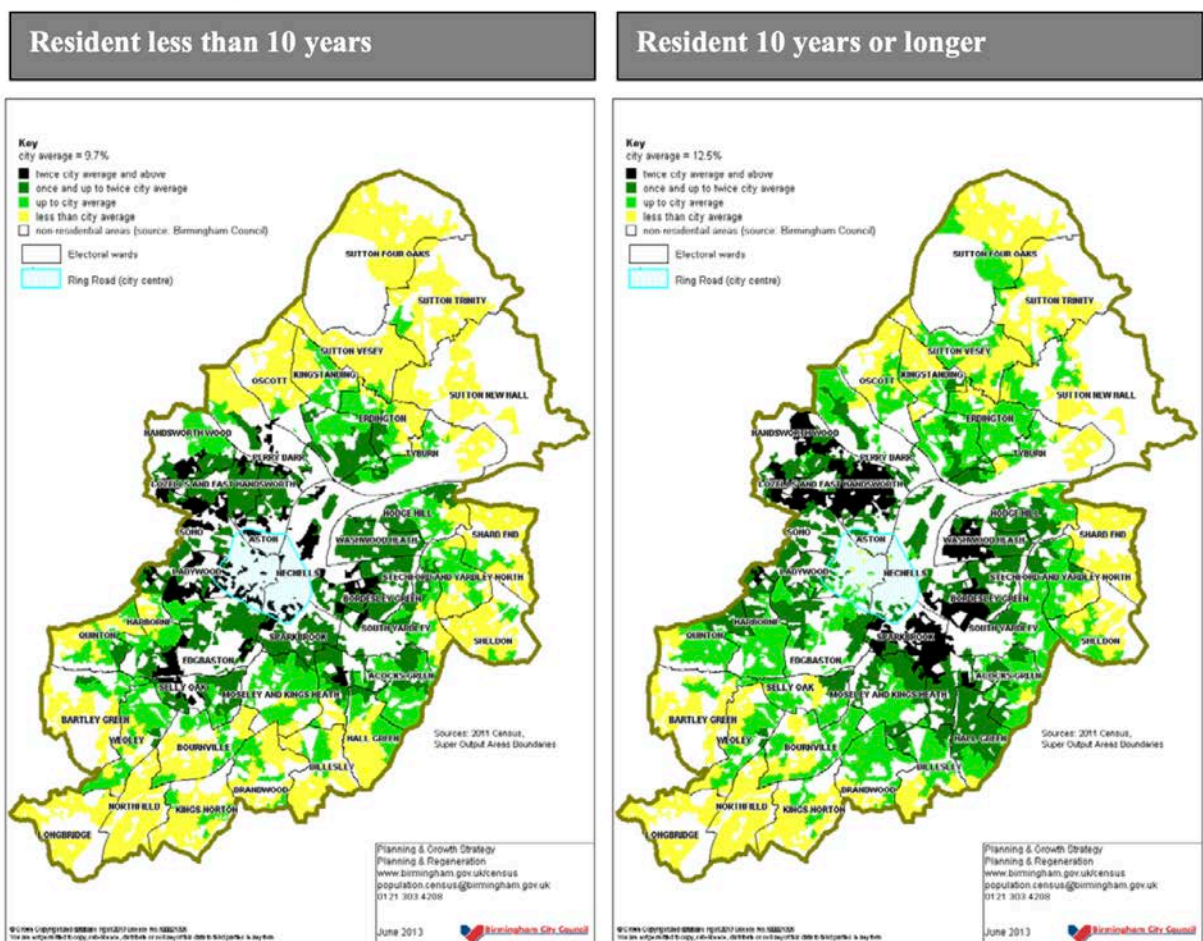


Figure 3 - Percentage of residents in Birmingham born overseas (Birmingham City Council 2021)

After the Second World War, labour shortages in Britain to reconstruct the infrastructure and the development of post-war Britain led to an active recruitment of labour from overseas colonies. During this period a small minority of ex-soldiers and other Sikhs came to settle in Britain as a means of making money to send 'back home' (Ballard, 1986). Early Sikh settlers in the Midlands primarily undertook manual jobs available in the metal industries. They were employed as unskilled or semi-skilled workers in manufacturing, despite being highly qualified in many cases (Ballard, 1986; Tatla, 1993). Often Sikhs (and other minorities) suffered high levels of racism and discrimination. As a result, men frequently obtained work through the recommendation of family or friends who were already employed. Others worked on the buses when the colour ban on employment was lifted in the 1950s. In Birmingham and its surrounding areas, most Sikhs settled in inner-city areas such as Aston, Handsworth, Small Heath, Wolverhampton, West Bromwich, and Smethwick, as these areas were relatively cheap and close to places of work.

According to the Migration Observatory (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva, 2017), approximately 15% of people working in the West Midlands in 2017 were foreign born, compared to a British average of 18%. The top industry employing non-EU migrants was health and social work (47,000 non-EU born workers) which was representative of my interlocutors (Figure 4).

Industry in 2017	EU born	Non-EU born	Non-UK born	UK born	Total
Manufacturing	39,000 (12%)	28,000 (8%)	67,000 (20%)	273,000 (80%)	340,000 (100%)
Health and social work	16,000 (4%)	47,000 (13%)	63,000 (18%)	296,000 (82%)	360,000 (100%)
Retail	33,000 (9%)	28,000 (8%)	62,000 (17%)	306,000 (83%)	368,000 (100%)
Transport and storage	19,000 (13%)	24,000 (17%)	44,000 (30%)	105,000 (69%)	149,000 (100%)
Hospitality	19,000 (13%)	23,000 (17%)	42,000 (30%)	95,000 (69%)	137,000 (100%)
Other industries	29,000 (3%)	61,000 (6%)	90,000 (9%)	840,000 (91%)	929,000 (100%)
<b>All industries</b>	<b>174,000 (7%)</b>	<b>239,000 (9%)</b>	<b>413,000 (15%)</b>	<b>2,252,000 (84%)</b>	<b>2,665,000 (100%)</b>

Figure 4 - Employment by industry and birth country in 2017 (Rienzo & Vargas-Silva, 2017)

## Sikhs and the West Midlands

The West Midlands is a hub for Sikh activism and community activity. According to the Office for National Statistics (2011), the West Midlands has the highest proportion of Sikhs (two per cent) in England and Wales. Wolverhampton (nine per cent), Sandwell (nine per cent) and Coventry (five per cent) were in the top ten local authorities in England and Wales with the largest representation of Sikhs. There are also many Sikh institutions including approximately forty-five Gurdwārās and seven Sikh schools.

During my fieldwork, my position as both a researcher and a Sikh were often topic of conversation. I had discussions about the difference in my upbringing as a Sikh in Yorkshire in a predominantly white and middle-class environment, compared with my interlocutors, who have been raised both culturally and religiously in a Sikh environment with predominantly Sikh and wide-ranging socio-economic backgrounds. Although most of these families began as working-class families that have started to climb up the social ladder, these groups tended to stay within their own communities and found it uncomfortable to mix with the wider, white community. Interestingly there is less resistance in mixing with members from the Black community, as they tend to find common ground. It is possible that this could be embedded in the history of the area as the Black Country is infamous for the Enoch Powell 'Rivers of Blood' speech (which Powell referred to as 'the Birmingham speech') that criticised mass immigration especially from Commonwealth countries. Some of my younger interlocutors therefore felt a sense of solidarity with other migrant communities as a result of their 'shared history' and experience of racism (Hall et al., 2017, p. 13).

There are a diverse and complex range of class positions of Sikhs in Birmingham with a significant number of working-class Sikhs (Jaspal & Takhar, 2016). This tends to include those that have set up charitable organisations in order to improve society at a local community

level. There are also many Sikhs that have worked up the class hierarchy and entered into the middle class through education and profession (Kalra, 2019). After being in Britain over a period of time, around the end of the 1900s, Sikhs became part of middle classes, running shops or firms such as the large warehouse, 'East End Foods' or working in professions such as medicine and law and local government (Tatla, 2015, p. 1086). Following this, many of them moved out of the inner city and settled in more affluent suburbs such as Edgbaston, Harborne and Great Barr. However, many Sikhs still live in the most deprived areas of Birmingham, and it is worth noting that Birmingham itself suffers from high levels of deprivation being the seventh most deprived Local Authority in England (Birmingham City Council (2019) - Figure 5). Since 2015, Birmingham's relative Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) rank has remained unchanged (Birmingham City Council (2019)). Some of my interlocutors also resided in adjacent neighbourhoods in the West Midlands, such as Sandwell, which are also ranked highly in the IMD (Figure 6). It is against this backdrop of social stratification, changing policies for minorities (including multiculturalism) alongside a dominant British public sphere, where a complex context of secularism with Christianity (i.e., Anglicanism, which links together Church and state, entwining the goodness of the nation with the goodness of the monarchy and of a Christian God) as the norm, that I have conducted my fieldwork and explored Sikh public expressions of faith. This community is not only apportioned by class (which is complicated by race and ethnicity), but also contains many different historical experiences and visions of how to be a Sikh.

## 2019 English Index of Multiple Deprivation - Birmingham

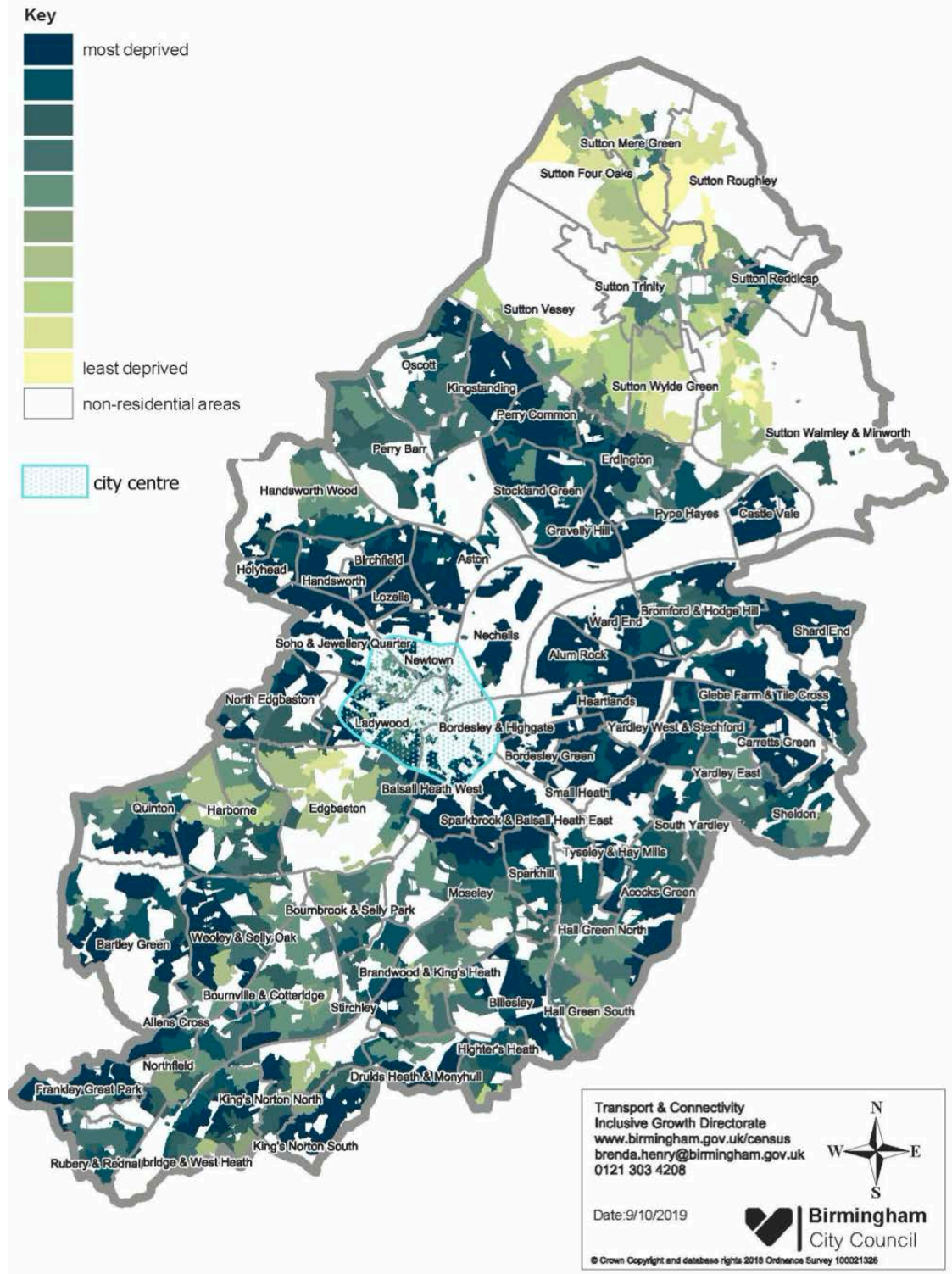


Figure 5 - 2019 English Index of Multiple Deprivation in Birmingham (Birmingham City Council 2019)

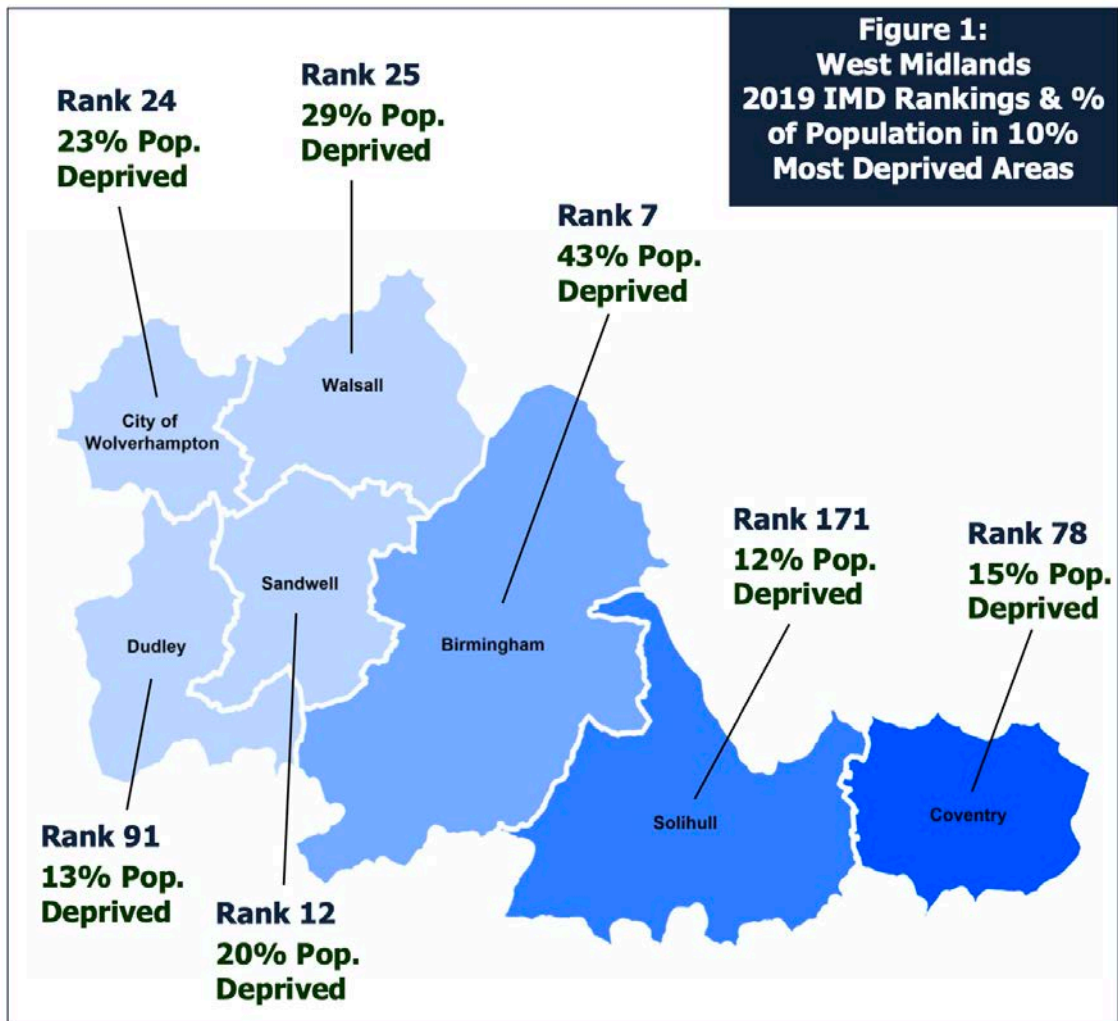


Figure 6 - West Midlands 2019 IMD rankings (Birmingham City Council 2019)

## Methodology and reflections on fieldwork

I chose anthropology as the discipline to carry out my PhD as I believed it to be the best fit for the type of research I hoped to undertake. In all of my years reading about Sikhī, primarily in the field of Sikh studies, I was desperate to hear about the actual lived experiences of Sikhs. I felt that taking an ethnographic approach to my research could help to provide some of these insights that I felt were missing.

My interlocutors were interested in my research from its inception, curious about my findings and what I was saying about the different contexts I was in. As can be determined from my later chapters, it is clear that my interlocutors deem themselves as equivalent to scholars when discussing and sharing their views on what it means to be a Sikh in Britain. Chapter 4: Home, shows the starkest example of my interlocutors developing their own theories of what it means to be a Sikh in Britain.

### 'Native' anthropology

I grew up as a Sikh in Yorkshire, which meant that I had 'native' experience of the type of interlocutors I might encounter in the field. However, the Sikh community in the West Midlands was very different from my upbringing and therefore was not 'home'. I was raised in a 'middle-class' family in a predominantly white town whereas my field site was diverse, and multicultural in terms of both class and race (Tsuda, 2015, p. 15). I had started to build up connections and approach gatekeepers in the field prior to commencing my fieldwork but securing access to institutions such as schools remained challenging. I explored familial connections to help secure my host family and entry into the different sites where I conducted my fieldwork.

As I show in Chapter 4: Home, my family is distantly related to my host family, although I did not know them personally before arriving in Birmingham. When I first began enquiring about potential homes for my fieldwork, I found that people were generally very open and expressing a desire to help. However, when it came to me actually explaining my position and research, I found access into households quite difficult. This was partly because my interlocutors wanted to be hospitable and assist with my work but were worried about their private affairs being shared so publicly. Eventually, my host family agreed on a trial basis, and we developed a strong relationship over the duration of my fieldwork. They introduced me to



their family and friends, building my connections up to different networks particularly through kinship structures. Kinship remained a central theme throughout my fieldwork.

When I first arrived at my field site in November 2017, I quickly reached out to a distant cousin who lived in Birmingham. She drove me around the city and showed me all of the areas where Sikhs lived and the different organisations that they were involved with. She told me about a charitable foodbank organisation who she occasionally volunteered for and offered to take me with her. This is how I was first introduced to Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS), (who I discuss in more detail in Chapter 7: *Sevā*). Through my own networks, I had connections with one of the Sikh television stations so I visited their studio where I met a young woman who became a key interlocutor and further developed my relationship with MLSS. I ended up attending the homeless feeds with her every Monday evening. She also introduced me to the organisation Sikh Youth UK (SYUK) where I met other young men and women and was able to talk to them about their experiences of Sikhī. I started to follow these organisations on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter where I was exposed to online debates and other organisations and platforms. I regularly searched the term 'Sikh' on the online application 'Eventbrite' to identify any events in the local area that might be interesting for me to attend.

My status as a Senior Research Fellow for the Sikh Education Council helped give me credibility in the field and made organisations such as SYUK more trusting of me as an individual rather than as a western academic; although I was still not fully accepted as an insider (Tsuda, 2015, p. 15). From my own experience of growing up Sikh, I knew that the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Smethwick and the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) Gurdwara were the most prominent Gurdwaras in Birmingham, both in terms of the size and their influence. As a result, I knew that these would be key sites for my fieldwork and locations where I would meet potential interlocutors. As my family are members of the 'twice migrant' community of Sikhs, I

had familial connections to GNNSJ which allowed me access to meet with the leader of the organisation and again his support for my research. Whilst at this Gurdwārā, I met my second host family who I refer to throughout the thesis. The school where I carried out my research is affiliated to GNNSJ Gurdwārā and so provided an access point for me to conduct research and become a part of their network.

Throughout my research and my writing of the thesis, ethical concerns have remained at the centre. I am aware that this is a community that I am simultaneously a part of and not a part of. I was constantly reminded of my insider and outsider status in a manner similar to that described by the Black anthropologist, Zora Neale-Hurston, “I needed my Barnard education to help me see my people as they really are. But I found that it did not do to be too detached as I stepped aside to study them. I had to go back, dress as they did, talk as they did, live their life, so that I could get into my stories the worlds that I knew as a child.” (Hooks, 1992, p. 142) My positionality as a young, Sikh, female, unmarried researcher allowed me to gain insights into the community that I worked with. Sometimes this involved an acceptance from certain individuals and groups and sometimes it highlighted my awkward position as being part of this community and also representing a Western, academic institution. These encounters are highlighted throughout all of the chapters in my thesis.

Whilst I acknowledge my position as a somewhat ‘native’ anthropologist, I recognise that this is never fully the case (Narayan, 1993). Recently, anthropology, and the ethnographic encounter, which was predominantly constructed where those being researched are ‘other’ has been challenged (Meyers, 2019). I was definitely in a beneficial situation throughout my fieldwork as a result of my positionality. My familiarity as a Sikh meant that I had privileged access, understanding and rapport in the field. I found that in some instances, particularly in peoples’ homes, my interlocutors were very open with me, especially where we had built up trust and a relationship, therefore I ensured that I captured my fieldnotes sensitively so that I

did not betray their trust. Although I was relatively open with my interlocutors about my personal life, I was aware of the hierarchy that exists between the researcher and the interlocutor (Jacobs-Huey, 2002). I found that throughout the duration of my fieldwork I shifted roles from being a daughter, a researcher, a volunteer, a counsellor, a friend and so much more. I found that my interlocutors became my *sangat* (community) and I became theirs which made me more reflexive in my approach (Jacobs-Huey, 2002, pp. 791-792). We spent approximately a year of our lives together influencing and learning from each other. I truly believe that my fieldwork was a life changing experience for me both personally and academically.

As a result of perceived previous misrepresentations in academia and the media, Sikhs can view an analysis of their faith as either a challenge or criticism. Therefore, I was conscious that my research needed to be conducted in a manner that made my interlocutors feel comfortable that I am not misrepresenting the community and their beliefs. Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have been reminded of my closeness to the community that I worked with and whilst I acknowledge that some may deem my work not to be critical enough given the familiarity I have with my community, whilst also feeling a sense of obligation to not misrepresent my interlocutors, I have presented only what I feel was necessary for my thesis and in some instances have altered my interlocutors' identities to protect them.

#### Key interlocutors

Throughout my thesis, there are some key figures who provided me insight into the Sikh community in the West Midlands. My primary interlocutors came from central organisations or groups; the main ones were the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ), Sikh Youth UK (SYUK), Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS) and some of the volunteers for other organisations such as those working in mental health: Tarakī and Sikh Your Mind. I also spent

the majority of the time with my host families and their friends and family. The family that I spent the most time with (my Bhūā - lit. father's sister, c.f. Chapter 4: Home) did not describe themselves as a religious family but still felt an affinity to Sikhī. My Bhūā and her family feature throughout my thesis, but I focus in on their family in Chapter 4. My second host family (Navpreet) are members of GNNSJ and describe themselves as religious and Sikhī is the most important element of their lives. This family relocated from London to Birmingham to be closer to the main Gurdwārā premises in Birmingham and the wider GNNSJ community.

GNNSJ are a public facing organisation and are regularly invited to act as representatives for the Sikh community in Britain. The leader of the organisation, Bhaī Sāhib is known across the global Sikh community and widely recognised as a community leader. This results in a conscious behaviour in the public sphere and also across all of its affiliated organisations, particularly the Nishkam High School that I consider in Chapter 6: School. Here I spent most of my time with three sixth form students who told me about the school from their experiences and perspectives. I also interviewed core staff members such as the senior leadership team and those involved in the 'faith' element of the school.

Much of my fieldwork involved actively participating in sevā and meeting younger members of the community. Ranjeet Singh is a volunteer for an educational Sikh charity and runs his own small businesses on the side. He was married and in his late thirties and his family started following Sikhī after the events of 1984. He has dedicated his life to learning about Sikhī and has travelled around the world to enhance his knowledge. I encountered some of the other volunteers (Gurpreet Singh, Pardeep Singh, and Manraj Singh) for this organisation at events such as seminars or social events where there were often discussions of belonging and what it really means for one to 'be at home'. I discuss one of these encounters in detail in Chapter 3: Sangat. I also met Bahadur Singh, a pharmacist who was single and in his late twenties. He was born in Smethwick and later raised in the outskirts of the city and described himself as not

being particularly involved in the Sikh community in Birmingham. He felt like he remained somewhat an outsider but constantly looking in and observing family who were more involved in the community. He felt closer to the spiritual elements of Sikhī and struggled to understand some of the more cultural aspects of people's behaviours and habits.

My work with Sikh Youth UK introduced me to an infamous character, Deepa Singh. He is a middle-aged amritdhārī man known for publicly discussing controversial issues such as the grooming of Sikh girls. He was an interesting character that was much more complex than he had been described. I consider SYUK as an organisation in Chapter 5: Gurdwārā and Chapter 7: Sevā. I also met two of their young volunteers, Simi, and Rupinder, who both also volunteer for MLSS. They told me about their experiences of being women in these organisations and how being part of these charities enables them to carry out forms of sevā. They were both working professionals and Simi was around 25 years old and single when we met in 2018 and Rupinder was 33 years old and also single. They both commonly shared with me experiences of the pressure to get married and the seeming conflicts that can arise through choosing to 'settle down.' Rupinder's was an interesting perspective because she now felt ready to get married but was struggling to find a suitable marriage partner, which she attributed to being older. This was a common theme throughout my fieldwork and is discussed throughout my thesis.

I also visited connections that I already had in the field such as family and friends who had been living in Birmingham. I had a friend, Jaspreet, who had been married for three years and moved to Birmingham from the East Midlands. Since being married, she had developed a model about types of Sikh families that she used to categorise families to understand them better, I reflect on this model and consider it in the wider context of my interlocutors in Chapter 4: Home.

My interlocutors were varied and provided a spectrum of insights into the complexity and differences within the Sikh community in the West Midlands. Whilst the interlocutors described in this section are key figures from my fieldwork, this is not an exhaustive list of those that I encountered or worked with.

### Multi-sited, urban ethnography

My fieldwork was multi-sited in the sense that it was carried out in a number of institutional, domestic, and social settings in an urban context. I lived with two host families for the duration of my thirteen months in the field, interacting with their daily lives in terms of their commitments such as family obligations, religious responsibilities, or social events; Marcus would term this “tracking” or “following” interlocutors (Marcus, 2021). I volunteered for charitable organisations, media outlets and at schools to help build rapport and better understand the community that I was working with. My ethnography took place in a physical landscape where the dominant white, Christian norm was not the overwhelming majority but there were large numbers of Sikhs that dominated these spaces. This allowed me insights into these people’s lives in a unique way.

The structure of my research was partly intentional through a desire to uncover lived experiences of Sikhī in a multiplicity of contexts, however it was only through the analysis of my research that I learnt I was understanding what it meant to be Sikh in the ambiguous spaces of the public and private spheres. Whilst my efforts represent a broad account of Sikhs in the West Midlands, it is important that my thesis is read as a contextually situated account of particular groups of Sikhs in the West Midlands. The thesis portrays the lived experiences of my interlocutors and the types of encounters that they navigate on a daily basis. I hope that my thesis will provide an insight into the complex lives of Sikhs as they navigate their position within the liberal and racialised British public sphere, understandings of ‘home’ and Sikh polity,

to depart from previous the binary categorisation of ‘militant warriors’ or ‘peaceful, good diaspora’ to present a spectrum of Sikhs.

## Chapter Outline

My thesis is structured using epigraphic headings that encapsulate the multi-sited nature of my fieldwork. Following a context setting chapter (‘Sangat’), the thesis structure ultimately explores how one ‘*becomes*’ a Sikh and the different ways of becoming a Sikh in various sites from the most private setting of the home to the most public arena in the form of *sevā* (selfless service). The thesis structure also reflects how I conducted my fieldwork and ultimately gained access to my field site. As described in the methodology section, I went through the home in order to develop outwards into the community through the various kinship networks.

## Sangat

This chapter of the thesis explores the specific ethnographic context of my interlocutors and an exploration of the concept of *mīrī pīrī* (the Sikh understanding of spirituality and politics) and how this is practised in the public sphere. I also consider how the Sikh ethnicity debate that arose prior to the 2021 census in Britain uncovers ideas of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Sikhness’. Through my fieldwork, I discuss what it means to be a Sikh in Britain and how this relates to Sikh ideas of *sangat* or ‘community’. Finally, I consider Sikh identity in Britain making use of examples such as the ‘Sikh guardsman’ and the erection of a statue of a Sikh soldier from the World Wars.

## Home

This chapter is primarily about senses of homeliness and unhomeliness in Sikh households in Britain. Sikh households have to make an effort to express Sikh ideas of home and homeliness, especially in Britain. The reason for this negotiation is because Sikhs as a migrant minority are seen as outsiders, and not belonging because of their ethnicity and religion as migrants and their belief in a sovereignty that is not compatible with state ideas of such forms of religio-kinship. In this chapter, I describe attempts to be 'at home' and to make a 'homeplace' in Britain which are negotiated through Sikh religious ideas of kinship and connections with each other, as well as through the material culture of the home.

I begin the chapter by describing raids on Sikh homes as an example of the way Sikh homes are under threat and Sikhs are made to feel 'not at home in Britain'. I explain how homes are made through marriage and through affiliation and movement to be near a religious or familiar community. I explore the different 'atmospheres' of the home and how these define different types of Sikh homes. Ultimately, I show that to be at home as a Sikh in Britain, one is required to conform to dominant British values of rational religion.

## Gurdwārā

In this chapter, I show how the Gurdwārā (the Sikh place of worship and central hub for Sikhs) is both a physical manifestation of *mīrī pīrī* and importantly, an extension of the household. It is a reflection of the religio-kinship that exists in the home. The chapter does not focus on Gurdwārā management or how it exists institutionally in Britain, rather it is focussed on the issue of Sikhī being practised somewhat in 'public' in Britain.



Throughout the chapter, I describe each of the elements of a Gurdwārā, illustrating the significance of the Gurū Granth Sāhib (the Sikh scripture), the institution of langar (community kitchen) and the role of kīrtan (singing of devotional music). I then provide two ethnographic examples of the largest and most influential Gurdwārās in the West Midlands to show how they provide different solutions to the same problem of being a public, racialised, minority religion in Britain.

## School

Given the etymology and history of Sikhī, education plays a central role, and in this chapter, I explore this context whilst also describing the history of schooling in Britain. I show how schooling cannot be separated from ideas of kinship, religion, economics, and politics, particularly in the context of faith schooling from a racialised, minority faith perspective and in the context of multiculturalism. I reveal how one particular school, a Sikh ethos multi-faith school positions itself despite a number of competing interests. This particular school is in an impossible situation because it poses a contradiction by trying to encompass broadly spiritual, Christian, British values and multifaith practises through the values of a 'minority' faith (often seen as 'irrational' religion in the wider public sphere). The school has to satisfy the Sikh community in its position as a Sikh school and the broader community as a multifaith school and thriving business. These tensions were made explicit through my positionality as both a Sikh and a researcher demonstrated through performative conversations with members of staff and the pupils. The chapter shows that the only way a Sikh school can successfully exist is as a Sikh ethos multifaith school.

## Sevā

Sevā is often defined as ‘selfless service’ and is performed through differing forms of ‘charity’ and philanthropy whilst also serving as a form of civic engagement. In this chapter, I explore how the dominant public sphere, which is not accepting of all forms of Sikhī and Sikh ideology, impacts the presentation and performance of sevā by Sikhs in Britain. I also show how langar as a form of sevā are being inserted within and transformed by the British charity sector as a source of ‘free food’ rather than as a site of labour and spirituality.

Through exploration of my interlocutors’ motivations for philanthropic work and the setting up of charitable organisations, I examine whether this is linked to the ethics of Sikhī, the forced racialised identity that has been placed on Sikhs in the public sphere or a combination of these factors. I consider what it means to be a “good diaspora” (Liberatore, 2018) through two primary organisations, Midland Langar Seva Society and Sikh Youth UK. Through using vernacular understandings of sevā and Sikhī, I explore the question, what does it *actually* mean to be a Sikh in Britain?

## Conclusion

The thesis conclusion reflects on my future aspirations for this work and further explains its importance. I suggest ideas for how my work can influence various sub-disciplines of anthropology such as the anthropology of religion and the anthropology of politics. It also suggests how studying Sikhs in anthropology can contribute to the growing field of Sikh studies and Sikh scholarship. The conclusion therefore further highlights the importance of my research lens and the contributions that it can provide. Building from a Sikh authored history of Sikhī and ethnographic evidence to support a theoretical underpinning of mīrī pīrī, we can begin to construct a more cooperative understanding of the relationship between the religious

and political which can be further utilised as a theoretical framework more broadly. Taking a Sikh emic understanding of these concepts will help to widen the lens through which anthropologists understand minority and marginalised communities to take seriously emic understandings and praxis.

ਸੰਤਸੰਗਿ ਤਹ ਗੋਸਟਿ ਹੋਇ ॥

Saṯsang ṯah gosat hoe.

In the Society of the Saints, spiritual conversations take place.

ਕੋਟਿ ਜਨਮ ਕੇ ਕਿਲਵਿਖ ਖੋਇ ॥੨॥

Kot janam ke kilvikh khoe. ||2||

The sinful mistakes of millions of incarnations are erased. ||2||

(Sri Gurū Granth Sāhib 199)

## Chapter 3: Sangat

*“Sikhī is purely about feelings and emotions. It is not a doctrine. It is about the emotions and feeling evoked because the nature of Sikhī is about forming a relationship with the Gurū.”*

- Ranjeet Singh

In Sikhī, the relationship with the Gurū is paramount. For my interlocutors, being Sikh is being part of the sangat (which can be understood as community or congregation) and therefore connecting with the Gurū. The concept of sangat is at the crux of Sikhī as it helps Sikhs to develop spiritually and actively practise Sikhī through bringing Sikhs closer together as a community and enabling them to express the core teaching of ‘oneness’. The experience of connection to divinity can be amplified when partaking in sangat as it leads to an elevated presence because the group is focused on the same goal and actively seeking a connection to divinity. This is exemplified in the statement from Ranjeet Singh above. There is a feeling created which some of my interlocutors’ term ‘indescribable’ and for them, this is the ‘purest’

form of Sikhī. Often this was through listening to kīrtan (both in the Gurdwārā or elsewhere) but also equally at home for example when eating together or discoursing.

The concept of 'sangāt' is central to Sikhs' practise of their lives, in every domain and not only the 'religious' elements of it. Often sangāt is described as the company you keep and those that you surround yourselves with, it is not only one's family. One of my interlocutors explained this concept to me as "you know more generally when people say that you are a reflection of the five people closest to you? Well, it's kind of like that. Your sangāt is important because you are a reflection of them, and they are a reflection of you." For the duration of my fieldwork, my interlocutors became my sangāt, they were the people that I lived with, worked with, and ate with. Their ways of living and being influenced my own and taught me how they envision their own lives and ways of being.

There is no such thing as an agreement about what it means to be Sikh both for Sikhs themselves and those that categorise Sikhs from the outside. Various groups and individuals have their own theoretical understandings and definitions of who and what is a Sikh. My fieldwork uncovered levels of uncertainty and shifting contradictions with a history of political violence serving as a backdrop. All of these contributing factors mean that the question 'What does it mean to be a Sikh in Britain?' resonates within everyday life in Britain and therefore it also acts as a framing question for my thesis.

The questions "Who or what is a Sikh?" and "How to be Sikh?" are ones that have been at the forefront of my mind and my research particularly whilst conducting fieldwork. When considering the context of Britain in terms of the history of multiculturalism and key political events, these questions became more prominent and raised further questions such as: Who chooses who is Sikh? And how does one become a Sikh? Is there a form of authentic Sikhī? Carrying out my fieldwork over thirteen months from November 2017 to December 2018, and

conversations with a range of Sikhs both individually and in groups, has shown that these are not easy questions to answer. It may well be that there cannot be a definitive answer as there are many positionalities from which to answer these questions—the point is that this is a live, ongoing debate. Everyone individually asks themselves these questions and there are also collective, more institutional reflections on this with both inter and intra group differences of who is considered a Sikh and what it means to be Sikh (P. Singh, 2014a, p. 32).

My interlocutors rarely refer to the Sikh faith as ‘Sikhism’ unless it is something they have been taught, most commonly at school. All of those who consider themselves to be actively Sikh will always use the terms ‘Sikhī’ or ‘Sikh dharam.’ ‘Sikhism’ as a category emerged during the colonial period as a way of categorising Sikhs. The term ‘Sikhī’ is a verb rather than a noun and implies Sikhī is a praxis rather than a series of beliefs and therefore, in my thesis, I will refer to the Sikh faith in the vernacular, Sikhī. This supports the claim made by Mandair that “the rejection of Sikh terms such as Sikhi, gurnat and dharam in English translations in favour of western terms transforms the action-oriented Sikhi into a rigid object ‘Sikhism’ in a process of ‘religion- making’ which began ‘during the colonial period through a process of inter-cultural mimesis between Sikh and European scholars disguised as natural translation.” (2013, p. 6) In this chapter, I describe how my Sikh interlocutors expressed being Sikh in their vernacular whilst also living in Britain.

I will outline the significance of the Sikh concept of *mīrī pīrī* and how it, alongside the Sikh concept of *sangat do* or do not align with the wider British public sphere. The public sphere is a European construct which encapsulates a division of private and public following the separation of the Church and state in the fifteenth century. Habermas’s (1989) concept of the public sphere is the most widely known theory. He suggested that the public sphere could act alongside the state almost as a tool to monitor its power (Bangstad, 2013, p. 357). The public sphere was primarily “bourgeois” and also coincided with the “rise of political liberalism and

early capitalist social orders, forming a necessary foundation for constitutional democracy as we understand it today” (Fisher, 2017, p. 21 cited in Singh, 2019, p. 1). Hirschkind suggests that scholars of ‘the public sphere’ often take their starting point an abstract public sphere “as an institution of national political life and then proceed to examine how different religious actors and organizations have contributed to its constitution, its modes of association and communication, its moral bases, and its heterogeneity and plurality.” (2001, p. 4) He argues that in his fieldwork site in Egypt, where devout Muslims were faced with an increasingly secular context, he had discovered that there is “an emergent arena of Islamic deliberative practice that, while articulated with the discourses and practices of national political life, remains structured by goals and histories not easily accommodated within the space of the nation.” (2001, p. 4) This can be seen as a public, where ‘public’, is understood as the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002).

Building on Hirschkind’s and Warner’s conceptualisations of the public sphere, I show the different ways in which Sikhs understand ‘politics’ and create ‘publics’ and in some cases “counterpublics” (Hirschkind, 2001; Warner, 2002). This is a particularly important way to define the public sphere in relation to Sikhī because deliberations about what it is or could be, have been ongoing since Sikhs first came under colonial rule in India. Singh explains that the distinction between the public and private spheres did not exist in Sikhī prior to colonial rule and that the Gurūs mediated the two spaces as one domain through the concept of *mīrī pīrī* (Singh, 2019, p. 1). So, the distinct European tradition of the public sphere has proved a particularly fertile arena for reflection, contestation, and deliberation for Sikhs since then. My research seeks to uncover how my interlocutors understand *mīrī pīrī* in relation to a political identity that has seemingly been imposed on them by the wider, dominant, British public sphere. The latest generation of Sikhs in the West Midlands where I carried out my fieldwork face different stakes, priorities, and positions of power (Hall, 2017, p. 2).

In the setting of my interlocutors in the West Midlands, my thesis explores how Sikhī is practised and understood in a public sphere that is not constructed with a Sikh ethos. I explore whether this impacts the relationship of Sikhs with the Gurū and question ‘does the practice of mīrī pīrī become untenable in the British public sphere?’ For my interlocutors, in some form or another, Britain is ‘home’. Mitra argues that “home can span national boundaries because ties span national boundaries as well.” (2015, p. 320; see also Werbner, 2013, pp. 43-44) For some of the people I spoke to, there was no issue with them identifying as both Sikh and British but for others, agitation with the state rhetoric towards Sikhs as a result of the state deciding what is ‘good diaspora’ which Liberatore explains as “an idealized construction of what a diaspora in Britain should do” (2018, p. 148) and a resulting ‘bad diaspora’ inherently impacts how Sikhī can be practised and therefore affects its authenticity.

For my interlocutors, Britain has become ‘home’, however, this does not guarantee feelings that Britain is home equally for all of its citizens, evidenced in the Parekh Report. As Werbner argues, “it is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet the experience of social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home.” (2013, p. 43) My thesis demonstrates the different positions of my interlocutors showing how for some of them, Britain does not feel like home because they cannot express what they feel is authentic Sikhī, because there is a crucial difference between being public and being “in” public (Hall, 2017, p. 1569) however, for others, they have adapted their Sikhī to make Britain feel more like home which is in line with one of the original recommendations from the Parekh Report to make Britain a ‘community of communities’. Considering these different positions, I question whether this leaves some Sikhs in Britain with a sense of non-belonging?



## Mīrī pīrī

Mīrī pīrī is a concept that has existed in Sikhī since its inception but has developed and evolved over time. Trying to live by mīrī pīrī is continually navigated by Sikhs; this is a dynamic practise and so peoples' understandings of it can change throughout their lives. The concept of mīrī pīrī is not always consciously discussed by my interlocutors, but there were often conversations about what it means to be 'spiritual' or to engage in 'politics.' The idea of destiny or kismet was a topic of conversation amongst my host family and I cover this in more detail in the next chapter (Chapter 4: Home). This current generation of Sikhs in Britain faces a different political backdrop than that of their parents and grandparents, and unlike some of their parents, many of them were born and raised in Britain. For my interlocutors in the West Midlands, their understanding of how to be authentically Sikh has been amplified through the more acceptable explicit forms of xenophobia and racism brought to the fore most recently in the Brexit campaign (Evans, 2017a, p. 217).

Within the Sikh faith, there is no binary of religion and politics and more importantly, they are not opposed. The two are intertwined and cannot exist without each other. This is the fundamental basis of 'mīrī pīrī' which symbolises that in the Sikh faith, politics, and spirituality, or, living spiritually and temporally, go hand in hand (Kalra, 2019; D. Singh, 2002). This concept has existed in the Sikh faith from its inception; however, it was formalised by Gurū Hargōbind (Gurū Nānak VI) who "wore two swords to represent the balance of spiritual and temporal power." (Khera, 2015, p. 3) He created "the seat of temporal power" (Khera, 2015, p. 3) the Akal Takht, at Amritsar and this later became the Sikh political centre. Gurū Gōbind Singh, (Gurū Nānak X), further solidified mīrī pīrī through the formation of the Khalsā in 1699. Mandair (2011) writes,

*The purpose of the Khalsa was therefore fourfold: (1) to resist the political and religious persecution by the Mughal state, (2) to fight the social oppression of Brahmanism, (3) to remain involved in worldly and political affairs through a spirit of inner detachment, and (4) to live according to a code of conduct (rahit) that would help distinguish Khalsa identity from all others.*

Mandair further poses the question of whether or not it is possible to “reread the meaning of religion/secularism” which can allow “nonmodern forms of subjectivity to be articulated through indigenous concepts”. (2011, p. 83) This follows both Asad’s (1993, 2003) and Van der Veer’s (2014) claim that our understanding of the secular has shaped our understanding of South Asian religions evidenced through some Sikh studies scholars and studies of Sikhs in Britain being understood from an external lens including how Sikhī fits into ideas of religion and secularism rather than taking an emic approach to understanding Sikhs.

One of my interlocutors, Ranjeet, a middle-aged man who is a volunteer for a Sikh educational charity explained to me that *mīrī pīrī* represents two distinct spheres of existence:

*Mīrī represents temporality. This is the world that we live in. It is both malleable and perishable. This means that individuals have the power to affect mīrī. This can be done through standing against oppression and doing what you think is right. Pīrī is spirituality. This is the soul. It is eternal and represents the ultimate battleground for mankind. Individuals cannot affect pīrī, but they can harness it by controlling the mind and enriching the soul. This poses a dichotomy. A Sikh should try to master both mīrī and pīrī.*

*This is a revolutionary concept because it creates a direct relationship between a Sikh and the Gurū. There is no need for any spiritual leaders or teachers. There is no*

*hierarchy that exists in humanity. This essentially means that a Sikh has the responsibility for both their individual self and the world. There is an expectation for one to live both in the present and the future. A Sikh should try to work on these concepts simultaneously as they both feed into each other. The way that this is done practically is through experience and experiences.*

Mīrī pīrī means different things for different people and can be used as a way to help to understand how they live Sikhī. Regardless of whether mīrī pīrī is explicitly referenced, it is often the guiding principle for how Sikhs live their lives. The sovereignty of Sikhs that was formally granted during the formation of the Khalsā is interpreted differently by my interlocutors, and sometimes, this is not always understood by Sikhs who have been born and raised in Britain. This results in differing practises of mīrī pīrī in one's daily life. The Sikh faith does not have a prescriptive doctrine of how one should live one's life rather Sikhs are to engage in discourse through their own interpretations of the Gurū Granth Sāhib (the eternal Gurū and Sikh scripture) and come to a consensus collectively through dialogue and by practicing sangat. The most important relationship for a Sikh is the one between them and the Gurū which can seem to present a paradox of individualism and community if understood through the traditional lens of secularism and acceptable rational religion. However, on a vernacular level, Sikhī transcends the supposed dichotomy presented through the categories of religion and secularism coupled with individual and community that are dominant in the British public sphere. This draws parallels to Liberatore's (2017) Somali, Muslim women interlocutors in London who she shows are not increasing in individualisation resulting from a supposed secularisation of Islam but rather they are navigating what it means to be Somali, Muslim women in London.

## Sikh ethnicity

During my fieldwork there was a reigniting of a campaign to include a Sikh ethnicity checkbox in the census for 2021. This caused significant tension, but most interestingly much of this debate has been online on social media and so in the very public sphere. Interestingly, very few of my interlocutors addressed this issue offline and it did not come up as a regular topic of conversation, suggesting that this was not a largely mainstream issue at grassroots levels. However, it was regularly discussed on various social media platforms. Given the nature of this campaign, it is not only a debate between Sikhs and others but also among Sikhs. One of the most public debates that took place was between Lord Indarjit Singh of Wimbledon (the first turbaned Sikh to sit in the House of Lords) and Preet Kaur Gill, the current Labour MP for Edgbaston in Birmingham. Gill was in favour of the checkbox and Lord Singh was not. This led to a very public back and forth taking place over twitter where the attack became quite personal. Many people responded to the tweets with some of the replies suggesting that Singh was displaying unfair and misogynistic views about Gill. By accepting the title 'Lord', Singh is evidently more inclined to align with British state narratives of what it means to 'be Sikh' in Britain. He does not perceive any tensions between being affiliated to the British state and also being Sikh. He is visibly Sikh through his pagh (turban) and beard and openly affiliated to Britain through his title which shows his interpretation of *mīrī pīrī* which one of my interlocutors (referred to later in the chapter) would describe as assimilation and a removal of an association to the authority of the Gurū.

In the debate, the primary conflict seems to come from varying definitions of terms such as religion, ethnicity, and race also present in mainstream politics through policies such as multiculturalism and the tension of whether or not certain groups constitute races e.g., Muslims not considered a racial group however, legally, both Jews and Sikhs are. As already mentioned, there are no words in Punjabi for these terms and these do not exist in Sikh

vernacular. It literally becomes a 'checkbox exercise' to try and assign the appropriate categorisation for different groups. The conflict is also embedded in the disenchantment of many Sikhs with both India and Britain and so not wanting to identify with either of these nations partly as a result of leaving their homeland resulting in a sense of loss which is never fulfilled (Werbner, 2013, p. 43). Some of the arguments as to why Sikhs should not be given a separate check box include that ethnicity is about shared, inherited characteristics and not beliefs. The foundation for this then being the assumption that Sikhī is about shared belief and not inherited characteristics. The emergence of Sikhī as a distinctive Punjabī religion with a geographical location, economic way of life, shared practices, and the development of Punjabī language with its own script marks it as something distinct (P. D. Singh, M, 2014, p. 484). Singh & Dhanda write that Ranjīt Singh's empire "appeared to be a teleological culmination of a distinct national identity eventually achieving a sovereign state of its own" (2014, p. 485) which feeds into the debate about Sikhness and Britishness and poses the question is it actually possible to be a British citizen and remain 'authentically' Sikh? This is because Sikhī has its own system or 'dharam' that some of my interlocutors will say is incompatible with being in Britain or any other dominant state which is based on differing interpretations of mīrī pīrī.

A prominent self-identified Sikh journalist Sunny Hundal made the statement that; "I think this campaign is divisive and counter-productive because there has been hardly any consultation and debate with Sikhs about it. It's an agenda being pushed by a few small but vocal groups. Worse, it gives the wrong impression of Sikhi[sm] to the wider public because you cannot change your ethnicity, but you can adopt Sikh beliefs." (Hundal cited in Sandhu, 2018) Aside from the disengagement of some Sikhs from both Britain and India, the most prevalent argument for the separate checkbox is so that public service providers can make appropriate provision given that Sikhī is one of the largest religious populations in Britain so that Sikh authenticity is not compromised. This stems from some Sikhs' beliefs that the British state

does not see Sikhs as equal citizens in Britain which I explore further in Chapter 5: Gurdwārā. It is also a marker of who is considered as *sangat* in the Sikh community in Britain and whether this is distinct from wider minority communities or British society which I will explore later in the chapter.

### *Mandla vs. Dowell Lee 1983*

Another argument for the checkbox is the legal case of *Mandla vs. Dowell Lee* in 1983. This case was referred to by my interlocutors who engaged in this debate in the online sphere. It was also one of the primary arguments put forward by the Sikh political group, Sikh Federation. In this landmark case, a young boy was given the right to wear his turban to school on the grounds that the Race Relations Act 1976 protects Sikhs as an ethnic minority (Singh G 2005:161). The result of this case was that a distinct Sikh identity now featured in British law. The case stemmed in 1978 from a young Sikh boy, Gurinder Singh Mandla not being allowed admission to the Park Grove School in Edgbaston, Birmingham as his desire to wear the turban was not compliant with the school's dress code. Mandla's father, a lawyer, lodged a complaint to the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) that his son had been discriminated against on racial grounds. The County Court initially dismissed the complaint stating that Sikhs did not constitute a 'racial group' under the meaning of the Race Relations Act 1976. The court maintained that the word 'ethnic' was limited to 'pertaining to race' and that wearing a turban was a religious practice not covered by the Act. This decision was also upheld by the Court of Appeal by Lord Denning (G. Singh, 2005) . Naturally, this was a disappointing decision for Sikhs and led to demonstrations being held in London and Birmingham in 1982. As a result of the implications from the Court of Appeal's ruling, the case was taken to the House of Lords. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1983 the Law of Lords overturned the decision on the basis that the definition of an 'ethnic group' was not restricted to 'race' or 'biology'. Sikhs fulfilled the criteria of an ethnic group because the group had:

1. a long-shared history, of which the group is conscious as distinguishing it from other groups, and the memory of which keeps it alive.
2. a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners, often but not necessarily associated with religious observance.

(All England Law Reports 1983, 1062) (G. Singh, 2005)

Lord Templeman further stated that Sikhs “are more than a religious sect, they are almost a race and almost a nation [...] they fail to qualify as a separate nation [...] because their kingdom never achieved a sufficient degree of recognition or permanence.” (All England Law Reports 1983, 1072)

The successful result enabled the young boy to be able to wear his turban to school and provided “inroads into previously excluded spaces.” (G. Singh, 2005, p. 171) This case can be seen as problematic because it has been appropriated by right wing groups to support the case for ‘white British’ as an ethnicity thereby reinforcing the already implicit separation between whites and non-whites (Evans, 2012, p. 19; G. Singh, 2005, p. 171). The reification of ethnicity built on previous forms of racism is “a refusal to enter into meaningful exchange” with others (Evans, 2012, p. 23). This case has therefore had some negative consequences such as several right-wing groups including the British National Party (BNP) using this case as evidence that on this basis, whiteness should be an ethnicity marker (Evans, 2012, p. 20).

Watson states that “‘ethnicity’ is not simply a euphemism for ‘race.’” (1977, p. 8) He argues that physical appearance is only one of many factors that can determine ethnic divisions.

Building on Abner Cohen, Watson suggests that ethnicity is better understood through shared custom which he says anthropologists would likely call ‘culture’ (1977, p. 8). Given such diversity even within academic discussions of ethnicity it is only natural that this diversity

would extend to grassroots level discussions of ethnicity. Watson tells us that it is important to note the “fundamental distinction between ethnic *groups* and ethnic *categories*” because although some might represent categories, they will unlikely constitute a group due to a lack of regular interaction (1977, p. 11, original emphasis). It seems that this desire for some Sikhs to have a separate checkbox is the movement of them from an ethnic category to an ethnic group thus leading to conflict.

The racialisation of Sikhī has had a circuitous path by shaping and being shaped by historical struggles for belonging (Kaur, 2020, p. 4). Exemplars such as the Mandla vs. Dowell Lee case have further instilled a ‘separate’ Sikh identity with apparent benefits such as access to previously excluded spaces but has also created further divisions in what it means to be a ‘British’ citizen. This case has not only marked Sikhs as distinct from whiteness, but also from Blackness, further solidifying existing ethnic-racial hierarchies (Kaur, 2020, p. 4). Kaur describes this as “historic struggles for belonging within the nation-state elucidat[ing] how hegemonic racism is sustained through transnational projects of legal belonging.” (2020, p. 4) The desire for a Sikh ethnicity checkbox could be a step towards some Sikhs “*becoming* a diaspora [...] outside of colonial and Western frameworks of existence” and “move beyond the limitations of belonging via whiteness.” (Kaur, 2020, p. 13, original emphasis)

Sikh(?) guardsman

As Sikhs have become second and third generations in Britain, there is a newfound interest in authenticity in being Sikh. The primary concern is no longer trying to ‘make ends’ meet as many Sikh families are well established in Britain either through their employment, family businesses or education. Many young activists are involved in the widespread ‘decolonisation’ movement across Britain. Many of them revere Frantz Fanon and some of them conduct their own independent or degree level research to expand their knowledge and participate in these



academic debates. Often young activists will describe their feeling and experience of being Sikhs in Britain as still being subject to colonialism partly in relation to rationalising the relationship of Sikhs with the British in relation to their role especially during the World Wars.

As part of World War One, Sikh troops were sent to the Western Front in 1914, Gallipoli in 1916 and Iraq in 1918. They supported the British but with this support concessions were made. These included that wherever the Sikh battalion would go, they would take the Gurū Granth Sāhib with them and that they were able to use traditional Sikh weaponry such as the talwār (a Sikh sword) (Madra & Singh, 1999). Many of these Sikhs chose to fight as way of earning money. The relationship of Sikhs and the British military continues today. Since the World Wars, Sikhs had been given special permissions such as being allowed to wear the turban in their regiments. This has been sustained through the twenty-two-year-old Sikh guardsman, Charanpreet Singh Lall (Figure 7); this in contrast with the Mandla vs Dowell-Lee case is significant in showing the public sphere's perception of what acceptable forms of Sikhī are.



*Figure 7 - Charanpreet Singh Lall wearing his turban as a Guardsman (Economic Times India, 2018)*

Lall rose to prominence in June 2018 as the first turban wearing Sikh Guardsman; this was widely shared on social media with an array of positive and negative comments from both Sikhs and non-Sikhs. However, in September 2018, it was announced that he was being faced with removal from the army for drugs abuse. Whilst many members from the community did not condone his actions, they recognised that he was young and also that he was being singled out despite a number of other guardsmen facing the same allegations. There were numerous messages of support that circulated on social media and the Sikh media organisation, Sikh PA, also wrote to the Sun newspaper as they unfairly singled him out and chose images of him from his social media accounts where he did not seem to uphold the respectable image required in the British military (Figure 8). This is reminiscent of Bollywood previously presenting the image of a turban wearing Sikh as a “buffoon” (P. D. Singh, M, 2014, p. 488).



*Figure 8 - Images used by the Sun newspaper to report on Lall's failed drugs test (Willets & Kerr, 2018)*

Some of my interlocutors described to me that they were upset with his actions and that he should have been more careful given his responsibility of representing Sikhs in the public sphere. Another one of my interlocutors, a young man of a similar age to Lall, called Beant, told me that he felt as though the guardsman was given an unfair burden particularly at such a young age, “everyone makes mistakes” he told me. A well-known Sikh group had interviewed Lall and had a video of him on their YouTube channel and they were also going to be featuring him in their newsletter that was due to be printed. However, after the scandal, they decided to remove the video and chose not to include him in their newsletter. One of the group members told me that the group could not publicly be affiliated to Lall but that they also would not say anything negative about him. They decided that the best course of action was for them to simply distance themselves from him. One of my interlocutors, also a member of this group, was unhappy about this and said that the group should be publicly supporting him given that mainstream media unfairly treated him purely because of his distinct Sikh identity.

Despite the group not wanting to speak negatively of Lall, they could no longer endorse him as they had to navigate their own position in the public sphere. The fear of them being associated with a figure such as Lall, now marked ‘deviant’, meant that they could no longer support his position as a Sikh in the British military. The group’s understanding of *sangat* has now been compromised through an interference of the public sphere via the media’s portrayal of Lall. The question arises as to whether this group could no longer support Lall because of the disrespect to Sikhī or the disrespect to the British public sphere. This echoes Hall’s finding of the notion that ““being public” rather than being “in” public space involves negotiating places that are differentially available or restricted” (Hall, 2017, p. 1569) showing why this group had little choice in the way they had to behave. Given the fragility of the relationships between visible minority communities and Britain, this example shows how public scandals can affect the respectability of the Sikh community in Britain. This relates back to the idea that Werbner presented whereby “it is quite possible to feel at home in a place and, yet the experience of

social exclusions may inhibit public proclamations of the place as home.” (Werbner, 2013, p. 43) Since the publication of the Parekh Report in 2000, there have been some changes in Britain, but this case is evidence that the associations of ‘Britishness’ and racial discrimination have not yet been overcome. The report focused on the levels of institutional racism that are prominent in Britain and provided recommendations to improve this, however, twenty years later, it can be seen that this has not yet been fully realised. Some of my interlocutors, those who wanted to make Britain ‘home’ are creating a kind of alliance with British “hierarchies of belonging” to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants. Back et al. argue that this is a situation whereby “[immigrant] presence is tolerated as long as it doesn’t challenge the hierarchy.” (2012, p. 140) In this instance the effort to ‘fit in’ whilst maintaining Sikh identity has been targeted as a result of dominant narratives of racism that exist in the British public sphere.

#### Actors of the state?

In recent years, Sikhs have become more politically engaged, particularly with their acceptance into British politics and the political system through examples such as Preet Kaur Gill, the first female, Sikh, Member of Parliament, and Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, the first turbaned Sikh MP alongside an increase in political engagement at a local grassroots level. The engagement of Sikhs in British politics is potentially being utilised as a platform to communicate Sikh ideas of Sikh identity as they are formulated by Sikhs themselves whilst also navigating Sikh ideas of identity that are deemed acceptable by the public sphere.

An interesting example of this was the erection of a Sikh soldier statue (Figure 9) outside Guru Nanak Gurdwārā in Smethwick, commemorating the role of Sikhs in the World Wars (Jhutti-Johal, 2019). The community were split in their opinions; some were praising it and proud of the legacy of Sikhs in the British Army whereas others were publicly commenting on how the

statue was not beneficial in any way and in fact marked how Sikhs were ‘puppets of the British’. The statue was defaced the day after it had been unveiled, with graffiti that had crossed out the words ‘Great War’ and text had been added saying ‘1 Jarnail’ and ‘Sepoys<sup>8</sup> no more’ (Figure 10). There were lots of conversations and debates surrounding this, with social media being the prominent platform for public debate. The consensus was that the statue had been defaced by some members of the Sikh community themselves given the terminology that was graffitied on the statue. The use of ‘Jarnail’ seems to be a reference to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and ‘Sepoys no more’ a reference to the Sikh activists who are against the Sikhs involvement in the British Army.



*Figure 9 - Statue of a Sikh soldier outside GNG Smethwick (de La Mare, 2018)*

This example illustrates the differing opinions of Sikh identity through a demonstration of Sikhī in the public sphere. Some groups of Sikhs see this outward expression as an affiliation to the

---

<sup>8</sup> Sepoy is a term given to an Indian soldier serving under British or other European orders

British state which is an acceptable portrayal of Sikh identity and fitting into the “good diaspora” (Liberatore, 2018) narrative while others deem this act of assimilation as detrimental to their belief of their Sikh identity which is enforcing a removal of the sovereign authority of the Gurū and inherently the relationship between the Sikh and the Gurū. A young man from one of the local Sikh charities told me that fitting into the British narrative of what Sikhs are means that Sikhs do not follow the Gurū as their teacher because they are focused on trying to be British rather than being Sikh. He told me that being a Sikh was difficult because like any relationship, it requires effort and dedication to the Gurū and no-one else. This incident suggests some of the ways in which Sikhs are perhaps no longer practising their Sikhī; rather they are performing their Sikh identity in a variety of ways that is regarded as acceptable by others. This argument reflects back to the earlier ethnicity debate where Lord Singh as publicly chosen to accept British authority through the acceptance of the title ‘Lord.’ The examples in this chapter are a manifestation of the extremes of this performance spectrum from within the Sikh community itself and seems to serve as a basis for enforcers of the public sphere, such as the police and media, determining what it means to be a Sikh in Britain.



Figure 10 - Vandalism of the Sikh statue (Mullin, 2018)

The fear of extremism, radicalism and terrorism has become associated with Sikhs particularly since 9/11 and the image of Bin Laden being used to represent what a terrorist looks like. The language that is used particularly on a broader scale for example in the media (such as the example of Lall above, previous media coverage of interfaith marriage scandals which showed protesting Sikhs as carrying weapons which referred to the kirpān and highlighting that problematic weddings were those that were between Sikhs and Muslims<sup>9</sup> and media stories about Sikh activists being referred to as ‘extremists’<sup>10</sup>), becomes appropriated to magnify

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/leamington-spa-temple-sikh-muslim-gurdwara-mixed-faith-marriage-protest-a7237071.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.sikhpa.com/west-midlands-police-media-make-outlandish-sikh-extremists-statements/>

other issues relating to forms of Sikh activism which reflects broader securitisation and Prevent strategies in Britain. This terminology has been applied to Sikh activists that strive for a separate Sikh homeland. Jasjit Singh (2017), produced a report for CREST (The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats) titled 'Sikh Radicalisation'. The report found that most of the 'crime' is Sikh on Sikh and that there is no actual threat to those external to the Sikh community for example Britain more generally. He concluded that all the activity carried out is legal and would fit into the category of activism rather than terrorism or radicalisation. The association of Sikh activism with forms of extremism rather than acknowledging forms of activism as a legitimate expression of one's freedom is evidence of who is 'allowed' to be considered as an 'activist.' The lack of attention and understanding of Sikh activism demonstrates how these acts can be explicitly mistaken for forms of radicalisation that are dictated by policies designed to reify and enforce racial stereotypes. The hypervisible image of (most) Sikh activists fit neatly into the media's constructed image of a 'terrorist'. These issues draw parallels to the points made in the Parekh report which was developed in a pre-9/11 context. It could be argued that rather than adopting the report's recommendations to become a more unified Britain, it has instead further solidified forms of racism.

To address the lack of understanding and misrepresentation, communities are finding new ways to navigate perceived legitimate spaces to enter into public dialogue. For example, the Sikh media organisation, Sikh Press Association was partly set up as an organisation to prevent misrepresentation of Sikhs in the media, primarily in Britain. They run campaigns to highlight and promote positive Sikh news, stories and events that are taking place across Britain, provide Sikh organisations assistance in getting their voices heard by the media and represent the Sikh community in mainstream media (Sikh PA 2021). Rather than entering the media sphere as a subset of mainstream media, representing Sikh views and stories, a significant amount of Sikh PA's resources are spent correcting misrepresentations of the community that



are reported as a result of both structural and institutional racism and as Sikhs being a group that are a minority in Britain.

Sangat or community?

These difficulties of making Sikhī public are also refracted through regional and class experiences within the Sikh community. This means that any ‘community’ gathering becomes a site of debate from different positionalities and experiences. But despite the different positions of my interlocutors, all of them are forced to reflect on how to make Sikhī fully British. These intersectional complexities were particularly visible at an event I attended in the summer of 2018, when I attended an academic seminar hosted by a London based Sikh charity, with some interlocutors that I had become friends with. Sikhs from around Britain attended the seminar and there were also several international students who were studying in Britain at university and had taken some classes run by the charity. I was having a conversation with some of my interlocutors, Gurpreet Singh, originally from Punjāb but currently living in Birmingham and the other, Pardeep Singh, from Canada but studying in Manchester for his intercollated year of study. We discussed the various places that Sikhs tend to live and what the environment looks like in those places. Pardeep described that many of the Sikhs in Canada were new immigrants and so still had what he described as a “pindū (villager) attitude”. Essentially, he meant that many of the Sikhs in Canada live as though they are still in the Punjāb and have not assimilated into their new environment. He mentioned that his family had been some of the first Sikhs to migrate to Canada in the early 1900s and so were well integrated into the country. He felt that Canada was more accommodating of Sikhs and that there was quite a lot of freedom there. He cited the political power that Sikhs such as Jagmeet Singh (Leader of the Canadian National Democratic Political Party) and Harjit Sajjan (Minister of National Defence of Canada) had managed to obtain.

Gurpreet was listening into the conversation and began to detail his experiences of living in Birmingham as a student for the past five years. He said he felt very comfortable living there due to the vibrant and large Sikh community. He felt safe and comfortable knowing that there were many Sikhs around him. He asked me about my upbringing and if there was a large Sikh community around me growing up. I told him of my experiences and that I was schooled and raised in quite a middle class, white environment. He seemed shocked and expressed to me that he would find my position difficult. He said he much preferred to be in an environment where people were 'like him'. Pardeep seemed to somewhat echo his sentiment and seemed more comfortable in primarily 'Sikh spaces'. Gurpreet told me that he often felt uncomfortable when in predominantly white settings, he liked to be around people that were similar to him. When I first began my fieldwork in the West Midlands, it took me time to adjust to the increased level of visible Sikh presence. Often growing up in Leeds, it would be a common occurrence that if there were a turban wearing Sikh present, someone would point him or her out. In Birmingham, it tended to be the opposite, particularly in locations that were notoriously densely populated by Sikhs.

On another occasion, one of my interlocutors, Manraj Singh, a working class, middle-aged, married man from Coventry, expressed his dislike of the vast numbers of Gurdwārās in the West Midlands and also in particular the fact that many of them were in such close proximity to each other. He felt that sangat resources could be much more efficiently used in order to assist community progression. He felt that Sikhs in Britain did not have enough power and had become too assimilated into British society and that they should look to other immigrant communities such as Muslims. He felt that these communities "have done it right. Look, they even have provision for things such as Sharia, and halal has become so mainstream [...] Sikhs should make more of an effort to keep their distinctiveness and identity." He felt that 'ghettoisation' would be a good idea because it meant that people were not required to fully assimilate and therefore lose any of their own culture. This idea resonated with Pardeep and

Gurpreet's feelings of cultural belonging because there were no fears about 'fitting in'. However, there were quite few of my interlocutors who did not agree with this (such as my host family) and thought it was important that Sikhs integrate into Britain. They did not see this as a loss of their identity which was one of the starkest contrasts across different interlocutors and sangats relating to their ideas of what it means to be Sikh in Britain. My host family's thoughts on being British align with the dominant 'Bristol School's' (Brahm Levey, 2019) approach to multiculturalism in Britain which focuses on adding to one's identity rather than seeing adopting 'Britishness' as a loss.

Certain areas in the West Midlands are associated with certain groups and are "marginal but not explicitly enclaved neighbourhoods." (Hall et al., 2017, p. 7) One of my interlocutors, Bahadur Singh, a pharmacist who was born in Smethwick and later raised in the outskirts of the city described that the desire for 'ghettos' is not necessarily driven from within the community but highlighted that they do have some benefits for participating in a sangat. He explained that,

*ghettos are usually formed due to social inequalities that have been developed and harnessed by local authorities. For example, places such as Smethwick, Handsworth, and others such as Sparkhill and Small Heath typify the relationship these communities have with the state. When you go to Smethwick the bins aren't picked up, the streets aren't cleaned and there is less of a presence from the local council showing a lack of engagement in caring for their residents. This forces people to be restricted to living in these areas because they become associated with a particular way of being, not allowing them to climb the social ladder. This is good because there is a sense of community, but this is through struggle rather than choice. It makes you become more inward facing rather than looking to integrate in the city more generally.*

Bahadur's sentiments expressed the claim made by Hall "that particular combinations of pronounced diversity in relation to origin and ethnicity are repeatedly located in marginalized parts of cities." (2017, p. 1569) Upon migration, my interlocutors were intentionally forced into living in a particular way because of their social capital. Sometimes if they have the financial means and capital to leave these enclaves, often resulting in a disconnect from their sangat, can also be restrictive because "a racialized and ethnicized notion of where someone is from matters more for where one lands in a city than class, educational attainment or language proficiency." (Hall, 2017, p. 1569) Consequently, this highlights there is a difference in the meaning of sangat and community. In my interlocutors' eyes, being part of the wider community and assimilated comes at the expense of the ability to practise one's Sikhī authentically through sangat.

Birmingham encapsulates migrant communities that have survived through sticking together but they do not really paint a picture of diversity as expressed through the political agenda of 'multiculturalism' (Hoque, 2019, p. 13). There is a compartmentalisation of different cultures rather than having shared cultures, which is different from Baumann's (1996) ethnography showing how the community tried to forge a common youth culture. This is more aptly captured in Suzanne Hall's concept of "super-diversity" where it has "provided a compelling space to explore what it means to live with the changing nature of migration as configured through a wider presence of individuals and groups within contemporary social formations." (Hall, 2017, p. 1565) The contradictions highlighted in how each of these four interlocutors spoke are encapsulated through the fact that the "crucial combinations of being public that tie us to the city and at the same time alienate us from it" (Hall, 2017, p. 1565) dominate how they live their lives. How my interlocutors experience being Sikh and expressing Sikhness in public depends on several factors such as class position social mobility, assimilation into prosperous neighbourhoods, rather than in more deprived neighbourhoods that are visibly and identifiably Sikh. It is through this complex matrix of factors that map onto a framework of mīrī

pīrī that means that my interlocutors are required to engage with their sangat to work out what it means to actually be a Sikh in Britain.

### 'Britishness' vs. 'Sikhness'

The contention between 'Britishness' and 'Sikhness' was further exhibited during a question-and-answer session at the student led 'Nishaan' research conference that took place in London in November 2018. One of the audience members, a young woman, most likely a student, asked the question why there was a conflict between Sikhī and being British. She explained that she had never felt torn and that she was both. The response from the speaker, a young Sikh activist, came in the form that the Gurū is supreme authority for Sikhs and so by accepting oneself as British is to contest that authority. The responder also claimed that he was aware of the benefits of being in Britain and as he termed it, the "controlled freedom" that this allowed. He said he used this position to his advantage to allow him to fight for Sikh causes in areas where Sikhs may not normally have had access. He recognised this as a benefit of being in Britain despite his lack of affiliation to the state. This speaker has always had a difficult relationship with state power as he himself is the son of a shaheed (martyr) following the events of 1984. He was close with his father and was young when he died. For him, identity and affiliation were primarily about the idea of sovereignty and whether or not being Sikh and British are compatible and consequently, how to navigate these identities depending on the space one occupies, reminiscent of the dual identities Sikhs had to navigate in the sixties where young people had to develop two separate identities with Sikhs having to maintain an 'English' identity and behave in an 'English fashion' whilst with English people, (especially at work and if they worked in non-manual labour) and would often then revert to a 'Punjabī' identity at home (Ballard, 1972).

The above examples highlight how my interlocutors emphasise stories of purity and resistance in direct opposition to the stories that the British state wants to emphasise about the relationship between Sikhs and Britain. To fit into a British public sphere, it appears as though many of my interlocutors therefore felt it necessary to prioritise 'mīrī' as a way of being seen as a "good diaspora" rather than being able to practice both mīrī and pīrī as being equally as important as each other. Those that focus on being Sikh rather than being British are not identified as 'good' because they have different priorities than those required by the British state for its citizens.

### Sikhs in Britain in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Spectrum of Sikhs

Vernacular understanding of Sikhī and how it is defined by the lives of my interlocutors allows us to see just how intertwined Sikhī is with experiencing life. The Sikh 'way of life', with the Gurū at its centre is fundamental for understanding the imposition of the British public sphere and how it affects the Sikh diaspora's praxis of Sikhī. Through the dominating public idea of what it means to be a Sikh by dictating narratives of what it means to be a "good diaspora," (Liberatore, 2018) Sikhs are reimagining their identities in different ways. This constant reimagination seems to contradict the ideas my interlocutors have of what mīrī pīrī means especially in the form of its practise through Sikh activism in Britain following the events of 1984. The narrative of fear around such activism makes Sikhs feel a sense of exclusion from both their 'home' in Britain and their homeland, which no longer exists in the same way that it once did. Consequently, Sikhs in Britain are traversing these boundaries of exclusion to present an acceptable form of Sikhī that attempts to align with the dominant hierarchy in the British public sphere which thereby results in a dilemma as they have to navigate an authentic relationship with the Gurū whilst also creating a sense of 'home' in Britain.

Being a Sikh in Britain appears to carry with it an inherent responsibility to navigate the “good diaspora” (Liberatore, 2018) narrative of the British public sphere whilst remaining ‘authentic’. This was exemplified in the response from the speaker at the student research conference who explained that the Gurū is supreme authority for Sikhs and so by accepting oneself as British is to contest this authority. This responsibility was also demonstrated via expressions of Sikh identity such as the Sikh Guardsman who was initially a representative of a ‘good Briton’ rather than a ‘good Sikh’ which rapidly deteriorated once he no longer represented the ‘respectable British image’. The result was that the wider Sikh sangat was faced with a choice of whether they supported the guardsman and what he represented or to show allegiance to the wider British public sphere which had its own ascription of labels such as ‘Briton’ or ‘Sikh’. This conflict in identities was also highlighted in the debate for a separate Sikh ethnicity checkbox for the 2021 census as a means of marking Sikhs as distinct citizens. This sentiment was publicly expressed in the clashing views of the erection of a Sikh soldier statue and what this actually represented: ‘Sikhness’ or ‘Britishness’. Set in the understanding of this framework, the remaining chapters of my thesis will explore how one ‘becomes’ a Sikh and the different ways of becoming a Sikh in various sites from the most private setting of the home to the most public arena in the form of sevā.

ਘਰਿ ਸੁਖਿ ਵਸਿਆ ਬਾਹਰਿ ਸੁਖੁ ਪਾਇਆ ॥

G̣har sukḥ vasiā bāhar sukḥ pāiā.

I dwell in peace in my home, and I am at peace outside.

ਕਹੁ ਨਾਨਕ ਗੁਰਿ ਮੰਤ੍ਰੁ ਦ੍ਰਿੜਾਇਆ ॥੩॥੨॥

Kaho Nānak gur manṭar driṛāiā. ||3||2||

Says Nānak, the Gurū has implanted His Mantra within me. ||3||2||

(Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib 1136)

## Chapter 4: Home

Homes (whether explicitly or not) exist at different levels, all at the same time. Some of these levels include the individual building that houses the members of the household and also the imaginaries that surround it. These are overarching imaginaries that can be internal or external and multi-layered. In this chapter, I follow an understanding of ‘home’ described by Samanani and Lenhard: “‘Home’ may refer more to imaginary spaces, or to bodily practices rather than physical structures, while houses, as sites of labour, conflict, and tension, may be at times fundamentally unhomey.” (2019, p. 2) For the Sikh diaspora in Britain, home can “provide a sense of place and belonging in an increasingly alienating world.” (Mallett, 2004, p. 66) In my field site, ‘home’ was a site of different atmospheres and the sensations of home that were created. For me, even as I began to get to know my interlocutors and settle into my field site, some houses already felt particularly ‘homely’; this chapter unpacks some of what this may mean to me and to my interlocutors. I explore senses of homeliness and unhomelessness in Sikh



households. Sikh households in Britain have to make an effort to negotiate homeliness because of their status as a migrant minority and therefore being seen as outsiders who do not belong because of their ethnicity and religion. Sikhs negotiate how to be at 'home' in Britain through Sikh ideas about kinship and connections with each other, as well as the material culture of the home.

### Politicisation of the house

Houses not only characterise the interactions between members of the household and wider kin; they also reflect broader conditions such as politics, economics, and the attention (or neglect) of the state (Carsten, 2018, p. 105). During my fieldwork, the house had become somewhat politicised, more so in recent times and particularly in this highly charged political and anti-religious climate of increased securitisation policy and rising xenophobia in Britain. Mallett (2004, p. 82) describes home as being a private space where the homeowners are the ones that have the authority to set boundaries and dictate the 'flows' of the house. She explains that "related to this view of home, as a refuge is the idea that it is a private, often familial realm clearly differentiated from public space and removed from public scrutiny and surveillance." (Mallett, 2004, p. 71)

In September 2018, British police had raided five Sikhs' homes. The media coverage and discussions on this topic had mixed reporting. Many Sikhs and Sikh organisations had stated that these raids had been conducted based on intelligence supplied by the Indian government to West Midlands Police. One of the reasons for this that has been suggested by some of my interlocutors, is that the raids are in relation to the case of Jagtar Singh Johal discussed in Chapter 1.

Another suggestion as to why the raids occurred is that they are linked to the Indian flag being destroyed when the current Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi visited Britain earlier in 2018. Since Indian independence in 1947 and it became the state that we recognise it as today, there has been rising tensions between the Indian state and the Sikhs. These tensions partly stem from partition (which had a destructive effect on the state of the Punjāb, where most Sikhs resided) and the incidents that built up to the devastating events of June and November 1984 (see Chapter 2: Panth for further information).

Before 1984 the Sikh diaspora was a somewhat marginal player in terms of its engagement with the Sikh homeland. The narrative surrounding Sikhs in the diaspora and particularly in Britain has become dominated by the discourse of a supposed 'Sikh radicalisation' (Singh, 2017, p. 5). The events of 1984 triggered Sikh activists in the diaspora to take action as a result of the seeming threat to the Sikh homeland and Sikh way of life. Under securitisation and Prevent policies, Sikh activism has been identified as a form of radicalisation and therefore a threat to the British state. Sikh activists claim that they fight for the rights and equality of Sikhs and are not threats to the British state or to the wider British public as there is no conflict with 'the West' or with Britain. In fact, forms of Sikh activism are contributing positively to the integration and multiculturalism agenda, particularly in the form of humanitarian aid such as disaster relief (e.g., Khalsa Aid and United Sikhs) and street food banks (Singh, 2017).

The raids represented a 'betrayal' of the British government in so far as it allowed the Indian government's interpretation of events to stand although they involved a British citizen, which has furthered the alienation of many Sikhs that reside in Britain. Labour MP, Preet Kaur Gill issued a statement on the raids:

*'There is speculation that the police raids have political motives and targeting those activists who are outspoken on the 1984 Sikh Genocide issue. If this is the case this is totally unacceptable.'*

One of the major issues that caused upset and anger amongst Sikhs in Britain was that Indian media published the names of the five homes that had been raided. This further supported the case that the Indian government were involved in the raids. West Midlands Police denied that the Indian government had any involvement in the operation, and they also stated that it was not connected to the case of Jagtar Singh Johal.

Understanding Sikhī and how it is defined in terms of the lives of my interlocutors is important as it allows us to see just how intertwined Sikhī is with experiencing life. As Uberoi succinctly states, "as we have defined it, it is a form of the non-dualism of self, the world and the other, and it must be expressed in the common morality of religion, family, economics and politics." (1999, p. 135) The Sikh panth and the Sikh 'way of life' following in the footsteps of the Gurū is fundamental for understanding Sikhs and how the Sikh diaspora operates in Britain. Through the house raids, the private space of home that is protected from public scrutiny and surveillance has now forcibly been made public.

## What is home?

For diasporic communities, the idea of home starts with the sense of loss of a homeland. Werbner discusses the idea that leaving one's homeland can leave one with a sense of loss that is never really fulfilled. Migrants have "insider and outsider perspectives simultaneously" (Werbner, 2013, p. 42) where, despite formal citizenship rights, they now no longer belong to any particular 'home.' Building on Stuart Hall (2008) and Alfred Schütz (1945), Werbner argues that one can never return home due to the ever-changing landscape, family and traditions that

are considered 'home', meaning that one is left to traverse a situation of double exclusion. As Mallett explains, "home is not a pure bounded and fixed space of belonging and identity that is as familiar as the away is both strange and inhabited by strangers." (2004, p. 78) Werbner considers the idea of 'simultaneity' to try and express this effect describing the way in which "the *illusion of simultaneity* remains a powerful experiential force, especially within transnational families, defining migrants' sense of self and subjectivity." (2013, p. 43, original emphasis) This is further compounded by a racialised, religious hierarchy that exists in Britain which Sikhs have to contend with as another form of exclusion, particularly through race and class. This is a similar situation to that of Anglo-Indian railway workers in India, who faced a double exclusion during the colonial period given the precarity of their relationship to Britain based on their position in relation to kinship and race. Bear (2007) describes how Anglo-Indians navigate these exclusions through articulating a space of habitation which works through their affiliation to Roman Catholicism, distinct from the dominant affiliation to Protestantism.

At its core, home is a site for understanding kinship and as Carsten writes, "the history of kinship is always, among other things, a political history." (2008, p. 22) The Sikh understanding of kinship is visible in the Gurū period in Sikh history which is reflected upon by Sikh preachers and Sikh scholars, usually in contexts familiar to all Sikhs. In Sikhī, kinship became formally established in the Khalsā and through the example of Gurū Gōbind Singh (Gurū Nānak X) after the shaheedī (martyrdom) of his four children (chār sāhibzadey). When his sons were killed at the hands of the Mughal Empire, Gurū Gōbind Singh declared "What happened is that you have killed four children (my sons), the coiled snake (in the form of my Khalsā) still remains (to confront you)." This shows how the Gurū had equated his sons with the Khalsā, thereby recognising the panth (Sikh collective) as kin. For example, during one of the children's camps at the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Smethwick, I heard one of the workshop leaders use this story to explain the idea of family to young Sikh children. As I will show in the next chapter (Chapter

5: Gurdwārā), this story also shows a traumatic inheritance of responsibility through kin and therefore the responsibility that one has to the wider sangat or panth.

In Sikh ideology, kinship is an extension of community and family; that responsibility is extended to all (even non-Sikhs) which comes from the core teaching of 'ek oankar' which are the first words in the Gurū Granth Sāhib (the Sikh scripture and eternal Gurū) and are very loosely understood as 'one' meaning that all of creation is the same and part of a larger whole. Water is a commonly used metaphor to illustrate this relationship by depicting all beings as droplets of water that are striving to return to the ocean or the 'Divine.' Cannell shows how the idea of sacred genealogies can be in tension with state, including modern Western states whose ideologies would suggest that these ideas are irrelevant (2013, p. 29). Through the example of American Latter-day Saints, Cannell shows that because they have forms of religion and kinship "not defined and placed exactly as the state would have them" (2013, p. 29) that they are thought of as 'primitive' particularly because kinship and religion are intertwined. This offers parallels to Sikhs in Britain, however, Sikhs' perceived 'primitiveness' is imagined not only in relation to their religion and kinship beliefs but also as a result of their race and ethnicity.

Home and homemaking are fundamental elements of living temporally and so, the way that my Sikh interlocutors understood and practised 'home' is an insight into their understanding of mīrī pīrī (living both spiritually and temporally). Given this understanding of the idea of home, there were questions that arose in considering how Sikhs in Britain understand and make and sustain a sense of 'home'. How is home understood, defined, and described by my interlocutors? Is home a place, a space, a feeling, a practice, or something different? How do people 'do' and 'feel' home as well as 'think' about home?

The theoretical form of kinship previously described is generally what my interlocutors would strive for, for example through the openness of their homes and hospitality towards non-consanguineal kin. This is described as the 'standard form' of kinship and a similar form of this kinship would be found in the Punjāb region. However, Sikh homes in Britain are not always aligned with this theoretical idea of kinship which also partly stems from a history of migration where younger sons were sent abroad to Britain and then created their own 'marginal' forms of kinship that were improvised in more fluid ways. Generationally, there have been changes in kinship in Britain, particularly as Sikhs have become more settled in Britain and aligned to British forms of kinship, such as emphasis on the nuclear family rather than the extended family, although this is not true of all Sikh families in Britain. For example, whilst it may be the case that families have become a looser structure, they have learnt to improvise kinship according to ideas such as their religious orientations. Kinship has become much more about choice of one's perspective of what Sikhī is rather than traditional standard forms of kinship.

Bhachu explains that the domestic economy of Sikh homes in Britain is one where wages are "linked not only to the predominance of nuclear households with no authoritarian elders and gatekeepers of expenditure, but also to the Sikh religion, which accords equal status to men and women." (1988, p. 77) To support this claim Bhachu presents further examples from Sikh history where women were strategists, involved in decision making and fighting in Wars (1988, p. 77). Bhachu reflects on a much less patriarchal kinship system than had previously existed and she attributes this to increased nuclearization of families particularly in Britain although, there are still many instances particularly from my fieldwork where extended families would live in close proximity to each other but in their own physical dwellings. Following Carsten, I do not use this chapter to focus "on houses *per se* but on the multiple entanglements that houses illuminate between the lives and relations that are enacted within them and the historically inflected social and political contexts in which they are situated." (2018, p. 103, original emphasis) I show how my interlocutors traversed an exclusion from the wider British public

sphere through the use of sensory scapes such as Sikh music and imagery to create a sense of belonging and 'identification.'

Kinship cannot be understood as either historically prior or structurally subordinate to the nation state (McKinnon et al., 2013). This is something that has been separated in the history of anthropology and has therefore had an impact on anthropological theory in the present (Cannell, 2013, 2019). Homes "embody the interconnections between individual trajectories, kinship and the state." (Carsten, 2018, p. 103) I spent time in Sikh homes where I learnt that the home was a 'safe space' for my interlocutors to live in a way that made them feel at ease and also make connections between cultures to create their version of 'home.' In these spaces people could decorate their homes how they felt was a true reflection of their identity and ideals. They could be selective about which elements from which cultures they chose to adopt to express themselves in their homes which were free from judgement and broader securitisation policies. It was a place to express oneself and their identity in a manner that showed how houses intertwine the spatial with the social (Carsten, 2018, p. 104).

For my interlocutors, the household extended beyond a single household and rather, into neighbourhoods or networks of homes that would pool their resources. Home encapsulates flows of people with common commitments and affections. These can be 'good' in the sense that they house kinship and also forms of 'kinning' (Howell, 2003) through the provision of both formal and informal networks of care. Howell describes kinning as "the process by which a foetus or new-born child (or a previously unconnected person) is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people that is expressed in a kin idiom." (2003, p. 465) However, these flows can also be intruded through state created fractures causing the supposed private space of a home to be forcibly made public, for example through the politicisation of the house when the homes of five Sikhs were raided. Building on Werbner's (2013) use of simultaneity, "home encompasses both movement and strangers. Home can be

experienced as strange and/or familiar." (Mallett, 2004, p. 79) Focusing on these flows and 'entanglements' in the house uncovers how it is "temporal, spatial, personal, relational and political." (Carsten, 2018, p. 104)

In Britain there is a link between ideas of the nation, religion, and kinship. The national level is a default atheist, post-Christian nation which features forms of residual Anglicanism (Engelke, 2012, 2013, 2014) which is perpetuated by the War on Terror and political strategies such as Prevent and the post-multiculturalism period. In this context, where Sikh religious kinship extends beyond ideas of biological kinship it is at risk of being seen as anomalous and as incompatible with British 'norms.' However, Sikh kinship represents an over laying of religious and political modes of kinship (through the framework of *mīrī pīrī*) which is nesting in the structure of the British nation. From the outside of the Sikh community, this looks as though Sikhs fit into the narrative of religious kinship, which is not anomalous to ideas of British nationhood, however, from the inside, Sikhs practise their own sovereignty which permeates their ideas of kinship and religiosity. This represents clashing ideas of kinship through *mīrī pīrī* which can be understood as religio-kin politics within the household.

As a result of a dominant public sphere, which does not allow for kinship through an understanding of religio-kin politics, one of my interlocutors described a schema making this tension explicit. The framework classifies Sikh families in Britain as either 'modern traditional' or 'traditional modern' through an understanding of what it means to be modern in Britain through a lens of western secularism. This modern traditionalist shared schema is brought about through attempting to model an idea of what it means to be a 'good' or 'bad' Sikh home in relation to the racialised, religious hierarchy that is prescribed by the British public sphere. Sikhs face a difficulty of claiming a right to being at home in Britain, because they are defined as 'others' from a foreign land who should not be fully at home in Britain. So, Sikh kinship is not the only problem, it is also the claim to be at home in Birmingham as I will illustrate later in



the chapter through the material and cultural practices of the home, drawing parallels to Anglo-Indian railway workers' double exclusion from the dominant public sphere resulting from their precarious position in relation to kinship and race during the colonial period (Bear, 2007). Based on the concept of *mīrī pīrī* (whether consciously or otherwise), in the same manner, Sikhs are forced to affiliate to Sikhī in a deliberate outward expression, primarily through materiality as a way of navigating exclusion in a way that is distinct from the dominant public sphere where there is an implicit racialised, religious hierarchy. As Mitra (2015) explains, Sikhs face a double exclusion based on their religion as well as their race.

### Marriage holds the key

Marriage is an important tool for the making of homes through lineage via transmission of culture and kinship ideals and it is where the creation of a home stems from. Households are connected through networks of marriage where alliances are made between families through marriage. Traditionally, after marriage, the bride would move in with her husband and his parents and they would live together as a multigenerational household but over time, this has changed, and often new couples will move out of the family home and live in their own nuclear family but often still in close proximity to the family home. A key reason for this change is the growing entry of women into the labour market and women not being defined as 'housewives.' They are often now also financial contributors to the household which often 'buys' them a say in how the household is managed (Bhachu, 1988). Although many of my interlocutors would live in their own nuclear households, their definition of a household was not limited to the physical dwelling in which they lived. For the Sikh families that I encountered and lived with, their household unit extended beyond those that they lived with and comprised of a broader care network. In many instances, grandparents, parents, aunties, and uncles all formed part of the informal care network. It is common for families to pool resources including but not limited to car-pooling, food shopping and food preparation (Bear et al.,

2020). Traditionally, families would stay closer to the husband's consanguineal kin though it is becoming more common for nuclear families to live close to the wife's consanguineal kin or if possible, close to both sets of families. Family is at the core of the household because in Sikh ideology, the family is the smallest unit and not the individual. An individual's achievement is not only their achievement, but also the family's – a child doing well is an achievement of the family as is the marriage of two individuals. Marriage is important in Sikhī because it is the creation of another unit and therefore the crux of the idea of *sangat*.

The subject of marriage was central in making connections during my fieldwork as it was a topic that almost everyone wanted to talk to me about. The frequency and often intrusiveness of these conversations continued for the duration of my fieldwork and in some instances, made it easier for my interlocutors to engage with me. Often young women would share their own stories with me, and elders used it as a means of connecting with me. Interestingly, these conversations were not only initiated by women; I tended to also have men wanting to give me suggestions on marriage and saying that it should be a priority for me given my age. This was often a process of maintaining a community of Sikhī and finding suitable marriage partners with 'good' qualities, which is true of both 'modern' and 'non-modern' Sikh families both in the diaspora and also in Punjāb. In my field site, the majority of my interlocutors formed relationships particularly through performing *sevā* and shared religious orientations.

Marriage is both a stage in one's life cycle and also a strategic decision looking to the future. The institution of marriage for Sikhs in the British diaspora has developed since the first wave of migrants. Marriage remains significant in terms of developing kinship through the creation of new relationships that are meaningful both morally and religiously (Mody, 2008, p. 16). Carsten shows that "marriage illustrates very vividly the ways that kinship and the state co-constitute each other." (2020, p. 327) Marriage is not only about the necessary interlinking of kinship and religion, but also that of the state (Carsten, 2020, p. 327). In the context of a nation

state which has legal authority over marriage, the Sikh practice of kinship through a religio-kin political lens is compromised further because sovereignty is not afforded to Sikhī but rather to the state. Until recently, the Anand Kāraj (Sikh marriage ceremony) was not recognised as a marriage ceremony under the Indian constitution creating feelings of not belonging even in the homeland. In Britain, the Anand Kāraj is recognised as a religious marriage but not a legal one and therefore a legal ceremony must also take place for the marriage to be recognised in law.

Marriage was originally a means of bringing one's family over from usually either India or Africa (Bertolani, 2012). Over time, it has developed, whilst maintaining moral and religious significance (Basu, 2001, p. 24). Ballard and Ballard signify marriage as "a turning point in the process of self-definition for young people of South Asian origin in Britain." (1977, p. 48) This is because it is the first time when a young person would openly face the seeming choice between their own independence and their family. Arranged marriages are much less frequent than they used to be traditionally and have been replaced with the more 'flexible', 'introduced' marriage where a young Sikh man and a young Sikh woman are 'introduced' to each other through a mutual connection termed a *vichōlā* (similar to a match maker). 'Love' marriages have also increased as a result of increased interaction of young Sikhs through "changing social landscapes" (Donner, 2016, p. 1152) such as university, work and more often than not, through *sevā* for Sikh organisations.

Marriage matters because it not only concerns the couple; it is also about the wider family and kinship network (Donner, 2016, p. 1154; Mody, 2008). In the context of migration, marriage is also about continuity and making relations in a new context (Carsten, 2020, p. 328). Mody argues that even if one chooses a marriage partner who their parents would otherwise completely approve of, they still often don't approve of them because they were not the ones that chose them. Whilst Mody writes about a Hindu cosmological and sociological (through caste) regeneration of kinship, even though Sikhī does not subscribe to caste associations,

there are also important parallels about the Sikh idea of kinship regeneration through marriage. There is still a need for the regeneration of Sikh ideas of kinship through a religio-kin political framing to maintain a distinct Sikh authenticity.

I recall a conversation that I have had with my own mother where I questioned whether marriage was about compatibility with one's partner or their family, to which she simply responded, "both". The repeated conversations about marriage and what my intentions were seemed to be significant for my interlocutors categorising me as either an 'insider' or an 'outsider'. Although I identify as a Sikh woman, Sikhs are not homogenous and therefore I still had a responsibility to work so as to establish my credentials as an 'insider', as this was not assumed. Conversation about marriage relating to my eligibility and desires seemed to act as the means through which my interlocutors determined my status particularly as they were keen to introduce me to people that they knew as potential marriage suitors therefore embedding our relationships to each other through mutual connections.

*"Home is where one starts from." - T.S. Eliot*

One of my host families were members of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) and so are embedded within this particular community even in terms of the locality in which they live which has many members of the jathā (loosely understood as a contingent, although they are sometime referred to as a 'sect' of Sikhī). They regularly attend the Gurdwārā and do sevā (selfless service) as part of their daily routines. The jathā extends the idea of kinship beyond the unit of the household and into the local (and somewhat national and global) infrastructure through a process of 'kinning' (Howell, 2003) by belonging to the jathā. Membership of the jathā permeates through every domain of one's life from where one might choose to live and to work. This partially stems from a shared following of the leader of the jathā and following the guidance that he gives. This requires a commitment both physically and spiritually in terms

of how one practises their Sikhī and also the type of lifestyle that they follow. The neighbourhoods where the jathā settles in these different localities creates a local community in proximity to the Gurdwārā and becomes a kind of central hub for practicing Sikhī and another way in which home is made, particularly in relation to a jathā.

This particular family was in the process of moving from London to Birmingham due to them being part of the jathā and wanting to be closer to the main base. When the move was complete, the house would comprise of my friend Navpreet, her brother (Amarjit), and his wife (Bhabhī, lit. sister-in-law) and their daughter, Mandeep. As a result of this situation, during my fieldwork, the house was predominantly occupied by the women of the family. I developed a relationship with this family through my friend, Navpreet whom I met quite early in my fieldwork. One day when I was at the GNNSJ Gurdwārā for a meeting, she had come in to speak to Bhai Sāhib (the Jathā leader) about some projects she was working on; one that related to Gurū Gōbind Singh and another project about Sikh heritage and migration. We ended up forging a friendship and I explained to her that I was looking for different families to stay with as part of my research. She confirmed that I could stay with them for a month, in April 2018.

As I got to know the family, I learned that Navpreet had originally moved to Birmingham for university, and part of the reason she chose to study there was because of the proximity to GNNSJ and the main Gurdwārā. She loved her lifestyle in Birmingham and being close to the jathā, so she decided to permanently relocate. She worked as a creative arts therapist in a school and dedicated her spare time as a volunteer for GNNSJ. Her brother and Bhabhī decided to move up to Birmingham so that their daughter could attend the jathā nursery and continue through the jathā school system (explored in Chapter 6: School). Her Bhabhī was a schoolteacher and so relocation was relatively easy for her as she was able to secure a teaching position covering someone on maternity leave.

From the moment I stepped into their house, I felt a peaceful atmosphere. The house was narrow but had three floors and lots of open space. Although this household consisted primarily of Navpreet, her brother, her Bhabhī and their daughter, they had a room that was dedicated for their parents to stay in when they came from London to visit. A distinctive feature of this house was that there was a 'spiritual' room on the top floor devoted to 'religious' activity. The family also often hosts kīrtan smāgams (gatherings where people sing selections from the Gurū Granth Sāhib together). The physical layout of the house and the commitment to other members of the family through dedicated, permanent spaces for them shows how "household designs, furnishings and technologies constrain or facilitate cultural and historical modes of relating between the people who share these spaces." (Mallett, 2004, p. 66)

The most prominent and stark characteristic of this household was the continuous Sukhmanī Sāhib pāth (Sikh prayer) being played on an iPod in the kitchen; I had not seen this practise at any other Sikh homes that I had visited although I know anecdotally that this is generally quite common. Sukhmanī Sāhib is an expressive pāth to have playing continuously as it is a prayer that is associated with positivity and happiness. Throughout my time staying with this family, the recital did not stop once and reminded me of the ethical soundscapes described by Hirschkind (2001). A conversation with Navpreet shed some interesting insights into this practice. We were sat in her living room late one evening and ended up discussing the importance of specific places and what makes a place 'sacred', 'holy' or have some sort of significance. We were discussing whether a place itself could be 'sacred' or if it is the people and experiences of a place that can create this feeling. She told me that she believed that a place itself could be sacred. She described how the Gurdwārā evoked emotion and feeling for her and how her house gave positive vibes because there is continuous Sukhmanī Sāhib pāth

playing in the house. Effectively, what Navpreet described to me was the combined power of sights, sounds, and smells creating a 'sacred' environment (Orsi, 2010, p. 171).

The idea of home is not explicitly differentiated from the Gurdwārā; suggesting that both of these "are coterminous and absolutely implicated in each other." (Cannell, 2019, p. 3) The idea of a home creates the 'religious' space of a Gurdwārā, however, the Gurdwārā becomes an exemplar of the idea of a home for all Sikh homes though this may be imagined differently by different families. Sikhī is not exclusive to the Gurdwārā and also takes place at home (Cannell, 1999). For Orsi's (2010) Italian migrants in Harlem, the *domus* represents the family or household and the moral judgement of this unit in determining ethical behaviour for its members. These moral and embodied frameworks gave shape to Italian immigrants' lives and understandings of God; we can consider this as a parallel to the household in which Navpreet and her family live. While the culture of family embraced by immigrants in Harlem is certainly not the same as that of my Sikh interlocutors, the very notion of how culture surrounds family seems to be closely similar. Orsi (2010) states that there are two senses of the word religion the first being rituals, practises, symbols, prayers etc and the second which is what really matters to people, this is their cosmology, the collection of their ultimate values, and what they deeply care about. Whilst Orsi specifically describes sacred relationality as a Catholic idiom following a rejection from the Church, the Sikh idea of kinship for my interlocutors in the West Midlands is embedded in an intertwined relationship of kinship and religion which is not exclusively situated in the Gurdwārā; rather, it is an extension of the Gurdwārā into what we might casually designate in Britain as 'private' and 'family' spaces. This is from an understanding shared explicitly by all of my interlocutors that every Sikh home is the Gurū's home and the Gurū's home (Gurdwārā) is every Sikh's home. Navpreet's home makes this especially visible however, this is common even in modern traditional and traditional modern homes as my interlocutors viewed them.

Navpreet's house is situated in a deprived part of Birmingham; however, it is in close proximity to the Gurdwārā. Many of the families who are part of the jathā live in this area for that reason. Most of the houses surrounding Navpreet's house belong to their family members or members of the jathā who are effectively considered kin. This neighbourhood transcends the physical home and so "home is not necessarily confined to this place. The boundaries of home seemingly extend beyond its walls to the neighborhood, even the suburb, town or city."

(Mallett, 2004, p. 63) Those who are key members in the jathā are a very close-knit community. The life of this particular family was heavily entwined with that of the jathā showing how the process of 'kinning' (Howell, 2003) is manifested throughout the jathā.

Much of the dialog that I had in this house was Sikhī related even if the topics themselves were not necessarily Sikh specific. One of the most interesting conversations I had was with Amarjit (Navpreet's brother). He used sci-fi references to describe Sikhī to me. In particular he used the films: *The Matrix*<sup>11</sup> (he compares the realms of reality and illusion from the film to explain waking one up from the mayā (illusion) into the realm of satyā (truth/reality)) and *The Devil's Advocate* (as a film based on 'values'). I had heard of the former being used before to describe Sikhī, however this was the first time I had heard of the latter. He described to me that 'it is all about values and virtues and this is what Sikhī is ultimately all about.' The Matrix analogy is based on the choice between living in sat (reality) or mayā (Illusion), and how we can nurture the desire to continue wanting to know and live in Truth (reality) as opposed to being bored and unhappy in our current lives. The argument is that many of us do not know this 'Truth' exists, but we can discover it if we take the correct 'pill.' These conversations became illuminating and provided an insight into the thought process of Navpreet and her family. What became clear was that every element of their lives was permeated (sometimes implicitly) by Sikhī in some way or another and Amarjit explained this explicitly through the

---

<sup>11</sup> The charity Basics of Sikhi have made a YouTube video on this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6DXYLnbnfo>



analogies of the films. The way of living for this family showed how they lived according to their understanding of *mīrī pīrī*, where the spiritual was a core element of anything temporal also showing how "kinship and religion are often bound up together in practice, and it is by no means always clear where one stops and the other begins." (Cannell, 2019, p. 6)

Navpreet's house posed a strange dichotomy for me. It seemed to have so many overt features that both contrasted and complemented those in my primary host home. This household was much more similar to the one I had grown up in and so I expected much of it to be reflective of my own childhood. I was surprised to find that in fact in terms of family behaviour, it was not what I was expecting. One of the most obvious similarities between my two host houses, however, was that Navpreet's house also had 'Sikh' art. There was a commonly seen painting (by Sobha Singh) (Figure 11) of Gurū Nānak on the corner wall in the living room. The most interesting feature of this is that the image had been edited to match the house decorations and colour scheme. It was also not the central feature or the most prominent artwork. There was a much brighter image above the dining table that matched the design and stood out. In the living room there was a large image of a landscape on the wall above one of the sofas that drew the eye in as you entered the room. There were no other obvious 'Sikh' references or artefacts in the main seating area. Given that this family would consider themselves more 'religiously' Sikh, I found it interesting that the 'Sikh' art blended in more to the natural design of the house. It seemed to be more of a design feature than a religious symbol similar to 'The Bible in the Victorian Home' described by Colleen McDannell (1995, pp. 67-102). She shows how the Bible is revered as a domestic object and testification to one's piety (McDannell, 1995, pp. 67-102). This led me to question, are displays of Sikh artwork reflections of the outward expression of Sikhī or is it merely an attribute of their

implicit commitment to their faith or an attempt at harmonious integration of both Sikh and British ideas of homeliness?



*Figure 11 - Sobha Singh Painting of Gurū Nānak (Sikh Expo, n.d.)*

### Language of the people

Language is crucial in the imagining of national communities (Anderson, 1983). Punjabī has been politicised and remains central to propagating ideas of Sikh polity that originated with the Gurūs and continued through Sikh history for example in Māhārājā Ranjīt Singh's Sikh Empire. In more recent history, following partition, Sikhs instigated the Punjabī Subā Movement as a means of protecting Punjāb as a Punjabī speaking state. The politicisation of language highlights the politics of inequality that exist (Hall, 2002, p. 73). In 1957, Punjāb was declared as a bilingual state which resulted in Sikhs demanding for Punjāb to be recognised as

Punjabī speaking state. However, the Arya Samaj (a Hindu reform movement) countered this demand by instructing Punjabī-speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue and as a result, The State Reorganisation Commission Report declared that there was no justifiable case for Punjāb to become a Punjabī speaking state (K. Singh, 1999, p. 156). The culmination of these actions and the decision not to make Punjāb a Punjabī speaking state can be seen as the instigation of the dismantling of the embedded foundations of Sikh ideology in the homeland of the state of Punjāb and therefore why Punjabī remains so important for Sikhs particularly in the diaspora.

Language in the household seemed to vary significantly depending on where I was and whom I was with. In my primary host family home, my Bhūā's (lit. father's sister) house (explained in more detail later), my Bhūā could speak fluent Punjabī and had been raised speaking it. Any time we would visit her family, she would speak Punjabī to her mother and sister. It was also interesting to note that when she met with some of her friends, 'brown girls' as she called them, they also conversed in Punjabī quite often. Despite this, she would only speak to her husband in Punjabī occasionally and particularly if it were something she didn't want her children to know. Often, she would converse in a mixture of English and Punjabī, particularly when she could not find the right word in English to express what she wanted to say. Her children couldn't speak any Punjabī; in fact, they referred to it as 'Indian' and when they heard it being spoken, they described it to me as sounding like 'curry, curry' showing a form of self-stigmatisation. It was clear that this was intended as a joke and the rest of the family found it funny. There was no desire for the children to learn Punjabī or acknowledge that it was part of their cultural heritage. This was the case even though their grandparents struggled to speak English and would much rather prefer to converse with them in Punjabī. In the other house where I stayed there was significant emphasis placed on Mandeep learning Punjabī. Her mother would only converse with her in Punjabī and Navpreet also made an effort to do so. She told me she had not spoken Punjabī much growing up and so that made it more difficult

for her now that she was older. As a result of this, the family was making a conscious effort to make Mandeep feel comfortable speaking Punjabi from a young age. The attitude towards Punjabi as a language that children should know was widespread among my interlocutors whether they actively practised speaking in Punjabi in the home or not. Often parents would send their children to Punjabi classes at the local Gurdwārā so that they could learn Punjabi and occasionally sit GCSE and A-Level examinations.

People shifted in the way they spoke and the terminology that they used depending on their contexts and company similar to the examples given in Amy Paugh's (2005) research with children on the island of Dominica where children's talk within a multilingual context where language use carries complex socio-political messages. English is the official language of government and schools, however local Afro-French creole, Patwa, is spoken in rural areas and by adults in the home. This pattern is echoed through my interlocutors and highlights the specific role of unmonitored peer interactions, where the way that English and Punjabi are spoken shift depending on who they are with.

A standout use of language was in relation to the description of Sikhī and how religion in general was discussed one evening when I was sat with my host family. At dinner, we ended up discussing notions of karma (which was interesting as Sikhs generally use the term karam in Punjabi), destiny and kismet (similar to the idea of fate). My Bhūā was trying to describe that she definitely believed in some form of 'everything happens for a reason.' She expressed that she didn't really know what to call this but that it seemed to resonate with the idea of kismet. Both my Fufar (lit. father's brother-in-law) and their son, Sahib, were not convinced by her argument. As I will explore later, the family are a self-proclaimed non-religious family, and Sahib identifies as an atheist and so explained his understanding of religion and what he thinks it means to be religious. The language and terminology that he used alluded to a conceptualisation of Sikhī through a Christian lens. He did not refer to any ideas in Sikhī using

Punjabī, but instead used Abrahamic language such as ‘God’ and ‘destiny.’ This makes sense considering that his understanding of what it means to be Sikh is mostly from his schooling education or exposure that he has had to Sikhī, i.e., media representations of Sikhī and how it is discussed on social media platforms particularly as Sikhī is not usually something that is discussed in the home or something that is actively taught to the children by their parents or other family members.

During my stay with them, I tended to be the one to instigate conversations about religion and so I would frame it in relation to my research, as opposed to something that they would regularly discuss. Religion also came up as a topic when my Bhūā would ask how I had spent my day. Religion was a category of conversation that requires attention because the practice of religion “takes shape consciously and unconsciously, entwined in the “lived practice” of law, economics, family, and so on.” (Bender, 2011, p. 275) I would often mention that I had been with a charity or at the Gurdwārā and this would then lead to a conversation about Sikhī in some way.

One day we were sat round the dining table and ended up talking about school and religious education. Sahib felt it was unnecessary for him to attend Religious Education (RE) lessons at school because he felt that religion was not worth his time. My impression was that he had not had the opportunity to explore religion and more specifically Sikhī but had simply decided it was not something he would want to critically engage with. It was easier for him to understand religion and religious people as something to be mocked rather than understood. Sahib's attitude towards Sikhī reflects the rejection of “traditional Islam” of second and third generation Muslims in Britain as explained by Hoque (2019) and Liberatore (2017). Sahib typifies a number of young Sikhs who have been raised in a similar way, with no significant emphasis on religious and cultural transmission. This was also evident through my Bhūā and Fufar's friends and their children; many of them did not have an affiliation to Sikhī but would

occasionally visit the Gurdwārā for events and adopt the karā (steel bangle) as a marker of their Sikh identity whilst not fully practising Sikhī.

Judeo-Christian terminology such as that used by Sahib shows how his understanding of Sikhī and Sikh tradition is reframed. The use of this language, particularly in Religious Education in school, and the liberal, racialised public sphere underpinned with forms of Anglicanism reinforces the unchallenged narrative of the 'Christian Norm' (Joshi, 1973). Singh explains that the result of this is that "Christian concepts are uncritically taken as the definition of religion." (2018, p. 346) Whilst the maintenance of language is important for any diasporic community, the imperativeness of Punjabī for Sikhs and Sikhī cannot be dismissed. This stems from Gurū Angad (Gurū Nānak II) bestowing on Punjabī the status of a 'religious language' or 'language of the gods' to people in a format that they could read and understand for themselves, facilitating a direct relationship between a Sikh and Gurū (Mandair & Shackle, 2005, pp. xvii–xviii). This is further compounded given that the Sikh scripture, the Gurū Granth Sāhib is compiled in Gurmukhī script (the script of Punjabī).

Given the varying interpretations of what it means to be Sikh in Britain, these conflicting attitudes towards language are expected. When at school, children are not exposed to their ancestral culture and if parents such as my Bhūā and their friends do not instil Punjabī or an understanding of Sikhī in them from a young age then it is likely that their understandings of Sikhī will be those of the dominant narratives and not from a Sikh perspective. This is one of the reasons why some Sikh parents (even if they are not 'religious') choose to send their children to Sikh schools which I address in Chapter 6: School. Those who are raised in extended kinship networks are much more likely to take a shared responsibility in communicating culture and language to children. For example, Navpreet's family not only rely on the household to instil Punjabī in Mandeep but also the Gurdwārā and other jathā members who

live in close proximity. However, the household is often the nucleus for forming language as it is the first time that children are exposed to it.

### Sikh homes in Britain

At the beginning of my fieldwork on 23rd November 2017, I found myself walking into homes that for me, were both full of familiarity and complete strangeness. Growing up Sikh in the north of England, I had always visited the homes of other Sikhs. Despite always thinking other peoples' homes were interesting, I had never fully observed the design and choices in the way I was considering them now. I consciously noted every detail from the way I felt, the smells, the photographs, the layout, and the colours. Although I would most likely be considered as a 'native anthropologist', entering into the homes of my interlocutors remained daunting, as Carsten and Hugh Jones describe,

*"To enter another culture is to stand nervously in front of an alien house and to step inside a world of unfamiliar objects and strange people, a maze of spatial conventions whose invisible lines get easily scuffed and trampled by ignorant foreign feet. But these first, revealing, architectural impressions, reinforced by the painful job of learning who is who, who and what lives where, become merely the context and environment for the increasingly abstract and wordy conversation of ethnographic research. In time, for both anthropologists and their hosts, much of what houses are and imply becomes something that goes without saying."*

(1995, p. 4)

In the months prior to starting my fieldwork and actually moving to the West Midlands, I contacted various people to try and help me secure potential host families. In many cases lots of people initially agreed to allowing me to come and stay with them, in some instances they

were actually quite enthusiastic about this prospect. However, as time passed many changed their minds or began making excuses as to why I would not be able to stay with them. This made me question and explore the positionality of Sikh homes. Were they public or private spaces? Was there a boundary that I could not cross as a researcher? I found that many people wanted to help with my research but that there was some reservation as to what I would be doing and what my research actually entailed. Was I there to 'study' them, and what did this mean?

In the same way that my prospective interlocutors were nervous of what I was coming to research and my potential intrusion into their private lives, my parents also had similar anxieties for the position I was going to put myself in. In order to put them at ease, my parents had come with me to settle me into what would be my new home for the next thirteen months. As with most Sikhs, I had family in the West Midlands, so we went to visit them and also take this up as an opportunity to build connections and relationships in my field site. In most South Asian communities, and particularly for my prospective Sikh interlocutors, the idea of family and kinship is part of genealogy being a lived reality and not just a metaphor (Bear, 2007; Cannell, 2019). This extended far beyond (the highly contested idea of) 'blood relations' but rather, "reflect[s] an expansive bilateral definition of relatedness based on the sharing of food and sentimental ties in households." (Bear, 2008, p. 41)

Despite my apparent status as a native anthropologist and the apprehension of Sikhs in Britain, I quickly realised that connecting with and building on my existing networks would be necessary for me to gain access to my future interlocutors. I was unsure whether this was because of the nature of Sikh homes being considered as 'private' or as uncertainty as to what I would be doing as a researcher, especially in Britain where this kind of embedded research is perhaps not as common. As a result of this, I had visited many homes on this day and had been



well and truly fed in authentic Sikh hospitality style! By the evening I could no longer breathe and had convinced myself I wouldn't need to eat for the remainder of my fieldwork!

### Home is not a place...it's a feeling

The final house of the day that I visited was my Bhūā's house as this was to become my host family. Although we are not actually closely related, 'Bhūā' is the closest familial term to describe our relationship as she knew my father when they were both growing up through other family connections. The kinship diagrams below show how our families are related and my Bhūā's kinship structure. My family and my Bhūā's family are related through my grandfather and her mother. Figure 12 shows my family kinship structure with consanguineal kin on my father's side and Figure 13 shows my grandfather's siblingship with two of his sisters highlighted as they married two brothers. The brothers that my grandfather's sisters married had a sister and she is my Bhūā's mother which can be seen in Figure 14. Figure 15 shows my Bhūā and Fufar's kinship structure and those who would regularly operate as an extended family. My Bhūā told me that she was introduced to my Fufar when she was in her early twenties. She explained that when she was told she would be meeting someone with the intention of marriage, she was not really interested but during the meeting, they got along really well and agreed to marriage. During my stay with my Bhūā, there were many occasions where the family would get together. Often my Fufar's mother would drop off food for us to eat and would help altering traditional clothing for her granddaughter (Maya) or my Bhūā. On special occasions such as birthdays, we would all go out for a meal together as a family.

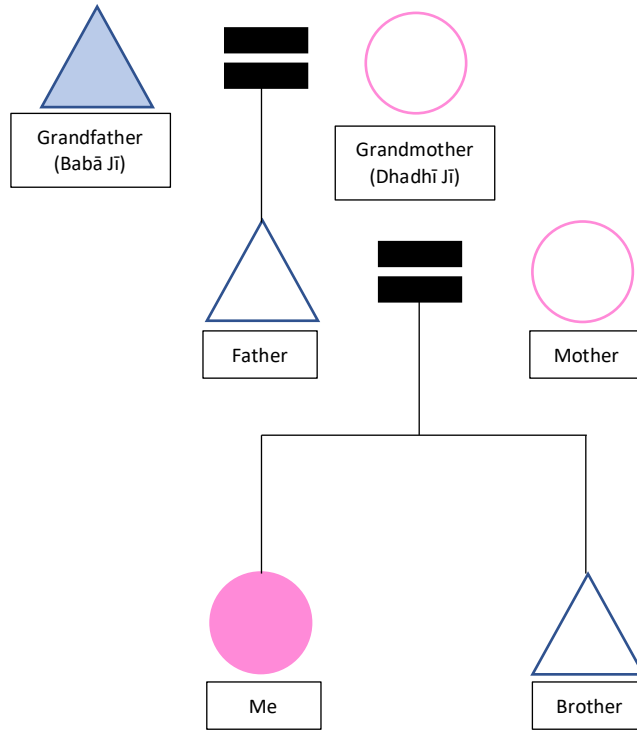


Figure 12 – My kinship structure showing the consanguineal relationship to my grandfather

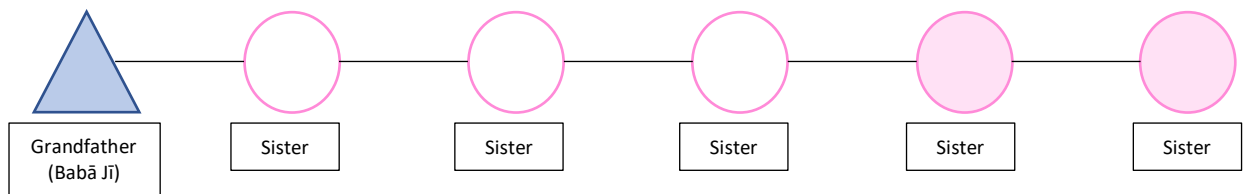


Figure 13 – My grandfather’s siblingship highlighting two sisters

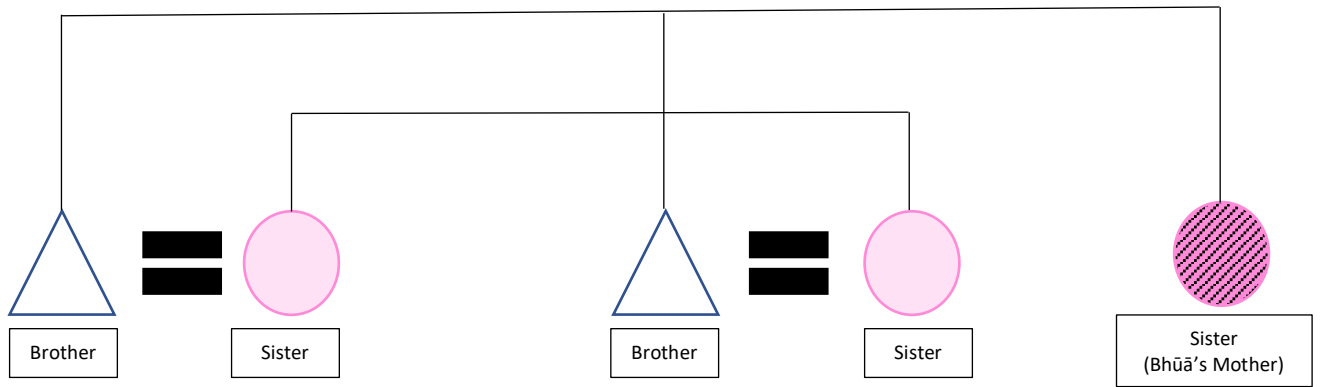


Figure 14 – Two sisters married two brothers who had a sister, my Bhūā's mother

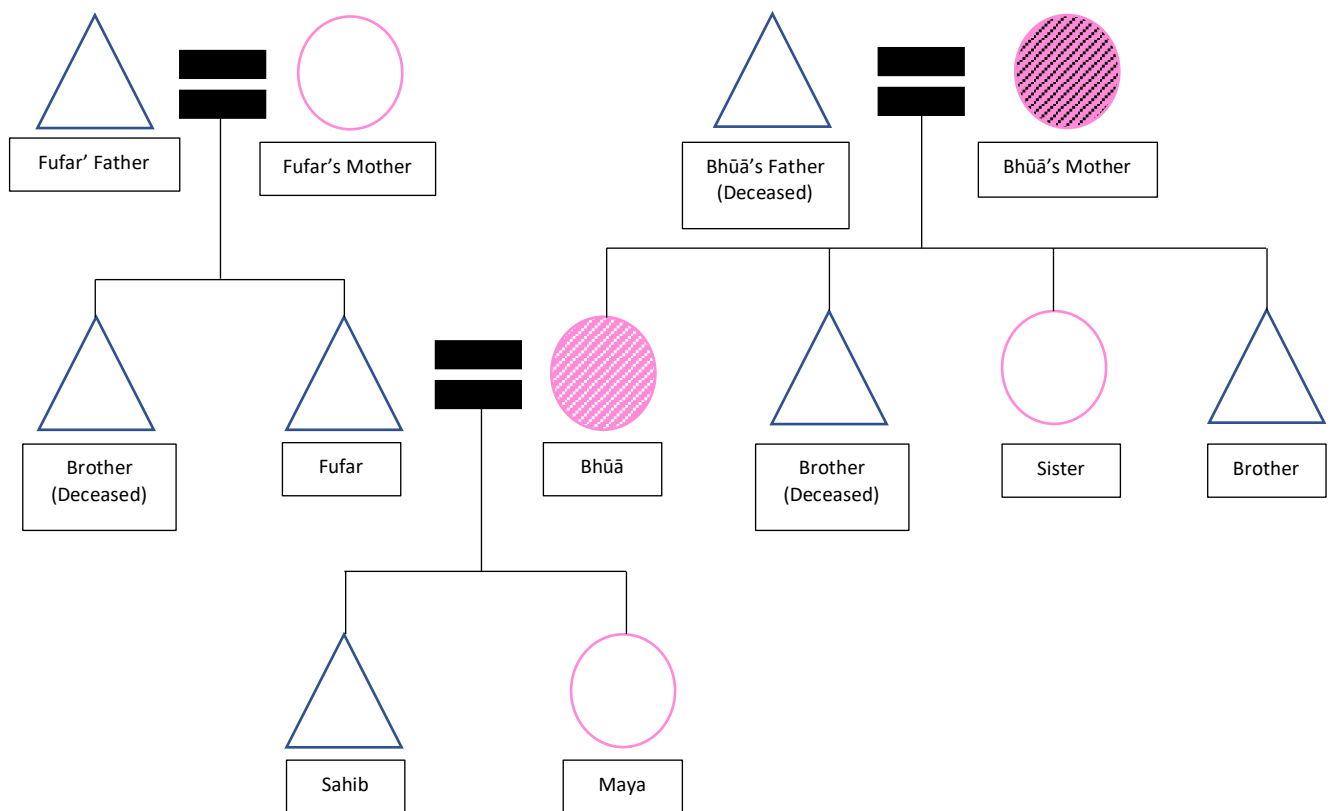


Figure 15 – Bhūā and Fufar's kinship structure

As I walked into the house, I inhaled the all too familiar smell of fried food such as samosas and spring rolls. "Home is place but it is also a space inhabited by family, people, things and belongings – a familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived." (Mallett, 2004, p. 63) These familiar smells meant that I started to feel less unnerved and more at home. As Bear explains, "food also makes bonds between people in households, ties dispersed families together, and changes the essences of people" (2008, p. 41) which was no exception in this case. I immediately noticed the Christmas decorations and the plethora of art, ranging from family photographs to what could be considered as 'stereotypical Sikh imagery.' Downstairs, the house was decorated with 'Sikh' paintings and artwork, in particular the Gurūs, the Darbār Sāhib and even a map of Punjāb. These didn't appear to have much significance other than decoration and the only time I had actually seen them being referred to by the family was at Christmas when they had been decorated with either tinsel or lights. It reminded me of the household design in the film 'Bend it like Beckham.'

This use of artwork and 'Sikh' references was not something unique to my host family and extended to all of the many different Sikh households that I visited. Variations of the paintings of Gurū Nānak by Sobha Singh (Figure 8) is almost universally used as a way of depicting Gurū Nānak in both of my host homes, Sikh homes more generally, Gurdwārās and other Sikh institutions. It has become a staple marker of the outward expression of a commitment to Sikhī whether the intention is explicit or implicit. The painting of Gurū Nānak has almost come to represent a Sikh home in Britain and further as a signifier that every Sikh home is also always (in some form) the home of the Gurū. The presence of the Gurū in the home makes a link between what is considered as the Gurū's house (the Gurdwārā) and any Sikh house such that, in a diasporic context, they are always part of each other.

James depicts Sikh homes in Britain as typically very similar to stereotypical British styles and not easy to identify as being specifically 'Sikh' (1974, pp. 53-54). My Bhūā's house fit into this depiction of a Sikh home in Britain, and it did not have a 'traditional' feel as some of the other Sikh houses I had previously been to earlier in the day and prior to commencing my fieldwork. Given the festive season, the house had an overwhelming presence of 'Christmas spirit' in a manner that would make any traditional multiculturalist proud. The dining table chairs had Santa chair covers and the corner of the main sitting area featured a beautifully decorated six-foot, real Christmas tree. Underneath the tree there were a few gifts and some inflatable elves and an inflatable Santa. This immediately stood out to me and again raised the question; could this be considered as a way of being both Sikh and British? Is this family adapting Sikhī to fit the British context or, is it drawing parallels to Liberatore's (2017) ethnography of British, Somali, Muslim women creatively deconstructing and considering meanings of belonging, difference and citizenship and opposing the binary of 'Islamic versus secular' or in this case, 'Sikhī versus secular'? Could this actually be a representation of living according to the concept of *mīrī pīrī* of British policies of multiculturalism? Ultimately, considering Liberatore's interlocutors navigating a space for themselves between 'culture' and 'religion', I came to the concluding question: what is the significance of a Sikh household choosing to have a Christmas tree?

I felt my own sense of uncertainty being reflected in the family as we were considering if we were compatible and whether this arrangement had the potential to be successful. My Bhūā and I were approaching each other in a tentative manner, given that I would be crossing a kind of invisible boundary of privacy and intimacy. Despite this, the family welcomed me straight away and did their best to make me feel comfortable. My Bhūā told me that she was a maths teacher at a local academy school and that her husband (my Fufar, lit. father's brother-in-law) worked from home for an IT company. She described the neighbourhood to me as 'nice' and not immersed in the wider Sikh community and that it was 'mixed' meaning that there were

families from all different kinds of backgrounds and cultures. Any anxieties that we had felt were eased through our receptiveness to each other and open communication about where our boundaries lay. I developed a bond with my Bhūā's daughter – Maya, and she became very much like my little sister throughout my fieldwork. We spent lots of time together talking and behaving like sisters.

One of the first things that my Bhūā told me was that she wasn't too sure how helpful she would be in terms of my research because even though they classified themselves as Sikh, they would say that they were not 'religious.' She told me that they didn't have a stereotypical household and that everyone helped out, by this she meant that there wasn't a division of labour where the women of the house were expected to do the domestic work whilst the men in the house went to work and so this dictated the family routine which is significant in the sense that "materially, practically and symbolically, household and family rituals are important 'performances' that both say and do many things." (Gardner, 2002; Gardner & Grillo, 2002, p. 185) My Bhūā used the example of telling me that often she will prepare dinner but that her husband would be in charge of clearing up because they both managed the financial burden of the household as well as its domestic maintenance (Bhachu, 1988). There was a slight pause and then she proceeded to tell me that "we don't do what we are *supposed* to do" and that "we don't do things just to make people happy." She said to me that if they choose to do something then it "has to be for the right reasons." Here she was referring specifically to religious, ethical and community obligations. I responded and told her that I understood but that it would still be beneficial for my research.

She continued and told me in an almost apologetic tone that I wouldn't see much religious activity in the house, "we don't do pāth (praying), jyot (this is a typically Hindu ritual, which is carried out by some Sikhs. It involves lighting a fire or some other form of light), etc. We just don't believe in that stuff." I listened carefully as she explained her family's stance on Sikhī and

what it meant to them. During our conversation, one particular statement really struck me: “if you ask my son, he would tell you he’s an atheist.” I considered this for a while and decided I would make a note to ask him about this one day.

Our conversation moved onto my Bhūā asking me about myself and what it was like in Leeds and Bradford. She told me that when she was younger her family would visit the north regularly and that she had fond memories of those visits. She asked me about the community there and what it was like now. Bhūā was curious about how closely I was raised to the Sikh community. She mentioned various families to me from the Sikh community there and asked if I knew them and eventually this conversation proceeded into her asking me about marriage. I was aware that this would be a topic that would arise throughout my research, but not to the level that it did. She asked me if I was in a relationship with anyone and when I told her I was single, she asked me when I would want to get married and what was I looking for in a partner. I told her that I didn’t really know and that it wasn’t something I was really planning for in the near future. She told me not to worry and that she knew some great families in Leeds for when I was ready, subsequently marking me as an insider.

Food became integral to the development of our relationship. On the day that I arrived, and we ate samosas and spring rolls together, she discovered that I really disliked peas. This became an important connection for us and led to many running jokes to the extent that on my birthday she bought me a t-shirt with the slogan ‘give peas a chance’ and when I completed my fieldwork and moved out, she bought me a card with a picture of a pea and the words ‘peas don’t leave.’ This interaction initiated the process of ‘kinning’ (Howell 2003) and my incorporation into the family “through the medium of food” (Bear, 2008, p. 41). My Bhūā would ask me every day if I had eaten and told me that I was welcome to eat anything in the house that I wanted. One of the starkest differences between my Bhūā’s family and me was that I was vegetarian, and they all ate meat. Every time she would prepare food, she would

always make something that was vegetarian and that she knew I liked, making sure to not add peas! The emphasis on making sure that I was fed was a significant act of care towards me as we built up our relationship and she started to refer to me as her daughter. Food played a vital part in the “act of caring [that] was central to the unity of the family.” (Bear 2008:41)

### ‘The old shaping the new’

Naturally, as I had built up a relationship with my host family, I was invited to accompany them when they went out with friends or family. One of their close family friends (Sharan and Raj) moved to a new house during my fieldwork. I went with my Bhūā and her family to visit them and see the new house. Upon entry into Sharan and Raj’s new home there was a large painting of Gurū Nānak by Sobha Singh (the same as the one in my Bhūā’s house). My Bhūā commented on it straight away and noted that they used to have it on display in their previous home. Sharan and Raj responded and said that until the painting had been hung, they didn’t feel like it was really home. This comment really stood out to me, as this family also do not classify themselves as religious. When I first met them, they told me that they don’t go to the Gurdwārā unless there is a specific reason, for example for a wedding, and it is not something that they have spoken about when we have met except for in specific reference to my research. In this short example, we can see that it is not only people that make homes but also homes that make people (Bachelard, 1994 [1964], p. xxxvi).

Being ‘Sikh’ cannot be dismissed in homemaking for my interlocutors, even for those who claim that Sikhī is not important for them. Mitra highlights that for her interlocutors, being Sikhs in America (and not the dominant norm of Anglican Christianity), meant that it was challenging for them to feel included. This is because “not only are Sikhs “othered” on account of their non-whiteness, Sikhs face racial prejudice and discrimination on account of their visible religious difference from the dominant norm as well.” (2015, p. 328) Mitra identifies the



tension in trying to satisfy different models and understandings of 'home' which in this case are American ideas clashing with Sikh ideas. This is a similar tension that Sikhs in Britain face, although in the context of Sikhs in the West Midlands, this is mediated slightly differently as a result of the size of the local Sikh community. To some extent, with the number of predominantly Sikh neighbourhoods, it is easier for certain neighbourhoods to set up norms of what it means to be a home in both a Sikh sense and a British one. For Sharan and Raj, it was a case of 'the old shaping the new' (Carsten, 2018, p. 108) and making this new house feel like 'home' in terms of the criteria for both Sikh and British homeliness.

### 'Modern traditionalist' vs. 'traditional modernist'

I went to visit one of my friends (that I knew before my fieldwork), Jaspreet, and we were in her kitchen preparing some food and talking about how life was going. I was asking her about her family, and she asked me about my research. We ended up discussing the topic of the pressure that young women can come under to get married. This led to us considering marriage and how it can be a big change for women in terms of them having to settle into and often move to another family. She told me that she had developed a theory that classifies Sikh families into groups which was widespread among my interlocutors, although they did not theorise it as explicitly as Jaspreet.

She described her theory to me by saying that she thought that there are two categories that Sikh families can be classified into – 'modern traditionalists' and 'traditional modernists'. She explained that modern traditionalists are those families that seem traditional in the way that they behave, and this is reflected in their values and ethics. She said that what makes them modern is their thinking and behaviour. For her this means that they tend not to focus so much on the 'cultural or superstitious' parts of Sikhī. She told me that she felt her family (prior to marriage) fit into this category. This is because they follow the Nāmdhārī tradition (a sect of

Sikhī that emerged during the reform period) and so may *appear* to be traditional due to the way that they dress (often in simple clothing, usually white) and the superficial parts of their lives for example how they follow vegetarian and alcohol-free lifestyles. However, she expressed that in terms of behaviour, her family would be considered modern, for example due to the emphasis placed on gender equality and her grandfather was a key proponent of this.

*In my family the females are treated the same as the males and they don't adhere to normal stereotypes or superstitions. In fact, my granddad made sure that we [all of his granddaughters] were educated and went to university. That was more of a priority for him than for our brothers to go. He told us that it was important for girls to be able to look after themselves and ensure that they are independent.*

She then proceeded to describe what she would consider to be 'traditional modernists.' She said that they would be the opposite; 'they appear to be modern but actually many of their habits and beliefs are 'quite old fashioned.'" She explained this by telling me that these kinds of families would *appear* modern for example 'they would drive nice cars and wear designer clothes,' however their behaviour would not be what *she* would consider as modern. For example, they would follow traditions and superstitions such as not washing their hair on particular days of the week as it would be considered 'bad luck.' They may also be concerned with their image and how others perceive them in the traditional 'keeping up with the Joneses' sense.' She suggested that in the instance of marriage, it is much easier to move from a traditional modernist family to a modern traditionalist family than from a modern traditionalist family to a traditional modernist family.

She used her own marriage as an example of this. Jaspreet explained that she is from what she would call a modern traditionalist family. The family she married into (approximately three

years prior) are what she would identify as traditional modernists. This is because they would *appear* to be very modern and align with the expectations of a group assimilating into Britain. 'They drive nice cars, are well off, don't conform to the 'traditionally Sikh image' of turbans and beards like my family.' However, their behaviours and values are lot more in line with cultural and superstitious norms. She told me she feels that it has been easier for her husband to adapt to her family than for her to adapt to his. This is more emphasised for her than for him because she moved in with him and his family after they married. She said the transition would have been easier for him because her family 'is *actually* modern whereas his family *thinks* they are modern.' It is therefore easier for her husband to fall into their routine rather than the other way around. This is because the expectations placed on him are not as difficult for him to adapt to whereas in her case, she expected his family to act similar to hers but in fact it did not. This meant it was more difficult for her to adjust given that she sometimes feels restricted in the household. She did recognise that it is likely that it is more difficult in general for women to adapt after marriage because they are often the ones whose lives change. In the majority of the cases, it is the woman that uproots her life and moves to where her husband is and so the change is therefore more prominent for the woman.

Jaspreet's model is one that makes explicit the implicit atmospheres that exist in a home. The model represents widely held views of my interlocutors though they were not always explicit. Some of these views exist in relation to class aspirations acting as a shared schema providing varying resolutions to the application of ethical ideas of a 'good' or 'modern' home and a broader model of modern, non-superstitious families in Britain which can be seen in attitudes towards women. For my interlocutors, class was interwoven with levels of education and an ability to become independent, hence why some of my interlocutors were insistent that their children went to university. My interlocutors would judge these atmospheres created in homes because a more religious and traditional home is problematic in the public sphere given the affiliation to religion as dogmatic and contradictory to western ideas of secularism. This is

because religious minority homes are widely represented as oppressive in British society and politics, for example public debates on forced marriage which I explore further in Chapter 7: *Sevā*. Each of my interlocutors provided different resolutions to the problem of being both modern and traditional. Some of Jaspreet's conceptualisation of Sikh families in this way can be somewhat attributed to broader expectations of what it means to be an accepted minority in Britain. The home is seen as private and so allows for these more 'authentic' forms of kinship and Sikhī to be performed which can result in multiple identities in different contexts showing a public alignment with the expectation of 'Britishness' as a racialised minority.

Sikhī as a faith is anti-ritual but in the context of political strategies that target racialised minority faiths, 'some' ritual became acceptable as a form of protecting what it means to live via religio-kin politics in the household. For many of my interlocutors, particularly those who were first generation migrants, education was a mechanism for escaping these atmospheres and representations by enabling Sikhs to become socially mobile and fitting into a broader British public sphere where one would have equal citizenship rights and not fit into narratives such as forced marriage. Jaspreet's definitions of 'modern' and 'traditional' fit with widely held views about whether people are from a particular class, but these criteria reflect the fact that to be at home as a Sikh you have to conform to dominant British values of rational religion (or western secularism) whilst combatting claims that minority groups 'oppress' their women. My conversation with Jaspreet shows that these criteria are also used by women to claim the right to particular forms of treatment, so they are internalised too.

Expanding on this theory I suggest that there are likely to be two other categories that Jaspreet has not explored: 'modern modern' and 'traditional traditional.' 'Modern modern,' would be families that have what Jaspreet would consider to be 'modern' beliefs and ethics and also behave according to these values. The final category would therefore be 'traditional traditional.' These are families that hold beliefs and values that would be considered as

traditional. For example, certain gender inequalities and assumed gender roles defined in relation to western ideas of modernity. They would also include following certain rituals or superstitions and their behaviour would be reflective of these values. Categorising my interlocutors using this model can be problematic as it is highly subjective. This is because another could, just as easily consider something or someone that would be considered as traditional by one person, as being modern. This is because what counts as traditional and what counts as modern is not necessarily the same for everyone; these categories are subjective and perspectival. However, it is still useful to consider this model to understand how my interlocutors view other Sikhs through a shared schema. It can also be helpful in understanding how my interlocutors might try to classify me and work out if I am an 'insider' or 'outsider'.

#### Girls' night: how public is private?

My Bhūā invited me along to a 'girls' night' with some of her friends. I had not been to this house or met this friend before but had met some of the others that were going to be there. The house was large and in a more affluent area of Birmingham. My Bhūā's friend came and greeted me when I arrived and took me inside to where everyone was sitting. Unlike the other houses I had visited, I did not notice any particularly 'Sikh' references such as photographs or artwork despite the host identifying as Sikh. Everyone was sat in the main living room; there was Bhūā, Sandy, Sandy's daughter Tara, Sarah, Jagdeep and the host, Priya. Priya's two sons were also there, one an adolescent and the other was quite young. Notably, everyone was Punjabī except for Sarah. For many of my interlocutors who don't necessarily ascribe to the 'religious' aspects of Sikhī, Punjabī culture and its associations create the same bonds of kinship. Punjabī language is also a means of expressing Sikhī through allegories, stories, and proverbs.

Most of the women knew each other or had worked with Priya at a school, in some capacity. Whilst having some drinks and snacks, they decided to go around the room updating each other on what was new in each other's lives ranging from work to personal relationships. When it was my turn, they were interested in my personal relationships and the topic of marriage was once again central to the discussion. As the night progressed, we decided that we should have some food. I was sat in the dining room with the children whilst the women went inside. After we had finished eating, we continued talking and then someone suggested we play some card games. We did this for a while and it ended up becoming quite competitive, particularly between Sandy and Sarah. I wasn't too sure why this was at first. After some time, I was asked to drop Jagdeep off at her house as she needed to tend to her children. By the time we returned, Sarah had also gone home and so we decided to head back to my Bhūā's. Sandy and Tara came with my Bhūā and me back to her house. On the way home Sandy and my Bhūā were talking about how it was strange that Priya had invited Sarah. They said it was uncomfortable because they had to be careful about what they were saying and also that they had to keep on translating things for her when they were speaking Punjabi or making references to Punjabi songs or Punjabi culture.

The evening illuminated the different interactions that take place between my interlocutors. I was surprised at the tension that was present at Priya's house as a result of Sarah's attendance. The tension seemed to have disappeared completely once she had left. The 'girls' were much more comfortable once they were in a 'purely Punjabi' space and felt that they could fully be themselves without feeling the need to explain any of their references or jokes and without fear of offending or excluding anyone. Priya's home presented itself as a site for interaction between an extended kinship. However, this was not necessarily the case with Sarah's presence seeming to not be representative of the same kinship, potentially as a result of her status as a white British woman (representative of the dominant and exclusionary British public sphere) which also made the atmosphere of the home become 'unhomely.' This

interpretation is further supported by my presence as a stranger, but still as a 'Punjabī' marking me as familiar and through the conversation about marriage, I was marked as an insider. In this example there are very clear boundaries of who is comfortably allowed in the intimate space of the home, not only in the physical building, but in the intimate interactions that take place in such a space. This example is representative of wider challenges in the West Midlands explored in Chapter 3: Sangat where some of my interlocutors described feeling uncomfortable in 'white' spaces where they felt as though they did not belong.

### What makes a Sikh home in Britain?

The home is a central site for my interlocutors, not only in terms of the individual building but also through the different imaginaries that create it and the formal and informal networks that maintain it. For my Sikh interlocutors, their 'Sikhness' cannot be ignored. Regardless of the strength of their affiliation to Sikhī, it provides a mediating relationship and Divine citizenship to the community (Bear, 2008, p. 51). The mediating relationship of Sikhī happens at a material level through the use of 'Sikh imagery' and sensory scape as a way of identifying that transcends the dominant British public sphere where Sikhs face an exclusion based on not being a member of the 'Anglican, Christian norm.' The repeated use of the Sobha Singh painting (among other sensory scapes e.g., pāth) are essential in creating this kind of Divine citizenship.

Sikhs appear to nest into forms of religious kinship, which are not anomalous to the British nation, however, from the inside, Sikhs practise their own sovereignty which permeates their ideas of kinship and religiosity similar to the case of the American Latter-day Saints presented by Cannell (2013). This represents clashing ideas of kinship through mīrī pīrī which can be understood as religio-kin politics within the household. Home is not only a site where Sikhs are navigating ideas of home in a Sikh and British sense of homeliness, but also a site for political

interaction. "The home is a major political background [...] for liberals, who identify it with personal autonomy and a challenge to state power; for socialists, who approach it as a challenge to collective life and the ideal of a planned and egalitarian social order." (Saunders & Williams, 1988, p. 91) From the variation and similarities of Sikh homes in Birmingham, it can be seen that there is a spectrum of Sikhs that still maintain a significant link to Sikhī through the practice of the interrelation of kinship and religion (Cannell, 2013; Cannell, 2015; Cannell, 2019; McKinnon et al., 2013; Orsi, 2010).

The physical dwelling of the home is about creating a sense of homeliness in Britain where the dominant British public sphere does not make Britain feel like home for Sikhs which is partly why the presence of a reminder of the wider British public sphere for example Sarah is seen as making a Sikh home unhomey. Home and homemaking are fundamental elements of living temporally and so, their homemaking practices shows their understanding of *mīrī pīrī* through an idea of 'home'. In my interlocutor's proposed framework, where Sikh families in Britain are either 'modern traditional' or 'traditional modern' through an understanding of what it means to be modern in Britain according to a lens of western secularism and acceptable forms of rational religion, we can see an attempt to model an idea of what it means to be a 'good' or 'bad' Sikh home in relation to a prescribed racialised, religious hierarchy. For example, Sikhs are also possibly defining themselves against other racialised, religious minorities (i.e., Hindus and Muslims) in Britain, to determine who belongs and why. As a result of Sikhs' hypervisibility and theological underpinnings of sovereignty, they are defined as 'others' who should not be fully at home in Britain meaning that it is problematic for them to claim to be at home in the West Midlands.



ਦੇਵਣ ਵਾਲੇ ਕੈ ਹਥਿ ਦਾਤਿ ਹੈ ਗੁਰੂ ਦੁਆਰੈ ਪਾਇ ॥

Ḍevaṇ vāle kai hath ḍātḥ hai gurū ḍūārai pāe.

The Gift is in the Hands of the Great Giver. At the Gurū's Door, in the Gurdwārā, it is received.

ਜੇਹਾ ਕੀਤੇਨੁ ਤੇਹਾ ਹੋਆ ਜੇਹੇ ਕਰਮ ਕਮਾਇ ॥੩॥

Jehā kīṭon ṭehā hoā jehe karam kamāe. ||3||

Whatever He does, comes to pass. All act according to His Will. ||3||

(Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib 33)

## Chapter 5: Gurdwārā

Gurdwārās are Sikhs' principal institutions and are representative of living both spiritually and temporally. "Gurdwaras are the very nucleus of the Sikh community and serve as a multi-purpose institution." (Riat, 2013, p. 109) The most commonly used phrases or transliterations to describe a Gurdwārā in English are 'Gurū's house', 'Gurū's gate' or 'door to the Gurū.' In my field site, the Gurdwārā was often experienced and thought of as more of a household than a 'temple'. Sometimes, people will refer to the Gurdwārā as a 'Sikh Temple' given that the term 'Gurdwārā' has not yet become mainstream vernacular, although the majority of my interlocutors would always use the term 'Gurdwārā'. The langar (community kitchen), charitable commensality and kīrtan are key institutions of the lived experience of Sikhī. In exploring this, I discuss what a Gurdwārā is, how it functions and what it means for each of the different groups of my interlocutors.

The Gurdwārā plays an important role in upbringing and 'religious' and 'cultural' transmission (J. Singh, 2016, p. 270). Over the past decade, there has been a growing desire for identity,

education and awareness of Sikhs which stems from heightened political policies such as multiculturalism and resulting islamophobia following events such as 9/11, the London 7/7 bombings and the apparent threat of terrorism (Allen, 2016; Lewis, 1994, pp. 164-169; Poole, 2009; Werbner, 2002, pp. 153-183). These factors led to an increased desire of understanding of Sikhī because of the impact of racism and hate crime targeted towards Sikhs who had an identity which is mistakenly taken as Islamic. Some of my interlocutors wanted their children to grow up being educated about their faith so that they could have an awareness of their heritage and key historical events. This has translated into Gurdwarās responding to this desire and making provision for care such as Sikh youth camps where young Sikhs are educated about Sikh history, culture, and ideology.

In Birmingham, the role of the Gurdwārā also extends as a provider of care and support has increased given the receding welfare state. Many Gurdwārās provide services such as support and citizens advice for the elderly and vulnerable as well as childcare and more informal networks of support which are usually funded from within the community. "Because gurdwaras, like most ethnic minority religious institutions in contemporary inner cities, have increasingly assumed an adjunct role to the local state and welfare services, the competition to control them has further intensified." (Singh, 2006, p. 155) Given the openness of the Gurdwārā space, despite its status as a sovereign Sikh space, there are moments where this type of sovereignty clashes with the dominant British state sovereignty. For example, Gurdwārās are often registered charities and therefore have to adhere to legal requirements for charities in Britain.

As in homes, there are key political interactions that take place in the Gurdwārā because they are "the foundations of community-building, acting as guardians of its core values and providing a forum for collective worship by the sangat." (Singh, 2006, p. 147) Gurdwārās serve as spaces for both Sikhs and the wider community, though they are primarily sovereign Sikh

spaces or Sikh publics. “Gurdwaras are models of self-help, self-reliance and community participation. They define the Sikhs as a distinct and separate independent community, but they also have an open-door policy signifying the oneness of God and the equality of mankind.” (Riat, 2013, p. 115)

While treading an interesting line between private and public, the Gurdwārā also informs how Sikhī is defined at this current moment in Britain. As Sikhs are often the victims of ‘mistaken identity’, Gurdwārās in Britain fit into the rhetoric of “minority institutions [that are] easily associated with transnational terrorism.” (Singh, 2006, p. 147) This, coupled with the government’s Prevent strategy (which is usually associated with Muslims), means Gurdwārās and other minority religious institutions such as Mosques and Mandirs are subject to close state monitoring (Singh, 2006, p. 147). Surveillance from the wider public sphere in this form and the state view of Sikh activism as extremism, impacts the practice of Sikhī in a ‘Sikh space’ therefore initiating the creation of different forms of Sikh counterpublics, similar to those of Hirschkind’s (2001) Muslim interlocutors in Egypt. Although it is worth noting that Sikhs are generally in a much better position than Muslims in Britain even though some Sikhs are often confused for Muslims. In the British context of increased securitisation, remnants of the ‘Big Society’ agenda and the erosion of the welfare state, some Sikhs choose to adhere to the ‘good diaspora’ (Liberatore, 2018) narrative, but this places limits on them in terms of “devaluing other members of the Sikh community, or in relation to the devalued bodies of other racialized communities marked as deviant” (Kaur, 2020, p. 8) such as Muslims, which can cause tensions between and within minority communities something which was only enhanced by the multiculturalism in the late 1990s and early 2000s. .

This chapter is not about the management of Gurdwārās or specifically how they function as institutions in Britain (Chahal, 1997; Helweg, 2003; Khaira, 2000; Singh, 2000; I. J. Singh, 2001; Singh, 2003; K. Singh, 2002, 2004; Singh & Thukral, 1992). Rather, this chapter seeks to

illustrate and explore various contentious issues such as how a space that is ideally open to all has been forced to police its boundaries and become private and how my ethnography sheds light onto the various different uses of the Gurdwārā and its purpose as an institution for my interlocutors. With the examples of two of the largest Gurdwārās in the West Midlands, I consider how these uses reflect the debates between different Sikh groups about dichotomies such as public/private, sacred/secular and fundamentally, the relationship between the political and religious. Through a discussion of these two Gurdwārās, I show how they resolve tensions with being Sikh and living in Britain through *mīrī pīrī*. Each of these Gurdwārās are 'defending' the sovereignty of not only their physical space but also through the space of Sikhī in general, although they accomplish this in very different ways. To begin the chapter, I will briefly outline the role of Gurdwārās and explore the significance of Darbār Sāhib (also referred to as Harmandir Sāhib<sup>12</sup>) in Amritsar to assist with understanding the present role of Gurdwārās in Britain given that this history is commonly at the fore of my interlocutors' minds.

### What is a Gurdwārā?

Jasjit Singh explains that there are "two types of gurdwara, those built to mark key events in Sikh history, and those built to serve the religious and social needs of the community, although it is clear that in the Western Sikh diaspora, all gurdwaras fall into the second category." (2014a, p. 42) Gurdwārās all over the world are open for anyone to visit regardless of their religion or political affiliations. There are two essential rules when one visits a Gurdwārā: alcohol, tobacco and intoxicants are prohibited from being brought onto the premises and upon arriving one is expected to cover one's head and remove one's shoes. Gurdwārās in

---

<sup>12</sup> Darbār Sāhib is commonly referred to as the 'Golden Temple' in English but this is seen as disrespectful by many Sikhs, and I therefore refer to it by its proper name throughout my thesis to best indicate proper usage.

Britain do not have a uniform layout or décor and tend to be different from those in Punjāb and other areas in the Indian subcontinent. Each individual Gurdwārā is designed and built according to the size of its sangat and their financial resources. Gurdwārās range from grand buildings to more modest locations such as converted houses or industrial buildings and many Gurdwārās in Britain are also converted from old Churches (Singh, 2006, p. 149). Every Gurdwārā will have a foyer/cloakroom area, langar and a Darbār (a court often the main hall in a Gurdwārā) which houses the Gurū's 'seat'. The latter is the vital part of any Gurdwārā without which there is in effect no Gurdwārā (Nesbitt, 2005, p. 39).



*Figure 16 - Pālki, golak and stage area (Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick Facebook page)*

The Darbār is the focus of worship and the place from which the Gurū's teachings are communicated; it is where the Gurū holds court for the Sikhs. The pālki or 'throne' is an ornate space where the Gurū is seated, elevated at the 'head' of the Darbār. Placed before the Gurū, there is a selection of weapons that can be used for protection in the event of an attack. In front of the palki there is usually a 'golak' or money box, where a donation (either monetary or food) for charitable causes (and often to cover Gurdwārā expenses) can be made (Figure 16). It is voluntary, although it is customary for Sikhs to donate on each visit. The throne of the Gurū

is a practical representation of the concept of *mīrī pīrī* in order to demonstrate the prominence of living both spiritually and temporally for any of the Gurū's visitors.

Draped down from the *pālkī*, covering the Gurū Granth Sāhib are *rumalleh* (clothes that are used to keep the Gurū Granth Sāhib clean and protected). The dressing of the Gurū Granth Sāhib in clothing is especially meaningful because as Cohn writes, "clothes are not just body coverings and matters of adornment, nor can they be understood only as metaphors of power and authority, nor as symbols; in many contexts, clothes literally *are* authority<sup>13</sup>." (1996, p. 114, original emphasis) Within the *pālkī* installation, a *chānanī* (canopy) can be seen above the raised platform of the Gurū Granth Sāhib. This is used as a mark of respect and also as a shade for the Gurū. There may also be a Sikh standing or sitting behind the Gurū Granth Sāhib with a fan, known as the *chaur Sāhib*. This is also used as a mark of respect and used to keep the air fresh around the Gurū. The rest of the *sangat* sits on the floor often with an aisle down the middle. In most of the *Gurdwārās* in Britain, unlike many *Gurdwārās* in India, men will sit on one side and women on the other. This was the case in all of the *Gurdwārās* that I visited throughout my fieldwork.

The form of the Sikh *Darbār* materialises ideas of combined temporal and spiritual power, just as the *Darbār* courts under the Sikh kingdoms and those under British rule did. The British 'Durbar' was used to send a message of imperial authority. The term 'Durbar' is an Anglicisation of the Indian term *darbar*, an Urdu word. They were important for exerting

---

<sup>13</sup> In this context the authority of clothing refers to the fact that the Gurū Granth Sāhib is dressed in decorative clothing that would usually be reserved for royalty. Through her Muslim interlocutors, Emma Tarlo (2010) shows how multi-layered outfits embody complex, multiple and hybrid identities which she terms an 'ensemble.' In a similar way, dressing the Gurū in this way is a material representation of an equal positioning to royalty or sovereignty. Additionally, dressing the textual format of the Gurū Granth Sāhib also represents the Gurū as a living being, treated in a parallel manner to a human.

political power through the appropriation of Indian practise and social power through drawing on existing practises and codes (Cohn, 1987, pp. 647-682). The material manifestation of the Darbār in the Gurdwārā shows the significance of the interwoven history of spiritual and temporal power.

In every Gurdwārā, there is also a further room that might not be clearly apparent, but it is always there, this is called sachkhand. It is a special, peaceful room inside the Gurdwārā that is used as a bedroom by the Gurū. Within this room there is little in the way of either furniture or appliances. There are cupboards for some of the Gurū's clothing. The focal part of the room is a bed for the Gurū Granth Sāhib. Every morning the Gurū Granth Sāhib is brought from the bedroom into the Darbār, where it 'holds court' throughout the day. In the evening, the Gurū is returned to their bedroom by two members of the sangat, the first carrying the Gurū above their head, and the second fanning the Gurū with the chaur Sāhib. The sangat or visitors do not generally go into this room unless they are cleaning up, vacuuming etc as it is considered a haven of tranquillity for the Gurū.

It is customary for Sikhs (or any visitors) to walk up to the pālki where respect can be paid to the Gurū. For Sikhs this usually involves saying a short, silent prayer followed by bowing and touching their forehead onto the floor. For non-Sikhs who are uncomfortable with this, it is appropriate to humbly nod one's head before the Gurū. There is no obligation for non-Sikhs to bow in front of the Gurū. For some of my interlocutors, non-Sikhs placing their forehead on the floor would be seen as offensive because touching one's forehead to the floor in front of the Gurū is not an 'empty ritual' but is symbolic of one 'giving their head to the Gurū.' This relates back to the story of Vaisakhī and the formation of the Khālsā. The Khālsā was founded in 1699 at Anandpur Sāhib where Gurū Gōbind Singh addressed the sangat and drew his sword (N.-G. K. Singh, 2005, p. xi). He asked for a volunteer that would be willing to sacrifice their head (Mahmood, 2010, pp. 43-45). One volunteer came forward and he took him inside a tent.

The Gurū returned without the volunteer but with a bloody sword. He repeated his call for a volunteer and did this until he had a total of five volunteers, each time repeating the same process.

After this, he returned to address the sangat with the five volunteers, all safe. He called these five the panj piare (five beloved ones) (Mahmood, 2010, pp. 43-45) Gurū Gōbind Singh prepared the amrit: water sweetened with sugar crystals and churned with a Khandā, a double-edged sword. He then administered this to the panj piare whilst reciting from the Adi Granth (the precursor to the Gurū Granth Sāhib) (Cunningham, 1918, pp. 68-69). This became known as the khande de pahul/amrit sanchār or initiation ceremony of the Khālsā (Dhavan, 2011, p. 49; Mahmood, 2010, pp. 43-45). He gave them a new surname in order to remove any previous identities associated with them for men this was 'Singh' meaning lion (Cunningham, 1918, pp. 68-69; S. Singh, 2005, pp. 67-68). He also gave them a uniform in the form of the panj kakkars (sometimes referred to as the five k's) which were kesh (uncut hair), kangā (a wooden comb), karā (an iron or steel bangle), kirpān (a sword) and kacherā (short breeches) and a rehat or a code of conduct (Nesbitt, 2016; Owen Cole, 1978). Following the initiation of the panj piare, Gurū Gōbind Singh asked them to initiate him as a Khālsā. Prior to this he was known as Gōbind Rai later becoming Gōbind Singh (Mahmood, 2010, pp. 43-45).

Depending on the time of day and the particular Gurdwārā, there may be a granthī (someone that has been trained to read the Gurū Granth Sāhib for an audience) reading from the Gurū Granth Sāhib or a rāgī (musician) singing selected shabads ('poems' or extracts from the Gurū Granth Sāhib) alongside the pālkī. The main way that Sikhs worship inside the Gurdwārā is by listening or reading along with the person that is reciting the Gurū Granth Sāhib. Kathā is a regular form of teaching in the Darbār where a learned Sikh will explain what has been read aloud from the Gurū Granth Sāhib and they may use historical accounts to place the Gurū's teaching in context to modern life. Many Gurdwārās now have projectors installed which offer



an English interpretation of what is being read so that those who are unable to understand Punjabi (usually second and third generation Sikhs) are able to follow.

The importance of the Gurū in the Sikh way of life is supreme and the respect afforded to the Gurū is indicative of this. Riat expresses that “the Guru Granth Sahib is revered as a living and Eternal Guru; Sikhs believe it has the ability and authority to perpetually and eternally perform the roles and functions of a living Guru which include bestowing blessings and grace; providing spiritual enlightenment; transforming individuals; and cultivating Divine qualities to move one closer to uniting with God.” (2013, p. 44) Regardless of any differing beliefs among my interlocutors, this idea was one that they all fundamentally agreed on. Sikhs believe that when the sangat congregates in the presence of the Gurū each individual reaches a heightened state of awareness and has a greater opportunity of experiencing a divine emotion which also relates to the statement from my interlocutor included at the beginning of Chapter 3: Sangat. Therefore, the Gurdwārā is an important space for Sikhs to worship together in sangat, despite the fact that they could contemplate or read from the Gurū Granth Sāhib within their own home. The Sikh concept of darshan of the Gurū becomes crucial as a means of not only literally ‘seeing’ and being ‘seen’ (Cohn, 1996, p. 161) by the Gurū but also partaking in sangat. The experience of being with the Gurū in a Gurdwārā marks the presence of the Gurū which is a presence of the Divine which cannot exactly be represented which is what Engelke might describe as “the problem of presence” (2007).

### Spirit of the Eternal Gurū

The Gurū Granth Sāhib is one element of the living embodiment of the Gurū (Mann, 2017; P. Singh, 2014a). Gurū Nānak I to Gurū Nānak X disseminated the Divine Revelation through ‘Gurbānī’ (compositions of the Gurū). Over the Gurū period, these compositions were compiled and eventually resulted in the Gurū Granth Sāhib. The Gurū Granth Sāhib captures

the essence of the Gurū and literally became Gurū when the gurgaddī (gurūship) was passed on from Gurū Nānak X (Gurū Gōbind Singh) in 1708. This means that “at the succession of the GGS [Gurū Granth Sāhib] the outer appearance of the Gurū was merely transformed, whereas the interior ‘spirit’ remained the same.” (Myrvold, 2017, p. 131) The scripture, known as the sarūp, which can be understood as the “body” (Kaur-Singh, 2004; N.-G. K. Singh, 2005, 2008; Singh & Kaur, 1993) is seen as containing the jōt (light or essence) of its predecessors and so is treated accordingly (Singh, 2018, p. 341). The scripture embodies the preceding incarnations of Gurū Nānak and therefore has a kind of ‘life’. Sikhs have a relationship with the Gurū; the Gurū has human qualities, needs and social agency (Myrvold, 2007; Myrvold, 2017). The practices of caring for the Gurū tend to dictate the routine of the day at a Gurdwārā and create the atmosphere of partaking in a sovereign’s court.

### The institution of langar

Langar is a key institution that helps in the practice of mīrī pīrī and a central part of the functionality of the Gurdwārā. At the most basic level, langar is about the provision of food, however, it also enables spiritual connection whilst also the opportunity to partake in temporal activities through cooking, cleaning, serving, and sharing food together.

Food is a basic component of social life and can be used as an indicator of social differentiation through social hierarchy constructs such as class, caste, status, and power (Appadurai, 1988; Ferris, 2012; Fischler, 1988; Gabaccia, 2000; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1994; Opie, 2010; Pilcher, 1998; Tierney & Ohnuki-Tierney, 2012). Commensality has been studied by anthropologists as a means of gaining insight into one’s interlocutors. Eating is fundamentally an act of the incorporation of ‘otherness’ and eating together is a symbolic act that serves as a metaphor of the collective self (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1994). Fischler described eating as “we send food across the frontier between the world and the self, between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ our body” (1988, p.

279). This is crucial for the understanding of langar not only as a practice of shared eating but also as an institution that requires the breaking down of social hierarchy particularly in relation to the importance of food in South Asian ideas of caste.

Langar has four key elements (Singh, 1969, p. 15). First, it gives a secular dimension to sangat. Second, it adds to the functionality of a Sikh group or community. Third, it translates the fundamental principle of equality into practice because of its obligation of *all* people, regardless of status or any other 'defining' features; they sit on the ground and eat together through the institution of pangat (sitting at the same level in rows) (Singh & Fenech, 2014, p. 22). Fourth, it acts as a cementing force among followers of the Sikh faith. Gurū Nānak attached vast importance to langar, as it became a significant step towards social reform (Singh, 1996, p. 208). It was an important rejection of a hierarchical social ideology by "promoting egalitarianism, community service, unity and belonging." (Hawley, 2014, p. 319; Singh & Fenech, 2014, p. 22; Srinivas, 1995, pp. 66-67)

Food plays an important role in religious life through the creation of boundaries as to who shares food and who does not. Chryssides and Moss show that the key difference between langar and the Eucharist is in the sociality of the act. "The character of *langar* by contrast with the Eucharist, ensures that there is no definition of those who do not belong, except those who wish to exclude themselves." (1985, p. 6, original emphasis) They highlight that although the theology of the Eucharist differs, Christianity generally accepts that the sacrament defines the Christian religious community to those who are considered as followers of Jesus Christ (Chryssides, 1985, p. 5). The langar extends the community of those that share food beyond those that identify as Sikh reflecting the fundamental Sikh ethos of oneness and extended forms of religio-kin politics.

The institution of langar comprises of the preparing, sharing and provision of food, an important and necessary commodity as ‘the sharing of food can symbolise *oneness*’.

(Chryssides, 1985, p. 5, original emphasis) This is the sentiment that is continuously expressed by my interlocutors. The provision of this food is free to all, regardless of whether one associates themselves with being Sikh or not. In the Gurdwārā, rather than the serving or giving of food, the emphasis of langar is on sharing and community. This can be seen through the partaking in langar sevā by all members of the community and sometimes by non-Sikh visitors. I regularly visited the Gurdwārā and participated in this sevā; mostly, I spent time in the kitchen when I was helping with the children’s summer camps. I assisted in the cooking, cleaning, and serving elements of langar. I also regularly consumed the food with many of my interlocutors.



*Figure 17 - langar being served to sangat sitting in pangat at Darbar Sāhib (Shafi, 2013)*

Langar is especially important as it extends the notion of equality and the practice of commensality. Sikhs and non-Sikhs are able to provide, prepare, distribute, and eat food together. The food is also always vegetarian to ensure ‘complete commensality’. Langar is therefore an important act of sevā and a declaration of openness (Owen Cole, 1985, p. 10; Y.

Singh, 2001, p. 18). It continues to reform society through its availability and accessibility to anyone, regardless of religion, class, caste, age, or gender (Kandal, 1999, p. 44).

## Kīrtan

Kīrtan is the performance of shabads (‘poems’ or extracts from the Gurū Granth Sāhib) to music<sup>14</sup>; “the purpose of Shabad kirtan is to experience Nam, the Divine presence, that resides in each person. Shabad (revealed Word) itself is the manifestation of anhad shabad (unuttered Word) that exists within each person.” (Kaur, 2011, p. 268) Kīrtan has been an essential element of Sikhī from its inception. From the janamsakhīs (oral tradition stories about the life of Gurū Nānak), we know that Gurū Nānak used to perform to the music of one of his companions, Bhai Mardanā (Kaur, 2011, p. 252). Particularly in the Gurdwārā, kīrtan is a core element of collective worship (Jacobsen, 2012, pp. 112-113), especially because in Sikhī, music is considered to be essential for connecting with Gurū and so, kīrtan is essential because it further facilitates this path (Mansukhani, 1982, p. 5). My interlocutors have described kīrtan to me as something that makes shabads more accessible to them. They are able to ‘join in’ with kīrtan because it has a rhythm and makes the shabads easier to follow and recite. Kīrtan also helps them to connect with the sangat through collective singing.

As previously explored in Chapter 3: Sangat and in the earlier sections of this chapter, Sikhī is concentrated on feeling, experience, and emotion. This type of worship helps to create an atmosphere of ‘calm’ and a space where devotees can connect to the sound of the music and more importantly, the words that are being sung. One of my interlocutors, a young man, reflected on the way that kīrtan is sung as it can influence the feelings that kīrtan can evoke.

---

<sup>14</sup> Some examples of kīrtan can be found on YouTube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hhzb8GPdbk>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxQQaGqTmDU&list=RDpxQQaGqTmDU&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxQQaGqTmDU&list=RDpxQQaGqTmDU&start_radio=1)

He felt that kīrtan sung traditionally using instruments from the Gurū period and sung in the intended rāg (a musical form in Indian classical music) creates the feeling of being in the presence of the 'Divine' and is inexpressible, "there are no words to describe that feeling." A middle-aged woman who is a professional and a mother of two, told me that kīrtan usually provides the answers to questions that she has and said, "it is like having a conversation with the Gurū."

Shabads, which literally are Gurū, are sung in rāg to evoke a particular kind of emotion linked to the message of the particular shabad (Grewal, 1996, p. 223; Singh Khabra, 2012, p. 148). Purewal and Lallie describe this as, "the spiritually emotive essence of kirtan makes it a significant dimension of the Sikh diasporic imaginary in evoking spirituality as well as longing, belonging, assertion, and creativity. The meditative and sometimes evocative state associated with kirtan contributes to its continuing circulation and popularity in the diaspora as an integral part of the Sikh diaspora experience." (2013, p. 384) In the Sikh diaspora, it is vital for Sikhs to feel a sense of community and connectedness and music, in the form of kīrtan, helps to build this relationship for Sikhs both within the sangat and with the Gurū. "Sikh devotional music in the diaspora represents the structuring of identity through its performance which, as can be observed across different global contexts, provides a musical backdrop to currents around orthodoxy, heterodoxy and musical traditions." (Purewal & Lallie, 2013, p. 382) The Gurū Granth Sāhib is written in thirty-one rāgs with some of these forms actually being developed by the Gurūs themselves creating a further connection for Sikhs through the invoking of the Gurū through modes of memory.

### Gurdwārā as 'mīrī pīrī'

The physical space of a Gurdwārā is a representation of Sikh philosophy. The most striking example of this is the Darbār Sāhib complex. Darbār Sāhib is the central seat of authority for

Sikhs both spiritually and politically (Figure 18). The Akāl Takht (the throne of the Timeless God), constructed across from Darbār Sāhib, is a physical representation of the temporal realm and the Darbār Sāhib itself is a representation of the spiritual realm (Singh, 2006, p. 147; P. Singh, 2014b, p. 56). Gurdwārās in the diaspora are significant as many of them are not built as heritage sites but rather as community hubs that feature as the nexus of the local Sikh community. Singh argues that it is important to focus on Darbār Sāhib as a “site, which not only represents religion and religious history but also politico-economic currents, processes and activities.” (P. Singh, 2014b, p. 50)

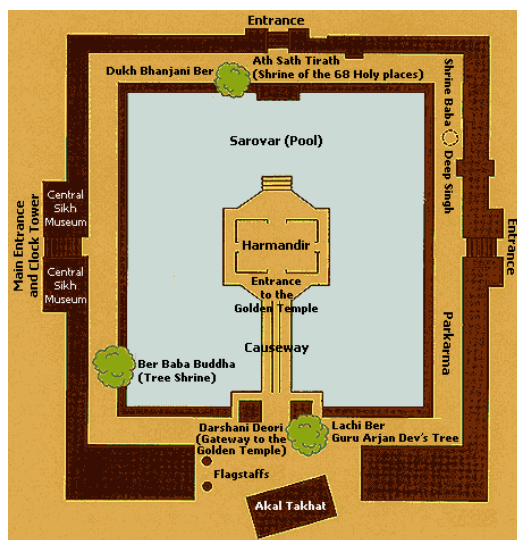


Figure 18 - Layout of Darbār Sāhib complex (Sabyachar.com, 2020; Sikhnet, 2010)

The complex serves as a blueprint for all Gurdwārās across the world, both in terms of its architecture and its implementation of Sikh culture, ideology, and polity. This is an interesting reference point for Gurdwārās in Britain because many are not purpose-built and are converted usually from Churches or industrial buildings. When a Gurdwārā inhabits a Church, it tends to follow the existing spatial infrastructure such as having an ‘aisle’ to the Gurū, where the Gurū is usually at one end of the Darbār rather than in the centre as is common in many Gurdwārās in India and Pakistan. Through an exploration of migrant and diasporic

communities in Britain, Werbner describes the way “that the creation of diasporic spaces of identity requires significant material investment and hence also social mobilisation. Social space in this sense may be defined as the nexus of financial, organisational, cultural and imaginative investment.” (2017, p. 9) Werbner shows that the existence of a diaspora is required to invest not only financially but also in all other domains to ensure that ‘authenticity of the original’ is preserved. One of my interlocutors, an architect, explained that because the original architecture of a Gurdwārā has changed it impacts the way Sikhs practice Sikhī and has therefore now impacted the Sikh ‘psyche’ and affected their understanding of what it means to be Sikh and how to practise Sikhī.

Pritam Singh (2014b) argues that the spiritual, economic, and political economy are all integral parts of Darbār Sāhib. Historically, studies of Darbār Sāhib have focused on it as a “heritage site or due to the tumultuous events surrounding Operation Blue Star” (P. Singh, 2014b, p. 50). The Gurdwārā often has its own spiritual economy and tends to run primarily from donations that are both financial and functional. The Gurdwārā is also run entirely by sevādārs (volunteers), and it is likely that many of these people will have other jobs and do this as part of their sevā. Pritam Singh (2014b, p. 61) describes this as, “the flows of people which stream into the Gurdwara [...] are matched by flows of monetary activity, whether in cash, commodity or in kind, showing the site to exhibit a complex spiritual economy.” I argue that as Darbār Sāhib is the economic, political, and spiritual centre of Amritsar (P. Singh, 2014b, pp. 53-54), Gurdwārās are the economic, political, and spiritual centre for Sikhs in general. Gurdwārās activate a cosmological sense of a Sikh state in specific ways through the immediate presence of the Gurū and Sikh institutions that might seem to be more muted in a domestic house such as commensality or forms of collective worship, though it is worth noting that some families host their own kīrtan smāgams (gatherings) at their homes where they will invite other members of the sangat to participate.



## Gurdwārās in Birmingham

The West Midlands and primarily Birmingham, are home to a large proportion of Gurdwārās in Britain (approximately fifty). Gurdwārās in general are structured in one of two ways: one with a system of elected committees and the other through the guidance of a spiritual leader known as a Sant or a Babā (Nesbitt, 2005, pp. 93-94). During my fieldwork, I spent time at the two largest Gurdwārās in Birmingham: one of them with an elected committee, Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Smethwick and one that is led by a spiritual leader, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha in Handsworth to uncover the different solutions to the problem of being a public religion in Britain, for Sikhī.

### Guru Nanak Gurdwara (GNG), Smethwick

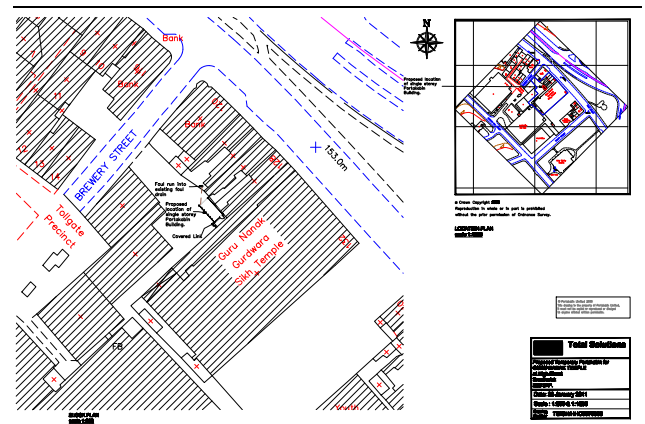


Figure 19 - Guru Nanak Gurdwara – Smethwick (Photo from Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick Facebook Page)

Guru Nanak Gurdwara (GNG) (Figure 19) is the largest Gurdwārā in Europe, spanning a total area of approximately seventy thousand square metres. The building has a number of facilities including a gym (generally used for boxing and mixed martial arts classes), classrooms, a lecture theatre, and a number of Darbār Sāhibs. Building work commenced in the late 1990s

and ever since, the Gurdwārā has been expanding in order to accommodate the growing Sikh community. GNG's website<sup>15</sup> explains the history of the Gurdwārā as

*Europe's first Gurdwārā to be purchased and used purely for the purpose of worship by the Sikh community in the United Kingdom. The building is four storeys high. Guru Nanak Gurdwara is a non-profit organisation, located in the in the West Midlands, UK. It was established in 1961 and is one of the most prominent and influential Sikh Gurdwārās in the world. The Gurdwārā Sāhib is open seven days a week and holds daily programs for local Sikhs and visitors to pray and seek blessings. It has more than ten thousand weekly congregation. A Church building at 130 High Street in Smethwick was purchased. With the Gurū's blessings we had a Gurdwārā where it became possible for the Sikh Communities from Birmingham and the neighbouring towns to be able congregate under one roof and worship the name of God. The purchase price for the premises was eleven thousand and six hundred pounds and the Gurdwārā opening took place on 31st July 1961. The present Gurdwārā premises is still at the old church site but has been totally rebuilt to gleam majestically. Now, the Gurdwārā complex consists of nine halls, of which two main halls have the capacity to hold around one thousand, five hundred members of the congregation at one time. The other seven halls include two Langar halls. The Gurdwārā has programs running continuously throughout the day. The programmes begin daily when Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī arrives from the sachkhand Sāhib into the lower main hall in the early hours of the morning. Nitnem (morning prayers) commence and then Srī Asā Dī Wār (a selection of poems from the Gurū Granth Sāhib) is sung by the rāgīs (musicians). Programmes run continuously everyday till dusk when Rehrās Sāhib starts which then begins the evening services at the Gurdwārā Sāhib. Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī is taken back to the Sachkhand Sāhib at the end of services in the evening. Throughout the day Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī presides*

---

<sup>15</sup> <http://smethwickgurdwara.co.uk>

*over the Sikh congregations. This is the Maryadā (conduct) that is followed.*

*Throughout the day thousands of Sikhs and non-Sikhs attend the Gurdwārā Sāhib to worship and visit the beautiful Gurdwārā complex. Gurū Kā Langar (free community kitchen) is served all day long, every day for three hundred and sixty-five days a year.*

This statement shows how certain institutions such as the langar are illustrative of the values of the Gurdwārā, and more importantly, Sikhī. This particular Gurdwārā has one of the largest congregations in Britain. The congregation is made up of Sikhs from across Birmingham and its surrounding areas. Some are attracted by the political stance of the Gurdwārā, and others attend as it is one of the largest Gurdwārās in the West Midlands. Many of my interlocutors lived in the vicinity of the Gurdwārā. All ages and genders attended but the committee is made up of primarily young men who would define themselves as Sikh activists. Approximately half of them are small business owners and around a quarter are young professionals. This Gurdwārā is known for its 'political' engagement and affiliation to youth groups such as Sikh Youth UK and is used as a space to partake in discourse and dialogue relating to different community matters.

The Gurdwārā's political engagement was encapsulated during an emergency meeting that was held to address Sikh girls being groomed by Pakistani, Muslim men (Figure 20). The meeting focused on discussion about the issue of Sikh women in the Sandwell area being targeted by groomers. There was a focus of this issue being 'brushed off' and not being addressed seriously. Tensions between groups as to how this issue is being handled were also highlighted. Some people tried to draw attention to other issues such as abuse in the Sikh community more generally and to move the discussion away from the contentious issue of grooming by Pakistani, Muslim men.

The meeting was held in the lecture theatre in the Gurdwārā and had been advertised widely on social media. By the time I arrived, the meeting had already started, and the lecture theatre was full. There were no seats left and many people were standing on the stairs and sitting on the floor. There was a mix of young men and women with the majority of the attendees probably around the age of thirty-five and under. There were members from all across the Sikh community in the West Midlands and some from London.



*Figure 20 - Emergency meeting held at GNG lecture theatre (Photo from Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick Facebook Page)*

The event was primarily hosted by Sikh Youth UK (SYUK) who are the charity that are most heavily involved with assisting and publicising this issue. There was a panel of speakers and comments and questions from the audience. A lady in the audience from a charity called the Sikh Women's Action Network (SWAN) raised the point that she did not agree with the statement that the issue was Muslim men grooming Sikh women. She said that this was 'a broader issue of abuse and not one that is between religious communities.' This caused some agitation from SYUK because it was detracting from the focus of the event and what started out as a fairly calm discussion, became very heated. Deepa Singh, one of the hosts, referred to the comment that the lady made as a 'denial of the problem.' She responded by saying that she was not denying the issue and that abuse happens in all communities and also within the

Sikh community itself. He said that this was not the issue that they were dealing with today and that the issue they are discussing is more pressing and a more pertinent issue.

When I spoke with Deepa, after the event, he expressed his frustration to me that this lady did not seem to understand the crux of the problem. For him it was more important to tackle the grooming of Sikh girls by Pakistani, Muslim men because this was something that was not being addressed by the state or the police, and never had been. Deepa expressed that this was not a means of only 'protecting' the women of the community because they were capable of this themselves. This is one of the reasons why the organisation's response to the issue was to hold self-defence classes at the Gurdwārā gym, that were 'women only' so that they were equipped to be able to defend themselves. Some of this stems from the dominant state narrative that South Asian women are at risk from within their own communities resulting from ideas of 'izzat' (loosely interpreted as honour). The organisation responds by showing that they protect their own women and more importantly that these women are able to protect themselves.

Never once was this issue recounted to me as one that was about honour explicitly (Werbner, 2002, p. 166), which is usually the lens through which issues surrounding women and specifically issues of the respectability of women are taken (see Abu-Lughod, 2002), particularly in the context of racialised minorities in the liberal British public sphere. The emphasis was placed on women being equitable to men in Sikh ideology and therefore entitled to the same rights and treatment as men and all other women. SYUK deems that the state has a responsibility to protect all of its citizens from issues such as abuse, and they see the neglect of young Sikh women in these situations as being markers of failing to recognise Sikhs in Britain as British citizens. They also believe that the state has the responsibility to treat all women and citizens equally, so this is a move away from gendered issues and more towards equality for all citizens. Hall et al. conducted a study in Birmingham and identified "Gurdwaras

[as] expand[ing] their counselling and the provision of meals to fill gaps in social welfare left by a receding state." (2017, p. 3) Deepa acknowledged the lack of care given to young Sikh women as another example of a gap in social welfare. He saw it as his responsibility and more importantly, as his *sevā*, to defend his community as exemplified by *shaheeds* (Sikh martyrs) throughout Sikh history. For Deepa, the purpose of this event was to come together as a collective or a 'panth', as a sovereign people to tackle this issue. This example shows how Sikhs are claiming their rights to be equal citizens through debates about Sikh women by demanding that Sikh citizens be treated equally to other citizens and that Sikh women should be protected like all women from abuse, but it is also about separating Sikhs from Muslims as citizens, as they are the intended targets of securitisation policies and Islamophobia. There are also links to the perceived tensions that exist between some Muslim and Sikh groups, especially where there has been an imposed position of 'good' versus 'bad' migrants. This draws parallels to Back et al.'s (2012, p. 140) 'hierarchies of belonging' whereby certain migrant groups attempt to align with forms of majoritarian nationalism so as to not seem like 'bad' migrants especially in the context of post-multiculturalism.

### *Policing the Gurdwārā*

The Sikh community seems to be experiencing a growing contradiction in its relations with public institutions and the British and Indian states and therefore some of my interlocutors are deliberately antagonistic towards both the Indian and British states. This tension between the expectation of a Sikh in Britain and what Sikhs in Britain hope to be or believe that they are, has created a more visible Sikh that does not fit the traditionally expected image of a 'British Sikh.' This is that Sikhs are peaceful people that assimilate well into British society which has been further exacerbated through policies such as Prevent. This has created a hostile atmosphere specifically in areas such as Birmingham where there is a significant racialised migrant community. This is a parallel to other Sikh diasporas such as those in the United

States for example Kaur argues that core principles of Sikhī are being reappropriated to “argue for global acceptance in a white supremacist nation” (2020, p. 8) which creates a more oppositional identity politics for Sikhs.

The Gurdwārā ideally is an open public space, but when it is ‘political’ it has to be protected from the intrusions of the police and the Prevent policy. These are explicitly seen as agents of a hostile state that does not allow Sikhs to maintain their sovereignty. The Gurdwārā treads an unclear boundary of private worship and public politics. It is a space where Sikhs can go to do ‘Sikh things’ without the risk of being ‘policed’ as they would be in the wider public sphere. As one of Harleen Kaur’s interlocutors described, “our gurdwaras were our one safe space.” (2020:8) The violation of this principle became a scandal within the Sikh social media sphere where a video of a Sikh police officer being removed from a Gurdwārā went viral in November 2018. Whilst this video did not take place at this Gurdwārā (GNG), it was particularly important as it included members from this Gurdwārā’s regular sangat. The video showed a police officer being told to leave a Gurdwārā in Walsall. This police officer was identifiably Sikh given his turban. The police officer was there with other members of the West Midlands police for a recruitment drive. The video displayed a non-violent yet still quite insistent encounter between members of the sangat and the police officer. The Sikh police officer, along with other members of the West Midlands police force were continually asked to leave. The police officers were told,

*West Midlands Police are banned from Sikh spaces...you are part of Indian collusion.  
You provided Intel on Jagtar Singh Johal, which led to the torture of a British citizen.  
West Midlands Police is interfering in India’s matters. Clearly there is collusion going on...Lets keep the peace. We can have a discussion later. This is nothing personal against you.*

One of the reasons this ban was implemented was as a result of rising tension between Sikhs and the British State. This stems from the case of British citizen, Jagtar Singh Johal (see Chapter 1: Introduction and Chapter 3: Sangat) and the West Midlands police allegedly supplying intel about Johal to the Indian government. As a result of this 'betrayal' a decision was taken to prohibit the West Midlands Police from attending the Gurdwārā. Despite this decision, the police came to the Gurdwārā for a recruitment drive.

This illustrates the dilemma of how this Gurdwārā imagines the relationship between public and private. This incident has shown how there is a desire from some Sikhs, such as this group to create the Gurdwārā as a sacred 'Sikh space' or even a Sikh "counterpublic" (Warner, 2002) because the public is seen as the aggressive state that is symbolised by the police. Warner's (2002) idea of the counterpublic is a set of publics that are in opposition to a dominant system and that strategically subvert how that system is publicly built. Hirschkind uses the term "counterpublic" to describe a contemporary Egyptian Muslim that is not like the regular public. The counterpublic "rests upon a conceptual edifice in which deliberation and discipline, or language and power are regarded as thoroughly interdependent." (Hirschkind, 2001, p. 106)

One of the most notable comments made by the Gurdwārā members was that the police officer was welcome to return to the Gurdwārā not in his police uniform and therefore not in his capacity as a police officer. He said, "You are banned, but not as members of the sangat, you are more than welcome. You are on duty. You are causing a scene, so we are nicely, humbly requesting you to leave." In the video, members of the Gurdwārā can be seen explaining the situation in a fairly confrontational manner yet there was no physical violence that took place. Extraordinarily, those members of the sangat that were involved in the confrontation uploaded the video to the Internet. Following from comments made on social media, one of the reasons that the video was released was as a means of sending a message that when these bans are in place, they are enforced. This shows the importance of the



identity of this Sikh being compromised due to his affiliation to the police force and subsequently as an agent of the British state. Technically, under normal circumstances the Gurdwārā is a private place of worship where anyone is welcome unless they are intoxicated. In this instance, the space has become restricted, and the turbaned police officer compromised, being forced to identify as a police officer rather than a Sikh. Here there is a difference in opinion as to what it means to be a Sikh in Britain. The British state is taking a 'secular' view of Sikhī and therefore is regarding the Gurdwārā as 'just' a 'religious' site in a private sense, not as a different kind of state of being. To some extent, this is encapsulated by the police officer through his understanding of what it means to be Sikh, however, it does not align with the views of the other members of the Gurdwārā.

In this situation, for the members of the Gurdwārā, it is impossible to be a Sikh and to be visibly an official member of the West Midlands Police. The police officer is inappropriate in the private space of worship because he is representing the British state in a space where it should not be present in accordance with ideas of Sikh sovereignty. This is a clear statement against the division between the public, and private religion to use it against the dominant state by claiming that if this is a private religious space, then agents of the state such as the police should not be there to recruit.

The police officer in the video is Sergeant Harvey Singh, one of the most senior Sikh police officers in Britain. In a 2020 BBC (Hundal, 2020) documentary titled 'Young, Sikh and Proud<sup>16</sup>,' Sunny Hundal, a journalist asked Singh if he felt any contradiction between being a Sikh and being British. Singh's response was

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/proginfo/2020/04/young-sikh-and-proud>

*I know what being Sikh is, and I live in Britain, I pay my taxes in Britain, and my wife was born in Britain and my kids were educated here, I was educated here. My life is in Britain, so, technically, yes, I am British, and I happen to be a Sikh, so I am a British Sikh. It's very humbling, and I'm very proud, and privileged that the community have someone to go to. I will be sensitive to their cultural needs. But there is a conversation taking place in the community to say that being a Sikh and being a police officer aren't compatible. I totally disagree with that totally. I think being a police officer you have to be honest. Sikhī espouses honesty y'know throughout its history. You have to earn an honest living, work hard, you know that's what policing does. There's a sense of integrity. It just fits everything that I understand Sikhī to be.*

Here there is a failure of a common understanding of what it means to live according to mīrī pīrī given the different understanding of it by the turbaned police officer and the members of the Gurdwārā. In the policeman's view, he does not appear to experience a contradiction between being a representative of the police, and of the British state, as well as being a Sikh. For him, a public identity as an enforcer of the law did not contradict his religious duty. The debate extends beyond the question of whether or not a Sikh policeman should go to a Gurdwārā as a Sikh, but it is also about whether Sikhs should even serve the British state.

### *Sikh Multiculturalism*

The context in which I conducted my fieldwork grew out of the era of multiculturalism and its transformation under the 'Big Society' agenda that argued for civic and community virtue, however, removing most of the funding for this and instead arguing for volunteers and communities to help themselves. The emphasis here is on a Conservative communitarianism which is confusing when coupled with Sikh values that have an ethos of sevā, sometimes seen as a form of humanitarianism which involves Sikhs taking care of the wider community before

taking care of themselves. This results in a dilemma for Sikhs when choosing to project their Sikhī authentically for example during British national festivals such as Christmas where minority faiths have to show they are ‘secular’ and ‘rational’ by celebrating them as well.

I decided that I would spend part of Christmas and New Year at GNG Gurdwārā to observe what kinds of practices took place, given that these are significant events in the British calendar and not in the Sikh one. I arrived at the Gurdwārā in the afternoon on Christmas Day in 2017. I had been sat in the Darbār for a while listening to the Gurū Granth Sāhib being recited and noticing the growing sangat. After a while a prominent kīrtan group from America came and performed. Often groups from all over the world will come to various Gurdwārās and perform kīrtan. I stayed until this had finished and then I left to spend the rest of the day with my host family.

On New Year’s Eve, there was a schedule of programs lined up. I arrived late in the evening around 9pm. There were various local groups that did kīrtan in a variety of styles. The programs were in the upstairs Darbār of the Gurdwārā. When I first arrived, the hall was not full and there was still space to sit. Around 10:30pm the sevādārs started to hand out small gutkās (small scriptures with select readings from the Gurū Granth Sāhib in them – Figure 21). Once they had finished handing them out, the pāth (recital) began in sangat rūp which is where the granthī reads a line followed by the sangat collectively reading the next line. As this pāth continued the Gurdwārā became busier throughout the evening. Despite it being very stuffy and warm, the atmosphere in the Darbār Sāhib was very calm and peaceful generated through the collective worship.



Figure 21 – Gutkā (H. Singh, 2005)

During the program, I looked around the Darbār Sāhib and I noticed that on the window ledge there were small Christmas trees (Figure 22). It reminded me of the mixed views I had heard about Sikhs celebrating Christmas and whether or not Sikhs should decorate their homes at Christmas time. Aside from this there was no obvious decoration that linked to Christmas. This was particularly noteworthy given the speech that was given at midnight by one of the Gurdwārā committee members who was a young man dressed in full bānā (traditional Sikh attire). The ambience at this time was very calm and peaceful but the speech that followed did not fit this tone. It was quite a blunt speech given in a mix of English and Punjabī that highlighted that this is not the Sikh New Year but that these programmes were taking place as a result of it being a time when all people have holidays. He said that despite this, any excuse for the sangat to get together is a good one.



*Figure 22 - Christmas trees as decoration in the Darbār Sāhib (photo taken myself)*

The speech focused on how this is a time when people tend to make resolutions. He said that Sikhs should make more of an effort to start keeping their hair, as it is an important part of who they are – it is their identity. The speech only lasted for a few minutes but drastically shifted the ambience in the Darbār. People started to make their way downstairs, some people went to the langar hall and others left. The Gurdwārā foyer became very congested, and it was difficult to get to my shoes! I eventually managed to get them and then made my way back to my car and host family. They were still awake when I got home as they had been out visiting some of their friends. We wished each other a Happy New Year and asked how each other's evenings were. I told them about the speech, as I was still thinking about it. Their faces seemed unimpressed and my Bhūā said to me "well, the thing is we live in this country and so this should be our calendar too. I don't think there's anything wrong with celebrating New Year."

## Mīrī pīrī in the public sphere

The public sphere seems to promise freedom and equality to all given its assumed 'free' and seemingly 'equal' access (Bangstad, 2013, p. 356). However, as evidenced by the Parekh report, it also defines and categorises minority groups. In the instance of Sikhs in Britain, it imposes a racialised religious identity upon them through race, class, and an expectation of acceptable forms of religion. This imposed identity is similar to the dilemma faced by Laura Bear's Anglo-Indian railway workers. She shows how the railways create contradiction for the Anglo-Indians, on the one hand they provide "individual liberty and social progress" (Bear, 2007) yet on the other they build upon "older practices of rule and social distinction." (Bear, 2007) During the colonial period, Anglo-Indians were doubly excluded from the public sphere as a result of the lack of concrete evidence to prove their kinship to or descent from British citizens therefore facing highly racialised and exclusionary restrictions. Anglo-Indians partly navigate these exclusions through an observance of Roman Catholicism which is a different form of religious identification to the dominant Anglican one. Sikhs in Britain also face a doubly excluded position from the British public sphere through a hierarchy that exists in the forms of race and class but also in the intersection of these two categories (Bangstad, 2013, p. 367; Mitra, 2015, p. 328). This imposition of a racialised religious identity influences Sikhs' own understandings of Sikhī and their positionality in Britain. There is an expectation of behaviour that follows fitting into a 'good diaspora' narrative (Bangstad, 2013; Liberatore, 2018) with earlier generations of Sikhs, whose primary goals were to improve their standard of living and potentially return home, accepted these impositions more readily.

One of the key conundrums for Sikhs is the secularism of the British public sphere. 'Secular' is a concept that is inescapable and one that cannot be ignored, as a historically produced idea, it impacts the way that we understand concepts such as religion and modernity. As Cannell explains, the definition of the terms "secular" and "secularism" are constantly shifting in the

literature (2010, p. 86). Secularisation theory and in particular how it helps us to understand the British public sphere is crucial for understanding whether, and to what extent, Sikhs can practice *mīrī pīrī* in contemporary Britain. Simplified to its most basic level, secularisation theory was “understood as both sign and consequence of an inevitable modernity.” (Cannell, 2010, p. 87) Cannell explains that the debate has developed from this understanding where the binary of the religious and secular is not so stringent. Pool develops the elements of secularism as a political ideology,

*“Secularism refers at once to a political ideology (the separation of religious and worldly powers, non- discrimination on the basis of religion, and the management of religious difference) and an epistemological and moral position (the valuation of belief-independent rationality; privatization and decrease of religiosity; and the rejection of tradition, the sacred, and the transcendent in favour of empirical evidence, logic, and the immanent). Secularism is deeply interwoven with the values of social liberalism (equality, individual freedom, tolerance, and plurality) and economic liberalism (free market economy and individual [property] rights).”*

(2020, p. 6)

Secularism with an underpinning of Anglicanism as the dominant norm is a direct contraindication of the essence of *mīrī pīrī* (Singh, 2019). As Liberatore’s (2017) British, Somali Muslim women interlocutors are not only adapting Islam to ‘fit’ the British context, they are effectively problematising what it means to belong, be recognised as ‘different’, who is considered a citizen and opposing the binary of ‘Islamic versus secular’, my Sikh interlocutors are engaged in a similar project and opposing the binary of ‘Sikhī versus secular’, and how this is navigated and practised in a dominant Anglican, liberal and racialised public sphere.

Suzanne Hall builds on Vertovec's (Vertovec, 2007a, 2007b) idea of super-diversity which is a useful tool for engaging with difference rather than assimilation amongst migrant groups (Hall, 2017, pp. 4-5). She describes "The migrant is the person necessary to but restricted from advanced capitalist societies." (Hall, 2017, p. 2) If we take Hall's approach it allows us to better understand the positionality of Sikhs in the public sphere and why there are "emergent dimensions of 'migrant-driven diversity'" (2017, p. 4) and therefore why there seem to be different ways of being Sikh not only *among* different groups of Sikhs but also *within* different groups of Sikhs. The celebration of Christmas and the New Year, shows how there are conflicting views within Sikh communities of how Sikhs should live and behave in Britain. One of these views demonstrated through the speech at midnight suggests that Sikhs should follow their routines and assert their identity in the public sphere and that to do otherwise is to somehow pollute it. The other view held by those such as my Bhūā, the Sikh police officer and Lord Singh which is one that is multicultural and encompassing or perhaps a form of Sikh secularism where there is no tension between practising Sikhī and being 'British'.

### *An Ambiguous Space*

Most of the attendees at the GNG Gurdwārā see it not only as a space for spirituality and politics but also a space for the community. In October 2018, they hosted a fresher's fair for Sikh university students across the country (Figure 23). This is an annual event hosted by the Gurdwārā as a space where Sikh students can access resources and discover Sikh organisations. It is held at the Gurdwārā and mainly organised by Sikh Youth UK. The event is held in the function room of the Gurdwārā with lots of stalls and an area for talks to be held in a manner similar to a fresher's fair that can be found at a university during fresher's week except it is much smaller and also comprises of presentations from some of the organisations and varied forms of entertainment.



The event ran from 5pm until 9pm and became progressively busier throughout the evening. A popular Sikh restaurant called Mr Singh's provided free pizza throughout the night. Some of the organisations that were in attendance included: Sikh Youth UK, Sikh2Inspire, British Organisation of Sikh Students (BOSS), Naujawani, Mr Singh's, Midland Langar Seva Society and Sikh Federation.



Figure 23 - Poster advertising GNG Freshers Fair (Photo from Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick Facebook page)

Approximately halfway through the event there was a short speech from Deepa Singh, from Sikh Youth UK. He thanked everyone for attending and explained a little about the organisation. He then introduced a speaker – a young girl, Hardeep, who is a student at Aston University. She spoke about how a girl was abused at university and how SYUK helped. She explained that the police didn't help or take it seriously. As she was speaking, the room

became very quiet, and the majority stopped what they were doing to listen to her testimonial. Hardeep then continued and talked about the problems that young women who suffer from abuse or 'grooming' experience and who were continuously referred to as 'victims.' She went into lots of detail about what happened to the girl including how she was raped and taken advantage of. After her talk Deepa came back to the stage and thanked Hardeep for speaking openly and bravely whilst highlighting the importance of staying safe at university. He said, "Sikh Youth are not trying to stop you going clubbing but trying to create awareness of the issues." He mentioned that most of the cases they deal with can come from problems in taxis, shisha bars, going out and now dessert bars because they are open late. He also said that he wanted to be clear that they "don't promote going out etc. but that they want to provide solutions." He suggested that you don't need to drink alcohol to go out and have a good time and that more Sikh societies should go out together and have social events so that people can socialise without needing to have alcohol. These stories seem to be in part an allegory for the mistreatment of the whole Sikh community historically at the hands of what they have seen as oppressive states as well as the contemporary exclusionary attitudes of the British state and police.

The next speaker to be introduced was Jagtar Singh Johal's brother, Gurpreet Singh. He had travelled down from Edinburgh to speak to students about what was happening to his brother. He spoke about how the 'naujawān' (youth) needed to get involved in helping to get his brother released. He said that it is grassroots people and protests such as students that can actually effect change. He mentioned that he was available if people want to ask anything and that he could provide the truth unlike what is perpetuated in the mainstream media. He asked for people to come to his stall to get groups going to help him get his brother released.

The final speaker was introduced as Bhai Gural Singh who spoke about the importance of "remembering who we are." He said, "We are all Kaur or Singh because someone in our family

chose to follow Gurū Gōbind Singh Jī, so we are blessed.” He talked about the importance of behaving a certain way at university and not forgetting your path. He then told a sakhī (story) about one of the sāhibzade (Gurū Gōbind Singh’s sons who became Sikh martyrs) and the symbolism of measuring Babā Ajit Singh chest to see how many arrows can fit (this is related to the story of when they were martyred). He then told another sakhī about Mata Gujārī (the mother of Gurū Gōbind Singh and the wife of Gurū Tegh Bahadur) asking where her four sons are. This was to symbolise the sacrifice made for Sikhs. He said that a “Gursikh is the son or daughter of Māhārāj (lit. king or ruler but the reference here is to Gurū Gōbind Singh as the ‘father’ of the Khalsā) and so we should not forget who we are.” He continued, “Our names are there for a reason.” He then spoke briefly about the shaheeds (martyrs) of 1984 and how this shouldn’t be forgotten and that ultimately, we should not forget the Gurū. In between the speeches there was entertainment in the form of music and a magic performance. This speech shows how the younger generations are also subject to the political legacies of the community and fall into the problematic gendered idea that women must ‘stay safe’. It shows that when Sikhs enter into unknown or new territory such as university, this could potentially be dangerous and threatening therefore Sikhs have a collective responsibility to shield themselves from these threats. This stems from the idea that the state does not equally protect all of its citizens (particularly women as highlighted by the concerns about grooming) and so they have to avoid being in situations where issues could potentially occur.

I walked around many of the stalls and collected resources, which varied from books, bookmarks, merchandise, and memorabilia. I made my way to the BOSS (British Organisation of Sikh Students) stall and one of the helpers spoke to me. We started talking about the langar on campus events that student societies often host, and she asked me what I thought of them. Not wanting to share too many of my own opinions I said to her that they were good but that I didn’t fully understand the purpose of them, and this was also part of my research. I said that I understood they were about creating awareness for Sikh societies, but I didn’t know much

more beyond that. She said to me that this is almost the 'party line' and that actually for her she believes the real purpose is to bring Sikhs together at university to create a sangat. She said that they have become more and more popular over the years and as a result have been getting bigger and gaining more traction especially in local media and recognition from university student unions. She described that for many Sikh societies it is the highlight event of the year, but she did believe that the main reason that they were being done was not necessarily a 'Sikh' thing because they did not necessarily capture the ethos of Sikhī or the institution of langar. She said that if the main reason was for awareness rather than to understand and practice langar then perhaps there needs to be a rethink of how these events are performed and framed. This is because she felt that often younger generations of Sikhs are not educated in Sikh institutions or their history and that university events could provide an opportunity to fill that gap. It also provides these young Sikhs with a 'safe space' and the potential to form a 'sangat' that they might not necessarily have had the opportunity for at university.

All of these previous themes of multiculturalism, multicultural secularism, state aggression and Sikh secularism were brought together in very ambiguous ways in the students' freshers fair held at GNG. The enactment of the politicisation of the Sikh identity by GNG transgresses the normative idea of the British private sphere that 'religion' should be unpolitical and restricted to the private sphere. This is echoed in Shani's argument that the politicisation of Sikh identity by Sikh political parties suggests a potential challenge to the state which also "relegates religious and ethnic identity to the 'private sphere'" (2015, p. 276). In a public sphere that dictates how one should live, there is a resulting scale of responses from groups such as minority religions that have ideologies that are not aligned with this way of living. Naturally some will integrate or assimilate in one form or another and others will be more resistant to this.

GNG is further politicising and demanding rights from the British state for its Sikh citizens whilst also acknowledging state concerns about women from South Asian backgrounds and 'deviant' minority communities. The recent history of the events of 1984 and the emphasis of the shaheeds (martyrs) are at the forefront of how the Gurdwārā positions itself. Through the formation of the Khālāsā<sup>17</sup>, and the responsibility placed on the Sikh panth with the inauguration of the Gurū Granth Sāhib as Gurū, Sikhs now explicitly bear the responsibility of sharing each other's trauma because the Khālāsā demands that its members uphold this level of accountability for the panth. The way that the Gurdwārā functions are all resolutions to making Britain 'home' through mīrī pīrī by making what the state would deem as 'religious' explicitly political and the basis for political demands through seemingly foregrounding mīrī. The other largest Gurdwārā in the West Midlands solves these same problems by foregrounding the 'religious' or seemingly 'pīrī' whilst not explicitly showcasing its ideas of 'mīrī.

---

<sup>17</sup> The Khālāsā was founded in 1699 by Gurū Gōbind Singh as an army that would operate in the name of the Gurū, create unity, cohesion, and the organisation of Sikhs.

## Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ)

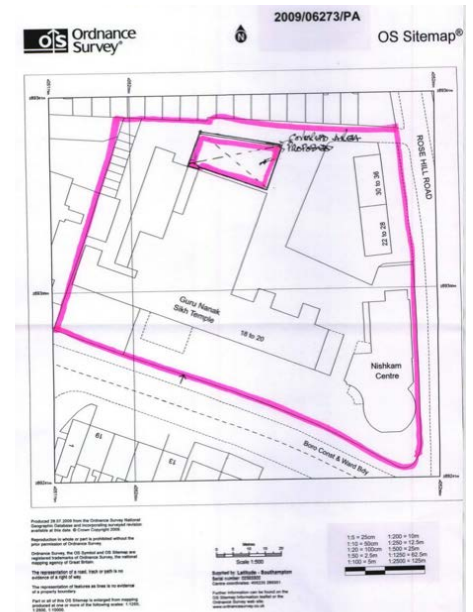


Figure 24- GNNSJ, Soho Road (Photo from GNNSJ Facebook page)

The other main, influential Gurdwārā in the West Midlands is the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) (Figure 24), commonly referred to as ‘Nishkam’ and follows the guidance of a spiritual leader, a ‘Sant’. This jathā (understood as contingent, sometimes described as a sect of Sikhī) adheres to the teachings of the Gurū as well as those of the founding spiritual leader, Sant Pūran Singh (Takhar, 2016, p. 38).

The majority of the followers of GNNSJ are Rāmghāriā (Takhar, 2016, p. 39). This means that their ancestors were members of the Rāmghāriā Misl (clan) from Māhārājā Ranjīt Singh’s period. Most of these Sikhs are described as the ‘twice migrants’ (Bhachu, 1985) which means that during their migration history, they arrived in Britain via East Africa. When these Sikhs arrived in Britain in the 1960s, many of them desired to establish a distinct identity (Singh, 2006, p. 151). Gurharpal Singh explains that "Ramgarhia migrants soon began to establish their own places of worship, both as a mark of separate identity and as a way of distancing

themselves from what many saw as lapsed Punjabi 'rustics'." (2006, p. 152) To some extent this is an alignment with the expectations for migrant communities in Britain that were outlined in multiculturalist policies and its predecessors.

Harpreet, a young woman sevādār at GNNSJ, who I met early on in fieldwork told me about the history of the group. GNNSJ was founded in the 1950's in Kericho, Kenya by Sant Pūran Singh. In 1975, Sant Pūran Singh migrated to Britain permanently. Following this, GNNSJ became a registered charity with its headquarters in Birmingham. The successor of Sant Pūran Singh was named as Bhai Sahib Bhai Norang Singh. He led the jathā after the passing of Sant Pūran Singh in 1983. Harpreet told me that a unique feature about Bhai Norang Singh is that he used to go into pubs to try and encourage people to reconnect with Sikhī. Many of the Sikhs in Birmingham worked in the foundries and used to socialise with their work colleagues in pubs as a way of integrating into British society. Often, this meant that the first wave of migrants to Britain began to lose their outward commitment to Sikhī by no longer choosing to adopt the turban and keep their hair. There was a concern that this could result in some Sikhs abandoning Sikhī in favour of assimilation. To address this anxiety, Bhai Norang Singh advised that they do ten minutes of simran (meditating) at lunch to help them come back into Sikhī. The Gurdwārā site opened in approximately 1976/1977 with the iconic dome being added in 1995 when Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh was named as successor.

As a result of the 1980s recession, the jathā opened a trade counter selling kitchens on property purchased by the Gurdwārā. This was to provide employment to members of the community and was also a way of living the principle of 'kirat' sometimes described as hard work or 'remembering God through work'. All of the workers were paid the same living wage or 'barkat'. Harpreet explained this to me as a 'spiritual enterprise,' similar to the idea of a social enterprise, but the focus is on connecting with the spiritual side. In 2005, the Nishkam Civic Association also known as the NCA or Nishkam Centre opened on the Gurdwārā complex.

Harpreet told me that the reason for this centre was because “you can’t always do business events at the Gurdwārā, so this provides a space for the community. We hold events, training, conferences, and there’s a gym.” Harpreet described the facilities to me as “not perfect but a brilliant space. It’s perfect for outreach and engagement of the community.” She also said it was a space for activities to take place that may not be appropriate in the Gurdwārā building itself, for example a gym may require the use of shoes or head coverings and so would be better suited in a different building.

Nishkam is seen as a controversial group among some of my other interlocutors. It has been described by some as a ‘cult’ or ‘not mainstream Sikhī’. I asked Harpreet about this, and she told me that often:

*people are jealous of Bhai Sahib. They (often as a sign of respect, my interlocutors will refer to respected people using the pronoun ‘they’ rather than ‘he’ or ‘her’) have a vision. Bhai Sahib’s leadership can do a lot and they have a skill to motivate people. The ultimate goal is to spread Gurū Nānak Dev Jī’s message. They develop personal connections with people. It is up to you how you feel comfortable paying your respect. A true Māh Purakh (spiritual leader) will lead you back to Gurū Granth Sāhib and so you show respect for that guidance. A Māh Purakh is there to help you build a connection to the Gurū. They are like a facilitator, like a teacher. They may be talk to you at a deeper level such as saying what’s in the Gurbānī (compositions of the Gurū). You respect them because of the respect they have for the Gurū.*

Takhar describes GNNSJ as a group that is still linked to mainstream Sikhī but that they ‘add’ to formal practices rather than deviating from them which is what differentiates them from mainstream Sikhī or the ‘panth’ (Takhar, 2016, p. 54). GNNSJ emphasises that they ‘do things properly rather than differently.’ (Takhar, 2016, p. 48, original emphasis) However, GNNSJ’s



commitment to the Sikh tradition suggests that there is not a divide along ideological lines but rather along those of social class (Singh, 2006, p. 153). This is demonstrated through the regular congregation of this Gurdwārā being described as Rāmghāriā Sikhs and the first generation of migrants generally being skilled labourers. Gurdwārās that are affiliated to GNNSJ have their own constitution and these rules are believed to have originated from Sant Pūran Singh (Takhar, 2016, p. 48), providing guidance on how the Gurdwārā should run in terms of how langar should be prepared and when Akhand pāths (recitals of the Gurū Granth Sāhib from beginning to end with no break, usually over a period of 48 hours) should begin.

Akhand pāths are an important part of worship for GNNSJ and are continuous at the main Gurdwārā in Birmingham and the group prides itself on having enough sevādārs to participate and enable this practice. On significant occasions such as Gurburbs (Gurū's birthdays) or Vaisakhī, GNNSJ performs five simultaneous Akhand pāths. This is a distinctive feature of the group and is not part of the Sikh code of conduct (Rehat Maryadā). When performing sevā, the group always dresses in white clothing which is a notable and unique characteristic of the group as there is no evidence to suggest that the colour white has any particular significance in Sikhī.

During my time at GNNSJ, I was fortunate to have interactions with the current leader, Bhai Sāhib Bhai Mohinder Singh. Bhai Sāhib Bhai Mohinder Singh grew up in Kenya and worked as a Civil Engineer before becoming the current leader of the jathā. He was a follower of the founder of GNNSJ and spent his time doing sevā (in service of) for him to work towards achieving his vision for the jathā. I met with him at the beginning of my fieldwork, and we had a long conversation about Sikhs in Britain and what the aims and goals of my research were. He told me that it was important that I use the correct terminology when describing the Sikh faith and encouraged me to refer to it as 'Sikh dharam.' This is because according to Bhai Sāhib, the term 'dharam' encompasses the responsibility and rights associated with the Sikh

faith. He told me that “to the creator, the entire creation is dharam.” This reiterates the claim made by Pool, that for her Bengali Muslim interlocutors, “*dharmā* encapsulates their ontological conceptions of being human and their ideas of life and society.” (2020, p. 1) This is where “*dharmā* encompasses ethics of justice and order” (Pool, 2020, p. 6, original emphasis) Bhai Sāhib was insistent upon this, and it was because he felt that it was important that authenticity is preserved. For him, misinterpretation was the cause of problems and leads to the creation of faith denominations. Building on Pool’s claim that if “development is to be considered worthwhile, it has to be embedded in *dharmā*” (2020, p. 4), for Bhai Sāhib, for my research to be worthwhile, it must be embedded in the Sikh idea of dharam.

Bhai Sāhib described to me what he saw as the history of Sikhs in Britain. He told me that we are at a moment in time where there are fourth generation Sikhs in Britain. The first generation were the economic migrants and faced lots of prejudice with many of them wanting to return home. Some of them tried to return home but couldn’t and so they stayed and tried to maintain their faith identity, but it was difficult. The second generation became compliant; Bhai Sāhib used the phrase “when in Rome...” to express this to me. They “did away with their identity.” This was partly because of the difficult circumstances they were facing as a result of racism and prejudice around beards and turbans in Britain. The third generation are the those that have a desire to ‘go back to Sikhī.’ These are the Sikhs that need their own identity so that they can respect others. The fourth generation are those that are making an effort to understand and speak Punjabī. However, they also have a language problem which stems from the fact that many of them have lost their original traditions because although they have their roots in the Punjāb, they do not have the same affinity or connection to it as previous generations do. They are conforming to religious practice as best as they can, but they do not have the same foundations as those before them; it has become diluted. Bhai Sāhib on occasion refers to these as the ‘failed generation.’ One of their greatest losses is the proverbial wisdom that came from being in Punjāb. This comes from language; these Sikhs

speak English at home and school therefore Punjabi begins to become less prominent. Bhai Sāhib referred to me as a member of this generation and so expressed that it was important for me to understand the dharam.

Bhai Sāhib told me that he felt that Sikhī was losing its originality. As Sikhī as a praxis is not ritualistic, I asked Bhai Sāhib about ritual and the role that this plays in Sikhī. He said that “the Gurūs were emphatic about ritualistic things.” This is exemplified by Sikh ritual being instituted in opposition to Hindu renunciation rituals (Uberoi, 1999, p. 5). He used an analogy of the human body to make his point about ritual and religion in general, not only in relation to Sikhī. He stated that the brain represented the substance or the core by which he meant the essence of Sikh teaching and theology. The skull represented ritual and was extended further to the hair being another level of ritual and the turban also being another. He said that the importance of ritual was to safeguard the brain or ‘core’ and that you cannot have the brain without a skull. Rituals are equivalent to a material bodily support provided by the skull. The skull not only protects the brain, but also the thought processes so that no evil or wicked thoughts occur. Bhai Sahib said that this analogy can also be used in relation to the heart suggesting an intriguing, different understanding of ritual, materiality, and the body of the worshipper.

For Bhai Sāhib, religion is something different from ritual, but ritual is a necessary protector of the substance. He told me that what is important is “what you do and how you do it; otherwise, it is ritualistic. There is a difference between ritual and being ritualistic.” Bhai Sāhib felt that some of these issues arise as a result of a “disconnect between one’s mother country or ancestral mother country.” Due to this, language becomes paramount and further explains why the use of the vernacular becomes imperative. The country that one resides in provides the context and understanding that becomes innate in an individual and therefore provides a threat to the authenticity of Sikhī. If Sikhs are unable to understand concepts such as mīrī pīrī

through a Sikh lens, then this naturally has an impact on how Sikhī is understood and practised therefore becoming a 'cycle' reminiscent of the case of Sahib (my Bhūā's son) not understanding Sikhī from a Sikh lens but rather from an Abrahamic one. Bhai Sāhib explains the need to prevent the encroaching of somewhere that isn't 'home' in the sense of a homeland because a 'foreign' and dominant public sphere does not necessarily have the right environment for Sikhī to flourish authentically. Bhai Sāhib's primary concern is an idea of how to be an authentic Sikh above all; in his understanding, being in Britain makes this more difficult because of the loss of the markers of a nation such as language or culture. GNNSJ as he sees it therefore prioritises religious preservation and revival by restoring the 'purity' to Sikhī.

### *Sikh Secularism?*

The GNNSJ Gurdwārā is well known in Birmingham as well as more broadly across Britain and globally. GNNSJ also tend to be the representative for Sikhs in a public setting, because of their alignment with the 'good diaspora' narrative, described by Liberatore as "an idealized construction of what a diaspora in Britain should do." (2018, p. 148) As part of GNNSJ's commitment to interfaith, they conduct 'faith guiding' at their main Gurdwārā on Soho Road. They regularly have visitors from schools and workplaces to have tours of the Gurdwārā and learn more about Sikhī showcasing their professionalism and the idea that it makes them educated and objective. Liberatore describes this as a "strategy of self-presentation" (2018, p. 160). I accompanied a few of these tours including one from a local law firm and one from a local school group. These tours are an illuminating insight into how the Gurdwārā and jathā presents itself to 'outsiders.' It is about its self-image of what it *should* take out into the public sphere.

The tour always begins with the guide welcoming and introducing the group to the Gurdwārā. They are taken to one of the langar halls at the back of the Gurdwārā that has rows of tables and chairs. They are then introduced to the Sikh faith including being told that the word Sikh means lifelong learner. The guide then says, “As the word Sikh means lifelong learner, it is our job to spend our life learning. In particular, we are learning how to become a good person, and live a values-led life.” The guide continues to explain that the word Gurū is made up of two words: *Gu* meaning darkness and *Rū* meaning light. Therefore, a Gurū is someone who enlightens or teaches. They are also told that Gurdwārā literally means doorway to the Gurū but that it is often referred to as the home of the Gurū.

These guided visits encapsulate what it means to live a Sikh life according to GNNSJ. It covers religion, culture, and lifestyle. The tour guide outlines the code of conduct that members of GNNSJ follow beyond the three core principles that are acknowledged by the majority of Sikhs. There is an important contradiction highlighted where the Gurdwārā is trying to show itself as ‘good’ and ‘authentic’ whilst also trying to maintain humility exhibiting a dichotomy in presenting this way of life to ‘outsiders.’

Next, the guide explains the main tenets of the Sikh faith. They are described as follows:

*The Sikh faith or dharam began in 1469 with the birth of Gurū Nānak Dev Jī. Amongst his many teachings he gave three golden rules:*

1. *Nām Japo – to recite God’s name.*

After this first tenet is explained, the guide asks the visitors to close their eyes and recite the word ‘mum’ repeatedly. They ask the group what they picture. One member of the group usually responds that an image of their mum comes to mind. The guide explains that this is the

reason that Sikhs are taught to recite *Wāhegurū* (one of the Sikh names for the Divine); in order to attempt to picture God.

2. *Kirit Karo – Living and working honestly in the presence of God.*

The guide demonstrates this to the group by asking them how they behave if they know they are being watched. They ask the group to consider ‘If God is watching, what values would you want to display?’

3. *Vand Ke Shakko – Sharing at least ten per cent of everything we are blessed with (money, food, knowledge, skills etc.)*

The guide completes this section by telling the group that a Sikh’s prime objectives are to serve and pray. There should be a balance of both in order to develop humility. They explain that everyone in this particular Gurdwārā is a volunteer and visitors are asked to notice the teachings that are being put into action during their visit. Sometimes visitors will ask questions such as ‘are all the volunteers unpaid?’ and the guide will respond that ‘yes, in this particular Gurdwārā we are fortunate to have enough volunteers to help out and so everyone that you will see here is an unpaid volunteer that is here because they want to be.’

The next part of the tour involves taking the group into the Darbār Sāhib. In preparation of this the group is informed that the work of Gurū Nānak was continued by nine human form Gurūs until 1708. They are then told that the Gurūship was passed from Gurū Gōbind Singh Jī to the Gurū Granth Sāhib Jī – the eleventh and eternal living Gurū of the Sikhs. The guide describes what the Darbār Sāhib will look like so that the visitors know what to expect when they enter. They are also told about the etiquette that is expected upon their entrance:

- *Shoes are to be removed and hands washed.*
- *Walk down the red carpet to the front where they will see the Gurū Granth Sāhib. There is no expectation of visitors to bow, they are told to pay their respects however they feel comfortable.*
- *Despite men and women usually sitting separately, the group will sit together facing forward, cross-legged on the floor.*
- *The visitors will be offered Parshād; this is a sweet dough-like food made from butter, water, sugar, and flour. This is offered to everyone that enters the Darbār Sāhib and it is a form of hospitality from the Gurū. It is to be received with both hands and guests are asked to finish all of it if they choose to take it.*

The group will sit in the Darbār Sāhib for a short time so that they can experience the recital from the Gurū Granth Sāhib and take in the atmosphere for themselves. For many of the visitors, especially if they are non-Sikh, this will be their first visit to a Gurdwārā.

The next part of the tour is where guests are escorted to the dome of the Gurdwārā. Here they are able to see the design work of the mirrored ceiling. They are told about the importance and balance of sevā and simran and are then told about the story behind the design of the dome:

*One day, a gentleman was passing the Gurdwārā and decided that he wanted to offer his service. He spoke to the Chairman and shared that he was skilled with mirror work. He shared this skill by creating a beautiful pattern in the entrance area. Once he had finished, he was asked to renovate the dome. He was provided with all of the materials and offered help. However, he saw this as his selfless service and chose to single-handedly cut over a hundred and thirty-two thousand pieces of mirror and attach them to create this exquisite design. The renovation took nine months and he stayed in the*

*Gurdwārā's rest rooms during this time. Before he left, the Chairman insisted he take something for his time. Whilst the other selfless volunteers inspired him, they had jobs and he had not been working during those months. The unique element of this story is the gentleman's faith. He was a Muslim. However, he recognised the symbol 'Ik Oankar' which is translated into 'One God and all is His creation'. He would call God Allah but saw no difference between Allah and Wāhegurū. Therefore, he respected the Gurdwārā as a house of worship.*

This story draws parallels to Sikh history where Mīyan Mīr, a Muslim, laid the foundation stone of Darbār Sāhib in Amritsar (Uberoi, 1999, p. 92). Here the story of a Muslim worshipper is used to enable Sikhs to appear all embracing so as to fit into Britain's 'good diaspora' (Liberatore, 2018) narrative. This particular story shows how "the identities evoked in the narratives – of nation, local community, religion and diaspora – are at times fused, at times kept strictly (and situationally) separated." (Werbner, 2017, p. 9) The Gurdwārā, now operating as a 'public arena', has to engage with these tensions of having numerous minority identities and therefore involuntarily engaging in what Werbner terms "imposed silences produced by the majority population's social denial or negation." (2017, p. 9)

Visitors are offered langar; before being served, the group is told the sakhī (story) of *Sacha Sauda 'the true trade'*. This group explains this story as Gurū Nānak's father giving him some money to buy goods to sell and make a profit and learn about business. He reached a village where the villagers were poor and hungry. Gurū Nānak saw this and took the money his father gave him and bought food and resources for the villagers. This is what GNNSJ described as the origin of the Sikh institution of langar.

The group is often informed of some of what the group describes as the core principles of langar:



*Equality - everyone sitting at the same level, eating the same food. The group are sometimes asked, "If the Queen were here right now, where would she sit?" The emphasis is placed on her sitting amongst them.*

*Respect for animals – Sikhs follow a strict vegetarian diet, as they do not believe they have the right to take life from another creature. If the group is an adult group, there will sometimes be an explanation about the belief in reincarnation.*

*Respecting langar – The visitors are informed that only a small amount of food will be provided to start with. This allows them to taste everything and see if they like it. The food will then be offered again in case anyone would like more of anything. The guide will request that if visitors take any extra food that they finish it all. This is because food is seen by Sikhs as a gift from God. Before the food is served the group will be told what there is and the guide will check for any allergies.*

The tour ends with a question-and-answer session and finally, the guide thanks the group for taking their time to visit. They conclude by reminding the group that Sikhs are life-long learners and so if any mistakes were made, they ask for forgiveness and pray for them to do better next time. Upon their departure they are asked to sign the guestbook and will sometimes be given sweets or chocolate to take away.

These tours are about imagining what the wider public sphere will think of Sikhs, and how the Gurdwārā then chooses to display themselves to counter false images of radicalism or intolerance or to suggest that they are a 'rational' tolerant religion that deserves recognition in the public sphere of British life. These tours are a distillation of what the group thinks should be shown to those who are not part of the Gurdwārā or jathā. There is a clear emphasis on the

importance of multifaith shown through the story of the dome and the inclusivity of the group and Sikhī. Some of this stems from the desire of this group to be 'seen' as good citizens and contributing to the wider British public sphere through their religious duties and commitment to multiculturalism. There is a sense that "by reframing belonging based on shared values, this new phase of awareness projects makes the case that Sikhs are exemplary or more worthwhile of inclusion [...] than other racialized communities." (Kaur, 2020, p. 10) As in the US case described by Kaur, there is a strong ethic that transcends religion and leads to the creation of a kind of defensive 'Sikh secularism' by showing it is a tolerant rational religion.

### *Networks of welfare*

A popular feature of these Gurdwārās and the way that they have extended their provision of care is through the running of 'Sikh camps' which GNNSJ refers to as 'schemes.' This is because they focus their attention on educating Sikhs about Sikh history and ideology rather than engaging them in any form of physical training which they associate with the idea of a camp. They aim to teach values and how to create an authentic relationship with the Gurū. The two large Gurdwārās that I spent time in hosted these camps every school holiday and these are often for children and teenagers. I attended camps in the summer, Christmas and during the Easter holidays. Each of the different Gurdwārās where I attended camps were very different in nature. In each of the camps I acted as a sevādār taking on various roles as a group leader, a workshop leader and as an extra pair of hands to help out wherever needed.

On the surface, each of these camps seemed to be similar and serve the same purpose: to educate children about Sikhī. However, there are many layers to these camps including their purpose, their intention and those that attend, both children and sevādārs. At one of the camps at a Gurdwārā in a less affluent area of Birmingham, one of the workshop leaders was frustrated about how the camp was organised and run but said "I suppose at least it's better

than the kids being out on the streets getting up to who knows what.” He compared it to another camp he had been to in the previous week and commented on how the children were much better behaved and that the camp ran much more smoothly. He also acknowledged that a lot of the children at this particular camp behave the way they do because of the area. This is similar to the idea that these camps are more than a space for religious transmission, they are also social spaces and provide the opportunity to be a part of a *sangat* or a ‘Sikh’ community (J. Singh, 2016, p. 270).

Whilst most of these camps follow a similar structure in terms of activities such as “talks, discussions, *kīrtan*, and exercise including self-defence, yoga, meditation, and sports” (Nesbitt, 1990, p. 24); there are differences in how these activities are performed. As Jasjit Singh (2016, p. 257) notes, a common feature of these camps is the provision of a ‘westernised langar’ including chips, beans, pasta, and pizza to attract children. I suggest that one of the key reasons that these camps at the different *Gurdwārās* are run differently comes down to each of these groups’ understandings of what it means to be authentically Sikh and how they believe that they should live according to the concept of *mīrī pīrī*. Jasjit Singh argues that different camps promote particular subcultures that have a “specific slant on Sikh beliefs” (2016, p. 269) depending on which group the camp is affiliated to. The key concerns for these groups are very different and therefore what they choose to expose to the younger generations varies. The Nishkam *jathā* projects itself as much more ‘spiritual’ and pious whereas the Smethwick *Gurdwārā* is closely aligned with Sikh Youth UK and the engagement in political discourse.

The Nishkam summer camp was about education through the teachings of the life and legacy of Gurū Nānak in preparation for 2019, which marked the five hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary of Sikhī. The workshops were focused on interactive learning of different types of *pāth* (prayers) and stories that related to Gurū Nānak. The workshop that I co-designed and led

was on the Udasīs (travels) of Gurū Nānak. We developed a game based on 'bingo' where the children had to find clues in order to complete the sakhīs (stories) about a selection of Gurū Nānak's travels.

The GNG camp was less focused on explicit education, rather, this camp focused on ideas of 'panth'. For example, authority was not restricted to 'group leaders' or sevādārs given that many of those that ran the camp were young Sikhs themselves. It was less structured and instead centred on more holistic teaching of Sikhī through physical fitness and the commitment to one's own journey through Sikhī in a public sphere where there is a racialised, religious hierarchy. The camp included workshops on the grooming of Sikh women and boxing classes in the Gurdwārā gym where self-defence and educating oneself were prioritised.

The way that the camps are run in each of these Gurdwārās shows how they provide care and the transmission of Sikhī to the next generation. It is revealing because we see what each of these Gurdwārās deems as most important to be transmitted to effectively equip the next generation of Sikhs and ensure the survival of Sikhī in the context of Britain. One focuses on a religious path and preserving authentic religious traditions in the context of a wider cultural sphere and social life that might pollute these, the other on defence and self-determination to defend yourself as a Sikh in a politically intolerant and uncaring public sphere. GNG is literally defending the community from an intrusion of the state whilst recollecting the memory of inherited trauma from history including the events of 1984. GNNSJ emphasises authenticity and purity of purification through the recuperation of Sikh values which is reminiscent of the actions of the Akalī Dal. Therefore, one appears to foreground mīrī and the other pīrī, but each of these concepts is embedded in the other and cannot be thought of without the other.

## Public or private? Sacred or secular? Political or religious?

The Gurdwārā plays a part in the lives of all of my interlocutors; their involvement usually depends on the individual and if they belong to any particular group. The Gurdwārā is an important site for Sikhs to practice their understanding of mīrī pīrī and to participate as members of the wider sangat. However, this varies from individual to individual depending on how they personally view the Gurdwārā and what it represents for them in their lives. There are different projects of being a Sikh in Gurdwārās for different groups and generations of Sikhs, particularly as a result of their migration to Britain. Many of the first generations of Sikhs were aiming to find work and therefore more willing to assimilate whereas later generations of Sikhs in Britain are more established and aware of their rights and therefore making more of an effort to learn about their heritage and return to a more 'authentic' form of Sikhī. The Gurdwārā is preserved in both of these examples as a private religious sphere in line with British ideas of secularism, but in GNG, this is an activist defence from political attack foregrounding the political aspects of mīrī pīrī. For Nishkam, on the other hand, defending the religious sphere of Sikhī means defence of religious values against their dilution by countervailing social and cultural values, which threaten its authenticity and purity which foregrounds the religious aspects of mīrī pīrī. Both of these distinct strategies are attempts to deal with the exclusions within the British public sphere, especially associated with Prevent and the post 9/11 political environment that have intensified during the more polarised era of Brexit politics.

## Mīrī vs pīrī?

As I have shown, both of these Gurdwārās are projecting themselves in the public sphere, particularly as key players in the race for legitimate leadership, not against each other, but, against the state and broader policies such as multiculturalism. Both of these groups focus on

how to make Sikhī survive and in some ways, this has led to a perceived separation of mīrī pīrī where one seems to be prioritised over the other. The Gurdwārā extends beyond the physical space that it inhabits, and it becomes symbolic of the social conscience as evidenced through GNNSJ and GNG. The generational differences have blurred the boundaries of what is considered as political and what is considered as religious, showing that in fact there is no separation of mīrī pīrī. The identities of these Gurdwārās and the perception of these identities is crucial in the wider public sphere because they are not static nor homogenous, they are fundamentally strategies for survival. Identities matter in context because they are enacted in different identity spaces and foregrounded oppositionally (Werbner, 2002, p. 267).

This chapter has shown two different versions of the relationship between private, community and public. One which is focused on inter-faith, multi-faith, Sikh secularism and the other is about the assertion of Sikh sovereignty and the creation of a Sikh counterpublic (Warner, 2002). There is a conflict in different groups' representations of Sikhī in the broader British public sphere. As Werbner neatly explains,

"Strategic essentialising has to be grasped as a reality beyond a constructivist historiography of subaltern consciousness (Spivak 1987:205): in fact, the subaltern does speak, even if her or his voice does not always reach 'us' – does not necessarily seek to reach us. The performance of identity outside and beyond the official public sphere, in alternative public spaces (Gilroy 1993:200), precedes and anticipates any public action in the larger national arena."

(2017, pp. 10-11)

The paths taken by these two Gurdwārās is not necessarily the direction that they have chosen but it is one imposed by their concern of their perception in the public sphere. Additionally, Gurdwārās have a responsibility to represent 'good', 'rational' religion which means defining

themselves against forms of 'bad', 'irrational' religion such as Islam which is seen as fanatical and morally problematic in its treatment of women as an example; therefore, at times, certain members of the Sikh community may seem to express forms of Islamophobia determined as a result of this imposed definition of acceptable forms of religion.

ਛਿਅ ਘਰ ਛਿਅ ਗੁਰ ਛਿਅ ਉਪਦੇਸ ॥

Chhia ghar chhia gur chhia updes.

There are six schools of philosophy, six teachers, and six sets of teachings.

ਗੁਰੁ ਗੁਰੁ ਏਕੇ ਵੇਸ ਅਨੇਕ ॥੧॥

Gur gur eko ves anek. ||1||

But the Teacher of teachers is the One, who appears in so many forms. ||1||

(Sri Gurū Granth Sāhib 12)

## Chapter 6: School

*Faith-based organisations can play a positive role in helping us become better parents, teachers, and citizens - and most importantly, better human beings.*

*- Bhai Sahib, Patron, Nishkam Schools Trust*

\* \* \*

*I just don't get it. They aren't a Sikh school. Or if they are, they should be proud to be one. I don't get why they have to do all religions prayers. Y'know if it was a Muslim school, you'd never see Muslim kids having to say Sikh or any other prayers. If it's a Sikh school, they should just do Mūl Mantar (a Sikh prayer) and that's it.*

*- Manraj Singh*



Education was an important, recurring theme throughout my fieldwork evident in the school setting. Given the etymology of the term 'Sikh' as a 'learner' and 'Sikhī' as 'the constant process of learning and becoming' (Ahluwalia, 2005, p. 7) there was a strong emphasis on acquiring new forms of knowledge throughout my fieldwork. Formal education has been an important part of Sikhī even from the Gurū period. Gurū Angad (Gurū Nānak II) instated education for young people at Khadūr Sāhib, a citadel in Amritsar where Gurū Angad lived for thirteen years spreading the message of Gurū Nānak (Chowdhry, 2018, p. 48; Dogra et al., 1995, p. 18). During my fieldwork, I spent time at a Sikh school in Birmingham which is part of a larger network of schools across England. Nishkam Schools describe themselves as "a pioneering group of Sikh ethos multi-faith academy schools" which were presented differently to different audiences (Puttick et al., 2020, p. 151), sometimes causing contention evidenced by the statement from Manraj Singh at the beginning of this chapter. Manraj is a young man who works for one of the Sikh media stations and often provides coverage of Sikh news and events. He is known for his affiliation to the charity Sikh Youth UK and his emphasis on strengthening Sikh identity, independent of identifying with other minority communities. He explained to me that he feels that often, Sikhs spend too much of their time protecting other communities and therefore they end up suffering themselves. He suggested that Sikhs should learn from other minority communities such as Muslims in Britain to protect their rights.

Levinson stresses the importance of citizenship when studying education in anthropology in order to help better understand democracy. He argues that "school-based programs in democratic civic and citizenship education have become one of the primary sites for the creation of new political dispositions and identities and for the consolidation of meanings about "democracy."" (2005, p. 335) He continues, "the study of citizenship education for democracy is therefore the study of efforts to educate the members of a social group to imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens." (2005, p. 336) Given that multicultural policies were first implemented through schooling and the

education of children this marks education as a key site for the production of democracy more broadly and why the Nishkam project is so illuminating to help us to understand the construction of citizenship for minorities and the idea of who is an 'acceptable' citizen.

When I first entered the school, I was confused as to its role and what a Sikh ethos multi-faith school actually meant, and my confusion was shared by the pupils. For example, a sixth form student called Simran told me it was a free school and another sixth form student called Kirpa described it as a multifaith school. Their friend, another sixth form student called Karan felt that the description of the school was problematic because it meant something different to different people. She explained that most people would think that a faith school is one where learning is focused on religion, however, Simran responded that "faith doesn't mean religion. Faith is just what you believe in." They all agreed that the reason that their parents wanted them to attend the Nishkam school was to prevent experiences of bullying, specifically racism, but there was also a desire that Sikhī would be at the centre of their education.

It is also important to consider the context in which providers of education are situated. This is illustrated in the case of the Nishkam School in the way it presents itself as a multifaith school to the general public, i.e., defending the faith school narrative by emphasising inclusivity rather than separatism versus how the school presents itself as a 'Sikh school' to a Sikh audience (Kaur, 2020). Whilst it is usually easy to keep these two realms relatively distinct, both of these competing audiences were represented by my dual positionality as both a Sikh and a researcher. As a school operating under competitive and market oriented, neoliberal influence, Nishkam faces the challenge of positioning themselves to speak to multiple audiences including the local authority, central government inspectors and funders and the parents of Sikh and non-Sikh pupils; therefore, there can be no singular answer to the question, what is a 'good' Sikh school? Nishkam emphasises the similarities between Sikh values and British values as a model for its schooling. This desire to shape Sikh schooling

“through shared values is a move to redirect the conversation away from obvious physical difference to moral embedded similarities.” (Kaur, 2020, p. 10) With school as an interior frontier (Bear, 2005), Nishkam is a microcosm of the Sikh nation shown through the Nishkam family environment and lack of desire for its pupils to leave. It is an attempt at practising an ‘acceptable’ form of Sikh sovereignty which aligns with an understanding of how to educate citizens resulting not only from the contradictory idea of faith schools but also how this can be navigated through an understanding of *mīrī pīrī* and so, as this chapter shows, through the example of Nishkam schools, it is impossible to separate conversations about kinship, religion, economics, and politics (Bear, 2005, 2007; Bear, 2015; McKinnon et al., 2013).

### Schooling in Britain

Under the Academies Act 2010, the UK Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition government introduced the ‘Free Schools’ scheme as one of their major education reforms (Academies Act, Department for Education 2010) . Prior to 2010, under the Elementary Education Act 1870, education in Britain was state administered by Local Authorities and any other schooling provision was either private or run by charitable organisations.

Before the Elementary Education Act 1870, there was no state involvement in education and so there was a reliance on Churches as the first providers of education for the public.

Negotiations took place to decide how these Church schools would be viewed and treated following state involvement in education and as a result of this, certain faith schools, primarily Christian denomination schools, were given state support (Gardner et al., 2005, p. 7; Sagoo, 2015, p. 115). These state schools controlled by Local Authorities includes schools that are religious and set up as “voluntary aided’ or ‘voluntary controlled’ institutions.’ (Sagoo, 2015)

Following the tension that surrounded the movement of school provision from the Church to the state through the 1944 Education Act, a settlement was reached meaning that the Church could set the direction of the collective worship element of education, and the state would provide guidance on the curriculum (including Religious Education (RE) and collective worship). These would be monitored by the Local Authority through the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) which were reformed in 1988 (Education Reform Act 1988) becoming permanent bodies with legal powers to formally signify the beginning of the neoliberal public private partnerships that currently exist in the British education system.

The 1996 Educational Act, Section 390 (4) states that SACREs in England have four groups with the following representative requirements: Christian denominations and other religions and denominations of such religions, as in the opinion of the local authority, to appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area; the Church of England; associations representing teachers, in the opinion of the local authority, ought to be represented, having regard to the circumstances of the area and finally, the local authority. The local authority appoints the members to each group on the recommendation of a sponsoring body (The Inter Faith Network, 2021) . The structure of the SACRE inherently prioritises the Church of England and Christian denominations as the norm for schools in religious education validating the dominance of Christianity in the legal structure of a school which limits the amount of input a non-Christian religion can have in directing religious education at school in the current structure. The structure acts as a key marker of who is effectively seen as socially belonging to the British understanding of citizenship and the current structure of the broader British public sphere which has an embedded Anglicanism in its form of secularism emphasising the findings in the Parekh report.

In 1997, following the election of a New Labour government, and its commitment to multiculturalism, minority faiths were included in the state provision of schooling (West &

Pennell, 2002, p. 9). This created incentives for faith schools, following the outcomes of a White Paper titled *Schools Achieving Success* (Department for Education and Skills 2001). Currently two thirds of state schools in England are 'non-religious' meaning that a third are schools with a 'religious character' which is the official, legal terminology for 'faith schools.' These schools are required to follow the national curriculum for all subjects except for RE, collective worship and other 'ethos related matters.'

In anthropology, literature on schooling in Britain has tended to focus on the relationship between education and social class (Evans, 2007; Willis, 2000). Many fee charging schools often have histories associated with the elite which results in the instilling and reproduction of class divides in Britain, perhaps providing the context for the analysis of schooling in Britain. However, in my own fieldwork, there is evidence of intersectionality involving forms of kinship, nationalism and citizenship that have tended to be somewhat overlooked in this literature.

This intersectionality was evident through my time spent at Nishkam High school. Nishkam was set up as part of the first wave of free schools in 2011 and have since expanded significantly now educating over two thousand five hundred students across five schools and two nurseries in the West Midlands and in West London. Given that the Sikh faith is not proselyting, the school ethos is one focused on maximising contribution towards a cohesive society. It has a unique multi-faith ethos, and the schools pride themselves on nurturing children of all faiths and those with no particular belief and rather than learning *about* faith, children are encouraged to learn *from* each other about faith through worshipping collectively and within specific faith groups (Pool, 2020, p. 11).

I previously attended a public lecture on religion in the public sphere at the LSE where the president of the National Secular Society was present, and he claimed that faith schools are against 'British values' as they promote segregation rather than integration. According to the

Government and set out in their 'Prevent' Strategy, British values are defined as 'tolerance, mutual respect between those of different faiths and beliefs, democracy, rule of law and individual liberty' (Gov.uk 2011). In 2014, eleven schools in Birmingham were judged by Ofsted as 'require improvement' in relation to children's safety. Five schools in Birmingham received media attention resulting from the 'Trojan Horse'<sup>18</sup> scandal where allegations were made that an Islamist plot was taking place to take over local schools and to run them according to Islamist principles. The eleven schools were all vulnerable and underperforming across the school and not only in the domain of child safety, however the schools caught up in the Trojan horse scandal were previously underperforming but at the time of the scandal, they had become exemplary in terms of their performance (Shackle, 2017). It is important to note that none of these schools were faith schools (RE Today Services 2015).

Mr Flora, the Nishkam Schools' Trust lead for Faith Inclusion explained to me how faith schools are guided by 'mother' institutions. Church of England schools are guided by the national society for religious education and the local diocese, Roman Catholic schools follow the Catholic Education service and Jewish schools have no formal national structure, however, they generally follow the liberal Jewish tradition and Rabbinic guidance. Mr Flora told me that Sikh schools have no national structure nor a national Sikh body which means that they are free to be guided by their own designated religious body or the local SACRE. In the case of the Nishkam schools, this is the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) and its leader, the patron of the school, Bhai Sāhib.

---

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/01/trojan-horse-the-real-story-behind-the-fake-islamic-plot-to-take-over-schools>; see also the 'The Trojan Horse Affair' podcast published by the New York Times in February 2022

## Free schools and faith schools

During the 1980s and 1990s, Conservative governments oversaw the rise of neoliberal policy and influence into schooling encouraging more competition and transparency, making schools more accountable to parents in ways that they were not previously (Education Reform Act 1988). This means that schools were now required to be thriving businesses as well as educators that must compete for students (Lunneblad, 2020, p. 429). Instead of the government providing state schools which are supposedly secular, the idea was that communities were to produce schools that should be viable businesses as a model that would make them more efficient. Following the introduction of 'academies', the 'free schools' initiative was launched and encouraged independent groups to set up new, not-for-profit, state-funded schools.

Free schools are state-funded schools with the same legal status as academies; they are independent schools that provide a means for groups of parents, teachers, charities, existing schools, or other organisations to respond to a need for a new school in their community – whether for extra places, to raise standards or offer a broader choice. Following all state schools, free schools are free to attend and open to all children with no discriminatory policies (New Schools Network, 2021). They have been opened all over England by parents, teachers, existing outstanding schools, community groups and charities. They range from primary, secondary, 16-19 or all through schools, and can open specifically for children with special educational needs or for those who struggle in mainstream schools (a means of alternative provision) (New Schools Network, 2021). There are now six hundred and eighty free schools open or approved to open across the country. Once full, these schools will provide over four hundred thousand new school places (Inge, 2018).

Setting up these schools is a challenging and rigorous process where applicant groups must demonstrate to the Department for Education (DfE) that they have excellent educational expertise and a strong team that is capable of responsibly governing a school. They also must prove that there is demand for the school in their community and show that they have developed a detailed education plan that will meet the needs of their students (New Schools Network, 2021). The DfE introduced the free school initiative stating:

Every child in this country, whatever their background, should have the opportunity to get a world-class education, giving them knowledge and skills that set them up for life. We want to continue extending the free schools programme to areas that have not previously benefitted from it. If you have a proposal for a free school that meets our criteria and want to join us in delivering this ambition, we want to hear from you.

(Department for Education, 2019, p. 4)

The most important factor in deciding whether a free school application is successful is based on the area and so, providers are required to justify the location of the proposed school before the application is considered further by the Secretary of the State, with no appeals process (DfE, 2019, p.15). The opening of a free school is the entry into a relationship between the state and members of society. The onus for determining the need and desire for a particular kind of free school is placed entirely on the applicant and assessed by the DfE and the Secretary of the State. Faith schools are required to demonstrate that they have the support of the local community by 'includ[ing] evidence that your proposed school is likely to attract applications from pupils outside of your faith group and from all parts of the wider community' (DfE, 2019, p.29).

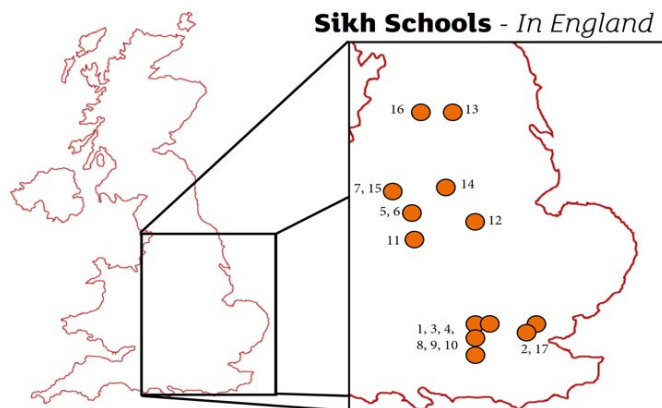
The 1992 Education (Schools) Act saw the creation of an 'Office for Standards in Education' (Ofsted) as an inspector of educational institutions because "schooling became solidly



associated with the public domain. Indeed, it is precisely because formal education became a public matter that educational public policy exists." (Blasco, 2011, p. 370). In a policy titled, *'Promoting and evaluating pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development,'* Ofsted (2004) guidance highlights the importance of social cohesion, referring to 'cultural development' and its links to diversity, preventing racism and recognising that 'culture' is continually changing. Schools were required to report on the 'spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of pupils' (SMSC) and this continues as a measure of school success as part of the ongoing relationship between the state and society to create 'good British citizens.' An important question for these schools is to consider 'how do we ensure that the ethos of the school is being properly and well delivered?' To ensure that standards are met, faith schools are subject to extra Ofsted inspection (Education, 2018, p. 74).

### Sikh schools: an impossible situation

England has seventeen Sikh schools and of these, thirteen have been set up through the free schools' scheme. Two of these schools are in the North of England, seven in the Midlands and eight in Greater London (Figure 25).



List of Schools:

1. Guru Nanak Sikh Academy, Hayes, Voluntary Aided Sikh School, Guru Nanak Multi-Academy Trust, 1993
2. Guru Gobind Khalsa College, Chigwell, Independent Sikh School, Guru Gobind Singh Khalsa College Trust, 1993
3. Khalsa Primary School, Slough, Voluntary Aided Sikh Academy, Slough Sikh Education Trust, 2007
4. Khalsa Primary School, Norwood Green, Voluntary Aided Sikh Academy, Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall, 2009
5. Nishkam Primary School, Birmingham, Sikh Ethos, Multi-faith, Values-Led Free School, Nishkam School Trust, 2011
6. Nishkam High School and Sixth Form, Birmingham, Sikh Ethos, Multi-faith, Values-Led Free School, Nishkam School Trust, 2012
7. Nishkam Primary School, Wolverhampton, Sikh Ethos, Multi-faith, Values-Led Free School, Nishkam School Trust (previously Anand Primary School run by Wolverhampton Sangat Education Trust), 2013 (Originally called Anand Primary; reopened in 2014)
8. Khalsa Secondary School, Slough, Free School, Khalsa Academies Trust, 2013
9. Nanaksar Primary, Hayes, Sikh Faith Free School, Guru Nanak Multi-Academy Trust, 2013
10. Nishkam School West London, Hounslow, Sikh Ethos, Multi-faith, Values-Led Free School, Nishkam School Trust, 2013 (New building opened in 2018)
11. Seva All-Through School, Coventry, Sikh Faith Free School, Sevak Education Trust, 2014 (Originally Seva Primary School; reopened in 2015)
12. Falcons Primary School, Leicester, Sikh Faith Free School, Akaal Education Trust & Sikh Council UK, 2014
13. Khalsa Science Academy, Leeds, Free School, Khalsa Education Trust, 2014
14. Akaal Primary School, Derby, Sikh Faith Free School, Akaal Academy Trust, 2015
15. The Khalsa Academy, Wolverhampton, Free School, Khalsa Academies Trust, 2015 (Originally called British Sikh School)
16. Khalsa Engineering Academy, Bradford, Free School Trust: Khalsa Education Trust, 2015
17. Atam Academy, Redbridge, Free School, Khalsa Academies Trust, 2016 (Originally only a Primary school)

Figure 25 - map of Sikh schools in England (GNNSJ 2018)

A school faces a number of dilemmas when identifying as Sikh and multi-faith and as a result, is in an impossible situation given the default model of schooling as an all-encompassing, Christian school, teaching 'British' values of tolerance. A Sikh faith school is problematic because it is seen as posing a contradiction between encompassing broadly spiritual Christian values and multifaith practices as schooling traditionally has done (further supported by education regulation), even if they were classified as being secular. However, the emergence of Sikh schools is partly due to a failure of mainstream schooling to fulfil the needs of all of its pupils (Rizvi, 2008, p. 136). Other faiths, including the Sikh faith, are associated with minorities who cannot encompass a 'majority' or even other minority groups within their values and extends further because the Sikh faith is associated with a racialised, minority identity

especially in Britain (Kaur, 2020). A Sikh school must satisfy several criteria including government regulations and certain members of wider society that insist on a multi-faith environment, its stakeholders who are predominantly Sikh families that want a 'home from home' away from racism, bullying and teaching the 'right kind' of values, whilst also providing an excellent academic standard. Particularly with current education policy, schools must also be flourishing businesses and an authentic moral space (Blasco, 2011).

### The Nishkam project

Nishkam schooling is a project that comes from the Sikh charitable organisation, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ). The organisation primarily focuses on the promotion of sevā (service) whilst remaining Nishkam, meaning 'selfless' or 'altruistic'. In vernacular, the organisation and its projects are commonly referred to as 'Nishkam', for example, Nishkam school, or Nishkam Gurdwarā. Nishkam's journey with education began before the opening of their formal schools. The Gurdwarā hosts its own gurmat school (a school dedicated to teaching spiritual education), involving teaching gurmukhī (the written form of the Punjabi language), santhīyā (scripture reading classes), and kīrtan (recital of the Gurū Granth Sāhib to music) classes. The gurmat school opened in 1977 and gradually expanded to include facilities such as Nishkam playgroup. The establishment of GNNSJ's Guru Nanak Nishkam Education Trust (GNNET) in 2003 meant that many of the educational initiatives started to develop further. GNNSJ had been planning for the opening of a school since the 1990s and so, following education policy in favour of 'faith schools' proposed by a New Labour Government in the 2000s, GNNSJ was further inspired to open a school (Sagoo, 2015).

## Kar sevā

According to GNNSJ, through self-reliance, self-help, and community participation, they have invested significant resources and funds to spiritually regenerate and environmentally enhance Nishkam Schools through 'kar sevā'. 'Kar' is used to suggest work that is done with the hands and 'sevā' is often understood as service or volunteering. Some of the sevādārs or volunteers described this to me as a traditional 'not for profit' construction methodology through community participation and contribution of finances, time, and skills.

On the surface, kar sevā appears to have similarities with the Coalition Government's 2010 'Big Society' political agenda. 'Big Society' was an ideology centred on promoting the work of communities, volunteering, and mobilising charities and social enterprises which was partly as a result of austerity measures that were put in place following the major global financial crisis in 2008. 'Big Society' had also paved the way for the implementation of the 'Free Schools' initiative. Nishkam High School Birmingham (Figure 26) opened in 2012 and the Nishkam School's Trust (NST) now has schools both across the West Midlands and in West London. The development of the infrastructure involved the complete refurbishment and conservation of several Grade II listed buildings in January 2011, eight months before the school was due to open.



*Figure 26 - Nishkam High School Birmingham (Nishkam school trust 2021)*

Approximately a hundred sevādārs (volunteers) from different backgrounds (primarily members of GNNSJ) ranging from skilled craftsmen, and project managers, to doctors and students, came together to deliver the vast majority of the project. Most of the volunteers came from the local area and others came from different parts of Britain and some even from overseas, usually because of their affiliation to the jathā. Contribution included monetary donations and physical participation in the construction of the schools which GNNSJ describes as a 'labour of love' (Miller, 2008). Traditional methods and materials were used to revitalise the derelict properties back to their former glory, to restore traditional features and to accommodate a modern education facility which entailed upgrading building fabric and electrical and mechanical installation. In the second phase, this involved constructing a modern rear extension and a rear access road. GNNSJ is affiliated to a builders' merchant, formed as a self-help community cooperative during the 1980s economic recession. Phase one of the work was completed by September 2011 with the site costing £1.2m to purchase and

£1.8m to refurbish. The NST was awarded £400,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and £1.62m from the Department for Education.

Andrea Muehlebach's work with voluntarism of Italians shows how this kind of neoliberal project can produce a "highly moralized kind of citizenship" (2012, p. 6). Through this type of voluntary, community work, an 'ethical citizen' is created alongside an 'imagined welfare community' (2012, p. 212). Here citizenship is performed through individuals' dual care of the self and care of the other. Rather than Muehlebach's 'Catholicisation of neoliberalism', (2012, p. 60) in my fieldwork, we see a potential parallel 'Sikh-isation' of neoliberalism. This approach of kar sevā is rooted in Sikh ideas of collective, community participation and operates from an understanding of mīrī pīrī evidenced in other institutions such as langar and sangat. The motivation for this kind of care work and production of value are precisely found in ethics such as compassion, solidarity and feeling all for the benefit of the 'welfare community.'

Muehlebach's 'citizenship to be lived with the heart' (2012, p. 11) seems to be another way of describing the kar sevā approach adopted by GNNSJ.

### Nishkam schools

GNNSJ's vision was always to create a Sikh ethos, multi faith school, however, prior to the free school's initiative, there was no viable method for making this into more than a concept given the policy surrounding new school provision and so they opted to open a private nursery (Sagoo, 2015). The vision is attributed to the founder and patron, Bhai Sahib. Bhai Sahib is the current guiding figure and chairman of GNNSJ (see Chapter 5: Gurdwarā). He is recognised widely as an individual of 'high spiritual standing' and is commonly regarded by non-Sikhs as the key Sikh representative. Bhai Sahib emphasises that the "collaboration between parents, families, community, universities and other guiding institutions are vital in realising this vision." (Bhai Sahib cited on Nishkamschooltrust.org 2021) Further, he suggested "faith-based

organisations can play a positive role in helping us become better parents, teachers and citizens - and most importantly, better human beings.” The Nishkam Primary School in Birmingham, situated opposite the Gurdwārā in Handsworth, opened in 2011, prior to the Government’s free school scheme. This was the beginning of GNNSJ’s entry into taking formal steps towards the opening of a free school.

Nishkam High School Birmingham with support from the GNNSJ community built temporary school accommodation for the opening of the school in 2012. This included twenty plus classrooms, dining facilities and hall space. The transformation was completed in sixty days by numerous volunteers’ contribution of over fifty thousand hours. The new school costing £7.5m was built in partnership with the Department for Education and opened in 2014. The Trust was given £8.5m from the Department for Education and the community raised £1.4m. The High school is situated in Lozells which is one of the most deprived areas of Birmingham however, the Head Teacher, Mr Davis, described that the “school provides an oasis in a difficult neighbourhood”.

According to Nishkam, for Sikhs guided by their Gurū, knowledge must be grounded in humility and selflessness to bring good to oneself, to others and the world more generally. The school motto, ‘Man neeva, mat uchi’ meaning ‘to be humble, to be wise’ outlines two aspects in the ‘learning journey of the self’. Firstly, it requires humility (man nēvā) and secondly, the elevation of the mind (mat uchī). Essentially, it reflects the aspiration to reach a state of balance of being humble, yet wise. For Nishkam Schools, the motto is a reminder that education must help pupils to achieve success whilst remaining humble in the process essentially reflecting their understanding of mīrī pīrī. The motto seeks to combine Nishkam’s goals of ambition and high expectations for their pupils whilst encouraging pupils to be selfless, good citizens. In the school, faith-inspired virtues are intrinsic to their vision of education and are not confined exclusively to religious education lessons.

### *The reflection space - collective worship*

The architecture of the Nishkam School is grand and features a dedicated spiritual space (known as the reflection space) in the centre of the school building primarily used for assemblies and collective worship (Figure 27). The space is kept clean, and students must remove their shoes before entering this area which is reminiscent of a Gurdwārā. “The spiritual space is centric to the school’s multi-faith and values driven philosophy endearing to inspire future generations.” (Nishkam Schools Journal, 2014, p.15)

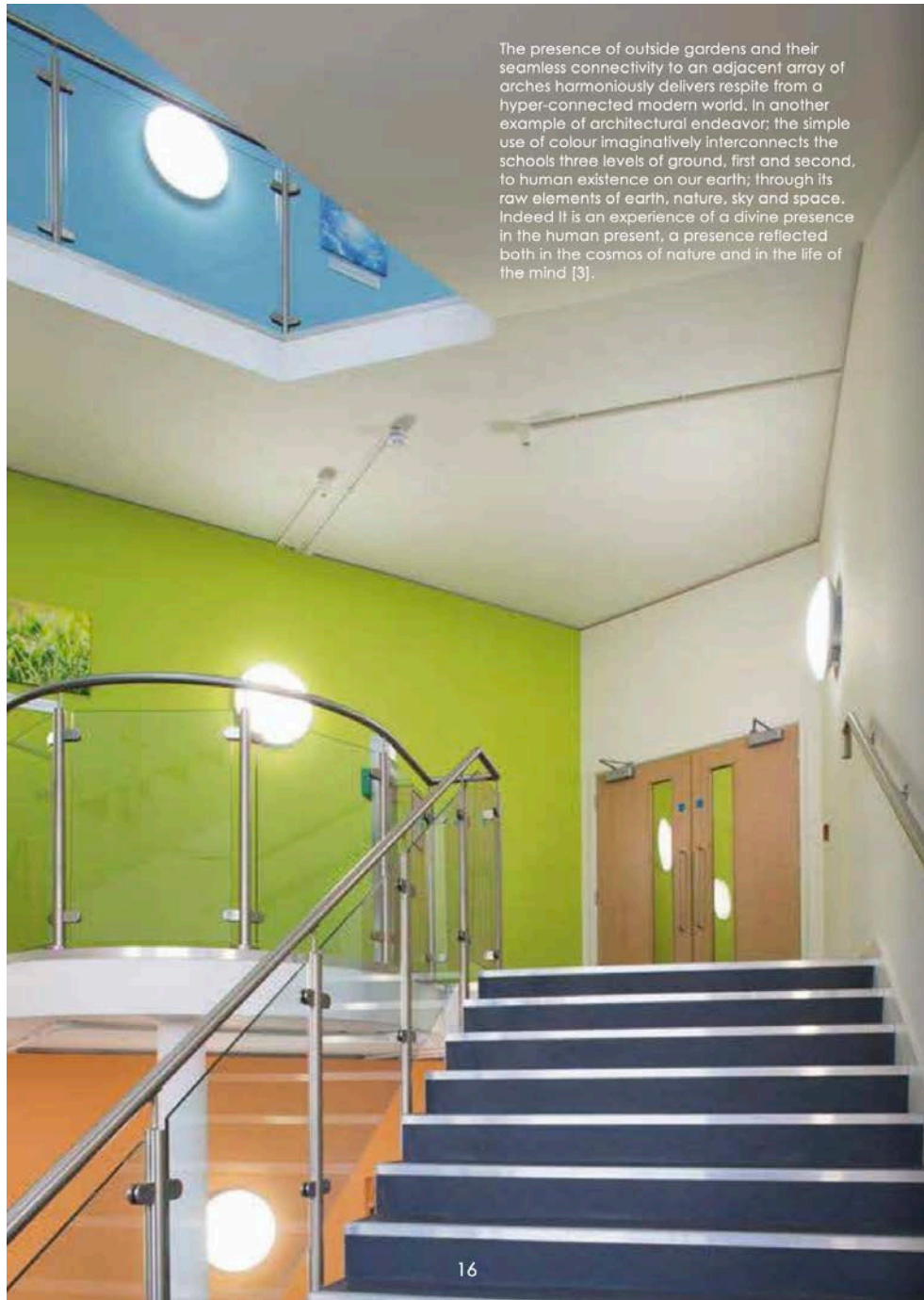


*Figure 27 - Interior of Nishkam High School Birmingham showing the reflection space (bam, n.d.)*

The Head Teacher, Mr Davis, said that the school is unique in the sense that it provides a holistic approach to learning highlighted through the importance of the school building through its architecture, community financial commitment and the volunteer time and investment. This is practically realised daily, through collective worship, lunchtime prayer and



sevā, and the end of the day reflection. Each of the three floors in the school building signify something that is important to the school and its commitment to the world (Figure 28). The ground floor represents the United Nations International Mother Earth Day (22<sup>nd</sup> April) and an acknowledgement that the Earth is fundamental for life. “It also aims to raise awareness that humans have a collective responsibility to promote harmony with nature and to balance the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations.” (Nishkam Schools Journal, 2014, p.17). The first floor is representative of the United Nations World Wildlife Day (3<sup>rd</sup> March) to remember and celebrate the environment and its conservation (Nishkam Schools Journal, 2014, p.17). The second floor and ‘sky space’ is designed to capture the understanding of the human race as being a small part of the universe and to put it into perspective (Nishkam Schools Journal, 2014, p.17).



*Figure 28 - A depiction of the three floors in Nishkam High School Birmingham from the Nishkam School Journal (2014)*

Education is not only a mechanism for reproducing social inequalities but also consolidates new forms of social separation (Froerer, 2007; Froerer, 2011). Through collective worship, the school appears to make an effort to create a space of inclusion rather than create separation

as all faiths are required to attend whether or not they choose to participate. When the school first opened, collective worship took place daily for all year groups, however, given the increasing number of pupils, different year groups participate on different days. I attended with some sixth form students, and they explained what I was required to do and how collective worship was practiced. We removed our shoes and sat down in rows of year groups (Years 9, 10, 11 and sixth form). The assembly started with prayers from different faiths: Sikh (mūl manṭar), Christian (The Lord's Prayer), Hindu, Islam and there was also a minute silence for those of other or no faith to reflect. Each prayer was led by a pupil in the school and the rest of the pupils were encouraged to recite along with the student that led the prayer. I found that the level of vocal participation from pupils was quite low but interestingly the Christian prayer was the loudest, as most of the teachers (who identified as Christian) audibly contributed. When I discussed collective worship with Mr. Singh, the only visibly Sikh teacher at the school, he explained that he really enjoyed it when he first joined Nishkam because there was lots of student involvement but now "it is dead. There is very little participation [...] collective worship isn't what it used to be, and the intention isn't really there."

Full school assemblies are not common occurrences given the space in the centre of the school and the size of the student body. Like collective worship, assemblies would be split into different year groups, and they would take place on different days of the week. However, in honour of remembrance Sunday there was a full school assembly and the theme of the assembly coincided with the value for the week which was 'reverence.' After collective worship, Mr Davis, began the assembly and recited a stanza from a poem about the war. All six hundred and fifty students in the school were either sat or stood silently for the duration of the assembly including a two-minute silence followed by a recording of The Last Post. Mr Davis spoke about the war effort and the importance of recognising those who had served in the war. He addressed the value of 'reverence' and encouraged the pupils to reflect on this in the coming week. He reflected on the changing position of women in society and noted their role

in the war effort though he made no explicit reference to faith and focused on values. Mr Davis's emphasis focused on values that could be extrapolated from faith rather than emphasising faith itself in this particular context, remarking that the school's values are neither solely British values nor faith values, rather, they are both.

### *Faith groups*

'Faith groups' take place at the end of the day every Tuesday and each student chooses to attend an assembly based on their belief which is not prescribed or monitored. The Sikh faith group is the largest and takes places in the school's main hall followed by Muslims as the next largest group and an approximately equal number of Christians and Hindus, with another further group, 'personal faith', for those who do not associate with any of the major world religions. The faith group sessions are designed as opportunities for pupils and staff to grow in their own faiths by learning from the faith leaders' experiences or stories specific to certain faith traditions. These teachings are then split into their constitutive parts and morals and values are extrapolated as ways for pupils to learn *from* different faiths and how they can implement these values in their own lives.

I interviewed the Director of Faith, Mrs Jones, to understand how faith, particularly Sikhī, played a role in education, especially considering that Mrs Jones had been brought up as a Christian and not Sikh. Mrs Jones came to the school as a result of a fear of what was happening with Religious Education in the future as it was becoming side-lined. She explained that she was also drawn to the school because of its multi-faith character. For her, despite there being a Sikh ethos, the school is fundamentally about making each person practice their own faith in the best way that they can rather than converting to Sikhī which was appealing because her aim was to foster an environment *of* faith and not necessarily one that was of her own which is evidenced through the faith groups. Considering a Sikh ethos as the foundation

for the school, Mrs Jones described the teachings of Gurū Nānak and explained that “the Sikh faith is quite nice because it talks about human nature and so bringing that into British society can definitely be beneficial.” She described faith as being something that can give a base understanding and so can give meaning and purpose to one’s position in society.

### *A Sikh ethos*

Ms. West (Director for Teaching and Learning at NST and a Drama and English teacher) spoke passionately about the school, its values model and how she also tried to live a values-led life. She spoke about the deprivation of the area that the school is situated in and how she feels that an organisation such as Nishkam can make a difference in improving both the pupils’ lives and the community more broadly. Ms. West expressed that she “think(s) it’s the right way to tackle the problems that are endemic in our society.” Ms. West believed that a Sikh ethos was important because it is “non-exclusive” meaning that the Sikh faith is not a missionary faith and so its focus is one that “makes us good human beings and work towards being good human beings.”

Ms. West felt that there was a misconception from the public about Nishkam schools and what they represent, as she describes, “we are a Sikh ethos multi faith school, which is really unusual. People just don’t get it; I mean they don’t understand, and they think they can’t apply for a job here because they are not Sikh despite the fact they might come and meet myself or Paul (the Head Teacher) or anybody else.” Ms. West does not identify as Sikh, she is a Roman Catholic and explained that Roman Catholicism is unlikely to be able to provide a foundational ethos for a multifaith school. This is because “the Catholic religion is about ‘that is the Catholic religion’ and everyone else is outside. [...] I think it would be wonderful if we could have another faith school in our midst, who was Christian ethos multi faith, that would be incredible. I would worry though; I am not sure anyone else thinks in that way. I don’t know

why because it makes sense to me.” Extrapolating Ms West’s thoughts about the potential for a Christian ethos school can draw parallels to the secular British public sphere which is inherently governed through an Anglican ethos yet simultaneously promotes a multifaith environment. The exclusionary nature of Catholicism that Ms West describes is therefore similar to the exclusions that are felt in the broader public sphere that attempts to promote multiculturalism and ‘equality for all.’ However, as the foundations of the British public sphere are not based on shared values despite the suggested narrative, there is an increasingly explicit exclusion for some citizens.

Ms. West captured how a Sikh ethos, based in an understanding of *mīrī pīrī* is able to encapsulate the values or beliefs of a number of faiths within it. Through her example of Roman Catholicism which requires a separation of who is ‘inside’ and who is ‘outside’, in turn facilitates exclusion, which is not compatible with a multifaith school, particularly in relation to the Nishkam model. By its definition a Sikh ethos is non-exclusive and not limited to ‘religion’, it also translates into spheres of kinship (through the school as a ‘home from home’) and a moral space where citizens are formed. Schools create internal or interior frontiers of citizenship (Bear, 2005, p. 236). Bear describes an interior frontier as a “concept that captures the hierarchies of degrees of belonging to the national community [...] it conveys a sense of nationalism as an existential project at the level of the individual citizen.” (2005, p. 236) In the case of Nishkam schools, which are based on a Sikh ethos, the interior frontier becomes one that captures the hierarchies of degrees of belonging not only to the national community but to the collective local community which Ms. West describes as beneficial to the local area as well as its pupils because it involves regenerating the local area with investment in infrastructure and the local economy.

In democratic nations, education “is a critical site for imagining national futures and creating ideal citizens.” (Hall, 2002, p. 87) Kathleen Hall draws on Foucault’s work on power in

understanding the role of modern schooling. She argues that for Foucault, “schools produce modern subjects or “useful individuals”.” (2002, p. 87) This is through the productive power of disciplinary practices. Rather than using education and disciplinary practices to produce modern citizens, Nishkam, through values and virtues embedded in a Sikh ethos have become a form of productive power. Given the minority status of Sikhī, this crucially plays a significant role in the continuation of Sikhī and its culture. Quillen furthers this argument stating, “education is the instrument through which cultures perpetuate themselves. It is the process through which the members of a society assure themselves that the behaviour necessary to continue their culture is learned.” (1955, p. 1) Nishkam emphasises its family culture and learning through values rather than discipline as a means of creating good citizens. It prioritises students from the local area and specifically aims to regenerate the local community going beyond Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of reproduction in education. The school aims to specifically improve the lives of its students by being a well performing, academically excellent, state-of-the-art school situated in one of the less affluent areas of Birmingham. Whilst Nishkam High school is still relatively new with little information on the future prospects of students in terms of their career and social mobility, there is some evidence to suggest that the school actually contributes to improving the social inequalities.

The NST’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr Atwal, has been with the trust since its inception and understands the vision and purpose of the school and how it has changed. I interviewed him at the end of my fieldwork due to his apprehension about my research and busy schedule (as a fulltime radiologist alongside his school commitment). The interview took place in the main boardroom in the old school building, which is now referred to as the Trust Headquarters. The room was a large classroom with tables and chairs organised in a square, with the chairs facing each other. The school grounds were very quiet as it was a weekend. Dr Atwal led me towards the back of the room to one of the chairs and he sat down diagonally opposite from me. The room was spacious, with photos on the wall from ‘famous’ people who

had come to visit the school, such as former Prime Minister Theresa May, when she visited in May 2017, prior to the election that she had called. She had met with the Patron and several members of the leadership team. May stated that “she was inspired by the strong values of education upon which the school is based and by the warm, family-like atmosphere within the school.” (Nishkam media centre 2017) Her official Facebook page covered the visit and featured a photograph with the caption (Figure 29): “Joined an art class today at Nishkam Primary School. My plan for a stronger Britain will deliver a good school place for every child.” This effectively shows how the creation of these spaces makes real the Conservative government’s various categories and imaginaries relating to choice, faith and education.



*Figure 29 - Theresa May’s visit to the school from her Facebook page*

Throughout the interview, Dr Atwal would almost always begin the answer to each of my questions by referring directly to Bhai Sahib, the patron. Whilst others had mentioned the patron before, it was different from this encounter, where some of Dr Atwal’s responses appeared rehearsed, but was understandable as he is a well-respected member of GNNSJ and



works closely with Bhai Sahib in setting the direction of the Nishkam schools. Dr Atwal told me that he did not think a Sikh ethos was necessary for this type of school. For him, like Mrs Jones, having a faith in general was much more important.

*I believe very strongly that faith has a massive role. The other bit that humanists can't really go along with, is one of the most ultimate, ultimate virtues: humility. To have humility you have to understand that at a state of connectedness with God, there is no 'I'. If there is no 'I', if you believe that, if you believe in faith, that you are part of a much bigger divinity or however you want to describe it, you know Buddhists describe it in a very different way. We all feel strongly that actually we all believe in the same thing. That 'I', that loss of 'I' is the beginning of your connectedness, that's where you're really starting to understand God because there is no 'you'. Suddenly, that revelation is real.*

Nishkam schools can be seen as the creation of a somewhat Sikh public nested in a 'secular' public sphere of Britain. The core foundations of the Nishkam schools' project developed by Bhai Sahib, Dr Atwal, and the leadership team, mobilise a Sikh ethos and values system embedded in their understanding of *mīrī pīrī*. Importantly, this creates citizens that transcend the idea of belonging exclusively through nationalism and religion. Dr Atwal's sentiment also represents a defence of 'religion' in general and a kind of dissent from secularism and what religion is deemed to be in society now. This kind of dialogue was also reflected from other members of the senior leadership team such as Ms. West where the school has a role to play in terms of unity and person making in society (Benei, 2009; Cannell, 2019, p. 17).

Nishkam educates through ‘values-based learning’ which essentially encapsulates the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development criteria and the importance of “the quality of our relationships defin[ing] the kind of people we are and, ultimately, the kind of world we live in.” (Ofsted, 2004, p.19) It is a particular form of the British neoliberal project of educating and creating ‘good’ citizens which is part of the implicit public private partnership created through this particular free, faith school. The government realised that schools are overly focused on academic achievement rather than the holistic achievement of children including in their character building and so, the Ofsted inspection framework has been redeveloped to include character education. Without schools demonstrating that they are doing this, they are unable to achieve a ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ rating. It is maintained that it is important that this type of learning might help individuals and societies to flourish, beyond a solely religious context.

Mr Flora described to me his sense of pride when a Christian, Afro Caribbean child decided to practice his faith more actively after attending the school. Mr Flora explained to me that often Sikh schools are proud when a certain number of students (even more impressively when they are not Sikh) can recite the *mūl mantar* (a Sikh prayer) from memory. However, for Nishkam, the intention is to instil their faith *back* into these pupils, not necessarily Sikhī. This particular child, came from a family where his grandparents were practicing Christians, but the nuclear family were “not a very Christian family.” Success was deemed as this child “becoming a better Christian.” I was told that the “Nishkam way is to nurture a person in their own faith to encourage them to grow in their faith.”

The senior leadership makes use of the work of Tony Eaude to help develop their frameworks. Eaude, a teacher turned academic, writes about the need to change the way that young people are taught. One of his frameworks, building on the SMSC, suggests linking ‘spiritual’ to

questions about ‘meaning’; ‘moral’ to those about ‘action’; ‘social’ to those about ‘interaction’; and ‘cultural’ to those about ‘belonging’ (Eaude, 2008, p. 9; 2019). He highlights the ‘cultural capital’ that children bring into the classroom from their own backgrounds and environments (Eaude, 2008, pp. 47-49). Before becoming a consultant, Eaude was the Head Teacher of a multi-cultural Church of England First School in Oxford suggesting that, despite the multi-cultural character of the school, many of the recommendations he provides in relation to this type of schooling are likely to come from a primarily Christian lens and ethos.

Aside from the SMSC framework, Nishkam’s education model is partly based on the United Nations’ (UN) sustainable development goals and Birmingham City Council’s twenty-four spiritual and moral dispositions. In 2007, Birmingham City Council’s Department for Education and the SACRE worked with Birmingham Faith Leaders Group<sup>19</sup> (including GNNSJ) to develop these spiritual and moral dispositions. In 2008, these were introduced into the ‘Birmingham Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education’ which resulted in a move from being taught ‘about’ faith to learning ‘from’ faith (Sagoo, 2015). There was more emphasis placed on the values faith had to offer and learning from faith had become part of personal and social development in order to transcend tension between ‘religious’, ‘cultural’ or ‘secular’ ideology.

For Evans, a school is a “distinctive social situation”, which is a very different learning environment from the home (2007, p. 7). This is an important consideration for the role of faith schools in Britain, are they primarily concerned with faith or education, or is this merely a perceived dichotomy? Social class is deemed important in educational attainment in Britain, but I am also interested in extending our understanding beyond this literature. Nishkam embodies the complexity of trying to create an aspirational space that is neoliberal, authentic, free from racism and focused on realising one’s potential. A Sikh ethos embedded in an

---

<sup>19</sup> An organisation representing faith communities from Birmingham

understanding of *mīrī pīrī* extended further through the SMSC development framework, the twenty-four spiritual and moral dispositions alongside the work of Eade, are the primary mechanisms for Nishkam to navigate this complex matrix.

Given Nishkam's emphasis on creating 'good' citizens, I spent time trying to understand how the values and virtues contributed to this objective. This raised a further question of 'is there a difference between being a 'good' citizen and being a 'good British' citizen?' Dr Atwal explained that the use of language is one of the most important and unique features of the school, both in learning and in building relationships.

*Their [pupils] self-esteem is so important. So, from a very young is age, it is really important that the way, we work very hard at this, we call it the language of values across our classrooms, the way in which our staff treat our children; that we try and avoid blame and shame. Where children see themselves as positively, not negatively, as soon as you start, that's when you get negative behaviours in society, because as soon as the individual starts to see themselves in a negative way and how you see yourself in a negative way is because other people approach you, talk to you, or treat you, or assume that you are, and you start to see yourself in that way or you respond in that way. We try to avoid that circle, where children are treated with respect, dignity, that doesn't mean that there's no strict behaviour guidelines, of course there are strict behaviour guidelines, but respect and dignity so their self-esteem is really high. Having that self-esteem on a virtues-based education means that results [academic attainment] you get are better and better. That's a by-product. It's important to us but it's a by-product of that foundation.*

This represents a transition from a results-based system to a system that is now trying to foster the construction of 'good' citizens essentially doing this through the process of

development of holistic individuals as opposed to solely academic achievement. Schools and their practices are spaces where those who may not otherwise have interacted to come together in one space which can enhance conflicts and inequality whereby these conflicts and inequalities are translated into 'assimilation' of a singular meaning of citizenship. On the other hand, they can also be spaces where these students and families can interact with each other to debate and consider what democracy, citizenship, and ideals of equality mean in society. The school's faith groups would be an example of a mode of education that inculcates a maximal view of citizenship values that teaches citizenship values, responsibilities, and skills throughout their curriculum and through extra-curricular activities.

Citizenship in Britain has linkages to one's legal status and rights in a given state. Schooling and citizenship have a longstanding relationship. For example, Sagoo (2015, p. 143) suggests that citizenship education begins in primary schools through "personal, social and health education (PSHE)." (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2000) The relationship between citizenship and education has only become further instilled over time. The Government's Prevent strategy which co-opts teachers into this project of targeting 'brown' children (See Chapter 3: Sangat) has meant that educators now have a responsibility to report on potential cases of radicalism and/or extremism thus denying schools the ability to act as neutral, democratic spaces as they have become racially and culturally coded.

#### *From 'values' to 'virtues'*

During my fieldwork, the school was beginning to transition their official terminology from 'values' to 'virtues', due to a longstanding academic argument based on the fact that all individuals have values and so in relation to faith, it is more applicable to use the term virtues. Curious as to why the term virtues was not used initially, I asked Dr Atwal why the language had shifted.

*Well, we have always talked about values and virtues. We have always known that virtues is actually the correct word. An organisation can have ‘values’ but virtues have a specific meaning. Virtues have a specific meaning in the human context of righteousness, whereas values, an organization can have values, like Google can have values. Those values can be corporate values, or they can be the vision of that organization. Whereas virtues irrelevant of faiths are ubiquitous. They are to do with the human condition. We knew initially that if we talked about virtues at the beginning, that people wouldn’t understand what virtues were. We felt that, actually more recently we have been having that debate internally over the last year, that we need to be more correct and bring people on the journey, so they understand the difference rather than y’know use language incorrectly.*

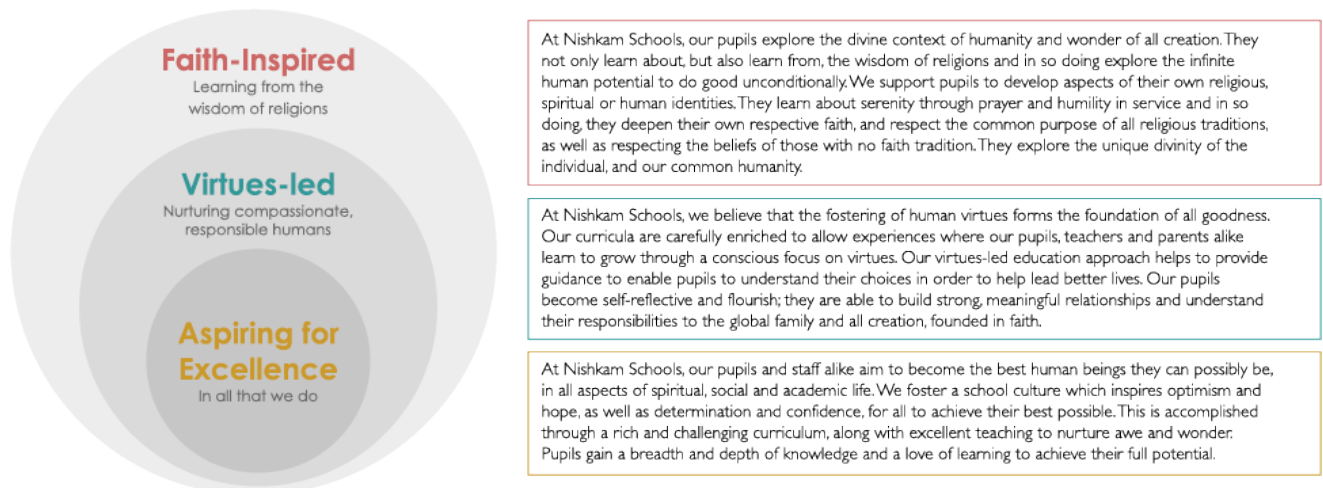


Figure 30 - Nishkam school’s vision (Nishkamschooltrust.org 2019)

Dr Atwal’s justification of the terminology of ‘values’ versus ‘virtues’ is striking alongside the school’s vision framework (Figure 30) which is presented as a corporate model that shows how they satisfy the government regulations but whilst also maintaining their idea of authenticity. The NST prides itself on what they describe as a ‘21st Century Education.’ This model seems to

mimic the form of a 'business plan' and corporate values, synonymous with a model that one would expect to find on a corporate website rather than a school website. Those that set the Trust and Schools' vision can be seen as "interpretive conduits" (Hornberger & Johnson, 2007, p. 528) between a specifically Sikh inspired ethos/framework and the official state policy which could be why the values are illustrated and articulated in this way whilst considering the application process for the opening of a free school which reads like instructions on how to set up a new business (DfE, 2019).

'Values' and 'virtues' were practically applied with the use of the Nishkam 'passport' which is a small blue book (Figure 31), given to all pupils, that contains fifty central 'values' or 'virtues.' The values are grouped into five categories and each value has a dedicated page with at least one corresponding quotation either from a faith tradition or an inspiring figure. It has a definition of the value and 'Signs of Success' which give guidance as to how the value can be used successfully. The aim of the 'passport' is to "further support the growth of values and the development of character of each child, staff and also parents" and it helps realise the schools' vision: "To empower children with values to enable them to excel academically and spiritually enabling them to serve humanity selflessly (Nishkam), with an abundance of love, compassion, and forgiveness". The pupils are encouraged to record their own 'Success Value' (when they have demonstrated a value), their 'Growth Value' (when they want to develop a value) and make personal 'Reflections' (assessments of their character). The sixth form students that I spent most of my time with told me that they did not really use the 'passport' much, now that they were more senior members of the school and that more of an emphasis is placed on it for the younger pupils.

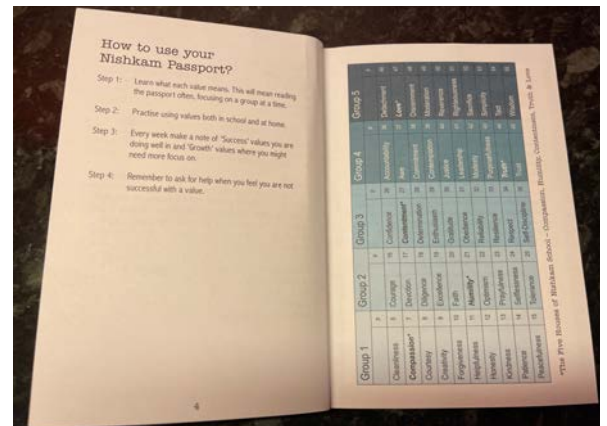
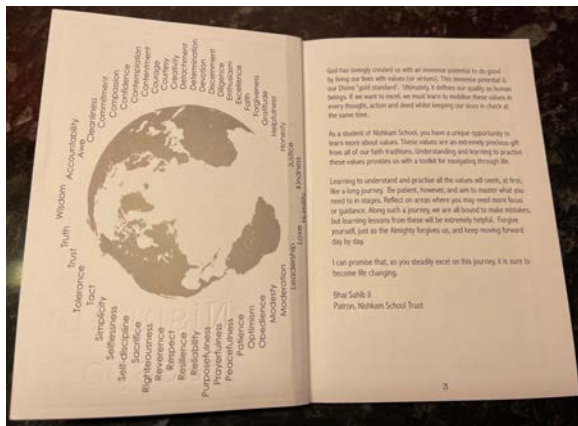
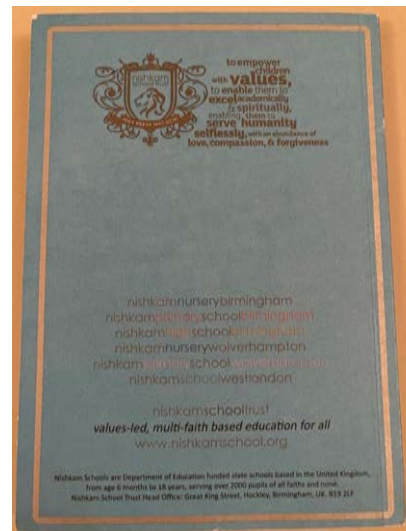
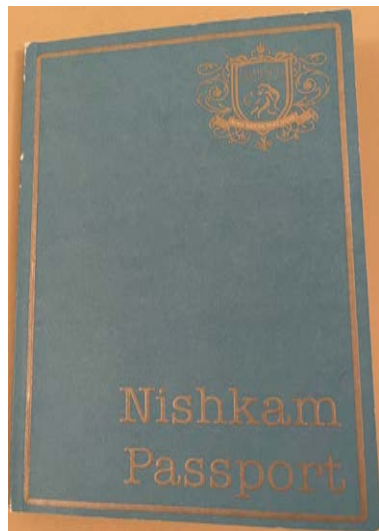


Figure 31 - Nishkam Passport (photos taken by myself)

Asking Mr Davis about his experience of being the Head teacher at a Sikh ethos multi-faith school highlighted some of the challenges as he described “trying to embody within one person, i.e., the principal of the school, trying to embody somebody knowledgeable across all faiths is quite a challenge.” He explained that the faith element of the school is implemented as part of the daily routine through collective worship and praying at lunchtime, whilst this can sometimes be ritualistic it is nonetheless an important time because it ensures that the pupils have to stop and reflect. He justified that there is usefulness for all pupils in this process regardless of belief because



*the free school charter gave an opportunity for communities to provide a quality education through an appropriate means that emphasises what are called British values but politely I might suggest that they are human values or they're world values. They're not specifically British in my opinion. But we all have them.*

Mr Davis is much more attracted to this sense of shared values than a specifically faith-based approach to them (evidenced in his remembrance assembly), however he also does not restrict this understanding to Britain rather extends it to humanity more generally. This is largely reflective of the patron and leadership team's aim to establish an environment in their schools that they hope will become a model for the rest of society by creating what they believe to be model citizens; drawing some parallels to the case of the Doon School where colonists and nationalists aimed to make pupils rational or 'European' citizens of civil society where the school encapsulated ideas of self-improvement, discipline, and opportunity (Srivastava, 2005). Srivastava moves away from a traditional focus on 'class dynamics' in schooling and focuses instead on "the cultural terrain on which the Indian dialogue of citizenship is carried out." (2005, p. 11) He shows how the school instils in its students the belief that to be post-colonial is to be rational, modern, secular, and metropolitan.

### *Admissions criteria*

Humanists UK argue that faith schools "lead to segregation along religious and socio-economic lines" because pupils of no faith are discriminated against through school admissions policies (Humanistsuk.org 2019). To better understand how the Nishkam school operates and how they select pupils, I spoke to Mr. Flora (Trust Lead for Faith Inclusion) as he was part of the team that helped to build and develop the school. He described to me that the GNNSJ Gurdwārā acts as a means of guiding the school and is similar to how Catholic faith schools have bishops to provide guidance and Jewish schools have Rabbis. Mr Flora told me that pupils

are not selected for admission because the school is open access and is classified as a 'non-selective school'. However, it is usually oversubscribed and so there is a need to determine who will be allowed to attend. Each year group has the capacity for a hundred pupils, but the school is usually six times oversubscribed and this is similar for the primary school based in Birmingham which is oversubscribed by five to one.

The school has two types of admissions; one is admission by faith practice and the other is allocation based on distance. Faith practitioners are determined according to a faith criterion which is published by the school. This criterion states that the highest proportion of places are given to those that are 'baptised' or 'initiated' into their respective faiths. However, Mr Flora acknowledged that for Sikhs, being initiated is not the same as being baptised or confirmed, it is more "demanding." He explained,

*It is actually initiation and then you are expected to practice certain values and a certain way of living in terms of prayer, in terms of your lifestyle and in terms of your diet and so on.*

As a result, there is another other category for Sikhs, for admission under the faith practitioner criteria for those that classify as kesadhārī (those that make a conscious effort to keep their hair). He explained that this is not monitored, and so people can choose which category to apply under. However, so that fairness is ensured, they request that parents obtain proof from their religious authority such as a vicar, an imam or a Gurdwārā to confirm that their child is actually initiated or practicing but they do not cross check this proof and accept it on face value alongside the application form.

## ‘Home from home’

Given that the school is rooted in a sense of values and virtues, it is inevitable that creating a feeling of kinship is intrinsic to the education model at Nishkam. For example, at the Nishkam Nursery, the terms ‘massī’ (mother’s sister) or ‘mamā’ (mother’s brother) are used rather than the traditional ‘Miss’ or ‘Sir.’ The use of maternal fictive kinship terms is to foster relationships of care and respect that are familiar to existing relationships (Sagoo, 2015). As Benei states, "Inasmuch as nations are imagined communities, the imagination invoked is often that of the extended family, with vocabularies of kinship abundantly used for producing a sense of national unity." (2009, p. 150) In this case kinship terminology assists in the production of sense of the ‘Nishkam family’ facilitating the transmission of the Nishkam values-based education.

Through their understanding of *mīrī pīrī*, kinship and Sikhī are interwoven in the Nishkam education model and this in turn impacts the relationship that exists with the state. Cannell (2019) illustrates a relationship through Mormons and the American nation state, comparable to that of my interlocutors, where this is a relationship between Sikhs and the British nation state. Although this relationship is not directly comparable, there are some useful parallels that can be drawn such as the link between kinship and Sikhī being emphasised through community and commitment to family in *this* life through the framing of *mīrī pīrī*. Following Cannell, I also argue that shown through Nishkam education, “kinship and religion are often bound up together in practice, and it is by no means always clear where one stops and the other begins.” (2019, p. 6) As Cannell argues, it is not always entirely clear what these terms are specifically referring to, even in relation to the nation state and religion, it is not always easy to explain how these two concepts exist in relation to each other. This fundamentally aligns with an understanding of how to educate citizens resulting from an understanding of *mīrī pīrī* and so, as this chapter shows, it is impossible to separate conversations about kinship,

religion, economics, and politics (Bear, 2005, 2007, 2008; Bear, 2015). Ultimately, the idea of kinship and community is indistinguishable from religious affiliation which is expressed by the school pupils. However, the state also co-opts various areas of life to itself, and this example shows that education is part of social reproduction since children are given over by their parents to the care of a state-approved institution.

Nishkam schools pride themselves on having a friendly environment where bullying is uncommon, and students look out for one another. Sandeep, a university student that was home for the holidays was part of the second intake of students at Nishkam High School which was situated in the old school building. Sandeep told me that she wanted to go to Nishkam because her family is affiliated to GNNSJ, and she had grown up in the jathā and her father helped to build the school. She decided to leave Nishkam and take her A levels at another school given its infancy and its turbulent environment. She described her experience as being a “guinea pig” because the teachers were also new and learning the education model. However, after a while Sandeep was grateful for her Nishkam experience because she had been able to develop her morals and learn how to have self-confidence. Sandeep talked about the school as feeling like a family through the buddy system that existed, “at lunch times we used to have a set seating plan so there was two sixth formers or three sixth formers per table and the rest were year 7 or year 8. So, the year 13s would sit with the year 8s and the year 7 would sit with the year 12. We had that big brother big sister relationship and it’s like treating each other like equals almost and knowing that they can come to us about problems, and we can ask them about stuff which you don’t get in mainstream high school at all unless you have siblings or relatives in older years.”

Sandeep explained that she did not feel that bullying was an issue at the school because bullying and behaviour were taken very seriously. During her time at Nishkam, some students that started calling her a ‘slag’ and the school responded straight away holding an assembly on

this issue and explaining how it was unacceptable. The school emphasised the importance of treating each other with respect and seeing each other as family; often describing themselves as the 'Nishkam family.' Sandeep explained that sometimes, affiliation to the jathā was an issue and could impact students in the school because "everything becomes very close knit and everyone in the community ends up knowing your business. This is because most of the people from the Gurdwārā are all the same people that go to the school."

Some of the current students at the school echoed the same views as Sandeep, that the affiliation to GNNSJ could be challenging. Three sixth form students that I spoke to were not members of the jathā and explained that they sometimes felt that the school's connection to the jathā meant that there were boundaries in relation to what could and could not be discussed in terms of Sikhī. The most obvious example of this was the discussion of the events of 1984. The students explained that they are not allowed to discuss it because it is "political". One of the girls, Karan, explained that she tried,

*Once, one of the values was justice and I was like okay it's a Sikh school we should be able to freely talk about the fact that loads of people didn't get justice in 1984, which is a valid point. But I asked and they were like 'oh no, it's too much of a political topic.' I think it was for my art coursework as well, I wanted to do a piece on it and they were like 'no, you're not allowed cos it's too political and the school doesn't want to get involved with them types of things.' Because it's very linked to Soho Road Gurdwārā (GNNSJ), and obviously they try to stay out of those types of things as much as possible. So, I wasn't allowed to do very passionate things.*

The relationship with GNNSJ and their approach to how they practise Sikhī as a result of their understanding of mīrī pīrī was showcased as being a distinct form of praxis, sometimes different from other Sikhs that are not members of the jathā. These students explained that

when wanting to bring in external speakers to discuss topics related to Sikhī, there was a requirement that they are from within GNNSJ. One of the girls was Head of the Sikh faith at the school and so was trying to organise for a speaker from the charity 'Basics of Sikhī' to deliver a short presentation. She asked Mr Singh, the staff Head of the Sikh faith and he explained that they were not allowed because Basics of Sikhī are not affiliates of GNNSJ, but he did not agree with the decision. Mr. Singh also recounted this experience to me personally and clarified that despite working for the Nishkam School and identifying as Sikh, he himself is not affiliated to any particular group or Gurdwārā. Mr. Singh disagreed with this decision because he felt that often the jathā members did not make the time to come to the school to speak at these events and students were not exposed to varied views of Sikhī.

Nishkam's policy on not allowing 'external' Sikh speakers is in line with their ideology of reframing Sikhī in a way that does not establish Sikhs as other (Kaur, 2020, p. 8). However, as Sikhī becomes reframed it results in "Sikh existence as aspiring toward inclusion into a society invested in the perpetuation of Christian, patriarchal, white hegemony." (Kaur, 2020, p. 8) Minority faith schools are also further subjected to policies such as Prevent where frontline workers, including those in education are required to report potential threats (and those at risk) of 'non-violent extremism', radicalisation and 'all forms of terrorism'. This makes schools become securitised spaces meaning it is simultaneously impossible to identify and not identify these threats. Faith schools also face the impossibility of distilling the essence of religion into a regulated, securitised institution which becomes a kind of failed project similar Nita Kumar's explanation of schools in Banaras that aimed to provide Hindu religious education to its pupils. "All the rituals tried in our new Hindu/India schools [...] failed before the changing evaluation of the prestige of English education, the image of an educated, modern person, and the need for self-questioning and reform." (1996, p. 150)

Despite the challenges of being associated with a jathā, the family element of the Nishkam schools was extremely distinctive with two sixth form students emphasising the ‘family atmosphere’ as being one of their highlights of the Nishkam school and what really set it apart from other schools, grammar schools in particular. Despite the school being situated in one of Birmingham’s most deprived areas, they seem to have been successful in creating a happy environment for the students through fostering an atmosphere of family and kinship. Although this was recognised as a benefit, some of the students reflected that the school could become “pind-like” (meaning traditional or village like) because there is an environment of “chuglī” or gossip which can become slightly toxic. Unexpectedly, one of the issues highlighted was that because Punjabīs are a majority at the school, there is a desire to “be different” and stand out. Sometimes some of these students who wanted to stand out would try not to associate with being able to speak Punjabī or affiliate to Sikhī so that they would have something that would make them unique as most of them have not been exposed to an environment where they make up a majority and an overwhelming sense of familiarity.

Some of the sixth form students asked me about going to university and if it was scary as they were both nervous and excited. However, one of the girls expressed that she was quite scared to go to university and wished that there was a “Nishkam uni” because of how comfortable and familiar the school was. The students recognised that Nishkam effectively represented a ‘bubble’ and an environment that is quite insular and a kind of “la la land”. Karan told me that she liked being in the comfort of Nishkam but that she actually felt that it was a bit of a problem for her.

*I don't know how to interact with other races. It sounds really weird, but I can't; because I am so used to talking to apne (our kind of people), like for example the first time I met you I knew you knew Punjabī so I could use some Punjabī words. Whereas if I was like talking to a gorī (someone white), or somebody else I would say like 'hunnā' (a*

*colloquial term for yes) and they would be like 'what?' So, because I am so comfortable using both languages it is natural for me to use both and so when I talk to other people it's hard.*

For many Sikhs in Britain, Punjabi and English spoken together are part of their vernacular. They will openly switch between both languages, and it is almost like an outward symbol of their interpretation of being Sikh and British. This expression of bilingualism is embedded in their daily praxis of Sikhī. For them, speaking Punjabi, is no different from speaking English, it is interchangeable at times that suit them and the creation of a new culture in a diaspora.

The students' overall perspective of school was that they saw it as an extension of 'home' where they were quite comfortable expressing themselves. Their slight anxieties arose when they considered what the environment of the world outside Nishkam would be like, such as university. Given the emphasis on Nishkam providing not only an academic education but also one that is more holistic, I was interested in how the school felt that they were meeting this aim. The students expressed their satisfaction whilst being at school but also their worries about how they might handle the future when they are no longer in the safety of the 'Nishkam family'. Ms. West explained,

*The only thing I think we have got to think about is, do we prepare our students sufficiently for the real world? Because we are almost like a little enclave here and actually the world isn't permeated with our lovely values and virtues. I wonder how do you prepare people for that? I am not quite sure. The one point for improvement we got...we got outstanding (in the Ofsted inspection) for it, but it was 'how are you preparing young Sikh men and women for life beyond school.' I thought that was really interesting because if they come from quite a traditional background at home and then*



*they are going off to university, how are we preparing them for that for example?*

*Although, I do think that the majority of them do stay at home.*

Nishkam's attempts to be an all-encompassing faith school with universal values coupled with its admissions policy gives rise to an insular nature creating cultural nuances through a desire for individuality by its pupils. These factors further relate to how the school is portrayed and understood by its key stakeholders. The wider Sikh community tends to envision it as a Sikh school that is there to improve students' knowledge of Sikhī, although students tend to see the school as a family environment that supports them well pastorally, for them, the main reason that the school is a Sikh school is because of the student body being primarily Sikh rather than the actual teaching of Sikhī.

The teachers are not representative of the student body however, many of the non-Sikh teachers value the Sikh ethos as a means to practise holistic education. All of the non-Sikh teachers that I interviewed felt that it was necessary for the school to be a Sikh ethos multi-faith school and that the Sikh faith is unique in providing the value base. The Sikh members of staff that I spoke to were generally more mixed and did not feel that Sikhī needed to be the value base but that potentially any faith could provide the ethos for this kind of school model however, this is more complex than it seems. For the Sikh members of staff, Sikhī is their idea of what is 'normal' and encapsulates their practise of mīrī pīrī. Sikh praxis is imbibed in their way of being and so separating Sikhī as the ethos base is not seen as remarkable. Sikhī is their dharam and shapes their ontological understandings of society (Pool, 2020, pp. 1, 12). Many of these members of staff have a belief in any kind of faith and so suggest that as long as faith is central, any faith can provide the ethos for a multifaith school model. For those that are non-Sikhs, the main reason why a Sikh ethos in particular works is because it has the ability to encapsulate other understandings of being. This is evident through Ms. West expressing that a Sikh ethos is essential because a stereotypical understanding of Catholicism does not

encapsulate other understandings of being and does not foster an environment for this to occur.

Karan decided to start wearing a pagh (turban) whilst attending Nishkam. Pupils often express their identities in a number of different ways, and this was a decision that she had taken. For some Sikhs this can be quite a momentous occasion as it is the first time that they are making a visible, outward commitment to their faith. I asked Karan what this experience was like for her, and she explained that at first, she was worried that it would be a big deal but when she came into school, she did not feel judged because so many of the pupils already wear paghs. One of her friends, Simran, told us about someone she knew who went to a predominantly white grammar school and felt quite nervous about when he first wore a pagh. However, Simran did not share this apprehension because of her exposure to the student body at Nishkam. Karan said that for her, the only uncomfortable experience was when “some of the white teachers asked me and were like ‘oh what’s with the change, like it’s a bit different?’ and then I explained it to them, and they were like ‘yeah its cool, whatever.’ Because there is so many other kids here that are (wearing a pagh) [...] and they already have a kind of, a little bit of understanding.”

The school has become a kind of utopia and as a result, there are fears associated with the future. As the Nishkam school is still a young school, it is difficult to assess the impact of the values-led learning approach. Sandeep felt that her values helped her when she went away to university, but she was unsure if these were as a result of her Nishkam education or the way that she had been raised at home. The school seems to provide somewhat a safe haven for what may seem like a major decision, such as wearing a pagh, if it were to be made in a non-Sikh majority school also resonating with the family, ‘home from home’ atmosphere that the Nishkam School seems to have nurtured. This shows how a public sphere that has a racialised,

religious hierarchy affects those from minority faiths in Britain and this dilemma is recognised at some level by the pupils I spoke to.

### An 'awkward mediator'

In October 2018, a Sikh school in Coventry had been in special measures so the Department for Education stepped in and planned for the school to be taken on by another school `trust which was later revealed as NST. There was a split in the community with petitions on both sides for the failing school to join or not join the Trust. Some parents from the school in Coventry said that they had not been told of these plans and that joining this Trust would 'erode the Sikh values.' On the other side, members from GNNSJ were signing a petition for the Trust to take over the failing school given its excellent Ofsted track record.

This controversy is an illustration of the difficulty that Nishkam has in mediating all of these competing visions of citizenship, education, aspirations, religion, and public life. School is a space "in which the private and public ambiguously meet" (Werbner, 2007, p. 174) especially through faith schools and the creation of a public private partnership as there are competing narratives of what the school aims to create as a 'safe haven' for its pupils, whilst also operating as a business and adhering to essential requirements.

Defining what is the 'right kind' of education, is an almost impossible task. The 'right type' of education for different people varies at distinctive moments in their lives. For the young girls I describe in this chapter, their idea of the 'right' education is determined as an environment in which they can flourish. For example, the values-based education provided at Nishkam schools allows them to perform to what they perceive as the best of their capabilities. This is the 'right kind' of environment to produce 'good' citizens and as a positive by-product, academically

astute individuals. Priorities for the majority of parents are their aspirations for their children and social mobility.

In Sagoo's doctoral research on the Nishkam Nursery, through two ethnographic figures, she illustrates why using the language of values rather than the language of faith might be seen as more appealing:

“During his interview in 2008, R. Singh noted that to create a Sikh-inspired multi-faith school of the kind they envisaged: *‘the only arena we can function in is of a faith school, there’s no other easy model for us to exist in’*. In his 2008 interview, Bhai Sahib suggested public opinion would more readily accept the educational vision if the term *‘faith’* was replaced by *‘value-led’*”

(Sagoo, 2015, p. 212, original emphasis)

The Trust is in a position where it has a duty to both the state (as the funding and accountable body) and the wider community (also including the specific Sikh community). These groups have conflicting ideas meaning that NST is placed in a precarious position where they are required to present themselves differently to different stakeholders. This becomes even more apparent when liminal figures, such as myself, both as a Sikh and a researcher, make it difficult to identify how the school should present itself. This is demonstrated through the kinds of performative conversations that some of my interlocutors were having with me.

Ethnographies that have demonstrated how faith is used in schools as a tool for nation building (Benei, 2008, 2009; Froerer, 2007; Froerer, 2011; Srivastava, 2005), are only able to show the successes of these schools being able to create a sense of nationalism, because the faiths in those places are majority faiths in those public spheres. In Britain where there is a racialised, religious hierarchy in the public sphere, the only way a Sikh school can successfully

exist is as a Sikh ethos multi-faith school. This explains why there is a conflict in the identity of the school and therefore there is a tailoring of the way the school is presented differently to key stakeholders.

Education policy remains rooted in deeply embedded Christian values which does not allow for a school to flourish unless it aligns with those values. A Sikh school, and even a Sikh ethos school becomes problematic because it directly contradicts those values by trying to encompass broadly spiritual Christian values and multi-faith practices. A Sikh ethos school established through the concept of *mīrī pīrī* (for example *kar sevā*) and the use of faith language that has been tailored to make it more appealing shows how Nishkam has created a Sikh public encapsulating kinship, religion, nationalism, and citizenship. Faith schools also face the impossibility of distilling the essence of religion into a regulated, securitised institution resulting in a reframing of a Sikh ethos demonstrated through Mr Davis, the Head Teacher, and the problem that this poses for some students. Karan felt that the Head Teacher should be representative of a Sikh ethos, and she was quite concerned that the current Head Teacher did not have a strong affiliation to Sikhī or any other faith.

*If you are saying it's a Sikh based multi faith ethos school or whatever it is, then as harsh as it sounds you have to have some element of Sikhī in there. 'Cos if you are putting the name Sikh in the title then you may as well just take it out if the values have nothing to do with Sikhī. If you're not using examples from Sikhī or you're not using anything to do with the faith itself but you're using the faith, as kind of like a decorative tool then it's not right I don't think.*

Nishkam is not only a school that aims to further and foster Sikhī, but also one that provides a defence of religion more broadly, in a context where religion is seen as problematic. This is emphasised by all of the teachers, except Mr Davis which is interesting because he is the Head

Teacher of the school. Nishkam is both a minority and racialised and has to operate in a highly securitised context with very specific categories of religion and secular. These categories complicate the position of Nishkam further as can be seen in the admissions process, where levels of religiosity are not directly comparable but equally important. Managing all of these competing narratives is a difficult situation for Nishkam to navigate. On a grassroots level, this poses confusion and irritation for example through the disallowance of non-GNNSJ speakers and the discussion of controversial topics such as 1984. Engaging with external stakeholders and partaking in controversy creates a loss of control for Nishkam where there is a fear of being seen as not fitting in with a 'good' citizen narrative. The example of Nishkam schools exemplifies the impossibility of being a faith school that is not compatible with a racialised, religious hierarchical nation state with a specific understanding of what it means to have a faith.

ਕਰਿ ਸੇਵਾ, ਭਜੁ ਹਰਿ ਹਰਿ ਗੁਰਮਤਿ ॥

Kar sevā bhaj har har gurmat.

Do sevā - selfless service; follow the Gurū's Teachings, and vibrate the Lord's Name, Har, Har.

ਤਿਆਗਿ ਮਾਨੁ ਝੂਠੁ ਅਭਿਮਾਨੁ ॥

Ṫiāg mān jhūṫh abhimān.

Abandon pride, falsehood, and arrogance.

ਜੀਵਤ ਮਰਹਿ ਦਰਗਹ ਪਰਵਾਨੁ ॥੩॥

Jīvaṫ marēh ḍargēh parvān. ||3||

Remain dead while yet alive, and you shall be welcomed in the Court of the Lord. ||3||

(Sri Gurū Granth Sāhib 176)

## Chapter 7: Sevā

*There is no such thing as Sikh radicalisation. Sikhī itself is radical.*

*- Ranjeet Singh*

Sevā is often defined as ‘selfless service’ and is performed through differing forms of ‘charity’ and philanthropy and also serves as a form of civic engagement (Hirvi, 2014). It is the manifestation of mīrī pīrī: a way of living both spiritually and temporally. I explore how the dominant public sphere, which has perceived tensions with Sikhī and Sikh ideology, impacts the presentation and performance of sevā by Sikhs in Britain.

In this chapter, I discuss how my interlocutors are reclaiming their identity through carrying out different forms of what they classify as *sevā*. This is whilst simultaneously fitting into a racially and religiously hierarchical public sphere. Building on Anderson's "long-distance nationalism" (1998), the term 'diasporic nationalism' can be used to explain the need for a separate state for Sikhs to preserve their sovereignty (Singh, 2020a) as a result of not 'fitting in' to the dominant public sphere. Although this type of nationalism is usually applied to a nationalism for a country left behind, it is clear that for my Sikh interlocutors this is not for 'India' but more for a country whose sovereignty will be realised despite a loss that was solidified under the colonial period in India. Therefore, this kind of 'diasporic nationalism' could be seen as a praxis of making meaning and a form of self-articulation (Nijhawan, 2014).

Through exploration of my interlocutors' motivations for philanthropic work and the setting up of charitable organisations, I examine whether this is linked to the ethics of *Sikhī*, the forced racialised identity that has been placed on Sikhs in the public sphere or a combination of these factors. Following Liberatore's (2017) work with British, Somali, Muslim women and Hoque's (2019) work with young Muslim men in Luton, I delve into the current British context to try and understand the constraints under which my interlocutors are navigating the broader classifications of being Sikh and being British. Moreover, I consider what it means to be a "good diaspora" (Liberatore, 2018) and consider Mamdani's (2005) conceptualisation of 'good' Muslims and 'bad' Muslims. Mamdani highlights that the contrast between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims is not real, but that this claim is part of a racialised rhetoric in contemporary society. In research relating to street kitchens in Britain, Zavos (2019, pp. 43-48) writes about the importance of narratives for South Asian diaspora communities in Britain. He shows how narratives such as what Jouili calls "an unprecedented Islamophobic discourse and mode of governance" (2015, p. 189) can shape how places, communities and individuals directly. I show in this chapter that part of the current inflection of *sevā* is that it has a double or ambiguous



status between traditional ethical work and 'charity' which is understood to operate in the 'good' public sphere of Britain and so in some ways it can mediate between these elements. Sevā allows my interlocutors to navigate these elements although not always smoothly.

I present a unique perspective into a complex group by considering what are acceptable forms of sevā through the lens of two key organisations, Midland Langar Seva Society and Sikh Youth UK. Who do these organisations serve? How do Sikhs envision their place in a British public sphere? How has their identity been further politicised and what does this mean in Sikhs' everyday lives? Through using vernacular understandings of sevā and Sikhī, I explore the question, what does it actually mean to be a Sikh in Britain? Particularly through the example of MLSS, I provide an analysis of how langar is being inserted within and transformed by the British charity sector as a source of 'free food' rather than as a site of labour and commensality.

### Sevā as mīrī pīrī

At the simplest level, the basis for Sikh ethics is threefold: 'Naam Japo (meditate or 'remember God'), kirat karo (work hard) and vand chhako (share what you have)' (Nesbitt, 2016, p. 27). This means that Sikhs should live a life full of meditation, conscientiousness, and generosity. Sikhs focus their lives on their relationship with Gurū and partaking in sangat which essentially means being part of the Sikh community. Following the examples in Sikh history, the Sikh ideal combines action and belief (T. Singh, & Singh, G., 2016). The janamsakhīs (which are accounts of Gurū Nānak's life that are thought to have been written by his companion, Bhai Balā) are commonly used to understand and contextualise the Gurū and Sikh ideology and polity.

An important janamsakhī (a version of this janamsakhī was given in Chapter 5: Gurdwārā from the perspective of GNNSJ) is the origin of the Sikh institution of langar, known as Sacha Sauda

or the 'true transaction'. Gurū Nānak's father (Mehta Kālu) gave him twenty rupees and told him to make a good investment or transaction with the money. On his travels with his companion, Bhai Mardanā, Gurū Nānak met a group of sādhus (religious ascetics) who were hungry as a result of a disease that had wiped out the village. He decided that the best use of this money was to feed and clothe the holy men and the villagers. He spent all of the money his father had given him on food and resources for the village and then returned home (Singh, 1989, p. 63). He believed<sup>20</sup> that investing in people was an investment into society which transcended any kind of monetary transaction. This was an idea that was echoed throughout Gurū Nānak's travels in his encouragement of sangat and pangat (a row of people sitting together at the same level to eat food, usually from the langar) as well as the instillation of dharamsāls (a place for congregation that later become the 'Gurdwārā') (Singh, 1993a, p. 2). The practice of sangat and pangat are key examples of the importance of the labour element of langar through an emphasis on welfare and community. These concepts were crucial in a dismantling of the social order through radical social reform and the reclamation of unconstrained social interaction. He showed how one can live in the world whilst also staying connected to the Divine which essentially encapsulates the concept of mīrī pīrī. As I will explain later in the chapter, the institution of langar as it was designed to be practised, could be understood as a total social fact, as a microcosm for the praxis of Sikhī more broadly. I show how this becomes complicated when it is inserted into the liberal, racialised public sphere.

Given the importance placed on community, social ethics have a principal role in the Sikh faith. The Gurūs have placed significant emphasis on social equity and the contribution of Sikhs in

---

<sup>20</sup> The stories in the janamsakhīs and the actions of the Gurū are supported through the writings in the Gurū Granth Sāhib. The Gurū Granth Sāhib is a unique scripture because it was compiled by the Gurūs in their lifetimes and contains contributions from six Gurūs, fifteen Bhagats, eleven Bhatts and four Sikhs that reflect a Nānakian philosophy – that is, a philosophy that follows in the praxis of Gurū Nānak (Chahal 2008; Singh S 2004).

welfare and community development initiatives. Sikhs are also encouraged to help in the economic improvement of the whole community and not only for themselves or their families. This is demonstrated through the Sikh concept of *daswandh*, which is the donation of ten percent of one's total wealth. This includes both financial capital and one's time, for example actively participating in charity work. The Sikh faith first and foremost teaches acceptance. The Gurūs expressed the universal collective as being above all. This means that Sikhs have a responsibility to respect the followers of all or no faith (Mansukhani, 1988, p. 122). Sikhs are taught to model themselves on the Gurū and it can be concluded from Gurū Nānak's teachings that the basis of a spiritual life is morality. Therefore, to some extent, it is a Sikh's responsibility to try and help others.

*“Seva means a deed of love and selfless service for fellow human beings. Seva is presented as the highest ideal in Sikh ethics. By seva one cultivates humility. By seva one overcomes the obsession with egoistic self and extends beyond individuality.”*

(Kaur Singh, 2011, p. 86)

Sevā is a practical way for Sikhs to live according to *mīrī pīrī*. Partaking in *sevā* is imperative for Sikhs because it erodes away the ego, which is a key goal for Sikhs and assists on the journey towards recognising all of creation as 'one' (Nesbitt, 2016, p. 26). In the Sikh faith, acts that are selfless and dedicated to the Divine are considered as *sevā*, for example, the institution of *langar* is recognised as a practical approach to *sevā*. However, the praxis of these conventions varies according to each person or group's interpretations of them particularly in a public sphere where the agenda has moved from an emphasis on multiculturalism into the most recent 'Big Society' agenda. As Zavos explains, "Religious identities are seen both as part of the reason for the fracturing of society, but also, when properly mediated, as excellent examples of the kind of 'little platoons' identified as key to regeneration." (2015, p. 249) Often this can lead to a conflict of a shared understanding of an 'authentic' form of Sikhī, where

understandings of *mīrī pīrī* are misaligned and institutions are transformed by the charity sector to align more with the 'Big Society' agenda rather than on the 'authentic' origins of the praxis. The adaptation of langar centres it on the provision of 'free food' rather than as a community kitchen which can lead us to consider it as an economic public good rather than as a site for actively practising *sevā*. Langar is transformed by the British charity sector to align with the dominant, majority Christian model of charity as secularised and 'humanitarianism' (Mittermaier, 2021).

### Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS)

Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS) is a charity that was set up in the Midlands to address issues facing the local community whilst maintaining a Sikh ethos. Two friends founded the charity in Walsall in 2013. It is an organization that "provid[es] hot food and drink to those living on the street, schools, safe houses and those on the poverty line. MLSS operates on a Sikh based ethos, where we help and support all people regardless of social status." (MLSS, 2019) Although the charity was initially set up in Walsall, it now operates across Britain and more recently, worldwide. According to MLSS, 'Langar is to address poverty in the world, bringing the basic fundamental human rights of free food to the forefront.' (MLSS, 2019) Based on this definition of langar, the most important part is the free food and so this is what MLSS have focused their efforts on providing. This is a demonstration of how the institution of langar has been reframed to fit into the British charity sector (Mittermaier, 2021). I often participated in what the charity described as 'homeless feeds,' and more colloquially, 'feeds.' Mostly I attended feeds in Birmingham city centre and in Walsall town centre. I usually attended with the same friend who has been a volunteer with MLSS since its inception and as a result of this, I was fortunate to be able to interact with many of the other volunteers.

Once, after one of the feeds was finished, I stayed with my friend, Rupinder, and we were talking with one of the founders of MLSS, Randhir Singh, a middle-aged man who grew up in Walsall. He was drawing on his experiences, background and how he used to be as he describes 'quite rough' and therefore had lots of life experience. He described himself as having been 'in with the wrong crowds' and having a 'gangster type' lifestyle. He talked to us about how he set up MLSS after volunteering for another prominent Sikh charity. He explained that since setting up MLSS he received all kinds of backlash, particularly from within the community.

*People see me and the other guys who set it up as gangster types. I try to not let it bother me and to just do sevā and do the best work that we can. You know, what is the point of doing this work or sevā and then showing off about it? That's not Sikhī – that's not what it's about. For me it is about being a good person and being a good Sikh and changing my life around. In life it is important to take negatives and make them into positives. Turn everything around and make it positive because it is about removing your ego. MLSS is not about being better than anyone else or showing people: look what we can do. It is about fulfilling a need and doing sevā. Sometimes when I come to the feeds, I really want to get involved and help with the serving but because it has become so big, it is important for me to take a back step and let others get involved because that is part of the sevā. People form opinions on people based on what they think they know and sometimes create rivalries. You know how it is with others setting up their own versions.*

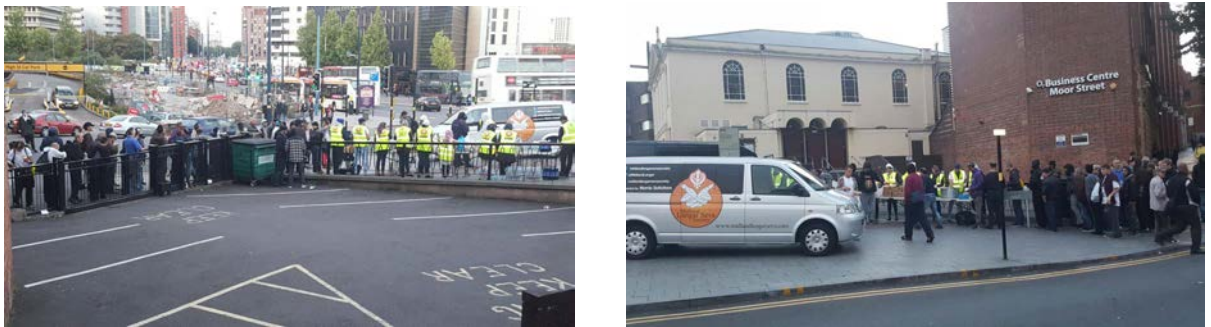
Randhir is an amritdhārī (initiated into the Khālsā) Sikh that is tall and broad and can appear quite intimidating to those not familiar with him. However, he has a charismatic personality and whenever I have seen him or personally interacted with him, he seemed to radiate an aura, which made me realise why people respect him. As described by some of the volunteers,

rather than it being that people fear him, it seems to be more a feeling of respect and so not wanting to disappoint him. It is a difficult feeling to express however, Randhir seemed to be somewhat a role model for these young Sikhs. In particular, for young men who had maybe not had the best start in their lives and found Sikhī as something to help them get their lives back on track.

MLSS is received with varied responses from within the community. One of my interlocutors, Jeevan, a young, lower middle class, amritdhārī student from Wolverhampton told me that she did not think that the work that MLSS was doing was necessarily beneficial. She told me that they are only making the problem worse. As she explained, this is because they are providing people with food and therefore there is no incentive for them to change their lives. She was quite cynical about homeless people and described them as all being “addicts causing themselves to be in these negative situations.” She also said that it allowed the government to “get away with not addressing these issues.” Jeevan highlights the problems associated with organisations that fit in with the goals of the ‘Big Society’ agenda. She articulates how communities are fulfilling gaps in the welfare state rather than the systemic problems being addressed.

The charity is diverse and has volunteers from a number of backgrounds with people of all ages, but many of them are young. There are all kinds of volunteers from the community that range from those that volunteer daily, weekly or whenever they are able to. Particularly at the Walsall feed, there were often young children with their mothers. One of the mothers told me that she brings her children so that they can be exposed to the “real world and not live a sheltered life”. Often at the Birmingham feed there are lots of young Sikhs that volunteer particularly that make up the core team of volunteers ensuring that everything runs smoothly.

The very first time I volunteered with MLSS was in December 2017 when the weather was extremely cold and wet. I had attended with my cousin and her friend but as it was after work, we were slightly late and so the setting up had already taken place. The feed station was in an open outdoor space in the centre of Birmingham (Figure 32). There were long catering tables stacked with different foods and drinks with around fifteen volunteers, mainly young men, and women. Some of the men had paghs (turbans) and beards but there was a range of people. I didn't get the opportunity to talk to many people as the queue was very long and continued along the side street.



*Figure 32 - MLSS homeless feed in Birmingham (photos from MLSS Facebook page)*

My cousin and her friend advised me to slot in wherever there was space. On this occasion the hot food was dāl (lentils) mixed with rice. The pan it was in was huge; I remember thinking I could probably fit into it. Given the weather we were all wrapped up warm and I had a large thick jacket on. I began serving the dāl. One of the regular volunteers was passing me trays and advising me how much to put into each one. I was using a stainless-steel plate to fill the trays as it was more efficient than using a ladle. I didn't realise how difficult this would be; particularly when the queue started moving, it was hard to keep up pace. My arm started to ache, and I was covered in dāl! It was quite a memorable experience.

Despite the culture shock of volunteering with MLSS the first time, I felt that there was a lot to learn from them and their volunteers. The experience raised many questions such as what benefit does it actually have for its service users and what really is the connection to Sikhī? I began to uncover some of these answers through attending the feeds and speaking to the volunteers regularly. On one occasion, there were lots of different volunteers that I hadn't seen before; unlike usual, they were mainly white. Rupinder told me that they were from John Lewis as they had donated the food that was being served on this occasion. John Lewis are one of a number of organisations that sponsor MLSS to give them either financial support or food donations and so, sometimes members from these organisations would come along and volunteer. This shows the importance of the donation and serving of the food rather than the collective donation, preparation, serving, commensality and clearing away as the entire process that constitutes the institution of langar. The idea of 'charity' in the British public sphere therefore becomes the main determinant of how seemingly 'charitable' institutions are practised publicly.

Taking from the practice of Sikhī, as volunteers, we were required to cover our heads whilst undertaking this sevā. As we were setting up, a member of the public asked if he could take a bottle of water. Rupinder asked him to wait in the queue like everyone else, but he told her that he didn't want any food, he only wanted water. She reluctantly gave him a bottle and he walked away. After this exchange one of the core volunteers came over and said to her "bhēnjī (sister) next time don't give it as we haven't done the Ardās (a Sikh prayer used as a mandate before any event or occasion) yet." She said she hadn't realised and apologised. This is significant because although the charity functions as an organisation to feed the homeless or help those in need in a sense of British charity, there is still an attempt to embed the practise in Sikhī, through the Ardās, emphasising the adherence to Sikh ideology and ethics.



During the sevā, one of the cars had Wāhegurū simran (continuous recital of the word 'Wāhegurū')<sup>21</sup> playing from it quite loudly. The lady from John Lewis who was stood next to me, said she loved the music and that it was similar to what they play in her yoga class. She said, 'it is so soothing and relaxing.' Whilst we were talking, she said to me that it didn't seem like there were too many people waiting for food. It was the height of summer and so it was warm and dry. I said to her that my friend had told me before that sometimes there are less people when the weather is nice. She agreed with me that was probably the case but noticed that it was also still quite early in the evening. When I attended the feeds and the weather was cold and wet, the queues were often very long and continued growing throughout the evening. Sometimes the food started to run low so the portion sizes would be reduced in order to prevent the food from running out. On this occasion, we continued to serve, and the queue became smaller and smaller, and the food started to run out. One of the other John Lewis volunteers, who was stood next to me said it looked like the food was going to run out, but it only finished as the queue ended and she said, 'it's so nice – it is almost like its God's will.'

Many of the people who came to receive hot food often showed gratitude to the volunteers. One of the service users referred to me as 'bhēn' meaning sister showing the respect afforded to the volunteers. In Sikhī, young men and women usually refer to each other as bhēnji (sister) or bhāji (brother) rather than by each other's names and so, it is also representative of the relationship and fictive kinship that the service users have built with the organisation and its volunteers over time. The range of people queuing to receive the food was vast. Some people had little, or no belongings and it was clear from their demeanour that they were struggling. It was likely that this would be one of their only (if not only) meals. In some other instances, some of the recipients were less obviously facing difficulty but talked about how they were

---

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0f5icFtXpk> an example similar to the music that was playing from the cars.

struggling to make ends meet on their low incomes. Often you would hear people ask if they could take more than one portion for their children or other family members.

On one occasion at a feed in Walsall a young man dressed smartly came over to the stand where we were serving the food. He told us how MLSS helped to change his life and get him back on his feet when there was no one else helping him. He felt that the service MLSS provided helped to keep him afloat at his lowest point when he was unemployed and homeless. He attributed the change in his life to the support that MLSS had given him. This young man was just one of the examples of the many people who had similar stories based on their experience with MLSS.

'Good' diaspora?

Jasjit Singh (2015) argues that "Sikhs in the diaspora are increasingly making efforts to take langar out of the Gurdwara so that it fulfils its core objective of serving the whole community." In Chapter 5: Gurdwārā, I discussed the institution of langar, and described its intended purpose of driving social equality and dismantling pre-existing norms based on caste (and by extension other social hierarchy such as class). However, in the context of MLSS, I propose that this practice of langar could potentially be seen as an influence of the dominant public sphere on how Sikhī is performed publicly. In modern society, where the institution of langar is being extended beyond the Gurdwārā and into the community, the equity characteristic becomes more complicated. Within this context, it is likely that social relations created in the homeless feeds are different from those in the Gurdwārā. This is in place of the institution being defined holistically in terms of removing hierarchy through the active participation of members from the contribution of food items to the preparation of the food and the collective commensality and clearing up.

In the Gurdwārā setting, the langar does not involve an explicit exchange of goods or services or an incurrence of debt. In the underpinning Sikh ideology of langar, there is an emphasis on equality that moves away from the Hindu custom where higher and lower castes would eat separately and crucially, where members of higher castes would not accept cooked food from those from lower castes (Nesbitt, 2015, p. 86; Srinivas, 1995, pp. 66-67). Given that Sikhī has a basis in social ethics and an importance placed on community, there is an emphasis on welfare and community development initiatives that extend beyond the 'Sikh community.' As the institution of langar is centred on food and in a modern British charity context, 'free food,' it is important to consider how langar can be seen as a public good (Bear & Mathur, 2015) and how it is understood and transformed in the vernacular context. This is where we take an understanding of the public good as a morally valorised endeavour for a collective shared better future (Bear & Mathur, 2015). Organisations such as MLSS are able to fulfil two key objectives through the 'free food' narrative as they are able to successfully perform as 'good diaspora' (Liberatore, 2018) whilst also providing a so called 'public good' – food. We can see these forms of langar as moral projects that allow them to self-cultivate and also to help others (Das, 2010).

Importantly, the institutions of langar and sangat were almost simultaneously introduced into Sikhī, highlighting the significance of the community aspect of the institution of langar. Beyond the notion of 'free food,' langar serves as a mechanism in which there is participation in the labour elements of the institution from all members of the community, including all ages, genders, classes, and races etc. Given this theoretical foundation of langar which is most commonly situated in the Gurdwārā, we can see how to some extent, the nature of the institution of langar has been transformed by the British charity sector by promoting it as 'free food.' Rather than placing the emphasis on the provision, preparation, and distribution of langar among the same sangat, it has taken on a new role in modern society which can be seen through two lenses; a shift away from the whole institution of collective labour and

consumption or potentially as extending the moral obligation to share what one has (vand ke shakkō – the principle of sharing what you have). The most likely outcome is that it is some combination of these two perspectives, particularly as evidenced by MLSS who see providing ‘free food’ as a core element of their sevā.

Sevā in Sikhī is more complicated than ‘charity’ or giving as it is centred on a Sikh ethics of care. Similar to what Mittermaier (2021) argues about an Islamic charity organisation, sevā and langar as a form of embodied practice of sevā, involve both “caring for” and “caring about” others. This gap becomes more evident in the contrast between langar in the Gurdwārā compared to langar as a food bank i.e., in the case of MLSS. As Mittermaier argues, self-cultivation and modes of caring for others are “intimately intertwined,” which is also highlighted in the case of langar and goes some way towards proving an explanation for why langar is taken out of the Gurdwārā context and into the wider community. As Randhir from MLSS states explicitly, he partially founded MLSS to fulfil his duty rather than solely from a place of compassion. When taken into the broader British public sphere, charity and the association with compassion are brought to the fore as a result of the dominant, majority Christian model being “secularized and transformed into “humanitarianism””. (Mittermaier, 2021) Building on Fassin, Mittermaier tells us that regimes of care do not have to “ride on compassion.” She shows that through an Islamic medical charity organisation, “ethics of care are lived, cultivated, and negotiated every day.” (2021) Whilst there is an ethos of compassion that underlies Sikhī and its institutions, MLSS is also focused on a concept of duty which is in parallel to Mittermaier’s context where “care for others here cannot neatly be separated from care of the self.” (2021) The transformation of langar by the British charity sector ultimately shines a light on this form of langar as a form of “ethics of giving that is about *piety* – not *pity*.” (Mittermaier, 2021, original emphasis)

Jouili's work with French and German Muslim women in everyday life shows how any 'small' decision such as choosing to wear a veil, praying and modestly in public life have perceived repercussions for the broader Muslim community (2015, p. 178). Essentially for these Muslim women, they have a responsibility to follow Islamic values that guide the everyday as well as an inherent responsibility to represent Muslims more generally in a context that requires some level of compromise due to the difference compared with the broader non-Islamic norms. Jouili terms this as "ethical labour" (2015, p. 178) which requires continuous effort to navigate identity and "a space where religion could be one of the possible foundations for ethical citizenship." (2015, p. 199) Despite the transformation of 'civic duties' through a neoliberal rhetoric of multifaith civic virtue, this shows how "religiously and culturally-configured ethical values are presented as diasporic alternatives, to be set alongside, in dialogue with, and subtly critiquing the universalising tendencies of liberal secular norms" (Zavos, 2019, p. 45) can allow communities to still remain 'authentic' in their belief and praxis.

Building on this work, langar could be understood as a total social fact: "[p]henomena that penetrate every aspect of the social system. They concentrate it and constitute its focus; they are the constitutive elements and the generators and motors of the system" (Gofman, 1998, p. 67). Langar encapsulates what it means to be Sikh and therefore is itself a microcosm of Sikhī. Jasjit Singh (2015) explains participating in Langar as "Sharing a langar – which includes cooking, serving, eating and cleaning up – emphasized the idea of equality beyond any categorizations of caste, gender, social status, ethnicity, or religion." The adaptation of langar as a street kitchen alters the original forms of labour associated with the institution of langar and instead replaces it with a new form of "ethical labour" allowing for a compromised positioning of Sikhī in the public sphere.

MLSS is about creating a better shared future through working together collectively, similar to the description of the 'public good' described above (Bear & Mathur, 2015). This is an

important organisation given the role that it plays in society as a whole, and not just the Sikh community. It is an example of how something as simple as giving out food can be seen as the practical representation of the politicisation of a group to fit in a rhetoric of what it means to be a 'good diaspora' (Liberatore, 2018).

Randhir was very concerned with how much of a problem homelessness in Britain had become and the lack of government funding and support to address it. He felt that this was something that he had a duty to address as part of his *sevā* and so he co-founded MLSS (Mittermaier, 2021). Given the 'Big Society' agenda and the limits of inclusion of the public sphere, the use of the institution of *langar* has become part of the selective inclusion strategy of some Sikhs (Kaur, 2020). As a result of this it can be seen that the actual practice of *langar* is being somewhat distorted to compensate for the deficiencies of the welfare state. Towards the end of my fieldwork, the charity was awarded the Queen's award, which "is the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK to recognise outstanding work done in their own communities" (gov.uk, 2021) showing how they are positively received by the British public. MLSS is an 'outward' facing charity meaning that is not intended to serve only the Sikh community. This links to the identity that has been imposed on Sikhs as peaceful people and 'good diaspora' and 'model minorities.'

Undertaking this *sevā* with a common goal in the context of the Sikh space that had been created through the essential performing of the *Ardās* as well as the playing of *simran*, created an atmosphere negotiating the tension of making religion public. Hirschkind suggests that scholars of 'the public sphere' often take their starting point, an abstract public sphere "as an institution of national political life and then proceed to examine how different religious actors and organizations have contributed to its constitution, its modes of association and communication, its moral bases, and its heterogeneity and plurality." (2001, p. 4) He argues that in his field site in Egypt, he has discovered that there is "an emergent arena of Islamic

deliberative practice that, while articulated with the discourses and practices of national political life, remains structured by goals and histories not easily accommodated within the space of the nation.” (2001, p. 4) This can be seen as a public, where ‘public’, is understood as the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002). The MLSS homeless feeds are resonant of the concept of moral selfhood or da’wa described by Hirschkind and thus show how MLSS negotiates these tensions to facilitate these feeds that serve as a ‘Sikh public’.

Hirschkind argues that “as conceived by its participants, the da’wa public constitutes that space of communal reflexivity and action understood as necessary for perfecting and sustaining the totality of practices on which an Islamic society depends.” (2001, p. 14)

Therefore, it is an analogous emerging sphere of practice and emergence of a Sikh discursive public that I found in MLSS through their performance of sevā and a transformation of langar in the British charity sector. For example, Hirschkind argues that cassette sermons have extended Islamic practice from the private to the public sphere. Cassette tapes cultivate virtues for proper moral behaviour - an ethical soundscape that creates a moral space for right action. The performance of Ardās and playing of simran during the homeless feeds I attended was reminiscent of this kind of practice and creation of a Sikh ethical space and soundscape.

For MLSS, the grounding for this discursive public comes from their understanding of mīrī pīrī and what it means to be a ‘Sikh’ in Britain. As Randhir explained, for him, sevā extended beyond the actual ‘performance’ of sevā and into the ideology behind it. The foundation of the institution of langar deliberately engages the sangat in spiritual consciousness through temporal acts, which is the essence of mīrī pīrī shown in the janamsakhī of ‘Sacha Sauda.’ It actively discourages the separation of mīrī and pīrī through the moral practice of sevā. Sevā transcends the physical separation that exists in relation to the physical Gurū and permeates Sikh praxis. In the dominant British public sphere, the institution of langar is not

accommodated, therefore for MLSS to practise the institution of langar, they must adapt its performance so that it fulfils the agenda of conforming to a 'good diaspora' (Liberatore, 2018) narrative whilst remaining immersed in Sikhī.

### Sikh Youth UK (SYUK)

Sikh Youth UK (SYUK) is a seemingly controversial youth organisation based in the West Midlands. The organisation was set up in 2014 after the '#ipledgeorange' movement which was inspired by Balwant Singh Rajoana who was on death row in India and was due to be executed on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. He was charged for participating in the 1995 assassination of the Chief of Punjāb, Beant Singh. There were protests and demonstrations all over the world, including in Britain to stop his execution. During this campaign, several forums were founded known as the Rajoana forums. SYUK developed from one of these forums as an initiative to tackle issues affecting Sikhs. It has branches in five locations across Britain with the central hub based in Birmingham.

SYUK regards itself as an organisation that deals with the fallout from failure of the welfare state. Currently, their main area of focus is the prevention of Sikh girls from being targeted by Muslim grooming gangs. The organisation calls the grooming issue one that is 'racially and religiously motivated.' They place an emphasis on Pakistani, Muslim men, targeting young Sikh women. One of their main projects was to go into university Sikh societies across Britain and deliver a presentation on the dangers of sexual grooming (Figure 33). Given the current political context and the sensitivity and fears surrounding terrorism, "the actions of state actors have led to certain terms being used to describe the activities of Sikhs." (Singh, 2017) This has led to an increase in concern surrounding potential 'Sikh radicalisation' and is part of the reason why SYUK has been at the centre of controversy.





*Figure 33 - SYUK poster advertising a presentation on the dangers of grooming at university (image from SYUK Facebook page)*

SYUK credits much of its success to Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Smethwick (see Chapter 5: Gurdwārā). At the SYUK training day in January 2018, they thanked the Gurdwārā for providing them with a platform from which they could base their organisation. According to Deepa Singh, one of the main sevādārs of SYUK, “the Gurdwārā is not just a place for worship and langar and then you go home, the Gurdwārā is a place to deal with our community issues. This includes issues such as drugs and grooming.” He continued to describe SYUK as an organisation dedicated to tackling “issues the Sikh community turns a blind eye to.” He said that often the youth would come forward and confide in the Gurdwārā about these issues and that this is important to note as a positive side to the Gurdwārā; “it’s important to recognise the positives rather than the negatives as this is what people usually want to focus on.”

There are varied opinions on the organisation both from within and outside of the Sikh community; generally, people respect the work that they do, or some people think that they are an unnecessarily controversial organisation. Among academics that work with Sikhs or around the field of Sikh studies, there is little respect for the organisation. Several academics that I have personally interacted with do not speak positively about SYUK or their work.

Academic Katy Sian (2018; 2013, 2014) has addressed this issue and specifically opposed SYUK. She claims that they massively overstate the issue of grooming and that their work only leads to divisions between the Sikh and Muslim communities. This has somewhat become a narrative that only further exacerbates historical Sikh/Muslim tensions (Singh, 2017).

According to Jasjit Singh:

For Sian, the narrative of large numbers of Sikh girls being targets for conversion by 'predatory' Muslims exists to allow Sikhs in Britain 'to preserve the integrity of their community and thus sustain Sikh identity in circumstances in which the traditional means of identity maintenance are no longer effective' (2013:118). Furthermore, she argues that this narrative encourages patriarchy by discouraging Sikh girls in particular from 'bad habits' and highlighting fears among certain Sikhs 'of women's agency, the fears of the shifting balance between men and women, the fears of being and at the same time not being accepted as part of the West' (2013: 119).

(Singh, 2017, p. 40)

One of the volunteers from SYUK spoke to me anonymously and feels that the only reason Sian wrote this and argues this point is because she is married to a Muslim herself. I met with Katy at an event at the University of Birmingham towards the beginning of my fieldwork. At this point, most of the contact I had personally with SYUK seemed to foster an environment of hyper masculinity and I found it very difficult to gain access to them to carry out any research.

From this initial experience, I could resonate with most of what Sian had described. This is a view that is shared by other academics in the sphere of Sikh studies. Often the claim is that SYUK “spend too much time trying to be macho, alpha male vigilantes.” However, after spending more time with the organisation and making friends with various volunteers including some of their main women volunteers, I developed a better understanding of the organisation and how it operated from within. I learnt more about where these ideas stem from in terms of how the organisation presents itself compared with how it functioned internally, where there is no fear of judgement or surveillance. There seems to be a lack of understanding between academics and SYUK as a result of a number of issues that are partially instigated from the changing behaviour of SYUK from the private to the public sphere. SYUK has fallen victim to how its multiple identities are performed (Werbner, 2017, pp. 8-9) As Werbner explains, “the fact that a person has heterogeneous identities, a multiplicity of identities, does not imply contradiction, ambivalence, or a lack of commitment, because identities matter in context. They are played out in different identity spaces and foregrounded oppositionally.” (2002, p. 267)

The SYUK training day in January 2018 was designed to educate the community on the work carried out by SYUK and to train volunteers to get involved with the organisation. Deepa said that seventy-one people applied to attend the training day and that forty people attended. He said that this showed there was a real drive from the community to have a “positive and productive input” into the work that they do. He covered some more of the areas that SYUK are and have been involved in. These include supporting Sikh prisoners in jails through helping them “stay away from ‘negative sangat’.” He said that the main projects involve tackling the growing issue of sexual grooming and drugs and mental health awareness.

They also facilitate weekly Friday forums held at the Gurdwārā where there is a selected topic of discussion, there are also martial arts classes held in the Gurdwārā gym, with some classes that are exclusively for women and children. Annual events also take place such as the football tournament in June each year commemorating the shaheeds (martyrs) of 1984, a magazine (an annual review) released on Vaisakhī and films such as the most recent called 'misused trust' highlighting the issue of sexual grooming. Deepa emphasised the importance of sport for keeping fit and providing self-defence echoing the sentiments of the Gurūs placing an emphasis on health, fitness, and wellbeing. Gurū Angad highlighted the importance of physical fitness through wrestling alongside formalised education for young people at Khadūr Sāhib (a citadel in Amritsar where Gurū Angad lived for thirteen years spreading the message of Gurū Nānak) (Chowdhry, 2018, p. 48; Dogra et al., 1995, p. 18).

SYUK provides these spaces as dedicated Sikh spaces that become a Sikh public. All of the services that they provide have a Sikh ethos, such as simran (recital of Sikh mantras) and sakhīs (stories from Sikh history) that follow activities such as sports, actively engaging with the concept of mīrī pīrī. SYUK describe the work that they do as "hard sevā that no one wants to do" and consequently results in backlash and negative attention. This supports the claims made by Mittermaier that charity is not only conducted as a result of compassion or "pity" but also as a sense of duty (2021). As Deepa explained, "any publicity is good, not just positive publicity." The main work that they do that generates this backlash is related to the issue of grooming. As part of the training day, I attended the session that they held on volunteering in this section of the organisation. They described the issue as "gang related grooming." Deepa introduced the workshop, and this was followed by an introduction to some of the volunteers for SYUK: a young non-pagh wearing man from Birmingham and a young pagh wearing woman from East London. The session began with an introduction of how SYUK envisages the issue of grooming. They describe it as a

*“hate crime that is racially motivated. There is a racial element to our grooming. This is because there is a specific community targeting our community.”*

The hosts of the session said that one of the reasons this is such a significant issue is because the Sikh community is one that is “honour based and so it affects our reputation.” Often, groomers will use blackmail to “trap young Sikh women.” The reference to honour was not explicit to gender roles but more generally in relation to upholding the responsibility of being a Sikh through the example set by the Gurūs and key figures in Sikh history.

The hosts referenced a report by The Quilliam Foundation from 2017 (Rafiq, 2017) that discusses grooming gangs and the particular impact of them on young women. The report concludes that around 84% of grooming gang offenders are of Asian descent and supports the claims that SYUK makes about Pakistani, Muslim men being the main instigators of grooming. However, there is controversy around the report itself and whether or not it had the correct academic rigour to be used as a valid evidence base.

According to SYUK, the first conviction relating to ‘street grooming’ took place in 2005. SYUK claim to have evidence that the issue of grooming where Sikh girls have been the targets has been happening since the 1970s. They argue that the issue of sexual grooming and the use of the term ‘grooming’ has only been commonplace since the publicity of cases of grooming against white girls.

#### A multiplicity of identities

I met with Deepa in one of the small office rooms, upstairs in Smethwick Gurdwārā. Deepa is known for being passionate and impulsive. His past experience in jail is well known and often the target of any publicity related to SYUK in mainstream media. We sat down on two of the

chairs and Deepa drank a cup of tea whilst we were talking. There was no one else in the room and the Gurdwārā was reasonably quiet, given that it was during the day in the middle of the week. Deepa was welcoming towards me; however, it was clear that he was trying to assess who I was and why I had an interest in him and SYUK. His interaction with me was quite formal and not representative of how I had seen him in his capacity as a sevādār for SYUK. My impression was that he was marking me as an outsider, aligned more to academia rather than Sikhī.

After we sat down, he asked me what I was currently researching and about myself more generally. I described to him what my research was and some of the questions I was hoping to answer, and I asked him if I could volunteer with the organisation, making it clear that I was an academic researcher. I could tell that he was uncomfortable with this and expressed that people had tried to 'expose' them in the past. He asked me if I was undercover working for the BBC or any other media outlet. I assured him that I was not and that I could provide documentation and my student ID if necessary, however, this did not seem to ease his anxiety towards me. I mentioned that I also volunteer for the Sikh Education Council in my spare time aside from my research and this seemed to put Deepa a little at ease as it marked me as an insider in the Sikh community. Towards the end of our discussion, Deepa told me that I could volunteer with SYUK. However, every time I tried to offer help, I noticed that there was resistance, and no opportunities presented for me to help. Through other encounters in fieldwork, I had built a relationship with one of the young women, Simi, that had become a prominent volunteer with SYUK since the training day in January 2018. The more I learnt about the organisation, the more I began to understand the resistance and anxiety towards me being involved in my capacity as a researcher.

I frequently volunteered with Simi for another organisation and so I had the opportunity to talk to her regularly. In the last month of my fieldwork, Simi and I were having a casual

conversation, discussing all kinds of topics such as work, family, and relationships. I asked her about her experience of working with SYUK as I told her that throughout my fieldwork, I regularly came in to contact with people who were dismissive of SYUK's work and their attitude. I spoke to her about the fact that most of the criticism I heard about SYUK tended to come from women and that one woman had told me that she felt as though SYUK were aggressive and "talking about women's issues that they had no idea about". I asked Simi what she thought of this and how she felt as a woman volunteering for an organisation with this kind of reputation.

Simi: I can see where people were coming from in their views of them but it's really not like that. The volunteers always treat me with total respect. You know I'm continually pushed forward to be in the limelight even though I don't want to be. It's just not my personality to be at the front. I like to work behind the scenes. I know what people think of them. I have had people ask me before why I volunteer with them. I am aware that they might have been doing this [pushing her forward] as a response to the negative coverage they receive in relation to not having a public presence of women, but I don't think it is that. You know a lot of the guys at the front just aren't used to being around strong women, so they don't really know how to handle it. I think this has a lot to do with the way they have been brought up and the way that they are with their siblings or even if they don't have any. The more I think about it, I don't think it's actually just an issue with Sikh Youth [SYUK]. I think that this is a problem in Birmingham generally. It seems to be amplified in Sikh Youth [SYUK] because it seems to have such a strong male presence. It's not only the guys' faults either. A lot of the women don't push themselves forward but there are loads of female volunteers in the background.

The guys always listen to me. One time there was this incident at the football tournament where one of the volunteers just got really mad at someone and looked like he was gonna hit him. Me and one of the others had a meeting with him after to talk about how it was handled. We told him that sort of behaviour just isn't on, and it isn't acceptable. He needs to learn how to handle himself better. He did listen to us and realised that we weren't wrong with what we were saying. Later on, he apologised.

Part of it is that they have trust issues. They have just been screwed over so many times by so many different people in the past. That's partly why they will have been the way they were with you when you tried to do research with them. They are just scared. They were the same with me when I first volunteered with them but now, they know me, it's not like that anymore.

There's so much passion associated with this organisation and often these frustrations that the guys have comes out and doesn't paint them in the best light. I'm not sure. Were you there when they held the emergency meeting at the Gurdwārā?

JKB: Yes, I was.

Simi: So, you know when it got quite heated? Well Deepa just got really frustrated because he started to feel like so many people there were just trying to take over the meeting to talk about their own issues rather than discuss grooming of Sikh girls. He's not even saying that it's the only issue, but it is the one he is tackling because it's no one else's priority. I'm not saying he's right with how he handles stuff all the time, but I suppose you can understand it.



SYUK tends to be labelled as a 'bad' organisation that is not representative of the Sikh community (Mamdani, 2005). They are continually vilified from both within the community and more widely; for example, there was a BBC documentary (BBC 2019<sup>22</sup>) on the show 'Inside Out' that featured SYUK and Deepa. On the show they highlighted the work carried out by SYUK but there was a strong emphasis on Deepa's background. The presenter asked him if he was the most suitable person to be doing this kind of work given his history. This is contrasted with the overwhelmingly positive media coverage that organisations such as MLSS receive, particularly from the BBC. In July 2019, according to the West Midlands Police, Deepa and his sister were arrested "following the examination of evidence obtained during searches which took place in September 2018" (these searches refer to the raids of five Sikh homes as discussed in Chapter 4: Home), whilst also stating they have "been working closely with the Charity Commission on this investigation." This is another example of who is included as an approved charity in the British charity sphere where the emphasis is on a "secularisation" and "humanitarianism" for the broader community (Mittermaier, 2021).

Upon his release, Deepa made the following statement on social media:

*First, I would like to thank the sadh sangat (holy Sikh congregation) that turned up yesterday to support us by standing outside both police stations and all those messaging us showing support and love, to the extent that a local Gurdwārā sent langar (free communal kitchen service) so we could have langar in the police station. Thank you for all your loyalty, love, and support.*

*Secondly, we have been expecting this. I have been expecting this since we took a stand against the police. There has been constant harassment for the last year, following our*

---

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8diLUFFU7k>

*cars around, interrogating our families, investigating local businesses that support us, censoring our social media, people coming in to watch our talks at unis and Gurdwārās ...it has been unreal. So, I would like to send a clear message to West Midlands Police; for you to arrest my sister, arrest me, to collude with the torture of Jagtar Singh Johal, we are going to take a stand; we have done and will continue to.*

*The protests will not stop, and the online campaigns won't stop, we will continue this. If we look, this has all come from the raids in September 2018. These raids were based on Indian intelligence and media reports that SYUK financially support Khalistanī militancy in Punjāb. They have had nine months to go through all of our financial records and transactions. Yesterday was the second raid by now investigating goodwill donations to SYUK being fraudulently used for alleged Khalistanī militancy.*

*One message back, you can make your choice, you have brains, have a look, and see how deep this collusion is to defame our characters. We won't be silenced. The movement will continue. Khalistan Zindabād.*

Several Sikh organisations across Britain released statements of support for Deepa and SYUK and they thanked him personally for the work he carries out for the Sikh panth. It is important to note that the majority of the work carried out by SYUK is for the Sikh community and not directly for the community in general, unlike many of the other organisations I volunteered for such as MLSS. The case of Deepa and SYUK is a prime example as to why many Sikhs in the diaspora desire a separate Sikh state. The apparent incompatibility of some forms of Sikhī and the dominant public sphere supports the emerging 'diasporic nationalism' (Singh, 2020b) through groups such as SYUK.

The work of SYUK directly exposes deficiencies in the state and reveals the tensions that Sikhs have to tackle. "The identities evoked in the narratives – of nation, local community, religion and diaspora – are at times fused, at times kept strictly (and situationally) separated." (Werbner, 2017, p. 9) The dominant public sphere is a space where an opposition to the state narrative is seen as social denial or negation which results in organisations such as SYUK effectively representing a "counterpublic" (Hirschkind, 2001; Warner, 2002). The public sphere is also an arena of "imposed silences" (Werbner, 2017, p. 9) in the form of racism and cultural xenophobia. SYUK's efforts to tackle the grooming of young Sikh women is representative of their understanding of *mīrī pīrī* and so contributes to their own "voluntary 'silences'" (in the form of submerged identities) (Werbner, 2017, p. 9), meaning, in the public sphere they have a multiplicity of identities that are expressed depending on the situational context (Werbner, 2017). An explicit example of this was my meeting with Deepa Singh showing his apprehension towards me as a researcher which later became complicated through my identification as a Sikh and my affiliation with the Sikh Education Council. Whilst this technically marked me as an insider, it was not sufficient to alleviate the association and expectation of me being linked to academia which so far, has not understood SYUK's intentions.

The media and the police have become synonymous with the state and therefore enforcers of the expectation of the dominant public sphere. The ethos of this dominant public sphere does not allow for the sovereignty of *Sikhī* to be encapsulated within it. The 'secular' nation state of Britain does not have an understanding of *Sikhī* as an all-encompassing *dharam* in the vernacular sense, which means that "one has to make oneself an asset to the nation and live *lawfully* before one can gain this recognition." (Pool, 2021, p. 30, emphasis added) SYUK's understanding of *mīrī pīrī* contained within the Sikh *dharam* is not compatible with the British conceptualisation of 'religion' and 'secular'. Pool (2016) shows that there is a contrasting definition of oneself for Indian Muslims, despite some shared understandings with Indian Hindus. Pool argues that the Indian 'secular' state is not independent of Hindu understandings

any more than the American state constitutes itself independently from Christian understandings. For Sikhs in Britain, the 'secular' state also constitutes itself through Christian understandings of what it means to be 'religious' and 'political'. If "the state is present as overseer or guarantor, defining limits, procedures, and necessary preconditions" (Hirschkind, 2001, p. 15) then the media is a mediator in the creation of SYUK becoming a counterpublic (Warner, 2002). The defamation of Deepa's character shows him as an example of being a marked 'deviant' in the public sphere. The portrayal of him as a 'criminal' or 'ex-convict' means that he does not fit into the 'good diaspora' narrative as he consciously chooses not to subscribe to the presentation of himself as a 'professional' (Liberatore, 2018, p. 160). This portrayal also needs to be considered against an important history and contemporary reality of Islamophobia that exists in Britain. Whilst Deepa does not wish to fully align with the British state, it is equally important that he is not aligned to Islam, which is noticeably, the most marginalised community in Britain and the target of anti-Islamist policies such as CONTEST.

### Sikh Performativity

Judith Butler (1988) proposes that gender is not something we are, but it is something we *do*. She calls this 'performativity'. For Butler, gender performativity is "stylized repetition of acts" (1988, p. 519). Her key concept of heteronormativity essentially means that gender performativity is subject to dominant conventions of gender as heterosexual. I would argue that in the case of the Sikhs I spent time with, they resonate with this notion of performativity, however, rather than gender performativity, we could consider this as Sikh performativity. This is as a result of the dominant public sphere being the norm and so everything is considered in relation to this. This act of performativity is essential for Sikhs in Britain because it has effects in the sense that it creates power and agency for those within a dominant public sphere who choose how to navigate their day to day lives against this complex matrix.

There are internal inclusions and exclusions of what it means to be a 'good' Sikh. At one of the MLSS feeds, my friend Rupinder wanted to recruit some of the volunteers to participate in a fundraiser to complete Europe's largest zip wire. The group that we were speaking to were young Sikh men, some of them were not visibly Sikh as they are not initiated and do not wear paghs. Most of the young men were not interested in participating in the fundraiser as they did not see a need for it. Rupinder explained to them that it was about teambuilding as much as it was about raising money. One of them responded to her and asked why they should do things with the Singh's, meaning those that wear paghs or are initiated and hence, are visibly Sikh. He told her that people like him (those that aren't visibly Sikh) get 'munnā-ised' (this is in reference to those that cut their hair being referred to as 'munnā') anyway and so they would rather carry on doing what they do and not get too involved. Rupinder asked what he meant, and he explained that they do not get taken seriously because they don't keep their hair. This exchange unearthed some underlying tensions between those that 'look Sikh' and those that do not.

This same sentiment was also expressed during my interactions with the all-female group 'Kaurageous' which is dedicated to creating a platform for women to participate in sangat and undertake sevā. One of their main initiatives is to deliver presentations at universities that focus on Sikh women from history to modern day. Towards the end of my fieldwork, at one of the final events that I helped to deliver as a volunteer, the other volunteer who wears a pagh and is an amritdhārī (initiated) Sikh, Aman, told me that she felt it was useful for me to be there particularly because of the way I look because despite me being a practising Sikh, I am not amritdhārī and do not wear a pagh. She said that often other people look at her and make a judgement that she will judge them because of her hypervisible appearance. She said she feels that this can make the group seem closed and that it is not open and welcoming of all Sikh women regardless of their appearance and 'level of Sikhī'.

*This isn't what we want to portray and it's something that I really hope will change.*

*Hopefully we can get more variety in the Sikh females we have involved, and this will help make the change.*

Aman is aware that one's appearance does not have to be representative of one's level of 'Sikhness.' In her eyes the appearance of a Sikh can be something that creates a barrier, but this is something that she hopes will change as people become less focused on how a Sikh *should* look and more on how they act. Kaur describes this phenomenon as the Sikh community continuing to "utilize its hypervisible, but malleable, identity to forge belonging." (2020, p. 1)

This resonates significantly with the young man who felt that he was being 'munnā-ised'.

There appears to be an issue as to who is taken seriously as a Sikh and who is considered as an 'authentic' Sikh related to their level of Sikhness. In Britain this seems to be further amplified because young men and women are dealing with issues not only relating to what it means to be Sikh but also with what it means to fit into wider society where this society is not one that has a shared understanding of the vernacular *mīrī pīrī*. How to *be* a 'good' Sikh is appropriated and emphasised through understandings of how to be a "good diaspora" (Liberatore, 2018).

I was once travelling in the car with Bahadur, a friend I made during my fieldwork. He was asking me about my research and the kinds of conclusions I was drawing. We discussed the pressure that there is on young Sikhs to get married, and he shared with me that it was not as easy for young Sikh men as people would 'normally' think. He said to me that there is some resistance to young Sikh women wanting to marry a Sikh man that wears a pagh and wears his beard without tying it up. Bahadur asked me about my experience of this as a young Sikh woman and why I thought that this was the case. I reflected back on a conversation I had with a few young Sikh women and a middle-aged Sikh man, Satraj, that I was with at the GNNSJ

Gurdwārā. This man was smartly dressed and fastened his beard, he wore a traditional African, Kenyan style pagh (this is a pointed style rather than a more traditional round style). He told us that he thought that

*young Sikh men today don't make any effort with their appearance. You just see them out and about with their trackies on. I don't know who they think they are impressing with that look. Young Sikh women are looking for men that look after their appearance – it's a sign they look after themselves. If Sikhs are striving to be like the Gurū, well, you never see any images of the Gurūs where they didn't look smart or groom themselves.*

My friend in the car disagreed with this point and told me he believed that it was more about “western appropriation into society that makes it undesirable to be with someone that wears a pagh. This isn't what we are taught is attractive.” These struggles are almost the same for both men and women even if they play out in slightly different ways. This shows how the issues of gender construction as part of the colonial project are still present in the way that Sikhs are constructing their selfhood (Jakobsh, 2000). In this case, and through the explanation given by Satraj, it is evident that the “idealised construction of what a diaspora in Britain should do” (Liberatore, 2018, p. 148) has infiltrated into what it means to be a ‘good’ Sikh. The nation state is usually the dominant force in propagating who is accepted and who is excluded. “The contemporary nation state is frequently in tension with kinship and religion considered together, as an alternative or partly alternative space for the making of persons and relations between persons.” (Cannell, 2019, p. 717) Through the “strategy of self-presentation” (Liberatore, 2018, p. 160) the association with one's appearance being more ‘groomed’ subscribes to the idea that it makes them superior in the sense that they now *seem* educated and objective.

In each of these encounters, the pagh has been highlighted as one central element of the hypervisibility of Sikhs. From its inception into Sikhī, the pagh has been a political marker rather than a solely religious one. The pagh was a symbol of Sikh sovereignty and a rejection of hierarchy (Rana et al., 2019, p. 2). The pagh has a deep-rooted history in Sikhī and has been seen as a physical manifestation of *mīrī pīrī* – it is a “symbolic displacement of economic, political and cultural” (Cohn, 1996, p. 107) marker of Sikhs. The adoption of the pagh into Sikhī was a statement of rejection of the dominant hierarchy of caste embedded in the power structure of the time drawing parallels to Rastafarians in Japan and Jamaica (Levine, 2007; Prashad, 2002; Sterling, 2010). The Rastafarian movement in Jamaica was premised on a rejection of white power through an aesthetic of unkemptness and ‘uncivilised.’ Not cutting your hair and not shaving your beard were explicit ways of undermining the colonial project of ‘civilising’ men in Jamaica and became a powerful act of performativity. This is similar to the institution of the pagh in Sikhī. For many young Sikhs labelled as ‘radical’ or ‘militant’ the pagh has become further politicised. The pagh was not initially intended as a rejection of whiteness and white power (Prashad, 2002; Sterling, 2010) at the beginning but to some extent, this is what it has become. As well as distance from whiteness, the pagh also includes a desire to distance from blackness as South Asians have become implicitly complicit in reinforcing ethnic-racial hierarchies within the dominant public sphere (Kaur, 2020, p. 4).

Similar to the young Somali, Muslim women that Liberatore (Liberatore, 2013, 2017, 2018) worked with, and the young, Muslim men that Hoque (2019) worked with, my interlocutors also had to encounter and manage “multiple, and at times contradictory, ethical projects.” (Liberatore, 2013, p. 257) For many of my interlocutors, their lives are a project where they are learning how to “prioritise an internal, embodied, and affective relationship with God” (Liberatore, 2013, p. 257). The questions of what it means to be Sikh and British through one’s everyday experiences of practising Sikhī are embedded in what Liberatore calls an “unstable and relational matrix” (Liberatore, 2013, p. 257). For my interlocutors it is a case of



understanding what it means to be a Sikh in Britain. Perhaps it could be argued that the diaspora is showing a level of cognitive dissonance due to the environments within which they have been raised. The performance of sevā is an arena in which Sikhs are able to explore and express Sikhī where mīrī and pīrī go hand in hand rather than having to compete with one another. The performance of one's sevā is dictated by how one is able to perform their Sikhī publicly and if this shows them in the light of being a "good diaspora" though this is not without compromise as evidenced by MLSS. The way that this sevā is perceived in the public sphere results in whether the particular form of sevā, and by extension Sikhī, is considered as either a public or a counterpublic (Warner, 2002).

### The 'right kind' of Sikhī

I argue that through their practices of sevā, Sikhs in Britain are navigating between their public and private understandings of what it means to be a Sikh "in Britain within a constraining political landscape" (Liberatore, 2017, p. 219) and with a backdrop of how to perform charity in an acceptable manner. Prevent and other securitisation policies have had significant impact in "turning the 'extreme' other into a liberal religious subject" (Liberatore, 2017, p. 255). The political context that religious and racialised minorities are facing has prescriptive ideas about what it means to be a "good diaspora" (Liberatore, 2018). A 'bad' immigrant is one that is opposed to 'British' values (Mamdani, 2005). These 'British' values seem to foster an 'us versus them' narrative with any attempt to address this narrative seen as anti-British, radical, or extreme. The role of the police and the media becomes crucial as enforcers of the dominant narrative, given that "popular media plays an important role in Sikh families' parental ethno-religious socialization." (Rana et al., 2019, p. 2)

Where acts of sevā can be seen as examples of exemplar behaviour and by extension associating with a "good diaspora" narrative set out by the dominant public sphere, there are

benefits such as awareness and support for these groups and missions (Rana et al., 2019, p. 249). However, “imposed silences” of the state reinforce the politicisation of Sikhī which results in a perceived challenge to the nation-state which marks Sikhs as equal citizens with equal rights and removes any hierarchy associated with religious and ethnic identity. The result is a divergent way of performing sevā that is not necessarily compatible with the “good diaspora” (Liberatore, 2018) narrative. This constructed threat sets out certain individuals as targets and also makes them more susceptible to being targeted and public information used against them. This creates a divide and leads to the establishment of publics and “counterpublics” (Hirschkind, 2001; Warner, 2002) and a form of ‘diasporic nationalism’ (Nijhawan, 2014).

The performance of sevā in Britain is shaped by the dominant British public sphere and its ethos embedded in Anglican Christianity as the norm which links together Church and state. As this chapter has explored, sevā navigates and negotiates the commonly used definitions of ‘volunteering’ and ‘charity’ in an Anglican Christian frame. Sevā ultimately derives from key Sikh principles of the idea of ‘oneness’ and seeing divinity in all through the framing of ‘dharam’. Crucially, it includes a concept of ‘the political’ and the creation of a religio-political public sphere that is not fully recognised, therefore actions by sevādārs are read through an alien framing. As a result of this, Sikhs are left with a choice to adapt their Sikhī and praxis to ‘fit’ into this ethos, which could be seen as aligning to what Back et al. call “hierarchies of belonging” (2012) or face being considered as antithetical to being a good citizen. This “functions to strengthen the physical boundaries of citizenship.” (Kaur, 2020, p. 1) The result is that the question of what it means to be a Sikh and British are not always compatible, leading to a tension of authenticity ascribed to one instead of the other. Where the previous questions were to determine one’s level of Sikhness, this has now become a question that includes one’s performativity as a marker of ‘authenticity’. The way that this is navigated by individual actors

and organisations is dictated by their understandings of mīrī pīrī and how this is central to the making of their moral selfhood.

ਕੋਈ ਬੋਲੈ ਰਾਮ ਰਾਮ ਕੋਈ ਖੁਦਾਇ ॥

Koī bolai rām rām koī kḥudāe.

Some call Him, 'Raam, Raam', and some call Him, 'Khudaa-i'.

ਕੋਈ ਸੇਵੈ ਗੁਸਈਆ ਕੋਈ ਅਲਾਹਿ ॥੧॥

Koī sevai gusīā koī alāhi. ||1||

Some serve Him as 'Gusain', others as 'Allah'. ||1||

(Srī Gurū Granth Sāhib 885)

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

I began this research with the aim of examining contemporary controversies in Britain about Sikhī and its role in public life. I hoped to answer the question, “How and why do Sikhs in Britain attempt to make their faith public?” In order to answer this question in a comprehensive and nuanced way, my project explored: the changing politics of religion in Britain, internal change, and contestation within the Sikh community in the West Midlands, Sikh theologies of the relationship between religion and politics and how to be an authentic Sikh, and alterations in education policy and the growth of public performance of Sikhī in the form of sevā.

Britain is reputed as a ‘superdiverse’ (Hall, 2017; Vertovec, 2007b), ‘multicultural’ (G. Singh, 2005) society. ‘Multicultural’ societies encounter challenges such as intercultural conflict and racial or ethnic tensions, which result in exclusion and discrimination of some members of society, and inequality in social, economic, and political opportunities in relation to how citizenship is defined and enacted (DeJaeghere, 2009). The British state is dependent upon migrant and minority labour but with a required political commitment to national authenticity.

However, at the core of the nation are hierarchical notions of race and ethnicity (Hall, 2017, p. 2). Sikhs are often hypervisible in their identity (through paghs (turbans) and beards) meaning that they are constant markers of opposition to the norm in the British public sphere. This is not only through ethnicity and religion but also through their worldviews that are on occasion, seen as being incompatible with British secularism although this might not necessarily be the case (Hoque, 2019; Kaur, 2020).

In Britain, and more generally in the world, there is a problem of making religious expression public, particularly centred on Islam through forms of Islamophobia. Taking an inside out approach, my research extends these debates by focusing on the forms of Sikh expression publicly and privately in Britain. Largely, research on Sikhs has previously been explored as a problem of 'identity' and 'assimilation' from the outside in (Ballantyne, 2012; Fenech, 2004, 2010; Fox, 1985; Grewal, 2009; Hall, 2002; Jacobsen & Myrvold, 2011; McLeod, 1999, 2003, 2008; McLeod, 1989; Oberoi, 1994; Shani, 2007; Takhar, 2016). I intentionally do not discuss identity politics in the traditional way as it previously has been studied in both anthropology and Sikh studies more generally. I depart from this tradition and locate current practices of Sikhī in Britain from an emic perspective, in a longer history of the making of the relationship between Sikhs and Britain through the lens of mīrī pīrī. I hope that my research will contribute to the anthropology of religion, politics, and Britain through a new way of studying and understanding a minority group. I also hope that my research will contribute to the growing field of Sikh studies and encourage others to undertake research with Sikhs.

### Why do Sikhs make Sikhī public?

Sikhī became visible in new ways through migration into Britain. An explicitly racial and class politics coupled with a new minority and diasporic citizenship identity emerged through the lens of a racially and religiously hierarchical public sphere. This relates to the idea that Sikhs

have a 'multiplicity of identities' (Werbner, 2002, p. 267) that enable them to present themselves differently in different contexts, supporting the argument for a kind of 'Sikh performativity.' As a result of an opposing, dominant public sphere which is white, secular, with residual Anglicanism, Sikhs are 'othered' in forms of racism and cultural xenophobia which are tackled explicitly by certain groups such as Sikh Youth UK (SYUK). SYUK's efforts to tackle the grooming of young Sikh women is representative of their understanding of *mīrī pīrī* and so contributes to their own "voluntary 'silences'" (in the form of submerged identities) (Werbner, 2017, p. 9). In the public sphere, they have a 'multiplicity of identities' that are expressed which is evident through me being marked as a disconcerting figure given my identification as both a Sikh, and a western academic researcher, blurring the boundaries of belonging. Additionally, the British charity sector transforms practices of *sevā* to emphasise certain elements of it such as in the case of MLSS where *langar* is defined as a source of 'free food' rather than as a site of labour, community, and commensality.

Previous authors described Sikhs' identity as relational and emerging from a relationship with institutions and a particular public sphere. Previous emphasis has focused on the relationship of Sikhs to the British administration in the Indian Sub-continent. Fox (1985) and Cohn (1996) argue that Sikh identity became solidified in a new way during the colonial encounter as an act of resistance. Fox claims that the British colonial government's cultivating of a supposed 'orthodox', separatist, and martial Singh identity (the "Punjab Lions") to serve their own military agenda at the time, and also one that to some extent resulted in a rebellion against them. Cohn (1996) suggests that British rulers were significant in creating political importance of clothing such as the Sikh turban. My thesis shows, that whilst British influence was prominent, it is not the only key player in marking Sikh identity. I show that there were a number of contributing factors that resulted in the current formation of *Sikhī*. Whilst I acknowledge colonialism, I am not explaining a history of colonialism in my thesis. Importantly, as a result of the development of Sikh history and the continuous juxtaposition of Sikhs to all

kinds of power structures, there has been a resulting multiplicity of identities (Werbner, 2017) leading to a 'spectrum of Sikhs' that still maintain a significant link to Sikhī through the practice of the interrelation of kinship and religion (Cannell, 2013; Cannell, 2015; Cannell, 2019; McKinnon et al., 2013; Orsi, 2010).

Major events such as 9/11, the 7/7 London Bombings and Brexit have revived the issues of 'intolerant' and 'tolerant', 'rational' and 'irrational' religious expression that have been part of the Sikh experience in Britain. Following racialised political policies such as multiculturalism, Prevent and increased securitisation, marking certain minorities as problematic, coupled with a worldwide anti-Muslim sentiment, some Sikhs are making an effort to disassociate themselves from Muslims and actively performing 'counter identities' in a defence against association with Islam. Some Sikhs such as my interlocutors from GNNSJ and MLSS, actively align with a 'good diaspora' (Liberatore, 2018) narrative, reimagining their Sikh praxis and becoming forcibly complicit in reinforcing the racialised, religious hierarchy that exists in the British public sphere (Kaur, 2020).

Given the dominance of the public sphere, political incidents such as Brexit have become fundamental in reshaping public expressions of religion and minority status. A proportion of Sikhs who affiliate with Britain fall into an allegiance with the state in an attempt at belonging and home making. Back et al suggest that this kind of alliance with majoritarian nationalism is an attempt to fall in line with "hierarchies of belonging" that distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' migrants. He describes a situation whereby "[immigrant] presence is tolerated as long as it doesn't challenge the hierarchy". (2012, p. 140) For many Sikhs, the problem lies with discomfort with the system in which they live, but a realisation that they must work within this system in order to be an acceptable citizen. The Nishkam school is perhaps the most clearly visible example of this behaviour. A Sikh ethos multifaith school is potentially the most viable solution for having a safe space for Sikhs without creating too much conflict with Britain. I have

described this as the formation of a Sikh public as an attempt to resolve issues of exclusion from the public sphere through using current government policy to support their ethical projects.

## Theoretical Contributions

Similar to the young Somali, Muslim women that Liberatore (Liberatore, 2013, 2017, 2018) worked with, and the young, Muslim men that Hoque (2019) worked with, my interlocutors also had to encounter and manage “multiple, and at times contradictory, ethical projects.” (Liberatore, 2013, p. 257) These are often at times competing ‘ethical projects’ that mean my interlocutors work to find solutions where they can practise Sikhī through their understanding of what it means to be ‘Sikh.’ For many of my interlocutors, their lives are a project where they are learning how to “prioritise an internal, embodied, and affective relationship with God” (Liberatore, 2013, p. 257). The questions of what it means to be Sikh and British through one’s everyday experiences of practising Sikhī are embedded in what Liberatore calls an “unstable and relational matrix” (2013, p. 257). For my interlocutors it is a case of understanding what it means to be a Sikh in Britain. Taking the perspective of one of my interlocutors, Bahadur, perhaps it could be argued that the diaspora is showing a level of cognitive dissonance due to the environments within which they have been raised. Each of the settings described in my thesis are spaces where Sikhs are able to explore and express Sikhī. There is an understanding of mīrī and pīrī whether conscious or not.

In anthropology (and more generally in the social sciences), western ideas of Christianity are the foundation of understanding concepts such as spirituality, politics, and religion (Asad, 1993; Keane, 2007; Milbank, 2008). Cannell argues that this is because of a misreading of Weber where “anthropologists have argued that the development of modernity has been intrinsically intertwined with Christianity (e.g., Keane 2007), and that the model of time



accompanying modernity is inherited from Christian theology (Cannell 2005).” (Cannell cited in Fesenmyer et al., 2020, p. 391) The anthropology of Christianity has relied on the idea of a “Christianity focused on the ascetic” (Cannell, 2006, p. 338) and become the foundation for understanding all other faith traditions. The perceived tension of religion and politics frames our understandings of those that we study and impacts how we interpret their beliefs and practises.

In each of the ethnographic contexts that I describe (sangat, home, Gurdwārā, school and sevā) my positionality as a young Sikh female and a ‘western academic researcher’ highlighted this dilemma. To the Sikh community it is important that Sikhs and Sikh institutions demonstrate themselves as ‘authentically’ Sikh and providing for the community, whereas for the wider public sphere it is vital that Sikhī aligns with ‘British’ values. For many of my interlocutors, particularly in the school and for Deepa, it was evident that I was a strange figure that did not fit exclusively into either one of these categories. As a liminal figure, and the ability to be both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’, I have sought to accurately represent my interlocutors and their lives. The preoccupation of my interlocutors with my marriage status importantly marked me as ‘kin’ and allowed me to form significant and valuable relationships. Using an almost autoethnographic approach, I have illustrated the complex matrix of religion, politics, kinship, race, citizenship, and selfhood for Sikhs in Britain.

My thesis is primarily about understanding how Sikhs in Britain comprehend the relationship between the religious and political through the lens of mīrī pīrī. Sikhī itself exists as a series of dualities and paradoxes so it is no surprise that the way that Sikhī is practised is so varied and so cannot be understood without interpreting Sikhī from a Sikh lens. Uberoi describes Sikhī, "As we have defined it, it is a form of the non-dualism of self, the world and the other, and it must be expressed in the common morality of religion, family, economics and politics." (1999, p. 135) I showcase these varying understandings of mīrī pīrī from the most intimate settings of

the home to the most public setting, through the performance of sevā. Ultimately, my thesis argues that whilst Sikhī was a faith that emerged as one to “dismantle structures of oppression and hierarchy” (Kaur, 2020, p. 8) it has been appropriated in the British context to allow for acceptance into a nation with a liberal and racialised public sphere and is not without compromise and sacrifice (Kaur, 2020, p. 8).

### Sikhī as an emic category

Sikhs in Britain are a minority but in certain areas of the West Midlands they have created spaces where they are the silent majority. This is not only through a religious identity but through a spatial one. For example, Soho Road is a predominantly ‘Sikh’ road. This is seen through the number of Gurdwārās, their presence and the number of Sikh businesses. Furthermore, organisations such as Midland Langar Seva Society (MLSS) create temporary spatial identities through their homeless feeds partly by making sure the volunteers cover their heads and through the playing of religious music (Hirschkind, 2001). The West Midlands seems to have become a microcosm or Sikh counterpublic (Warner, 2002) in an attempt to practise Sikhī in a way that they deem ‘authentic’.

Sikhs in Britain face the predicament of negotiating conflicting, contradictory, and complementary understandings of what it means to be Sikh in Britain and therefore there are different interpretations about what it means to be ‘authentically’ Sikh between individuals, groups and within groups. The British public sphere also has its own understanding of what it means to be a Sikh, specifically in Britain. These views are not always aligned, and as a result of the British public sphere being the dominant and Sikhs being the minority, there is sometimes a resulting conflict. This derives from the crucial difference between being public and being “in” public (Hall, 2017, p. 1569) (although the latter is also important) therefore, being a Sikh in Britain appears to carry with it an inherent responsibility to navigate the “good diaspora”

(Liberatore, 2018) narrative of the British public sphere whilst remaining 'authentic'. These tensions provide the context for understanding the lives of my interlocutors. It is important to note that as a Sikh, I have my own understanding of Sikhī, but even more importantly, my interlocutors will have an understanding of what they will consider as my understanding of Sikhī.

My thesis highlights the need to take seriously indigenous Sikh understandings of the relationships between religion and politics and spiritual and temporal. Csordas (2002, pp. 241-249) argues for the importance of taking seriously the lived experiences of various cultures because not all experience the Western paradigm of the mind/body distinction. He presented a theory of 'somatic modes of attention', as a way of addressing the ways in which we think about how we live in the world and how we can understand other people's everyday reality. Csordas attempts to show the ways in which we can explain other phenomena that do not neatly fall into mind/body separation of the Western paradigm. I follow a similar line of argument in my thesis, suggesting that anthropologists must take seriously Sikh emic understandings of mīrī pīrī in understanding both the religious and political as well as the spiritual and temporal. Without this understanding, Sikhs in Britain (like other minorities such as Muslims in Britain), who are already subject to discriminatory policies such as Prevent are further marginalised through a lack of understanding of their construction of reality, existence, and their daily praxis of Sikhī (Hoque, 2019; Liberatore, 2017). Only through vernacular considerations is it possible to uncover the mutual relations between ideas of kinship, religion, and the state (Cannell, 2019, p. 31).

## Vernacular Sikhī

Vernacular understandings of Sikhī demonstrate how intertwined Sikhī is with experiencing life. Sikhī and the relationship that exists between a Sikh and Gurū is unique and is prevalent

throughout Sikh history. Uberoi describes Sikhī and Sikh history as "a sacred and joint construction of the guru and the Sikh, and it is not a pragmatic or a contingent one; it has a history of freedom and not of determinism." (1999, p. 99) The Sikh 'way of life', with the Gurū at its centre is fundamental for understanding the imposition of the British public sphere and how it affects the Sikh diaspora's praxis of Sikhī. The Sikh consciousness is constantly reimagined by the dominating public idea of what it means to be a Sikh through dictating narratives of what it means to be a "good diaspora" (Liberatore, 2018).

Before 1984, the Sikh diaspora, was a somewhat marginal player in terms of its engagement with the Sikh homeland (mostly through the formation of the Ghadar party in California). The narrative surrounding Sikhs in the diaspora and particularly in Britain has become dominated by the discourse of a supposed 'Sikh radicalisation'. As Jasjit Singh (2017, p. 5; 2020a, 2020b) writes, Sikhī became reinvigorated in a way that is similar to the effects of other key moments from Sikh history (such as the misl confederacies and the reform movement). The events of 1984 triggered Sikh activists in the diaspora to take action as a result of the seeming threat to the Sikh homeland and Sikh way of life. Consequently, through 'acceptable' forms of activism, Sikhs in Britain are traversing these boundaries of exclusion to present a form of Sikhī that attempts to align with the dominant hierarchy in the British public sphere which thereby results in a conflicting dilemma as they have to navigate an authentic relationship with the Gurū whilst also creating a sense of 'home' in Britain.

Unresolved traumas are still filtering through generations of Sikhs despite many of my interlocutors being born and raised in Britain yet not being accepted as 'British' citizens and feeling a true sense of belonging to the place that they now call 'home'. This is explicitly part of the religio-kinship of Sikhī through the community remembering and attempting to right traumatic events which is an explanation of how my interlocutors remember and acknowledge historical traumatic events such as partition, 1984 and resulting Sikh activism and Khalistān

movement. Sikh activists react to trauma and absorb it as an element of community identity, and it becomes a form of creating collective strength.

### Britain as home?

Sikh ideas of home are multi layered through an understanding of home as the homeland, home as the domestic dwelling and home as the current place of residence. In each of these domains, for my Sikh interlocuters, their 'Sikhness' cannot be ignored. Sikhī is the thread that runs through each of these layers of what home means. Therefore, regardless of the strength of their affiliation to Sikhī, it provides a mediating relationship and Divine citizenship to the community (Bear, 2008, p. 51). Home is not only a site where Sikhs are navigating ideas of home in a Sikh and British sense of homeliness, but also a site for political interaction in each of these layers. The home and the Gurdwārā extend beyond the physical spaces that they inhabit, becoming symbolic of the social conscience and concern for Sikhī in the context of a diaspora as neither private nor public spaces.

Like Anglo-Indian railway workers, Sikhs in Britain are doubly excluded from the dominant public sphere through race, class, and the intersection of these. Anglo-Indian railway workers faced a double exclusion during the colonial period given the precarity of their relationship to Britain based on their position in relation to kinship and race (Bear, 2007). Based on the concept of mīrī pīrī (whether consciously or otherwise), in the same manner, Sikhs are forced to affiliate to Sikhī in a deliberate outward expression, primarily through materiality as a way of navigating exclusion in a way that is distinct from the dominant public sphere.

In several Sikh institutions the lack of vernacular understanding of mīrī pīrī results in a superficial understanding of it and leads to a precipitation of mīrī pīrī. This is exemplified through the apparent opposition between Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha (GNNSJ)

Gurdwārā and Guru Nanak Gurdwārā (GNG) in Smethwick. Both of these Gurdwārās are projecting themselves in the public sphere, particularly as key players in the race for legitimate leadership, not against each other, but, against the state. They are concerned with the survival of Sikhī through their understanding of mīrī pīrī foregrounding one over the other.

These concerns result in different resolutions to the same problem. GNNSJ promotes ideas of inter-faith, multi-faith, Sikh secularism and GNG asserts Sikh sovereignty and the creation of a Sikh counterpublic (Warner, 2002). Whilst these resolutions are significant because of their differences, they are even more meaningful because they are not necessarily chosen but rather, they are imposed through an understanding of the dominant discourse of the public sphere. This lack of choice of how to behave in the public sphere is highlighted further in the example of the school.

Education policy remains rooted in deeply embedded Christian values which does not allow for a school to flourish unless it aligns with those values. A Sikh school, and even a Sikh ethos school is in an impossible situation because it directly contradicts those values by trying to encompass broadly spiritual Christian values and multi-faith practices. Whilst there are ethnographic examples to suggest that faith schools that are not Christian are successful, these are not in the context of majority Christian public spheres (Benei, 2008, 2009; Froerer, 2007; Froerer, 2011; Srivastava, 2005). Nation building and education are interwoven through ideas of citizenship and person-making and so the 'right kind' of education is equally dependent on the 'right kind' of Sikhī. From the inside the school provides the fundamental safe space for its pupils to thrive, however, from the outside the school is in an impossible situation of meeting conflicting requirements from its key stakeholders.

The political context that religious and racialised minorities are facing has prescriptive ideas about what it means to be a "good diaspora" (Liberatore, 2018). A 'bad' immigrant is one that

is opposed to 'British' values (Mamdani, 2005). These 'British' values seem to foster an 'us versus them' narrative with any attempt to address this narrative seen as anti-British, radical, or extreme. Through practices of *sevā*, Sikhs in Britain are navigating between their public and private understandings of what it means to be a Sikh "in Britain within a constraining political landscape." (Liberatore, 2017, p. 219) The role of the police and the media becomes crucial as enforcers of the dominant narrative where acts of *sevā* can be seen as exemplar behaviour and association with a "good diaspora" (Liberatore, 2018) narrative, sometimes being defined against a "bad diaspora" i.e., British Muslims. Further, "imposed silences" (Werbner, 2017, p. 9) of the state reinforce the politicisation of Sikhī which results in a perceived challenge to the nation-state which marks Sikhs as equal citizens with equal rights and removes any hierarchy associated with religious and ethnic identity. The result is a divergent way of performing *sevā* that is not necessarily compatible with the "good diaspora" narrative establishing publics and counterpublics (Hirschkind, 2001; Warner, 2002) as a form of 'diasporic nationalism' (Singh, 2020b).

The performance of *sevā* in Britain is shaped by the dominant British public sphere and its ethos embedded in a dominant Christianity (i.e., Anglicanism, which links together Church and state, entwining the goodness of the nation with the goodness of the monarchy and of a Christian God) as the norm. Similar to the Gurdwārās and the school, Sikhs are left with a choice to adapt their Sikhī and praxis to 'fit' into this ethos or face being considered as antithetical to being a 'good' citizen strengthening the boundaries of citizenship (Kaur, 2020, p. 1). Resulting from this, migrant communities are restricted but also essential in capitalist societies (Hall, 2017, p. 2). Where the previous questions were to determine one's level of 'Sikhness', this has now become a question that includes one's performativity as a marker of 'authenticity'. The way that this is navigated by individual actors and organisations is dictated by their understandings of *mīrī pīrī* and how this is central to the making of their moral selfhood.

## Public visibility of Sikhī during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Even more recently, during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, Sikhī became public in new ways through the forms of sevā such as food banks and Gurdwārās providing food to those isolating or facing newfound hardship. The public visibility of langar and sevā have become amplified as a sign of ‘good citizens’ but still not fully understood in its depths. Gurdwārās were forced to close their doors to members of the community who it provided a shelter or safe haven for, but they were allowed to remain open as institutions distributing food. In some ways Sikhs have become a ‘model minority’ but in other ways they have been constrained by government moves through discriminatory and stigmatising policy. Multi-generational households in particular were victim of these policies, with limited support to suggest that they were a real threat (Bear et al., 2020). Rather, the lack of recognition of these kinship structures gave the state license to intrude in the home once again causing homes to have been re-politicised due to social distancing and virus security. The battles of mīrī pīrī have been taken in new directions during the Covid-19 pandemic in Britain. This lack of understanding further highlights the importance of my research and insights into this particular minority community.

## Propositions from this research

The understanding of the relationship between Sikhs and Britain has been reduced to the colonial period in which a supposed altering of Sikh identity took place (Mandair & Mandair, 2009). However, whilst it is true that there is an impact of colonialism, it is impossible to reduce Sikh identity as a construction of colonialism and a manipulation of the Singh Sabhā movement (Singh & Shani, 2015, p. 274). Given this understanding, it is vital to consider the relationship that Sikhs have with Britain and the British. Diasporic Sikhs in Britain have to regenerate ideas of kinship, religion, politics, and selfhood because of the cost of



detritorialisation, where Sikhs have been forcibly removed from their homeland (which no longer exists in the form it did before partition) and the impact of the British public sphere on the construction of one's imagination. Ranjeet Singh, one of my interlocutors, who has family and land ties to Punjāb, constantly referred to a desire of wanting to return but acknowledged that the state did not exist in the way that it once did. He reflected on the corruption of the politics and the dire position of many Punjabīs. He talked about the difference in lifestyle and the nostalgia about how Sikhī is literally imbibed in the soil. There is a desire to return 'home' with no real conception of what 'home' actually is.

My thesis provides a description of the total schema of the relationship between religious and political from the viewpoint of my interlocutors. This is also present in indigenous texts written by Sikh authors writing about Sikhī who see the relationship between the religious and political in similar ways. This is an indigenous theory of the political and the religious that can have implications for our interpretations of other cultures and societies. Rather than a default Christian based theory, we could consider using this sort of theory more generally in anthropological and social theory as a means of better understanding other cultures understandings of concepts such as the political and the religious. Fesenmyer et al argue that because there has been limited conversation between the sub-disciplines of the anthropology of Christianity and the anthropology of Islam, there is a lack of attention "to the interplay between people's religiosity and the wider, often multi-religious and non-religious, worlds they inhabit." (2020, p. 387) An anthropology of Sikhī could further contribute to this conversation showing an alternative view of the interplay of people's worlds. As my thesis shows my interlocutors understand and interpret mīrī pīrī differently, it also shows how we can take seriously how religion and religious concepts are meaningful in peoples' lives (Hausner, 2020, p. 494).

My ethnography not only shows how Sikhs in Britain debate their positionality in relation to religion and politics but also, how they conceptualise and theorise these domains of life. Building from a Sikh authored history of Sikhī and ethnographic evidence to support this theoretical underpinning of mīrī pīrī we can begin to construct a more cooperative understanding of the relationship between the religious and political which can be further utilised as a theoretical framework more broadly. A Sikh theoretical understanding of these concepts can help to widen the lens through which anthropologists understand minority and marginalised communities to take seriously emic perspectives and historical experiences which are inherited and configured in the lives of Sikh people in Birmingham at present and the ways in which their sense of personhood in relation to the divine and human others encounters the demands and restrictions of the current and past British state.

## Bibliography

Abbasi, A. (2016). Why did South Asians Vote for Brexit?

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2016/11/03/why-did-south-asians-vote-for-brexit/>

Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American anthropologist*, 104(3), 783-790.

Education Reform Act 1988, (1988).

Academies Act 2010, (2010). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/32/contents>

Ahluwalia, D. P. (2005). *The Subject of Sikh Studies* Routledge].

Allen, C. (2016). *Islamophobia*. Routledge.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised edition, London: Verso*. (London:Verso)

Anderson, B. R. O. G. (1998). *The spectre of comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the world*. Verso.

Appadurai, A. (1988). How to make a national cuisine: cookbooks in contemporary India. *Comparative studies in society and history*, 30(1), 3-24.

Appadurai, A. (2006). *Fear of small numbers*. Duke University Press.

Prevent Strategy, (2011).

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf)

Asad, T. (1993). *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. JHU Press.

Asad, T. (2003). *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford University Press.

Association, S. P. (2021). "Providing an interface between the mainstream media and the Sikh community". <https://www.sikhpa.com>

- Authority, Q.-Q. a. C. (2000). *National Curriculum 2000 framework*. London: Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)
- Axel, B. K. (2001). *The nation's tortured body*. Duke University Press.
- Bachelard, G. (1994 [1964]). *The poetics of space* (Maria Jolas, trans.). Beacon.
- Back, L., Sinha, S., & Bryan, w. C. (2012). New hierarchies of belonging. *European journal of cultural studies*, 15(2), 139-154.
- Baldwin, J. (1845). A Narrative of Four Months' Campaign in India. *Between the Years*, 6.
- Ballantyne, T. (2002). Looking back, looking forward: the historiography of Sikhism. *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 4, 5-29.
- Ballantyne, T. (2012). Migration, Cultural Legibility, and the Politics of Identity in the Making of British Sikh Communities. In A. Malhotra (Ed.), *Punjab Reconsidered*. Oxford University Press.
- Ballard, R. (1972). Family organisation among the Sikhs in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 2(1), 12-24.
- Ballard, R. (1986). Changing life styles among British Asians (a review article). *New Community*, 13(2), 301-303.
- Ballard, R. (1994). *Desh pardesh: the South Asian presence in Britain*. C. Hurst & Co. Publishers.
- Ballard, R., & Ballard, C. (1977). The Sikhs: the development of South Asian settlements in Britain in Watson, JL (ed) *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*. In: Oxford: Blackwell.
- bam. (n.d.). *Nishkam High School, Birmingham*. <https://www.bam.co.uk/how-we-do-it/case-study/nishkam-high-school>
- Bance, P. (2007). *The Sikhs in Britain: 150 Years of Photographs*. Sutton.
- Bangstad, S. (2013). Inclusion and exclusion in the mediated public sphere: the case of Norway and its Muslims. *Social Anthropology*, 21(3), 356-370.
- Basu, M. (2001). *Hindu women and marriage law: From sacrament to contract*. Oxford University Press, USA.

- Baumann, G. (1996). *Contesting culture: Discourses of identity in multi-ethnic London* (Vol. 100). Cambridge University Press.
- BBC. (2019). *BBC Inside Out*. BBC.
- Bear, L. (2005). School Stories and Internal Frontiers: Tracing the Domestic Life of Anglo-Indian Citizens. In V. Bénéï (Ed.), *Manufacturing citizenship: Education and nationalism in Europe, South Asia and China*. Routledge.
- Bear, L. (2007). *Lines of the nation: Indian railway workers, bureaucracy, and the intimate historical self*. Columbia University Press.
- Bear, L. (2008). Ruins and Ghosts in Kharagpur. In J. Carsten (Ed.), *Ghosts of memory: essays on remembrance and relatedness*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bear, L. (2015). *Navigating austerity: Currents of debt along a South Asian river*. Stanford University Press.
- Bear, L., James, D., Simpson, N., Alexander, E., Bhogal, J. K., Bowers, R., Cannell, F., Lohiya, A., Koch, I., & Lenhard, J. (2020). A right to care: the social foundations of recovery from COVID-19. *LSE ePrints*.
- Bear, L., & Mathur, N. (2015). Introduction: Remaking the public good: A new anthropology of bureaucracy. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 33(1), 18-34.
- Bender, C. (2011). Practicing religions. In *The Cambridge companion to religious studies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Benei, V. (2008). *Schooling passions: Nation, history, and language in contemporary Western India*. Stanford University Press.
- Benei, V. (2009). Anthropologists and the study of formal education: nationalism, school curriculum and human development. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 3(1), 143-154.
- Bertolani, B. (2012). Transnational Sikh Marriages in Italy: Facilitating migration and negotiating traditions. *Sikhs across Borders. Transnational Politics of European Sikhs*. London, New York, New Delhi, Sydney, Bloombury Academic, 68-83.

- Bhachu, P. (1985). *Twice migrants: east African Sikh settlers in Britain*. Tavistock Publications.
- Bhachu, P. (1988). Apni marzi kardhi. Home and work: Sikh women in Britain. *Enterprising women: ethnicity, economy and gender relations*, 76-102.
- Bhachu, P. (2015). Twice migrants and multiple migrants. *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, 1-4.
- Blasco, M., and Vargas, C. A. (2011). Educational policy, anthropology, and the state. *A companion to the anthropology of education*, 368-387.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. K. A. H. Halsey (Ed.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp. 487-511). Oxford University Press.
- Brahm Levey, G. (2019). The Bristol school of multiculturalism. *Ethnicities*, 19(1), 200-226.
- Brar, K. S. (1993). *Operation Blue Star: The True Story*. UBS Publishers' Distributors.
- BSR. (2016). *British Sikh Report 2016*. <https://britishsikhreport.org/british-sikh-report-download-2016/>
- BSR. (2017). *British Sikh Report 2017*. <https://britishsikhreport.org/british-sikh-report-download-2017/>
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre journal*, 40(4), 519-531.
- Cannell, F. (1999). *Power and intimacy in the Christian Philippines* (Vol. 109). Cambridge University Press.
- Cannell, F. (2006). *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Duke University Press.
- Cannell, F. (2010). The anthropology of secularism. *Annual review of Anthropology*, 39, 85-100.
- Cannell, F. (2013). The Difference Kinship Makes. In S. Mckinnon, & Cannell, F. (Ed.), *Vital Relations: Modernity and the Persistent Life of Kinship* (pp. 14-49). SAR Press.
- Cannell, F. (2015). Ghosts and ancestors in the modern West. In J. Boddy, & Lambek, M. (Ed.), *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion* (pp. 202-222). John Wiley & Sons.
- Cannell, F. (2019). Kinship, world religions and the nation state. In S. Bamford (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of kinship* (pp. 700-728). Cambridge Univeristy Press.

- Carsten, J. (2008). *Ghosts of memory: essays on remembrance and relatedness*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Carsten, J. (2018). House-lives as ethnography/biography. *Social Anthropology*, 26(1), 103-116.
- Carsten, J. (2020). Imagining and living new worlds: The dynamics of kinship in contexts of mobility and migration. *Ethnography*, 21(3), 319-334.
- Carsten, J., & Hugh-Jones, S. (1995). *About the house: Lévi-Strauss and beyond*. Cambridge University Press.
- Casanova, J. (1994). *Public religions in the modern world*. University of Chicago Press.
- Casanova, J. (2006). Secularization revisited: A reply to Talal Asad. *Powers of the secular modern: Talal Asad and his interlocutors*, 12-30.
- Chahal, D. S. (1997). Meanings and functions of Gurdwara. *Sikh Courier*, 37(84), 21-26.
- Chahal, D. S. (2002). Nanakian philosophy—The term defined. *Understanding Sikhism Res. J*, 4(2), 17-22.
- Chahal, D. S. (2002). A unique concept of God in Nanakian philosophy. *Understanding Sikhism Res. J*, 4(2), 5-16.
- Chahal, D. S. (2008). *Nanakian Philosophy: Basics for Humanity*. Institute for Understanding Sikhism.
- Chowdhry, M. (2018). *Defence of Europe by Sikh Soldiers in the World Wars*. . Troubador Publishing Ltd. .
- Chryssides, G. a. M., L. (1985). Significance of Langar in Gurdwara. *Sikh Courier*, 25(60).
- Cohn, B. S. (1987). *An anthropologist among the historians and other essays*. Oxford University Press.
- Cohn, B. S. (1996). *Colonialism and its forms of knowledge: The British in India*. Princeton University Press.
- Council, B. C. (2019). *Index of Deprivation 2019*.

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2533/index\\_of\\_deprivation\\_2019](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2533/index_of_deprivation_2019)

- Council, B. C. (2021). *Birmingham Population*.  
[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about\\_birmingham/1294/population\\_and\\_census/2](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20057/about_birmingham/1294/population_and_census/2)
- Csordas, T. J. (2002). Somatic Modes of Attention. In T. J. Csordas (Ed.),  
*Body/Meaning/Healing. Contemporary Anthropology of Religion*. . Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cunningham, J. D. (1918). *A History of the Sikhs: From the Origin of the Nation to the Battles of the Sutlej*. H. Milford, Oxford University Press.
- Curtice, J., Clery, E., Perry, J., Phillips M. and Rahim, N. (2019). *British Social Attitudes: The 36th Report* (British Social Attitudes, Issue.
- Das, V. (1990). *Communities, riots and survivors in South Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Das, V. (1996). The Spacialisation of Violence: Case Study of a 'Communal Riot' In K. S. Basu, S (Ed.), *Unravelling the Nation: Sectarian conflict and India's secular identity*. NY: Penguin Books.
- Das, V. (2006). *Life and words*. University of California Press.
- de La Mare, T. (2018). *Remembrance Day: Memorial for Sikh soldiers vandalised less than one week after unveiling*. Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sikh-soldiers-remembrance-day-first-world-war-memorial-vandalised-smethwick-birmingham-a8627696.html>
- DeJaeghere, J. G. (2009). Critical citizenship education for multicultural societies. *Inter-American Journal of Education for Democracy*, 2(2), 222-236.
- Deol, H. (2003). *Religion and nationalism in India: the case of the Punjab*. Routledge.
- Dewdney, A., Dibosa, D., & Walsh, V. (2010). Cultural Inequality, Multicultural Nationalism and Global Diversity Tate Encounters: Britishness and Visual Culture. *Beyond Cultural Diversity: The Case for Creativity*, 81-91.
- Dhanda, M. (2017). Casteism amongst Punjabis in Britain. 52(3), 62 - 65.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2436/620351>



- Dhavan, P. (2011). *When Sparrows Became Hawks: the making of the Sikh warrior tradition, 1699-1799*. OUP USA.
- Dogra, R. C., Mansukhani, G. S., & Dogra, R. C. (1995). *Encyclopaedia of Sikh religion and culture*. Vikas Pub. House.
- Donner, H. (2016). Doing it our Way: Love and marriage in Kolkata middle-class families. *Modern Asian Studies*, 50(4), 1147-1189.
- Dosanjh, B. (2016). *The Sikhs of Smethwick*. BBC.
- Dusenbery, V. A. (2016). 1. A Sikh Diaspora? Contested Identities and Constructed Realities. In *Nation and migration* (pp. 17-42). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Eaude, T. (2008). *Children's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development: Primary and Early Years*. Learning Matters.
- Eaude, T. (2019). Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development. *A Broad and Balanced Curriculum in Primary Schools: Educating the Whole Child*, 47.
- Economic Times India. (2018). *First Sikh guardsman tests positive for cocaine, could be expelled from UK Army*  
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/first-sikh-guardsman-tests-positive-for-cocaine-could-be-expelled-from-uk-army/articleshow/65946421.cms?from=mdr>
- Education, D. f. (2019). *How to apply to set up a mainstream free school*. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/830148/How\\_to\\_apply\\_guide\\_W14\\_v3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/830148/How_to_apply_guide_W14_v3.pdf)
- Education, O.-O. f. S. i. (2018). *School inspection handbook: Handbook for inspecting schools in England under section 5 of the Education Act 2005*.
- Engelke, M. (2007). *A problem of presence*. University of California Press.
- Engelke, M. (2012). Angels in Swindon: Public religion and ambient faith in England. *American Ethnologist*, 39(1), 155-170.
- Engelke, M. (2013). *God's Agents*. University of California Press.

- Engelke, M. (2014). Christianity and the anthropology of secular humanism. *Current Anthropology*, 55(S10), S292-S301.
- Equality Act, UK Government (2010). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- Evans, G. (2007). *Educational failure and working class white children in Britain*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Evans, G. (2012). "The aboriginal people of England": The culture of class politics in contemporary Britain. *Focaal*, 2012(62), 17-29.
- Evans, G. (2017a). Brexit Britain: Why we are all postindustrial now. *American Ethnologist*, 44(2), 215-219.
- Evans, G. (2017b). Social class and the cultural turn: Anthropology, sociology and the post-industrial politics of 21st century Britain. *The Sociological Review*, 65(1\_suppl), 88-104.
- Featherstone, D. F. (1968). *At Them with the Bayonet!: The First Sikh War*. Jarrolds.
- Fenech, L. E. (2004). Doris R. Jakobsh. *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2003. Pp. xi, 296. Rs. 1000.00. In: Oxford University Press.
- Fenech, L. E. (2010). Martyrdom: WH McLeod and his Students. *JPS*, 17, 1&2.
- Fernando, M. L. (2014). *The republic unsettled*. Duke University Press.
- Fernando, M. L. (2019). State sovereignty and the politics of indifference. *Public culture*, 31(2), 261-273.
- Ferris, M. C. (2012). *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South*. UNC Press Books.
- Fesenmyer, L., Liberatore, G., & Maqsood, A. (2020). Crossing religious and ethnographic boundaries: The case for comparison. *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*.
- Fischler, C. (1988). Food, self and identity. *Social science information*, 27(2), 275-292.
- Fox, R. G. (1985). *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*. Univ of California Press.
- Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social text*(25/26), 56-80.

- Froerer, P. (2007). Disciplining the saffron way: moral education and the Hindu rashtra. *Modern Asian Studies*, 41(5), 1033-1071.
- Froerer, P. (2011). Education, Inequality and Social Mobility in Central India. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 23(5), 695–671.
- Gabaccia, D. R. (2000). *We are what we eat: Ethnic food and the making of Americans*. Harvard University Press.
- Gardner, K. (2002). Death of a migrant: Transnational death rituals and gender among British Sylhetis. *Global networks*, 2(3), 191-204.
- Gardner, K., & Grillo, R. (2002). Transnational households and ritual: an overview. *Global networks*, 2(3), 179-190.
- Gardner, R., Lawton, D., & Cairns, J. (2005). *Faith schools: consensus or conflict?* Psychology Press.
- Garvin, E. (2016). “When a big tree falls, the earth shakes”: Anti-Sikh Violence in 1984 Delhi.
- gov.uk. (2021). *The Queen's Awards for Enterprise*. gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/queens-awards-for-enterprise>
- Grewal, J. (1996). *Sikh Ideology, Polity and Social Order*, (Vol. New Delhi).
- Grewal, J. S. (2009). *The Sikhs: ideology, institutions, and identity*. Oxford University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1989). The structural transformation of the public sphere, trans. Thomas Burger. *Cambridge: MIT Press*, 85(85-92), 180.
- Hafiz, S. (2017). *Gap's Ad With Sikh Model Waris Ahluwalia Defaced With Racist Graffiti, Drawing Incredible Response From Company*. Huffington Post. [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gap-ad-sikh-waris-ahluwalia\\_n\\_4343586](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gap-ad-sikh-waris-ahluwalia_n_4343586)
- Hall, K. D. (2002). *Lives in Translation: Sikh Youth as British Citizens*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hall, S., King, J., & Finlay, R. (2017). Migrant infrastructure: Transaction economies in Birmingham and Leicester, UK. *Urban Studies*, 54(6), 1311-1327.

- Hall, S. M. (2017). Mooring “super-diversity” to a brutal migration milieu. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(9), 1562-1573.
- Hausner, S. L. (2020). The comparative anthropology of religion, or the anthropology of religion compared: a critical comment. *Social Anthropology*, 28(2), 482-495.
- Hawley, M. (2014). Sikh Institutions. In P. F. Singh, L. E (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (pp. 317-327). Oxford University Press.
- Helweg, A. (1979). *Sikhs in England: The Development of a Migrant Community*. Oxford University Press.
- Helweg, A., W. (2003). The Gurdwara and the Sikh Diaspora. *Journal of Sikh Studies*, 27(1), 117-127.
- Hirschkind, C. (2001). Civic virtue and religious reason: An Islamic counterpublic. *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(1), 3-34.
- Hirvi, L. (2014). Civic Engagement and Seva: An Ethnographic Case Study of a Sikh Gurdwara in Yuba City, California. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 21(1).
- Holloway, L. (2015). The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: 15 years On.  
<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/the-future-of-multi-ethnic-britain-15-years-on>
- Hooks, B. (1992). Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics. *Hypatia*, 7(2).
- Hoque, A. (2019). *Being Young, Male and Muslim in Luton*. UCL Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv550c56>
- Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2007). Slicing the onion ethnographically: Layers and spaces in multilingual language education policy and practice. *Tesol Quarterly*, 41(3), 509-532.
- Howell, S. (2003). Kinning: The creation of life trajectories in transnational adoptive families. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9(3), 465-484.
- Hundal, S. (2020). *Young, Sikh and Proud*. BBC.
- Hunter, W. W. (1895). *A brief history of the Indian peoples*. Clarendon Press.

- Inge. (2018). What are free schools - and have they been successful? *The Telegraph*.  
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education-and-careers/0/free-schools-have-successful/>
- Jacobs-Huey, L. (2002). The natives are gazing and talking back: Reviewing the problematics of positionality, voice, and accountability among "native" anthropologists. *American anthropologist*, 104(3), 791-804.
- Jacobsen, K. A. (2012). Tuning Identity in European "Houses of the Guru": The Importance of Gurdwaras and Kirtan among Sikhs in Europe. *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European*, 11.
- Jacobsen, K. A., & Myrvold, K. (2011). *Sikhs in Europe: migration, identities and representations*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Jakobsh, D. R. (2000). *Relocating gender in Sikh history: Transformation, meaning and identity* [University of British Columbia].
- James, A. (1974). *Sikh children in Britain*. published for the Institute of Race Relations by Oxford University Press.
- Jaspal, R., & Takhar, O. K. (2016). Caste and identity processes among British Sikhs in the Midlands. *Sikh Formations*, 12(1), 87-102.
- Jhutti-Johal, J. H., S. (2019). *The changing nature of activism among Sikhs in the UK today*.
- Jones, D. (2016). Being Tamil, being Hindu: Tamil migrants' negotiations of the absence of Tamil Hindu spaces in the West Midlands and South West of England. *Religion*, 46(1), 53-74.
- Joppke, C. (2009). Limits of integration policy: Britain and her Muslims. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(3), 453-472.
- Joshi, S. S. (1973). *Pitch and Related Phenomena in Punjabi* (Vol. VI). Pakha Sanjam.
- Jouili, J. S. (2015). *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints*. Stanford University Press.
- Juergensmeyer, M. (1989). The Gadr syndrome: Immigrant Sikhs and nationalist pride. In G. B. a. V. Dusenbery (Ed.), *The Sikh diaspora: Migration and experience beyond Punjab* (pp. 173– 190). Chanakya Publishers.

- Juergensmeyer, M. (1993). *The new cold war: Religious nationalism confronts the secular state*. University of California Press.
- Kalra, V. S. (2019). *From textile mills to taxi ranks: Experiences of migration, labour and social change*. Routledge.
- Kandal, M. S. (1999). Channelising Reservoir of Khalsa Energy a Matter of Right Management. *Sikh Review*, 47(1).
- Kaur, G., & Singh, S. J. (2009). *Lost in history: 1984 reconstructed*. (Sikh Spirit Foundation)
- Kaur, H. (2020). Making citizenship, becoming Citizens: how Sikh Punjabis shaped the exclusionary politics of belonging. *Amerasia Journal*, 46(1), 107-122.
- Kaur, I. N. (2011). Sikh Shabad Kīrtan and Gurmat Sangīt: What's in the Name? *JPS*, 18(1&2), 252.
- Kaur Singh, N. G. (2011). *Sikhism: an introduction*. IB Tauris.
- Kaur-Singh, N. G. (2004). The Body of the Gurus. *Religious Studies and Theology*, 23(2), 27-52.
- Keane, W. (2007). *Christian moderns*. University of California Press.
- Khaira, G. S. (2000). Sikh Gurdwaras: Problems and Possible Solutions. *The Sikh Review*, 48(4), 30-33.
- Khera, P. K. (2015). *Catalogue of Sikh Coins in the British Museum* (Vol. 190). British Museum Research Publication.
- Kiessling, H. (2016). *Faith, Unity, Discipline: The Inter-Service-Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Kumar, N. (1996). Religion and ritual in Indian schools: Banaras from the 1880s to the 1940s' in Crook, N (ed) *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History and Politics*. In: Oxford University Press.
- Kundnani, A. (2002). The death of multiculturalism. *Race & class*, 43(4), 67-72.
- Lambert, H. (2016). *EU Referendum Result: 7 Graphs that Explain how Brexit Won*. The Independent. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-result-7-graphs-that-explain-how-brexit-won-eu-explained-a7101676.html>

- Leonard, K. (1990). Pioneer Voices from California: Reflections on Race, Religion and Ethnicity. In N. G. B. a. V. A. Dusenbery (Ed.), *The Sikh Diaspora: Migration and Experience Beyond the Punjab*. Chanakya Publications.
- Levine, D. N. (2007). Ethiopia, Japan, and Jamaica: A century of globally linked modernizations. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 41-51.
- Levinson, B. A. (2005). Citizenship, identity, democracy: Engaging the political in the anthropology of education. *Anthropology & education quarterly*, 329-340.
- Lewis, J. R. (1989). Misrepresentation of Sikh tradition in world religious text books. In J. S. S. Mann, H. S. (Ed.), *Advanced Studies in Sikhism* (pp. 265-277). Sikh community of North America.
- Lewis, P. (1994). *Islamic Britain: religion, politics, and identity among British Muslims: Bradford in the 1990s*. IB Tauris & Company.
- Liberatore, G. (2013). *Transforming the self: An ethnography of ethical change amongst young Somali Muslim women in London* The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)].
- Liberatore, G. (2017). *Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitized Britain* (Vol. 81). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Liberatore, G. (2018). Forging a 'Good Diaspora': Political Mobilization among Somalis in the UK. *Development and Change*, 49(1), 146-169.
- Lunneblad, J. (2020). The value of poverty: an ethnographic study of a school–community partnership. *Ethnography and Education*, 15(4), 429-444.
- Madra, A. S., & Singh, P. (1999). *Warrior Saints: three centuries of the Sikh military tradition*. IB Tauris & Company Limited.
- Mahmood, C. K. (2010). *Fighting for faith and nation: Dialogues with Sikh militants*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Mallett, S. (2004). Understanding home: a critical review of the literature. *The Sociological Review*, 52(1), 62-89.

- Mamdani, M. (2005). *Good Muslim, bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the roots of terror*. Harmony.
- Mandair, A., S. (2011). Translations of Violence: Secularism and Religion-Making in the Discourses of Sikh Nationalism. In M. M. Dressler, A. (Ed.), *Secularism and Religion-Making*. Oxford University Press.
- Mandair, A.-P. S. (2013). *Sikhism: A guide for the perplexed*. A&C Black.
- Mandair, A.-P. S. (2015). After 1984? Violence, Politics and Survivor Memories. In: Taylor & Francis.
- Mandair, A.-P. S., & Mandair, A.-P. (2009). *Religion and the Specter of the West*. Columbia University Press.
- Mandair, A.-p. S., & Shackle, C. (2005). *Teachings of the Sikh Gurus: Selections from the Sikh Scriptures*. Routledge.
- Mann, S. G. (2017). Guru Granth. In J. K. e. al. (Ed.), *Brill's Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (Vol. 1, pp. 129 -137). Brill.
- Mansukhani, G. S. (1982). *Indian classical music and Sikh kirtan*. Oxford & Ibh New Delhi.
- Mansukhani, G. S. (1988). *A hand-book of Sikh studies*. National Book Shop.
- Marcus, G. E. (2021). *Ethnography through thick and thin*. Princeton University Press.
- McDannell, C. (1995). *Material Christianity: Religion and popular culture in America*. Yale University Press.
- McKinnon, S., Cannell, F., Bear, L., Bodenhorn, B., Carsten, J., & Feeley-Harnik, G. (2013). *Vital relations: Modernity and the persistent life of kinship*. SAR Press.
- McLeod, H. (1999). Sikhs and Muslims in the Punjab. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 22(s1), 155-165.
- McLeod, H. (2003). Operation black thunder: An eyewitness account of terrorism in the Punjab. In: ROUTLEDGE JOURNALS, TAYLOR & FRANCIS LTD 4 PARK SQUARE, MILTON PARK ....



- McLeod, H. (2008). The Five Ks of the Khalsa Sikhs. *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 128(2), 325-331.
- McLeod, W. H. (1989). *The Sikhs: History, religion, and society*. Columbia University Press.
- Meer, N. (2006). "GET OFF YOUR KNEES" Print media public intellectuals and Muslims in Britain. *Journalism studies*, 7(1), 35-59.
- Meer, N. (2010). *Citizenship, identity and the politics of multiculturalism: The rise of Muslim consciousness*. Springer.
- Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2009). The multicultural state we're in: Muslims, 'multiculture' and the 'civic re-balancing' of British multiculturalism. *Political studies*, 57(3), 473-497.
- Meyers, R. (2019). Native Anthropology, to be a Native Scholar, or a Scholar that is Native: Reviving Ethnography in Indian Country. *Anthropology Now*, 11(1-2), 23-33.
- Milbank, J. (2008). *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Miller, D. (2008). The Comfort of Things (Cambridge). *Polity*, 43.
- Mitra, D. (2015). The Boundaries between " Home " and " Diaspora ": American Sikhs and the Construction of Place. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 22(2).
- Mittermaier, A. (2021). Non-compassionate care: a view from an Islamic charity organization. *Contemporary Islam*, 15(2), 139-152.
- Model, S., & Lin, L. (2002). The cost of not being Christian: Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in Britain and Canada. *International Migration Review*, 36(4), 1061-1092.
- Modood, T. (2012). *Post-immigration 'difference' and integration: The Case of Muslims in Western Europe. A Report Prepared for the British Academy (2238-6939)*. (London: The British Academy, Issue.
- Modood, T. (2016). Multiculturalism can foster a new kind of Englishness. *The Conversation*, 10.
- Modood, T. (2017). Must Interculturalists misrepresent multiculturalism? *Comparative Migration Studies*, 5(1).
- Mody, P. (2008). *The intimate state: Love-marriage and the law in Delhi*. Routledge.

- Muehlebach, A. (2012). *The moral neoliberal*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mujeeb, M. (1969). Relevance of Guru Nanak's Teachings Today. *University News*, VII(11), 1.
- Mullin, G. (2018). *SICK STATUE SLUR Thugs vandalise Sikh soldier memorial just days after being unveiled in honour of thousands of Indians killed in both world wars*. The Sun. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7711103/sikh-soldier-war-memorial-smethwick-birmingham-vandalised/>
- Myrvold, K. (2007). *Inside the Guru's Gate: Ritual Uses of Texts among the Sikhs in Varanasi*. Lunds universitet, Media Tryck]. Lund.
- Myrvold, K. (2017). Guru Granth: Ceremonial Treatment. In G. Singh Mann, Jacobsen, K. A., Myrvold, K. & Nesbitt, E. (Ed.), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Sikhism Vol. 1 (Brill's Encyclopedia of Sikhism)* (Vol. 1). Brill.
- Narayan, K. (1993). How native is a "native" anthropologist? *American anthropologist*, 95(3), 671-686.
- Nesbitt, E. (1990). Sikh Youth Camps. *Sikh Bulletin*, 7(24).
- Nesbitt, E. (2005). Young British Sikhs and Religious. *The Intimate Other: Love Divine in Indic Religions*, 310.
- Nesbitt, E. (2016). *Sikhism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Network, N. S. (2021). *Free schools: the basics*. New Schools Network. <https://www.newschoolsnetwork.org/free-schools-the-basics>
- Network, T. I. F. (2021). *Understanding SACREs*. The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom. <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/activity/understanding-sacres>
- Nijhawan, M. (2014). 1984 and the Diasporic Politics of Aesthetics: Reconfigurations and New Constellations among Toronto's Sikh Youth. *Diaspora: A journal of transnational studies*, 17(2), 196-219.
- Oberoi, H. (1994). *The construction of religious boundaries: Culture, identity, and diversity in the Sikh tradition*. University of Chicago Press.

- Oberoi, H. (2009). Ghadar movement and its anarchist genealogy. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40-46.
- Office, H. (2011). *Counter-terrorism strategy*. Gov.uk Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest>
- Ogden, J. (2012). Ghadar, Historical Silences, and Notions of Belonging: Early 1900s Punjabis of the Columbia River. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 113(2), 164-197.
- Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (1994). *Rice as self*. Princeton University Press.
- Opie, F. D. (2010). *Hog and hominy: Soul food from Africa to America*. Columbia University Press.
- Orsi, R. A. (2010). *The Madonna of 115th Street: faith and community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*. Yale University Press.
- Owen Cole, W. (1985). Sikh Worship in the Gurdwara *Sikh Courier*, 25(60).
- Owen Cole, W., & Sambhi, P. S. (1978). *The Sikhs: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Parekh, B. C. (2000). *The future of multi-ethnic Britain: Report of the commission on the future of multi-ethnic Britain*. Profile Books.
- Paugh, A. L. (2005). Multilingual play: Children's code-switching, role play, and agency in Dominica, West Indies. *Language in society*, 63-86.
- Pettigrew, J. (1984). Take Not Arms Against the Sovereign'. *South Asia Research*, 4(2), 113.
- Pettigrew, J. (1995). *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard voices of state and guerilla violence*. Zed Books.
- Pilcher, J. M. (1998). *Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*. UNM Press.
- Pool, F. W. (2020). Development Within a Religious Ontology? The Argument from Islamic Dharma. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 32(4), 1038-1056.
- Pool, F. W. (2021). Within and Beyond Modernity: Lived experiences and ethical interruptions of the Tablighi Jamaat in West Bengal. *Modern Asian Studies*, 55(1), 1-39.

- Pool, F. W.-W. (2016). *The ethical life of Muslims in secular India: Islamic reformism in West Bengal* The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)].
- Poole, E. (2009). *Reporting Islam media representations of British Muslims*. I.B. Tauris.
- Prashad, V. (2002). *Everybody was Kung Fu fighting: Afro-Asian connections and the myth of cultural purity*. Beacon Press.
- Purewal, N. K., & Lallie, H. S. (2013). Sikh Kirtan in the Diaspora: Identity, Innovation, and Revivalism. In *Sikh Diaspora* (pp. 381-403). Brill.
- Purewal, S. (2000). *Sikh ethnonationalism and the political economy of the Punjab*. Oxford Univ. Press.
- Puttick, S., Hill, Y., Beckley, P., Farrar, E., Luby, A., & Hounslow-Eyre, A. (2020). Liminal spaces constructed by primary schools in predominantly white working-class areas in England. *Ethnography and Education, 15*(2), 137-154.
- Quillen, I. J. (1955). An introduction to anthropology and education. *Education and anthropology, 1-4*.
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act, UK Government (2000).  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/34/contents>
- Race Relations Act, UK Government (1965).  
[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1965/73/pdfs/ukpga\\_19650073\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1965/73/pdfs/ukpga_19650073_en.pdf)
- Race Relations Act, UK Government (1976).  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1976/74/enacted>
- Rafael, V. L., & Bolton, K. (2008). Taglish, or the phantom power of the lingua franca. *Philippine English: Linguistic and literary perspectives, 101-127*.
- Rafiq, H. A., M. (2017). *Group Based Child Sexual Exploitation: Dissecting Grooming Gangs*.  
<https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/group-based-child-sexual-exploitation-dissecting-grooming-gangs/>
- Raj, D. S. (2000). 'Who the hell do you think you are?' Promoting religious identity among young Hindus in Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 23*(3), 535-558.

- Raj, D. S. (2003). *Where Are You From?* University of California Press.
- Ramnath, M. (2005). Two Revolutions: The Ghadar Movement and India's Radical Diaspora, 1913–1918. *Radical History Review*, 2005(92), 7-30.
- Rana, M., Qin, D. B., & Vital-Gonzalez, C. (2019). Mistaken identities: The media and parental ethno-religious socialization in a Midwestern Sikh community. *Religions*, 10(10), 571.
- All England Law Reports Vol. 1, (1983).
- Riat, P. K. (2013). *A historical and theological evaluation of the Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925* [University of Birmingham]. Birmingham.
- Rienzo, C., & Vargas-Silva, C. (2017). Migrants in the UK: An overview. *Migration Observatory briefing, COMPAS, University of Oxford*.
- Rizvi, S. (2008). Ethnographic Research in a Muslim School. In D. Sridhar (Ed.), *Anthropologists inside organisations: South Asian case studies*. SAGE India.
- Sabyachar.com. (2020). *Golden Temple | Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar – Heaven on Earth*.  
<https://sabyachar.com/golden-temple-amritsar/>
- Sagoo, G. K. (2015). *Making and Shaping the First Nishkam Nursery: A Linguistic Ethnographic Study of a British Sikh Project for Childhood* [University of Birmingham]. Birmingham.
- Samanani, F., & Lenhard, J. (2019). *House and Home*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sandhu, J. S. (2014). Green revolution: A case study of punjab. Proceedings of the Indian History Congress,
- Sandhu, S. (2018). *What Sikhs think about making 'Sikh' an ethnic category on the 2021 census: 'This campaign is divisive and counter-productive'*. inews.  
<https://inews.co.uk/news/long-reads/what-sikhs-think-about-making-sikh-an-ethnic-category-on-the-2021-census-this-campaign-is-divisive-and-counter-productive-188036>
- Saunders, P., & Williams, P. (1988). The constitution of the home: towards a research agenda. *Housing studies*, 3(2), 81-93.

- Sealy, T. (Forthcoming). *Religiosity and Recognition: Multiculturalism and British Converts to Islam*. In: Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Service, U. D. (2011). *2011 Census data*. Retrieved from <https://census.ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data.aspx>
- Services, R. T. (2015). *Faith Schooling in Britain*.
- Shackle, S. (2017). Trojan horse: the real story behind the fake 'Islamic plot' to take over schools. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/01/trojan-horse-the-real-story-behind-the-fake-islamic-plot-to-take-over-schools>
- Shafi, S. (2013). *In Pictures: Kitchen that feeds 100,000 daily*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2013/11/17/in-pictures-kitchen-that-feeds-100000-daily>
- Shani, G. (2002). The Territorialization of Identity: Sikh Nationalism in the Diaspora. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 2(1), 11-19.
- Shani, G. (2007). *Sikh nationalism and identity in a global age*. Routledge.
- Shilliam, R. (2018). *Race and the undeserving poor: From abolition to Brexit*. Agenda Publishing.
- Shiva, V. (1991). *The violence of the green revolution: third world agriculture, ecology and politics*. Zed Books.
- Sian, K. (2018). Stupid Paki loving bitch: The politics of online Islamophobia and misogyny. In *Media, crime and racism* (pp. 117-138). Springer.
- Sian, K. P. (2013). *Unsettling Sikh and Muslim Conflict: Mistaken Identities, Forced Conversions, and Postcolonial Formations*. Lexington Books.
- Sian, K. P. (2014). The politics of Sikh Islamophobia. In *Debating Islam* (pp. 119-134). transcript-Verlag.
- Sikh Expo. (n.d.). *Guru Nanak Dev Ji by Sobha Singh*. <https://sikhexpo.com/products/guru-nanak-dev-ji-artwork-painting-sobha-singh>

- Sikhnet. (2010). *200 year Old Historic Gates at Golden Temple removed for Repair and Preservation Work*. <https://www.sikhnet.com/news/200-year-old-historic-gates-golden-temple-removed-repair-and-preservation-work>
- Singh, A. (1982). Studies in Sikhism. *Guru Nanak Foundation*, 1(1).
- Singh, B. (1993a). A History of the Sikh Misals. In: Publ. Bureau, Punjabi Univ.
- Singh, B. (1993b). *A History of the Sikh Misals*. Publ. Bureau, Punjabi Univ.
- Singh, B. S. B. M. (2021). *Patron's Message*.  
<https://www.nishkamschooltrust.org/page/?title=Patron%27s+Message&pid=480>
- Singh, D. (2002). Sikhism: A Miri-Piri System. In J. S. a. S. Mann, K. (Ed.), *Recent Researches in Sikhism* (2nd Ed. ed.). Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, Patiala. .
- Singh, F. (1969). Development of Sikhism under the Gurus. In F. Singh, Singh, T., Talib, G. S., Uberoi, J. P. S., Singh, S. (Ed.), *Sikhism*. Punjabi University.
- Singh, G. (2005). British multiculturalism and Sikhs. *Sikh Formations*, 1(2), 157-173.
- Singh, G. (2006). Gurdwaras and community-building among British Sikhs. *Contemporary South Asia*, 15(2), 147-164.
- Singh, G., & Shani, G. (2015). Rethinking Sikh Nationalism in the Twenty-First Century. *Sikh Formations*, 11(3), 271-282.
- Singh, G., & Talbot, I. (2009). *The Partition of India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Singh, G., & Tatla, D. S. (2006). *Sikhs in Britain: The making of a community*. Zed Books.
- Singh, H. (2005). *Photo of Gutka being read*.  
<https://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/File:Gutka7.JPG>
- Singh, H. (2014). *Reflections on 1984*. Akaal Publishers.
- Singh, I. J. (2000). On the politics of Gurdwaras. *The Sikh Review*.  
<http://www.sikhreview.org/pdf/march2000/pdf-files/perspective3.pdf>
- Singh, I. J. (2001). Towards Self Governance: Akal Takht and related Issues. *The Sikh Review*.  
<http://www.sikhreview.org/pdf/october2001/pdf-files/moral.pdf>

- Singh, I. J. (2003). Akal Takht Jathedar: A view from America. *The Sikh Review*.  
<http://www.sikhreview.org/pdf/july2003/pdf-files/editor.pdf>
- Singh, J. (2010). Head first: young British Sikhs, hair, and the turban. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 25(2), 203-220.
- Singh, J. (2012a). Global Sikh-ers: Transnational learning practices of young British Sikhs. *Sikhs across borders: Transnational practices of European Sikhs*, 167-192.
- Singh, J. (2012b). Keeping the faith: Reflections on religious nurture among young British Sikhs. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 33(3), 369-383.
- Singh, J. (2014a). House of the Guru? Young British Sikhs' Engagement with Gurdwaras. *Journal of Punjab Studies*, 21(1).
- Singh, J. (2014b). Sikh-ing online: the role of the Internet in the religious lives of young British Sikhs. *Contemporary South Asia*, 22(1), 82-97.
- Singh, J. (2015). From the temple to the street: how Sikh kitchens are becoming the new food banks. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/from-the-temple-to-the-street-how-sikh-kitchens-are-becoming-the-new-food-banks-44611>
- Singh, J. (2016). Sikh-ing beliefs: British Sikh camps in the UK. In *Sikhs in Europe* (pp. 267-292). Routledge.
- Singh, J. (2017). The Idea, Context, Framing and Realities of 'Sikh Radicalisation' in Britain: Full Report.
- Singh, J. (2018). Lost in translation? The emergence of the digital Guru Granth Sahib. *Sikh Formations*, 14(3-4), 339-351.
- Singh, J. (2020a). Narratives in Action: Modelling the Types and Drivers of Sikh Activism in Diaspora. *Religions*, 11(10), 539.
- Singh, J. (2020b). Racialisation, 'religious violence' and radicalisation: the persistence of narratives of 'Sikh extremism'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(15), 3136-3156.



- Singh, K. (1989). *A History of the Sikhs*, vol. 1, 1469–1839, 1963, reprint. In: Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Singh, K. (1999). *A History of the Sikhs, Volume 1: 1469-1839*. Oxford University Press New Delhi.
- Singh, K. (2002). Gurdwara and the Aad Guru Granth Sahib: A Legal Perspective. *Understanding Sikhism-The Research Journal*, 4(1), 18-22.
- Singh, K. (2004). *Commentary on The Sikh Gurdwaras Act, 1925*. Guru Nanak Dev University.
- Singh Khabra, G. J. (2012). Music of the Sikh diaspora: Devotional sounds, musical memory and cultural identity. *Sikh Formations*, 8(2), 147-170.
- Singh, N.-G. K. (2005). *The birth of the Khalsa: A feminist re-memory of Sikh identity*. SUNY Press.
- Singh, N.-G. K. (2008). Guru Granth: The Quintessential Sikh Metaphor. *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts, Cultural Histories, and Contemporary Contexts*, 4(2), 157-176.
- Singh, N.-G. K., & Kaur, S. N.-G. (1993). *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the transcendent* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.
- Singh, P. (1926). *The book of the ten masters*. Selwyn & Blount.
- Singh, P. (1996). Guru Ka Langar. In H. Singh (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Sikhism* (Vol. 2, pp. 207-210). Punjabi University.
- Singh, P. (1999). *The Sikhs*. John Murray Publishers.
- Singh, P. (2014a). An Overview of Sikh History. *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies*, 19.
- Singh, P. (2014b). Towards an Understanding of the Spiritual Economy of the Golden Temple in India. *English for the Humanities Science and Scientific Methods Studies*, 7(2), 50-64.
- Singh, P. (2019). How Avoiding the Religion–Politics Divide Plays out in Sikh Politics. *Religions*, 10(5), 296.
- Singh, P., & Fenech, L. E. (2014). *The Oxford handbook of Sikh studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Singh, P., & Thukral, G. (1992). *Gurdwaras in India and around the World*. Himalayan Books.

- Singh, P. D., M. (2014). Sikh Culture and Punjabiya. In P. S. a. L. E. Fenech (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sikh Studies* (pp. 282-492). Oxford University Press.
- Singh, P. S., P. (1999). Nanakonianism: An Ecumenical Philosophy. *The Sikh Review*(47), 15-18.
- Singh, S. (2004). *Divine Revelation*. Sikh Foundation.
- Singh, S. (2005). *The Sikhs in History*. Singh Brothers.
- Singh, T., & Singh, G. (2016). *A short history of the Sikhs/1* (6th ed.). Publication Bureau, Punjabi University.
- Singh, U. (2008). *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone Age to the 12th Century*. Pearson Education India.
- Singh, Y. (2001). The Wonder That is Langar. *Sikh Review*, 49(12).
- Schools achieving success, (2001). <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-achieving-success>
- Society, M.-M. L. S. (2021). *What we do and why we do it*. <https://www.midlandlangarseva.org/about-us/>
- Srinivas, M. N. (1995). *Social change in modern India*. Orient Blackswan.
- Srivastava, S. (2005). *Constructing post-colonial India: National character and the Doon School*. Routledge.
- Statham, P., Koopmans, R., Giugni, M., & Passy, F. (2005). Resilient or adaptable Islam? Multiculturalism, religion and migrants' claims-making for group demands in Britain, the Netherlands and France. *Ethnicities*, 5(4), 427-459.
- Sterling, M. (2010). *Babylon East: Performing Dancehall, Roots Reggae, and Rastafari in Japan*. Duke University Press.
- Takhar, O. K. (2016). *Sikh identity: An exploration of groups among Sikhs*. Routledge.
- Tarlo, E. (2010). *Visibly Muslim: fashion, politics, faith*. Berg.
- Tatla, D. S. (1993). *The politics of homeland: a study of the ethnic linkages and political mobilisation amongst Sikhs in Britain and North America* University of Warwick].
- Tatla, D. S. (1999). *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood*. UCL Press.

- Tatla, D. S. (2005). *The Sikh diaspora: The search for statehood*. Routledge.
- Tatla, D. S. (2015). The Third Ghallughara: On the Sikh Dilemma Since 1984. *Sikh Formations*, 11(3), 316-342.
- Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (2009). The polysemy of the secular. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 76(4), 1143-1166.
- Taylor, J. M. (2001). *After Secularism: Inner City Governance & the New Religious Discourse* University of London].
- Tierney, R. K., & Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (2012). Anthropology of food. *The Oxford handbook of food history*, 117-406.
- Trust, N. S. (2014). Nishkam Schools Journal. *The Journal of Nishkam Schools Trust*, 1(July).
- Tsuda, T. (2015). Is native anthropology really possible?(Respond to this article at <https://www.therai.org.uk/publications/anthropology-today/debate>). *Anthropology Today*, 31(3), 14-17.
- Uberoi, J. (1999). *Religion, civil society and the state: a study of Sikhism*. Oxford Univ. Press.
- UK, H. (2021). *State-funded faith schools*. Humanists UK.  
<https://humanists.uk/campaigns/schools-and-education/faith-schools/>
- Van der Veer, P. (1994). *Religious nationalism: Hindus and muslims in India*. Univ of California Press.
- Van der Veer, P. (2014). *The modern spirit of Asia: The spiritual and the secular in China and India*. Princeton University Press.
- Vertovec, S. (2007a). Introduction: New directions in the anthropology of migration and multiculturalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 961-978.
- Vertovec, S. (2007b). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024-1054.

- Vertovec, S., & Wessendorf, S. (2010). Introduction: assessing the backlash against multiculturalism in Europe. In *The multiculturalism backlash: European discourses, policies and practices* (pp. 1-32). Routledge.
- Warikoo, N. (2020). Weak multiculturalism and fears of cultural encroachment: Meanings of multiculturalism among young elites in Britain. *Ethnicities*, 20(1), 49-70.
- Warner, M. (2002). Publics and counterpublics. *Public culture*, 14(1), 49-90.
- Watson, J. L. (1977). *Between two cultures: migrants and minorities in Britain*. Blackwell.
- Werbner, P. (2002). *Imagined diasporas among Manchester Muslims: The public performance of Pakistani transnational identity politics*. James Currey Publishers.
- Werbner, P. (2007). Veiled interventions in pure space: Honour, shame and embodied struggles among Muslims in Britain and France. *Theory, culture & society*, 24(2), 161-186.
- Werbner, P. (2013). Mothers and Daughters in Historical Perspective: Home, Identity and Double Consciousness in British Pakistanis' Migration and Return. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 26(1), 41-61.
- Werbner, P. (2017). Barefoot in Britain—yet again: On multiple identities, intersection (ality) and marginality. *Sociological Review*, 65(1).
- West, A., & Pennell, H. (2002). How new is New Labour? The quasi-market and English schools 1997 to 2001. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 50(2), 206-224.
- Willetts, D., & Kerr, C. (2018). 'MARCHING POWDER' First Sikh guardsman faces being kicked out of the Army after testing positive for cocaine. The Sun.  
<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/7337783/first-sikh-guardsman-positive-cocaine/>
- Williamson, M. (1992). A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of. *A Course in Miracles*.
- Willis, P. (2000). *Learning to labour: How working class kids get working class jobs*. Routledge.
- Zavos, J. (2009). Negotiating multiculturalism: Religion and the organisation of Hindu identity in contemporary Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(6), 881-900.

Zavos, J. (2015). Small acts, Big Society: sewa and Hindu (nationalist) identity in Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(2), 243-258.

Zavos, J. (2019). Ethical narratives, street kitchens and doing religious difference amongst post-migrant communities in contemporary Britain. *Culture and religion*, 20(1), 39-64.