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Sikh History on The Streets of London: The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea

Ranveer (Rav) Singh

*Founder, A Little History of the Sikhs**

Abstract

Across London, in England, United Kingdom can be found a wealth of Sikh and Anglo-Sikh history. This paper presents field and desk research to give a Sikh perspective on the artefacts, collections, memorials, and buildings found in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in West London. The places include the Royal Hospital, the National Army Museum, St. Luke's Church in Chelsea, where artefacts from the Anglo-Sikh Wars and of the Punjab Frontier Force regiments are found. Treasures, jewels, and exquisite fabrics from the Panjab are found at the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington, where the Imperial College campus is also located and associated with prominent Sikh scientist, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany. Other sites within the borough include the current location of the Khalsa Jatha British Isles, UK and the residences of Maharaja Duleep Singh, Maharani Jindan Kaur, and Princess Indira of Kapurthala. This paper provides an account of sites, artefacts and individuals to give a history of the Sikhs from the height of the Sikh Empire in the first half of the 19th century through to the modern day.

Keywords: Sikh history, Anglo-Sikh history, Victoria and Albert Museum, Duleep Singh, Jind Kaur

Introduction

The author's childhood, higher education years, and consultancy work have all been spent in the Greater London area. Within this context, the author has maintained and grown his interest in Sikh and Anglo-Sikh history through visits to museums, buildings associated with events and figures related to Anglo-Sikh history, and attendance at a range of commemorative ceremonies. A role as a Panjabi language teacher at Karamsar Panjabi School in Ilford, Essex required volunteers to manage mixed ability groups of children aged 11-15. Groups ranged from enthusiastic students, who had no other access to the Panjabi language in their home environment, to those who presented challenges to the teachers. It was these groups of children that encouraged the author to examine the structure of weekly lessons from the viewpoint of a child – and the author began to implement a story-telling history session at the end of each lesson. Artefacts from the author's collections were explored, including vintage newspapers, stamps of the British Raj, coins of the Sikh Empire, and photos of Sikh regiments in the British Indian Army.

During a *Sikhi* camp for children in 2011, the author presented a lecture based on sites of Sikh interest in London. The presentation detailed stories of the Kohinoor diamond at the Tower of London, Sikh relics at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, and at the Wallace Collection, amongst

* Contact: www.facebook.com/alittlehistoryofthesikhs.

others. However, it became apparent that the young audience was not familiar with the locations in London referred to in the presentation. The author began to use sites on the London Monopoly Board as references, e.g., referring to the Tower of London near 'Fenchurch Street.' With 'Fenchurch Street' being a site on the Monopoly Board, the children could relate to a reference point and better focus on the story of the artefact. Following the initial lecture, the author commenced a personal research challenge to visit all the sites on the London Monopoly Board and draw out stories from Sikh and Anglo-Sikh history associated with these 'familiar' locations. These visits helped to draw out a wealth of information, which was not available easily online; for example, learning about paintings of Sikhs in the Royal Collection at Buckingham Palace, and researching stories through memorials in churches and cathedrals in London such as Westminster Abbey, St Paul's Cathedral, the Dissenters' Chapel in Kensal Green, the Pembroke College Mission in South London and St. Luke's Church in Chelsea. These, together with citations referring to Sikhs and the Punjab on the plinths of statues in Central London, links through buildings to notable historical figures and the archives of the numerous museum collections made for an enriching and rewarding research experience.

The research continues and has grown to cover other locations that are not necessarily on the London 'Monopoly Board' and is titled 'Sikh History on the Streets of London.' The presentation and lectures have been supplemented by guided tours since November 2014, based on the initial personal research, under a community initiative called 'A Little History of the Sikhs.'

This paper provides an account of the sites in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the associated artefacts and individuals to give a history of the Sikhs from the height of the Sikh Empire in the first half of the 19th century through to the modern day.¹

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Kensington and Chelsea is the smallest borough in London, immediately to the west of the City of Westminster, yet it is one of the most densely populated districts in the United Kingdom. The royal status was designated to the borough in 1965 because it was the birthplace of Queen Victoria at Kensington Palace in 1819. The district contains major museums and universities in South Kensington, embassies in Belgravia and Kensington Gardens, famous department stores in Knightsbridge, as well as the most expensive residential streets in the world. In terms of Sikh and Anglo-Sikh history, the streets of the borough contain a wealth of memorials, artefacts, and events related to Sikh military history, the Kingdom of Punjab and the Sikh people. This paper

¹ This paper restricts itself to documenting aspects of history associated with specific sites. Broader questions of the relationship between the Sikhs and the British during the period associated with these sites is beyond the scope of this research.

presents research from books, online resources, and visits to locations in the borough, intending to centralize those places and characters with a close association for the benefit of researchers, tourists, and students of Sikh history.

The locations presented in this paper are organized in the following categories: Museums, Institutions and Events, Places of Worship, and Residences. Museums in the borough include the National Army Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, which houses treasures and art from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Empire. Institutions and events include the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, Hyde Park, where the Great Exhibition of 1851 took place, and Imperial College, London, associated with Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany. Places of worship related to Sikh history include St. Luke's Church in Chelsea, where artefacts from the Sikh Empire and the Punjab Frontier Force can be found. St Peter's Church in Belgravia and the current site of the Khalsa Jatha British Isles in Kensington. Two residences of the Duleep Singh family, 53 Holland Park and Abingdon House in Kensington, and Nell Gwynn House in Chelsea, the residence of Princess Indira of Kapurthala are also described.

The National Army Museum

The British Army's central museum on the Royal Hospital Road in Chelsea houses collections that relate to the colonial, imperial and commonwealth land forces of the British Army from its founding in 1660 to the present day. As part of its collections, the museum includes the collections of the British Indian Army, raised by the government of India in 1895.

In 2013, the museum launched a summer exhibition and a social history project, 'War and Sikhs' – a co-curation endeavour with the London-based United Kingdom Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA). The project worked to raise awareness of the vital contribution of Sikh soldiers to the British Army while giving British Sikhs more ownership around how their history and artefacts have been understood and described. The Museum's rarest items relating to Sikhs were presented, including the earliest known photographs of Sikhs, a *dastar boonga* (fortress turban) complete with miniature *kirpans* and quoits from the collections of the Museum, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *shamshir* (sword) and photographs of Sikh soldiers in the First World War.

The information gathered during the social history project was incorporated into the exhibits of the 'Empire, Faith & War: The Sikhs and World War One' exhibition, held at the Brunei Gallery of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 2014. The exhibition was curated by the UKPHA, who researched regimental histories, official dispatches, correspondence, and war grave records to provide a detailed picture of the Sikh involvement in World War One.²

²Heritage Fund (2013).

Between 2014 and 2017, the museum was closed, as significant refurbishment works were carried out. The transformed museum was opened by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh on Thursday 16 March 2017 and now is based around five themed galleries. The soldier, army, battle, society, and insight galleries provide spaces to explore and discuss the British Army and its relevance to society from fashion and films to flood defences and conflict.³ The insight gallery includes the British Army's connection with Punjab and includes a *dastar boonga* (turban fortress) on permanent display, which was first presented during the 2013 War and Sikhs project.



Figure 1: A section of the Punjab display in the Insight Gallery at the National Army Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum

The origins of the Victoria and Albert Museum lie with the Great Exhibition of 1851. Henry Cole, the museum's first director, planned the Great Exhibition with Prince Albert. Cole purchased exhibits at the end of the exhibition to form the first collections of applied art and science, which were displayed at Marlborough House in 1852. By 1855 Brompton Park House, the current site, was extended to include Refreshment Rooms, and the process was underway to transfer the collections. Brompton Park House was renamed the South

³ London Evening Standard (March 2017).

Kensington Museum, and Queen Victoria conducted the official opening on 22 June 1857.



Figure 2: The Chair of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

On 17 May 1899, the setting of the foundation stone of the Aston Webb building was the last official public appearance by Queen Victoria. It was announced on that day that the South Kensington Museum was to be renamed as the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁴ One of the Museum's most prized items is the throne of the Sikh ruler of the Kingdom of Punjab - Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The throne, made of wood and engraved in gold, was crafted by the goldsmith Hafez Muhammad Multani sometime between 1820 and 1830,⁵ during the height of the Sikh Empire. The beautifully decorated chair comprised of two tiers of lotus petals and octagonal is reflective of Mughal furniture,⁶ and was first displayed at the Great Exhibition of 1851 after the British annexed the Punjab in 1849 following the Second Anglo-Sikh War.

The V&A holds many more treasures. From 25 March to 25 July 1999, The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms exhibition celebrated one of the most important anniversaries in Sikh history: the creation in March 1699 of a new order called the *Khalsa* or 'the pure.' Ever since that first *amrit sanchar* (baptism ceremony)

⁴ Victoria and Albert Museum (2017a).

⁵ Victoria and Albert Museum (2017b).

⁶ Stronge (1999), p 82.

in 1699, millions of Sikhs all over the world are still identified by the visual symbols adopted in 1699 - their uncut hair that is covered with a turban, as well as by standard surnames, *Kaur* for women, and *Singh* for men. The museum ruled out an exhibition with a religious theme and chose its historical collections and the cosmopolitan court of the first Sikh Maharaja of Punjab, Ranjit Singh, as the focus of the exhibition. The Court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, known as the *Lahore Darbar*, was the most magnificent in the subcontinent at the time, 'he gave employment to defeated foes, honoured faiths other than his own, and included Hindus and Muslims among his ministers.'⁷

Susan Stronge curated the 'Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms' exhibition, and a wide range of material was presented, depicting a fascinating cultural history of the Sikhs through works of art. The opening section depicted Sikhs through miniature painting, 19th-century photographs of the Golden Temple, illustrated manuscripts and coins and explored the artistic heritage of the Panjab region, now divided between India and Pakistan. The next section of the exhibition focused on Ranjit Singh's court. It included paintings of leading Sikh and non-Sikh personalities, some of the maharaja's most treasured jewels and possessions, and items from the Sikh armoury, including distinctive turban helmets. After the great ruler died in 1839, a decade of upheaval and war culminated in the British annexation of Punjab. Despite the problems suffered by the region, the arts of Punjab survived. During the period of the Sikh Empire, the Lahore court supported silk weavers, embroiderers, metalworkers, and woodcarvers across the region. It provided a market for the work of the artisans. After the annexation of the Kingdom, the rulers of the smaller remaining Sikh kingdoms, the cis-Sutlej Sikh Kingdoms, notably Patiala, ensured the survival of these traditions into the 20th century.⁸

The Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms exhibition was a significant turning point in Sikh/Punjabi representation in Central London: it inspired many Punjabis to research their histories and their place in British society. The V&A has since included other exhibitions following its success, such as Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and London (14 January 2017 to 2 April 2017).

The Great Exhibition of 1851, Hyde Park, Mayfair

During the summer of 1851, in London's Knightsbridge district, a palace made of glass was constructed at Hyde Park to house the 'Great Exhibition of the Works and Industry of All.' The '*Crystal Palace*' was the idea of Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, to display the wonders of industry and manufacturing from around the modern world. The exhibition was opened on 1 May 1851 by Queen Victoria, with more than 100,000 objects displayed along more than ten miles of gallery space. Britain occupied half the display space

⁷ Singh and Rai (2008).

⁸ Stronge (1999).

inside, with exhibits from across England and the Empire. Queen Victoria wrote in her diary of ‘every conceivable invention’ with items including every kind of steam engine, elegant carriages, the early version of bicycles, a printing press from the Illustrated London News newspaper, and folding pianos convenient for yachtsmen. Foreign contributions included a display of tapestries, enamels, porcelain and silk from France, gold watches from Switzerland, and a 50kg single lump of gold from Chile. At the end of the Exhibition on 11 October 1851, over six million people had visited, and the Exhibition had made a profit of £186,000. This profit was used to create the South Kensington museums, and the Queen commissioned The Albert Memorial – a statue of Prince Albert sitting under a gilt canopy opposite the Royal Albert Hall.

Amid all the wonders, the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond was displayed in the ‘Works in Precious Metals, Jewellery, etc.’ part of the South-Central Gallery as one of the centre-pieces of the Great Exhibition. The accounts presented sources at the time described the initial reaction to the Koh-i-Noor, which at the time was a recent spoil from the annexation of Punjab. It was reported that:

“The Koh-i-Noor is at present decidedly the lion of the Exhibition. A mysterious interest appears to be attached to it, and now that so many precautions have been resorted to, and so much difficulty attends its inspection, the crowd is enormously enhanced. The policemen at either end of the covered entrance have much trouble in restraining the struggling and impatient multitude. For some hours yesterday, there were never less than a couple of hundred persons waiting their turn of admission, and yet, after all, the diamond does not satisfy. Either from the imperfect cutting or the difficulty of placing the lights advantageously, or the immovability of the stone itself, which should be made to revolve on its axis, few catch any of the brilliant rays it reflects when viewed at a particular angle.”⁹

A French writer gave a vivid description of the exhibit:

“To ordinary eyes, it is nothing more than an egg-shaped lump of glass. They may show us what they please, and call it the Koh-i-noor. On ordinary days, that is the shilling days, it is exposed in its great cage, ornamented with a policeman, and they rely on the sun to make it sparkle; but on the Friday and Saturday, it puts on its best dress; it is arrayed in a tent of red cloth, and the interior is supplied with a dozen little jets of gas, which throw their light on the god of the temple. Unhappily, the Koh-i-Noor does not sparkle even then. Thus the most curious thing is not the divinity, but the worshippers. One places oneself in the file to go in at one side of the niche, looks at the golden calf, and goes out the other side. If the organs should chance to play at the same moment, the illusion is complete. The Koh-i-Noor is well secured; it is placed on a machine

⁹ The Bankers' Magazine (1852), p 246.

which causes it, on the slightest touch, to enter an iron box. It is thus put to bed every evening, and does not get up till towards noon. The procession of the faithful then commences, and only finishes at seven o'clock.”¹⁰

The appearance of the stone and the disappointment it caused was not uncommon. Prince Albert consulted various mineralogists, and, following the approval of the government, it was agreed that the Koh-i-Noor should be re-cut and polished. Mozes Coster, the famous Dutch diamond merchants, were employed for the task and assigned Levie Benjamin Voorzanger, their most experienced artisan for the task. Work began on 17 July 1852 at the factory of Garrard & Co. in Haymarket, using a specially built steam-powered mill.¹¹ The weight of the diamond was reduced from 186 carats to its current 108.93 carats.¹² Although Prince Albert was dissatisfied with the considerable reduction, most experts of the time agreed that Voorzanger had made the right decision and fulfilled his job skilfully.¹³ Following the work on the Koh-i-noor by Voorzanger, the lighter but more dazzling stone was worn by the queen in a brooch and was not yet part of the Crown Jewels. Although the brooch was worn often by Queen Victoria, she became increasingly uneasy about how the diamond had been acquired. In a letter to Victoria, Princess Royal (her eldest daughter), she wrote:

“No one feels more strongly than I do about India or how much I opposed our taking those countries and I think no more will be taken, for it is very wrong and no advantage to us. You know also how I dislike wearing the Koh-i-Noor.”¹⁴

After Queen Victoria's death, the Koh-i-Noor was set in the Crown of Queen Alexandra, the wife of Edward VII. The Crown was used to crown her at their coronation in 1902. The diamond was then transferred to Queen Mary's Crown in 1911, and then finally to The Queen Mother's Crown in 1937. When the Queen Mother died in 2002, it was placed on top of her coffin for the lying-in-state and funeral. All these crowns are on display at the Tower of London in the Jewel House, with crystal replicas of the diamond set in the older crowns of Queen Alexandra and Queen Mary. A glass model of the Koh-i-Noor shows visitors how it looked when it was brought over to Britain in 1850. Replicas of the diamond in the original form and its re-cut forms can also be seen in the ‘The Vault,’ a permanent gallery at the Natural History Museum in South

¹⁰ Tallis (1852), p 150.

¹¹ The Illustrated London News (1854), p 54.

¹² Coster Diamonds (undated).

¹³ Tweedie (2010).

¹⁴ Tarling (1981).

Kensington that opened in 2007.¹⁵ Thus, a substantive symbol of Punjabi sovereignty also sits in the symbols of the sovereignty of England.

The Royal Hospital, Chelsea

Under a 1593 Act of Parliament, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, a weekly tax on parishes was levied to raise funds to support soldiers and sailors. In 1681, King Charles issued a Royal Warrant authorising the building of the Royal Hospital Chelsea to care for those 'broken by age or war.' Sir Christopher Wren was commissioned to design the building, at a site adjacent to the River Thames in the countryside of Chelsea.¹⁶

On the grounds of the Royal Hospital, which hosts the annual Chelsea Flower Show, is the Chillianwallah Memorial in memory of British casualties in a battle between the armies of the British East India Company and the armies of the Sikh Kingdom. The battle was fought during the Second Anglo-Sikh War in the Chillianwallah region of Punjab, now part of modern-day Pakistan, on 13 January 1849. It was one of the bloodiest battles fought by the British East India Company. Both armies held their positions at the end of the battle, and Sher Singh withdrew to the north. Both sides claimed a victory, with the Sikhs claiming that they forced the British to retreat. Since the Sikhs disengaged first, the British also claimed the victory, although they admitted that the Sikhs had missed an opportunity to gain victory. However, the forcing back of the British - including the rout of the 14th Light Dragoons together with the loss of several guns and the colours of the 24th and two other regiments - dealt a blow to British morale and was testament to the tenacity and martial skill of the Sikh army. A testimony left by a British observer stated:

“The Sikhs fought like devils, fierce and untamed... Such a mass of men I never set eyes on and as plucky as lions: they ran right on the bayonets and struck their assailants when they were transfixed”.¹⁷

The battle stands out because the British failed to defeat their opponents outright, where the final losses to the army of the East India Company included a comparatively high proportion of the British casualties (rather than native Indians). The repulse of the British during the battle, together with the loss of several guns and the colours of the 24th Foot Regiment and two other regiments, and the rout of the 14th Light Dragoons, dealt a blow to British morale.

¹⁵ What's new at the museum. Available at: https://www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/blogs/whats-new/tags/sir_david_attenborough.html [Accessed 3 May 2020]

¹⁶ Royal Hospital Chelsea (2017).

¹⁷ Randhawa (2002).



Figure 3 and 4: Sikh Cannons from the Anglo-Sikh Wars



Figure 5: Chillianwallah Memorial, Royal Hospital Chelsea

For many years, it was believed and stated that two cannons from the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh were on the grounds of the Royal Hospital, amongst a set of eight cannons displayed from the Crimean, Napoleonic and Anglo-Sikh Wars. However, in recent years experts have continued to examine the cannons, and Neil Carleton, Senior Documentation Officer from the Victoria and Albert Museum, presented an account of the Sikh cannons and guns as part of the Anglo-Sikh Wars exhibition at the Newarke Houses Museum, Leicester on 1 April 2017. Neil Carleton provided an account of where many of the Sikh

cannons and guns now reside in the UK and stated that only one cannon on display at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea is from the Anglo-Sikh Wars.¹⁸

Other items of Sikh interest include the panelled wood walls of the Great Hall which detail each of the battles of the first and second Anglo-Sikh Wars, amongst a chronological record of every engagement in War of the British Army. The Great Hall was designed as a Dining Hall with 16 long tables, one for each of the 16 original Long wards, where the Chelsea Pensioners resided.



Figure 6: The battles of the Anglo-Sikh Wars on the wall of the Great Hall of the Royal Hospital

A small Museum dedicated to the Chelsea Pensioners is located close to the London Gate entrance of the site. The Museum includes a Medal Room where examples of the Punjab Medal can be seen. The Punjab Medal was issued to officers and men of the British Army and Honourable East India Company who served in the Punjab campaign of 1848-49. The medal was authorised for all who served in Punjab between 7 September 1848 and 14 March 1849,¹⁹ and three clasps were authorized:

- **Mooltan** (7 September 1848 – 22 January 1849) - awarded to troops engaged in the siege of Mooltan.
- **Chillianwallah** (13 January 1849) - awarded to troops under the command of Lord Gough, who engaged with the Sikh army of Sher Singh and Lal Singh.
- **Goojerat** (21 February 1849) - awarded to troops under the command of Lord Gough, who defeated the Sikh army of Sher Singh at Goojerat.

¹⁸ The Lions Teeth – Sikh Artillery from the Anglo Sikh Wars (2017).

¹⁹ Joslin, Litherland and Simpkin (1988), p 117.



Figure 7 and 8: Examples of the Punjab medal at the Museum of the Royal Hospital Chelsea

Imperial College, South Kensington

Narinder Singh Kapany is an Indian-born American Sikh physicist known for his work in fibre optics, and was named as one of the seven ‘Unsung Heroes’ by *Fortune* magazine in their ‘Businessmen of the Century’ issue.²⁰ A graduate of Agra University, India, he completed his advanced studies in optics at Imperial College, London in South Kensington in 1955. The wedding of Narinder Singh Kapany, whilst a student at Imperial College, to Satinder Kaur, an English literature student at the University of London on 6 February 1954 was one of the earliest recorded marriages at the 79 Sinclair Road site of the Khalsa Jatha, British Isles.²¹

The term ‘fibre optics’ was coined by Kapany in 1956, when he became the first person to demonstrate the transmission of an image through a bundle of glass fibres, earning him the moniker “the man who bent light.” His paper in the science journal, *Scientific American* in 1960 established the new term – ‘fibre optics’, and Kapany became known as the ‘father of fibre optics,’²² whilst his 1960 paper continues to be a reference point for the subject even today. His research and inventions influenced (or advanced) communications, lasers, biomedical instrumentation, solar energy and pollution monitoring technologies. He has over one hundred patents, and his illustrious career has included him being a member of the National Inventors Council; an International Fellow of the British Royal Academy of Engineering and a Fellow of both the Optical Society of America and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

²⁰ *Fortune Magazine* (1999).

²¹ Bance, Paul and Anand (2008).

²² Narinder Singh Kapany Chair in Opto-electronics, University of California Santa Cruz. Available at: <https://southasia.ucsc.edu/endowed-chairs/narinder-singh-kapany.html> [Accessed 3 May 2020]

As a philanthropist, Kapany has been active in education and the arts. He was the founding chairman and a major funder of the Sikh Foundation. In collaboration with international institutions and publishers, the Foundation runs initiatives and projects in publishing, academia and the arts. In 1998, Kapany endowed a Chair of Sikh Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. In 1999, his gift of \$500,000 to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco established a gallery in its new building displaying the works he has donated from his collection of Sikh art. He provided paintings and other objects on loan for the internationally acclaimed ‘Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms’ exhibition which proceeded from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, USA and then onto the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada.

St. Luke’s Church, Chelsea

“James Savage’s Gothic Revival ship, sailing parallel to the King’s Road. A massive plot of land with a house of God sixty feet high whose tower pushes 142 feet high into Chelsea’s skyline – what a gift, what a responsibility” – a poetic description of the church, by The Rev Canon Peter Delaney in 1997.



Figure 9: St. Luke’s Church Chelsea

St. Luke’s Church is the tallest parish church in London, and is often referred to as ‘Chelsea’s Cathedral.’ The original parish church on the Chelsea Embankment was proving to be too small for the growing population, and a competition for the design of St. Luke’s took place in 1819. Plans for different styles were submitted by foremost architects of the time including John Nash and James Savage. Savage’s plans were courageous, based as they were on the 16th-century medieval style of building known as Gothic. This style had been

displaced by Greek and Roman styled architecture, as seen in the design of the British Museum, also constructed around the same time. His design was accepted and St Luke's became one of the first Gothic Revival churches to be built in London. The foundation stone was laid on the 12th of October 1820, and the church was consecrated on St Luke's Day, 18th October 1824, by the Bishop of London.²³

It is at St. Luke's Church that a remarkable monument stands in memory of the Punjab Frontier Force (PFF). The PFF chapel commemorates one of the great fighting units of the Indian Army, with a repository of the memories and traditions the PFF, who carved out a notable reputation on the North-West Frontier of Punjab, during the battles of the second Anglo-Afghan War (between 1878 and 1880).

The history of the PFF commences with the formation of the Punjab Irregular Force (PIF), which was formed to protect the Punjab province after the second Anglo-Sikh war in 1848-49. Having faced the Sikh armies on the battlefield, the British recognised the stalwart Sikh soldiers as formidable warriors and began to raise military units in the province.²⁴ During the 1860s, as part of a substantive reorganisation of units after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, the military units were re-organised into the Punjab Frontier Force (PFF) and comprised specialised units of all arms – Mountain, Artillery, Cavalry, and Infantry, with five regiments of cavalry, eleven regiments of infantry and five batteries of artillery besides the Corps of Guides.²⁵ Regiments of the reorganised PFF, known more popularly as the Piffers, served with distinction not only on the North-West Frontier but also during the Indian Mutiny of 1857; the Second Afghan War, 1878 – 1880; the Boxer Rebellion in China, 1900; the First World War, 1914-1918 and the Third Afghan War, 1919.

The Force comprised regiments of different martial classes – Sikhs, Panjabi Muslims, Pathans, Dogra, Hindus and Gurkhas. The Indian Army, of which the PFF was part, was a volunteer regular army with no conscription. Recruitment to the different regiments took place in specific areas, so it became common to find succeeding generations of a family serving through the ranks of the same Regiment. A recorded oath of the 4th Punjab Infantry for volunteer recruits joining the Regiment reads:

“I.....inhabitant of.....son of.....swear by the Gooroo Grunth Sahibjee (holy scripture of Sikhism) and if I tell a falsehood may the Gooroo Grunth Sahib cause misfortune to descend upon me, that I will never forsake or abandon my Colours, that I will

²³ Johnston (1999).

²⁴ Raugh (2004), p 268.

²⁵ Moreman (1998), p 21.

march wherever I am directed whether within or beyond the Company's Territories, that I will implicitly obey all the orders of my Commanders, and in everything behave myself as becomes a good Soldier and faithful servant of the Company, and failing in any part of my duty as such I will submit to the penalties ascribed in the Articles of War, which have been read to me."²⁶

With the Partition in 1947, departure of the British, and the subsequent creation of modern-day India, Pakistan and West Pakistan (now Bangladesh), there was some anxiety about the preservation of the memorials that had been set up in the garrison churches of the Punjab region. After disappointing responses following approaches elsewhere, the rector and wardens of St. Luke's Church agreed to receive the memorial brasses, stone plaques, and memorabilia from India. A sanctum was created in the crypt of the Church, and a chapel was designed in a large space within the main church. Both the sanctum and the chapel were dedicated on 3 June 1951 by the Bishop of London in the presence of Field Marshall Sir William Slim and General Lord Ismay. General Lord Ismay was the Indian born British Indian Army officer and diplomat, who was Winston Churchill's chief military assistant during the Second World War.²⁷ In the 1990s, the PFF Association disbanded as the number of survivors began to decline. The memorials and other relics of the PFF were donated to the National Army Museum in 1998 and the sanctum closed in the crypt of the church. However, the PFF chapel is maintained in superb condition, and a crypt to the 3rd Gurkha Rifles sanctum remains intact.²⁸

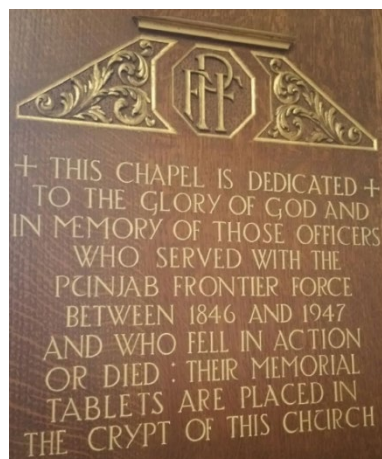


Figure 10: The Panjab Frontier Force Memorial Chapel

²⁶ Wilde (2009).

²⁷ NATO (2011).

²⁸ Renfrew (2020).

All the regiments that made up the PFF are commemorated in the chapel. The badges of the fourteen units are carved on glass screens, the wooden walls, and on the chapel chairs. The altar frontal is presented in the red, gold and green colours of the regiment. Other items on the wall of the chapel narrate the story of the force, including a plaque detailing the origins of the chapel. Several flags and colours hang in the chapel, including those of the 2nd Punjab Infantry - a regiment that stayed loyal to the British and played a prominent part in the suppression of the Indian Mutiny in 1857. The union flag that flew over the PFF Brigade Headquarters in Kohat (lowered for the last time on the 15 August 1947) is found here together with a Book of Remembrance listing the names of former PFF officers.



Figure 11: The Panjab Frontier Force Memorial Chapel, with remembrance wreaths

The church is proud of its association with the PFF, with daily prayers for political and religious tolerance taking place within the chapel. Standing and pausing for a moment in the PFF chapel, it is hard not to feel as if one is back in time and standing in a regimental church on the North-West Frontier in the late 19th century.

St Peter's Church, Eaton Square

Prince Victor Albert Jay Duleep Singh was the eldest son of the Maharaja Duleep Singh and Maharani Bamba Duleep Singh, born in England on 10 July 1866.²⁹ The Prince was educated at Eton, and his higher education was at Trinity College, University of Cambridge, where he met his first and true love Lady Anne Blanche Alice Coventry. Prince Victor succeeded his father Maharaja

²⁹ The Open University (2020).

Duleep Singh as Head of the Royal House of Punjab in 1893. The marriage of the Prince to Lady Anne Blanche was not only unusual but rocked Victorian society to its core³⁰ – it was first time an Indian Prince had married an English woman of the nobility. Lady Anne was the youngest daughter of the 9th Earl of Coventry. Equally controversial was the fact that the Prince was declared bankrupt and was seriously short of cash, largely because of financial losses at the casinos of Europe. The Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII, and a friend of the young Prince Victor at Trinity College, Cambridge) was instrumental in calming the concerns about the alliance and was a guest at the ceremony,³¹ and Queen Victoria sent her blessing.

Prince Victor made arrangements for a lavish wedding to be held at St Peter's Church, Eaton Square, where many fashionable weddings of the day took place. Invitations were sent to every family of note, and on the day of the wedding, crowds gathered with sightseers and those interested in the Coventry family and Prince Victor of the Royal House of Lahore. The wedding reception was held in Balfour Place, Mayfair at the residence of Lord Coventry, and the wedding gifts included a statuette from Queen Victoria of herself. Lady Anne was a skilled horsewoman, an enthusiastic rider to hounds and a supporter of charitable causes. Prince Victor was the grandson of the legendary Maharajah Ranjit Singh, the Lion of Punjab, who 'unified the warring cheifdoms of the Punjab into an extraordinary northern empire stretching to the borders of Kabul and Tibet, built up a formidable army, kept the British in check to the south of his realm, and closed the Khyber Pass through which plunderer had for centuries poured into India.'³²

The glow of the wedding soon faded as financial problems blighted Prince Victor; in 1890, he was taken to court after failing to pay a £16 bill for stationery despite allegedly "living in a sumptuous manner, keeping several male servants, being a member of two leading clubs, owning a private Hansom cab, being looked upon as a leading member of society and reputedly a rich man."³³ By the late 1890s his debts were at more than three times his yearly allowance from the British government at the time. The couple later moved to Paris, where Prince Victor died on 7 June 1918 at the age of 52. He was buried at the Anglican Cemetery overlooking the gambling casinos of Monte Carlo, where he had spent his time gambling away his wealth.³⁴ Lady Anne Blanche Coventry died in 1956, aged 82.

³⁰ Pryce (2009).

³¹ Countess of Carnarvon (2011).

³² Singh and Rai (2008).

³³ Pryce (2009).

³⁴ Bance (2009), p 115.

The Khalsa Jatha British Isles

During the reign of Edward VII (1901 – 1910), there were a significant number of Sikh students in the UK, many of whom were children of aristocratic families in Punjab. In 1906, a group of five young *amritdhari* (baptised) Sikhs were sent to England by Sant Attar Singh Mastuana, to implement his vision of establishing *Sikhi* in the western hemisphere.

Sant Attar Singh Ji was born on 28 March 1866 and joined the Indian Army when he was 17. In 1888 he left the army and undertook a journey on foot from Dera Ghazi Khan (now in Pakistan) to Hazoor Sahib in Maharashtra, India. Attar Singh Ji was committed to educating children and established a series of schools and colleges across India, while also attending many educational conferences.³⁵ In addition to expanding *Sikhi* in India, Sant Attar Singh Ji also wanted to reverse the trend of Sikhs cutting their hair and embracing the consumption of alcohol upon arrival in Western countries, and so begin to lay the foundations for *Sikhi* to be practiced in the West. Attar Singh's work and vision introduced him to Niranjan Singh Mehta, Principal of the Khalsa College in Amritsar. In time, Niranjan Singh Mehta was initiated to the Khalsa with an *amrit sanchar* (baptism) by Attar Singh Mastuana Ji, who changed his name to 'Teja'.³⁶ Attar Singh Ji then instructed Teja Singh and a group of Sikhs to go abroad, to implement his vision.

Teja Singh, Amar Singh, Hari Singh, Bhagat Singh, and Dharmanant Singh arrived in London on 24 August 1906.³⁷ These young Sikhs enrolled at Universities, including University College London and Downing College, Cambridge, where a small congregation formed and met every Sunday, laying the foundation for the formation of the Khalsa Jatha British Isles in 1908. Prominent founding members of the *Jatha* (a 'military detachment' commanded by a jathedhar, the chief officiant of a Sikh institution)³⁸ included Sardar Narain Singh Sargodha and Hardit Singh Malik, who was the first Indian in the Royal Flying Corps, and fought with the 28th Squadron in the First World War. The founding members of the Khalsa Jatha contributed a monthly sum of £1 for the running costs of the Jatha and sought a location that would serve as a Gurdwara. The Sikh students met with Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, who was on a tour of England with the Indian cricket team while also attending the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary in June 1911. A notice from the Times, 3 July 1911 read:

"A deputation of the British branch of the Khalsa Jatha and of military officers from Hampton Court has waited on his highness the Maharaja of

³⁵ Sant Attar Singh Ji (Mustuana Wale) (undated).

³⁶ Fenech and McLeod (2014), p 306.

³⁷ Bance, Paul and Anand (2008).

³⁸ Fenech and McLeod (2014) p 167.

Patiala to urge upon him the necessity of having a Dharamsala (Sikh Church) in the metropolis, and for that purpose to request him, on behalf of the Sikh community, to perform a preliminary ceremony in commemoration of the Coronation of their Majesties. The Maharaja acceded to the request, and promised a donation of £8,000 towards the project.” The Times, 3 July 1911.³⁹

Following receipt of the donation, the Jatha was able to lease a house in Putney (South London). The exact location of the house, street, or area is not known, and so the site which served as a base for the first Sikh congregations is currently unknown. In 1913, Maharaja Bhupinder Singh was again in London, and together with Teja Singh, he obtained a 64-year lease on a large three-story Georgian terraced house at 79 Sinclair Road in Shepherd’s Bush in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. This site in West London would serve as the first Sikh place of worship in Europe, and the Khalsa Jatha remained based there at the site for the next 63 years, serving the small but growing Sikh community. The Maharaja Bhupinder Singh Dharamsala/Gurdwara would quickly become a welcome base for many illustrious visitors who would help settle London, England and the wider British Isles.

The founding members of the Jatha and those that served in the early management committees included Maharajah Bhupinder Singh, who would visit the Dharamsala from his London base at the Savoy Hotel, the renowned Sikh scholar, Kahn Singh Nabha, who served as part of the 1913 committee and Hardit Singh Malik, the first Indian in the Royal Flying Corps who served with the 28th Squadron in the First World War, and served as President of the Khalsa Jatha.⁴⁰

Manmohan Singh, who trained as a civil engineer and completed a course in flying, was one of five Sikh Indian Air Force pilots who supported the British in 1940 in the Second World War, Khushwant Singh, who arrived in 1934 as a law student at Kings College London and would later become a prominent author, historian and writer and Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, the youngest daughter of Maharajah Duleep Singh, were also a regular visitor to the Khalsa Jatha.⁴¹

Udham Singh, arrived in England around 1933. On his arrival in London, Udham Singh moved to 79 Sinclair Road and stayed at the Dharamsala for around a month. Although he constantly moved addresses, he was a regular visitor to the Khalsa Jatha headquarters. He is renowned amongst the Sikh and Indian community for the assassination of Sir Michael O'Dwyer in London on

³⁹ Unless otherwise noted, the subsequent discussion in this section draws generally on Bance, Paul and Anand (2008).

⁴⁰ Bance, Paul and Anand (2008), p 3.

⁴¹ Bance, Paul and Anand (2008), Chapter 3.

13 March 1940. Sir Michael O'Dwyer was the former Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab in British India, who approved General Dyer actions at the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar, Punjab, in April 1919.⁴²

It was in 1953 that weekly *diwans* (religious discourses) commenced and in 1954 a full time *giani* (someone learned in the Sikh religion or knowledgeable in 'dharam' or 'path of righteousness') was employed. As funds were raised, the Jatha purchased a building known as Norland Castle, 62 Queensdale Road, London, in the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, and in 1969 the *Jatha* moved into the building where the current Gurdwara now stands.⁴³

53 Holland Park, Kensington

An English Heritage blue plaque was placed at 53 Holland Park in Kensington on 1 January 2005, to commemorate Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last ruler of Lahore, who lived at the address between 1881 and 1886 (Figures 12 and 13). Maharaja Duleep Singh was the last Maharaja of Lahore and the Sikh Empire. He was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's youngest son and the only child of Maharani Jind Kaur. Following the death of his father in 1839 and after the death of his predecessors amongst turmoil in the Court of Lahore, he came to power at the age of five in September 1843. For a while, his mother ruled, as Regent, but after the First Anglo-Sikh War in 1846, Article 10 of the Treaty of Byroval⁴⁴ provided for the Maharani to be awarded a pension of 150,000 rupees and be replaced by a British resident in Lahore supported by a Council of Regency, with agents in other cities. After the Second Anglo-Sikh War in 1849 and the defeat of the Sikh Army, the terms of the annexation of Punjab were read out to Maharajah Duleep Singh on 29 March 1849. The Terms of 1849 stated that all property of the Punjab Kingdom, 'of whatever description and wheresoever found, shall be confiscated to the Honourable East India Company, in part payment of the debt due by the State of Lahore to the British Government, and of the expense of war.'⁴⁵ On 6 April 1849, the Maharajah was introduced to his new guardian, a British Army surgeon from Calcutta -- Dr John Login. John Login wrote to Queen Victoria, stating:

"...although the young Maharaja could not but feel that the terms which had been imposed on him were hard and severe, especially when the loss of the throne was occasioned by no fault on his part, but entirely from the treachery of those whom we had placed in power around him, the difficulties with which he had been surrounded in his precarious position, before he was received under the protection of the British government, were too strongly impressed on his mind to cause any hesitation on his

⁴² Wagner (2019).

⁴³ Central Gurdwara (Khalsa Jatha) London (2017).

⁴⁴ Singh A (2014).

⁴⁵ Singh A (2014).

part to retire into private life, and he accordingly submitted to the force of circumstance with very becoming dignity.”⁴⁶

The Maharaja was exiled to Britain at the age of 15, arriving in Southampton in May 1854. The Maharaja's first meeting with Her Majesty Queen Victoria took place on 1 July 1854 at Buckingham Palace. Queen Victoria described the Prince following his visit as “extremely handsome and speaking perfect English, having a graceful and dignified manner”, and decided that his rank should be equal to a European Prince. He grew to be much admired by the Queen and became a regular at Buckingham Palace, Windsor and at the Queen's summer retreat at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. In 1861 the Maharaja returned to India to meet his mother, Maharani Jind Kaur. No longer seen as a threat to the British, Duleep Singh was granted permission to bring his mother to London, where she died in 1863. On the journey to take her body back to India, Duleep Singh met Bamba Muller, who became his wife in 1864. They lived together at Elveden Hall Estate on the border of Suffolk and Norfolk with their children.



Figures 12 and 13: Residence of Maharaja Duleep Singh, 1881 - 1886

Later in life, he became increasingly alienated about the loss of his kingdom. He reconverted to Sikhi, influenced by the stories his mother told him of his past. In 1881, the Maharaja rented 53 Holland Park in Kensington, so that he could be close to the British Library where he researched the papers connected with the annexation of his Punjab Kingdom. The result of his research whilst in London was a publication titled *The Annexation of the Punjaub*, written with the help of a professional agitator, Major Thomas Evans Bell. The Maharaja's publication reflected his embitterment about his kingdom, which was also demonstrated when he stated he was not interested in a peerage offered by Queen Victoria and Prime Minister William Gladstone. Lord Argyll visited the

⁴⁶ Lady Login (1890)

Elveden Estate to make an alternative offer of peerages for his sons in 1880. Prince Victor's tutor, Rev J. Osborne Jay, witnessed the meeting between the Maharaja and Lord Argyll, and recorded the response:

"I thank Her Majesty. Most heartily and humbly convey to her my esteem affection and admiration. Beyond that I cannot go. I claim myself to be royal; I am not English, and neither I nor my children will ever become so. Such titles—though kindly offered, we do not need and cannot assume. We love the English and especially their Monarch, but we must remain Sikhs."⁴⁷

This polite refusal to accept a peerage reflects a Maharaja, who was then very aware of his identity as the "son of the 'Lion of Punjab.'"

Abingdon House, Kensington

Jind Kaur, known affectionately as Jindan, was the daughter of the Manna Singh, the kennel keeper at the Royal Palace in Lahore. She came to the attention of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who married Jind Kaur in 1835. In 1838 she gave birth to Duleep Singh, who became the Maharaja of the Sikh Empire in 1843 after the death of three successive monarchs following the death of his father Ranjit Singh in 1839. The story of Jind Kaur sees the Kennel Keeper's daughter become the most powerful woman in Northern India, as Regent to the young Maharaja Duleep Singh.

Upon the provocation of war by the British East India Company in 1845, the unsettled Sikh Army fought the First and Second Anglo-Sikh Wars between 1846 and 1849. The Sikh armies were led by Generals who had little appetite to fight for the interests of the Empire. They acted in a way that was more focused on meeting their individual needs and maintaining their localised power in the regions. Maharani Jind Kaur was imprisoned in 1847, and by 1849 Punjab was completely annexed by the British. The 11-year old Maharaja Duleep Singh taken under the care of army surgeon Dr. John Login and exiled to England in 1854. By 1860, her son Duleep Singh was living the life of an English aristocrat and contacted his mother via Col Ramsey in Kathmandu. Col Ramsay stated that:

"The Rani had much changed, was blind and lost much of the energy which formerly characterised her, taking apparently but little interest in what was going on."⁴⁸

The Maharani was granted permission to travel to England and arrived in February 1861 – the first recorded Sikh woman in Britain.⁴⁹ Dr. Login arranged

⁴⁷ Wainwright (2013).

⁴⁸ Bance (2009), p 50.

⁴⁹ Nicholson (2018).

for a residence to be taken up upon arrival at No. 1 Lancaster Gate, two doors away from his own home. On meeting Jind Kaur, Dr. Login's remarked:

Jinda Kaur was truly an object of commiseration when one contrasted her present with her former state... Health broken, eye sight dimmed, her once famed beauty vanished, it was hard to understand the power she had wielded through her charms. It was only when she grew interested and excited in conversation, that one caught glimpses, beneath that air of indifference and the torpor of advancing age, of that shrewd and plotting brains which had distinguished the famous 'Messalina of the Punjab'.⁵⁰

After a short spell at Mulgrave Castle in Yorkshire, she returned to London to reside at Abingdon House, Kensington, under the care of an English lady. It was at Abingdon House that Duleep Singh commissioned George Richmond, an artist who painted the British gentry, nobility, and royalty, to paint his mother's portrait. Duleep Singh had negotiated the return of the Maharani's jewellery, which arrived just before the Maharani was due to meet Lady Login. The Maharani's delight was so great that "she forthwith decorated herself, and her attendants, with an assortment of the most wonderful necklaces and earrings, strings of lovely pearls and emeralds," to wear during the visit. The portrait of the Maharani by George Richmond shows her wearing some of the jewels, including the emerald and pearl necklace, which was sold at Bonhams in 2009 for £55,200.⁵¹ After just two years of being reunited with her son, on the morning of 1 August 1863, Maharani Jind Kaur passed away peacefully at Abingdon House. Duleep Singh was in Scotland at the time. Dr. Login arranged for the Maharani's 'sumptuous white velvet-draped and jewelled coffin' to be housed beneath the Dissenter's Chapel in Kensal Green Cemetery. The Kensal Green Cemetery dates from 1832, is an early example of a 'garden cemetery' and is the resting place for many famous people.⁵² The Maharani was laid in rest at the chapel through to the spring of 1864. This was to allow for Duleep Singh to make necessary arrangements for her body to be transported to India for cremation (as cremations were not legal in the United Kingdom at the time). It is recorded that Charles Dickens visited the Maharani's coffin whilst it laid in state, and wrote:

Down here in a coffin covered with white velvet, and studded with brass and nails, rests the Indian dancing woman whose strong will and bitter enmity towards England caused Lord Dalhousie to say of her, when in exile, that she was the only person our Government near feared.⁵³

The final home of the Maharani was Abingdon House, a grand house on Wrights Lane close to the Abingdon Villas and Scarsdale Villas area, which was built

⁵⁰ Bance (2009), p 51.

⁵¹ Bonhams (2017).

⁵² Dissenters Chapel, History and Architecture (undated).

⁵³ Bance (2012).

between 1850 and 1864, now known as Kensington Village. Today, the area has many buildings whose names are associated with Abingdon, linked to the Benedictine Abbey of St Mary at Abingdon. The abbots at the Abbey in Abingdon looked after the son of Aubrey de Vere I (who died circa 1112-1113), a Norman knight rewarded with estates including the manor of Kensington. Research by Peter Bance, has concluded that the original Abingdon House was demolished in the late nineteenth century and Wrights Lane is now known as Marloes Road, where a new row of houses and apartments now stand.⁵⁴ Today, Wrights Lane in West Kensington also associated with Anglo-Sikh history, with it being the location where the once-powerful Maharani of the Kingdom of Punjab died peacefully in 1863 at Abingdon House.

Nell Gwynn House, Chelsea

Maharajkumari Indira Devi, known as Princess Indira, was born on 26 February 1912 to Maharaja Paramjit Singh and Maharani Brinda of the Princely State of Kapurthala, Punjab⁵⁵. Princess Indira arrived in Britain in 1935 at the age of twenty-three to study at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. The princess resided at apartment 512a in Nell Gwynn House, Sloane Street, Kensington.⁵⁶ Nell Gwynn House is a ten-storey residential art deco style residential building completed in 1937. Above the main entrance is Nell Gwynn's statue, with a Cavalier King Charles spaniel at her feet. Nell Gwynn (1650–1687) was one of the first actresses of English stage, and became best-known for being the long-term mistress of King Charles II. The statue is believed to be the only statue of a royal mistress anywhere in London.

Interestingly, Princess Indira had ambitions to work in the arts, as a film actress, similar to Nell Gwynn as actress on the theatre stages of London. Princess Indira worked briefly with Alexander Korda at London Films, who wanted to launch her as his next big star after Merle Oberon (the Anglo-Indian actress who was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance in *The Dark Angel*, 1935). However, the difficulties of the film industry in the late 1930s, primarily due to the onset of World War II, meant that ultimately Princess Indira did not get her big break in the movie business.

Her sisters, Princess Sushila and Princess Ourmilla would often come to visit her in London and stayed with her in Kensington. The three Kapurthala princesses were well-known amongst London socialites in the 1930s, and their visits were covered by all the fashion magazines of the time. In 1942, she joined the BBC and became known as the 'Radio Princess', hosting a radio programme in Hindi for Indian forces stationed in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. She also presented a program called the 'The Debate continues', a weekly report

⁵⁴ Bance (2009), p 167.

⁵⁵ Bance (2012) pp 23-24.

⁵⁶ Making Britain (undated): this is the source for much of the information in this section.

on the proceedings in the House of Commons, where she was the only woman in the Press Gallery. She was offered a permanent contract with the Overseas Service Division in 1943 and continued to work for the BBC until 1968. Princess Indira died in Ibiza, Spain in September 1979.

Conclusion

Sites in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea have been presented here to provide a narrative of Sikh and Anglo-Sikh history, revealing the borough to have significant cultural and historical significance to the Sikh community in London.

In addition to the world-famous Victoria and Albert Museum, located in the borough's Museum quarter in South Kensington, and its wealth of Sikh treasures kept within its collections are the lesser-known military museums in Chelsea – the National Army Museum and the Museum of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The National Army Museum houses records and collections of the British Indian Army within the broader history of the British Army, including a display of a Sikh *dastaar boonga* (warrior turban) amongst a showcase of Sikh armour. In the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea stands the Chillianwallah Memorial, in memory of the British casualties of the battle which took place between the British East India Company and the Sikh armies in 1849. The Museum and Medal Room contain examples of the Punjab Medal, together with details of its history.

Events held in the borough include the Great Exhibition of 1851: amid all the wonders was the center-piece -- the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond, and more recently, in 1999, the Victoria and Albert Museum held the Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms exhibition to commemorate the tricentenary of the first *amrit sanchar* held in March 1699 in Anandpur Sahib, India. Institutions in the Borough include the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, where the Chillianwallah Memorial and cannons from the Sikh Empire can be found in the grounds, and Imperial College, London, where Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, the Indian-born American Sikh physicist known for his work in fibre optics completed his post-graduate studies.

Places of worship in the borough include St. Luke's Church in Chelsea, a neo-gothic designed church built in the 1800s in which is found the Punjab frontier Force Memorial Chapel. Nearby is St Peter's Church in Eaton Square, where the marriage of Prince Victor Albert Jay Duleep to Lady Anne Blanche took place in January 1898. The history of the first Sikh gurdwara in Europe is also closely associated with the borough, with the Khalsa Jatha British Isles UK moving from Sinclair Road in Shepherd's Bush to a building in the borough known as Norland Castle, 62 Queensdale Road, Kensington in 1969. Prince Victor Albert Jay Duleep Singh was married at St. Peter's Church in Eaton

Square in Belgravia. The wedding and the first time that an Indian Prince had married an English woman of the nobility.

Residences of Maharaja Duleep Singh in Holland Park and that of his mother, Maharani Jindan Kaur, who lived at Abingdon House, can be found in the West of the borough, as well as the flat of Princess Indira of Kapurthala who stayed at flat 512a in Nell Gwynn House in the South of Kensington.

Through the museums, the institutions, the churches, the gurdwara and the residences of notable individuals from the Panjab, the Streets of Kensington and Chelsea reveal fascinating stories from the history of the Sikhs, from the height of the Sikh Empire in the first half of the 19th century through to the modern day.

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The Development of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper maps the development of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK Higher Education (HE) over the past five decades and contemplates its future prospects. It provides a brief overview of relevant literature, resources and a history of the educational circumstances surrounding the UK Sikh community. The paper analyses some of the key educational activities and initiatives of academics that have influenced the trajectory of the study. It has also been informed by various discussions and perspectives of research practitioners, students and educational activists. The conclusion reached, in terms of formulating possible models for a future strategic development, has also taken cognisance of the changing interests, needs, demands and challenges facing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE.

Keywords: Sikh and Punjabi Studies, Higher Education, United Kingdom

Introduction, Approach and Purpose

The development of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK Higher Education (HE) has a history of five decades. The writing of this paper was inspired by the 2015-16 initiative to set up a chair of Sikh and Punjabi Studies at a leading research university. The paper's aim is to investigate the potential and possibilities of establishing a formalised provision of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE. In addition to briefly reviewing relevant literature and tangible resources, the paper provides a contextual background and history of the circumstances surrounding the development of the field. It offers an overview of related educational events, activities and initiatives that have influenced the field. It draws on this journey of the academic field to suggest models for making strategic progress. The paper benefits from the direct longitudinal experience, observations and involvement of this author in a range of community educational, writing and publishing activities over the past 50 years, between 1968 and 2018, in the UK. It is also informed by a number of academics and educationalists who have been active and/or working in this field.¹ These inputs have enabled analysis of the context and chronology of various initiatives.

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¹This paper benefits from the views, reflections and contributions of several academics and educationalists who participated in the 2015-17 meetings relating to the area of Sikh and Punjabi Studies, held in Oxford, Warwick, London and Leicester. As well as the author, they included Dr Mangat Rai Bhardwaj, Dr Stephen Conway, Dr Meena Dhanda, Professor Jasbinder Kaur Dhillon, Professor Bjarke Frellesvig, Professor Roger Goodman, Mr John Hollingworth, Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, Dr Harjinder Singh Lallie, Professor Satvinder Juss, Dr Baldev Singh

Various initiatives and contributions of educational and research activists have been valuable in the process of developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the UK. Many of these activists have also been involved in supporting the organisation of commemorations of significant Sikh anniversaries such as the quinqucentenary of Guru Nanak Dev's birth and the centenary of Bhai Vir Singh's birth during the 1960s and 70s.² The events marking the 1984 crisis, the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the Khalsa Panth in 1999 and the 2004-8 celebrations marking the compilation and ordination of the Sikh Scripture (*Sri Guru Granth Sahib*) have raised interest in developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE.³

Kandol, Mr SP Singh Mahal, Mr Gurinder Singh Mann, Dr Jagat Singh Nagra, Professor Eleanor Nesbitt, Professor Polly O'Hanlon, Professor Gurharpal Singh, Dr Gurnam Singh, Dr Jasjit Singh, Dr Kamalroop Singh, Mr Prabhsharandeep Singh, Professor Pritam Singh, Dr Ramindar Singh MBE, Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar MBE, Dr Darshan Singh Tatla, Dr Shinder Thandi, Ms Lauren Welch, Professor Shearer West, Professor Harvey Whitehouse and Professor Johannes Zachhuber.

²Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick, Sandwell, UK supported by a group of Sikh community activists and educationalists, organised a national celebration of Sri Guru Nanak Dev's 500th Birth Anniversary in 1969. Notably then, there was little availability of any quality literature relating to the Sikhs in UK and their heritage. Those were early days for formalising any provision of Sikh and Punjabi studies in UK HE. However, that event inspired some educationalists to take exploratory steps in this direction. Dr. Bhai Vir Singh Centenary Celebration Committee UK chaired by S Jasmer Singh Rai, supported by this author and a team of educationalists, together with a developing class of Sikh academics and artists held a national event at Town Hall, Birmingham on 13 March, 1973. The event was sponsored by a cross-section of about 20 UK gurdwaras and it was attended by many leaders and academics of other faiths, as well as a delegation from India. The gathering of over 2000 participants passed a formal resolution to set up Sikh Studies at a UK university involving topical survey of the Sikh Scripture *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*.

²The resolution triggered an exploratory discussion in conjunction with Dr. Owen Cole and Professor John Hick with Dr. Ferguson then President of Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham.

³The British Sikh-Punjabi Literary Society held a three-day conference in Birmingham and Wolverhampton in 1985 to review and rationalise the 1984 tragic events in India. The conference was attended by many Punjabi writers and educationalists from the UK, North America and India. One of the key public conclusions of this event was that a higher level 'schooling' should be established in Sikh and Punjabi studies. It was sponsored by Guru Nanak Gurdwara Smethwick, Sandwell, UK, when S Daljit Singh Shergill was the president. Two follow-up conferences were held during 1987 - 1988.

The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham chaired by Cllr. Gurdial Singh Atwal, after him led by S. Jaswant Singh Heera and S. Mohan Singh, organised a convention marking the 300th Anniversary of the Khalsa Panth in 1999 at the International Convention Centre, which was addressed by Prime Minister Tony Blair. It was attended by many dignitaries and members of the general public. In the process of compering proceedings of the program, this author received significant feedback concerning the absence of any exhibition of suitable literature or provision of information in the UK on the community's history, contemporary life and challenges.

A review of various initiatives reflects the underlying dynamics that have formed and sustained the trajectory of the field. In addition, the parallel academic developments in India marking the aforesaid and commemorations relating to the 350th birth anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh in 2017 and the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev in 2019 have revived and reinforced the impetus for formalising Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE.⁴

This paper also takes account of the higher education funding environment and the views of a sample of active researchers, students and educationists to understand the changing interests, needs, demands and challenges involved in this area. The views of researchers and practitioners in education who participated in five meetings held at the University of Oxford, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, the University of Warwick during 2015-16 and the Punjabi Language Development Board conference of Leicester held in February, 2017, were noted, analysed and have benefited the current analysis.⁵ It also refers to the academic and

The establishing of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, marked the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak in 1969 in India. The establishing of Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University, Fatehgarh Sahib, commemorated the anniversaries relating to the Sikh Scripture in 2006-08. These events inspired some UK Sikh educational activists to initiate establishing of higher level Sikh Studies in the UK. The initial draft of the SGGSWU was prepared in 1999 by the UK based Sikh academics Dr. Darshan Singh Tatla and this author, at the request of then Jathedar Akaal Takhat Sahib Prof Manjit Singh, in conjunction with S. Avtar Singh, then member of the Religious Advisory Board of the SGPC.

⁴This author co-ordinated a group of Sikh academics to hold exploratory meetings with the University of Oxford and the SOAS, University of London in April and October 2015 regarding the development of Sikh and Punjabi Studies. The updates from the meetings were also shared with the International Sikh Research Conferences held at the University of Warwick in June, 2015 and July 2016. The exploratory meetings noted that the timing of the initiative was inspired by the 2017-2019 Sikh anniversaries relating to the 10th and the 1st Gurus. In India, for example, the Government of Haryana celebration of the 350th birth anniversary announced establishing of Guru Gobind Singh University.

⁵During the 1990s Baba Amar Singh and his project organisers, including Dr. Sadhu Singh and Mr. Rajinder Singh Sandhu, were working on the development of Sikh School at Hayes in London. They were advised and supported by this author together with a small group of educationalists. The author was involved in initiating the Nishkam Nursery and School development project in Birmingham during 2001-2003 which was led and sponsored by Bhai Mohinder Singh OBE, Chairman of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha. At the initial stages, this project also benefited from the experience of Sikh educationalists such as ex-Headteacher Mrs Sudarshan Kaur Abrol MBE, ex-Deputy Headteachers Master Atma Singh and Mr Harbachan Singh Grewal, and Punjabi writer and teacher Mr Surjit Singh Kalra who was also experienced in developing multi-cultural education.

community experiences of developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in North America.⁶

Overview of Literature and Resources

This overview of the literature relating to the area of Sikh and Punjabi Studies is relatively short and non-exhaustive. However, it provides substantive evidence of the personal passion, perseverance and resilient commitment of the individual writers and researchers whose work constitutes a growing body of knowledge in this field since the 1960-70s. Tatla (1996) compiled a directory of Punjab scholars in Britain which surveyed and listed published and unpublished work - this is now in need of updating. The Punjab Research Group (PRG), formed in 1984-85 as a voluntary forum of academics for sharing ideas and research, has continued to function. The PRG has accumulated a comprehensive repository of knowledge by way of discussion papers and published/unpublished literature.

Scholars such as Ballard (1977), Cole and Sambhi (1978), Duffield (1988), and Barrier and Dusenbery (1989) who were working with institutions of higher education initiated their research and writing relating to this area within the context and scope of South Asian, diasporic, religious, community, race and/or industrial relations studies. The philosophical and historical literature of Banton (1966), Grewal (1990), Hick (2004), Singh (1994) and Talbot (2016) has been attracting research students to pursue their study from anthropological, historical and interpretative perspectives. Shackle and Mandair (2005) and Nesbitt (2016) have worked on the principles, teachings and messages of the Sikh Gurus as rooted in the Sikh Scripture and heritage. The contemporary ethnographic research and publications of Singh and Thandi (1996), Tatla (1999), Singh, G and Tatla (2006), Singh and Fenech (2014) provided comprehensive readings in Sikh Studies and set out a transnational framework for further innovative research. Bhachu (1990), Dhanda (2009), Purewal and Kalra (2010), Jhutti-Johal (2011) and Takhar (2014) have addressed socio-religious and community issues including those of diversities of class, sects, castes and gender across Sikh and Punjabi society. The dimensions of Punjabi language - including grammar, teaching and learning, and culture - have been analysed by Bhardwaj (2016), Kalra and Purewal (2016) and Tatla (1996). Singh and Mann (2015) have innovatively provided insights into the Sikh scripture Dasam Patshah Ka Granth or the Dasam Granth (attributed to Guru

⁶This author held ad-hoc individual exploratory conversations with six academics during the May, 2015 Sikh Studies Conference at the Riverside campus of the University of California, USA. The objective of the conversations was to learn about the North American experiences of setting up and developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in Higher Education. The References and Further Readings Section provides electronic links for further investigation.

Gobind Singh) and consider the relationship of the scripture to manuscripts, apocryphal, translations, and relics. Singh R (2013), Singh and Sangha (2015) and Sangha (2016) have discussed issues of representation of UK Sikhs including a trend towards democratic development of the organization structure, management and leadership of Sikh gurdwaras. Furthermore, an increasing number of researchers involved in other fields such as Lallie (2012) who has an interest in Sikh musicology, Singh, J (2017), who has researched the development of Sikh Faith among the Sikh youth in UK. These scholars are introducing innovative modes and methodologies for teaching, learning and researching the area of Sikh and Punjabi Studies which would strengthen its presence and accessibility in cyberspace.

As outlined earlier, the Punjab Research Group conferences (PRG, 2017) and *International Journal of Punjab Studies* have been providing a platform for research discussions and publishing papers for 35 years on a wide range of themes. For example, the International Conference held in 2016 was themed around the transnational Punjab's Past, Present and Future. It attracted research papers from the USA, India and Pakistan as well as from some current post graduate research students in the UK.

The Sikh Museum Initiative (Mann, 2015) enables exploration of the relatively unknown history of links between the Sikhs and the British since the eighteenth century. It endeavors to locate and uncover relics and artefacts that will facilitate further investigation into the nature and patterns of earlier links. Many of the Sikh relics and manuscripts which found their way to UK institutions like the British Museum and Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, Sandhurst Military College, Castles and Regimental Museums, remain underexplored and researched. A project titled Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail (ASHT, 2017) has created a trail of linking Sikh Heritage places in the UK and aspires to raise awareness about them. Since 2014, together with the Royal Geographical Society, it has been focusing on a collection of maps, photographs, documents and books. The UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA, 2017), active since 2007, has researched the contribution of Sikh soldiers in the First World War by reviewing regimental histories, official dispatches, correspondence, and war grave records. Likewise, the Empire Faith and War (EFW) project, the National Sikh Heritage Centre and a new potential collaboration with Smethwick Heritage are complementing research and development efforts. The UK Sikh Survey (2016) and the British Sikh Report (2017), two separately commissioned documents by different groups, provide some data relating to the Sikh community for general and institutional use. While the quality of data and analyses are good, the sampling methodology can be further improved for balance, objectivity and reliability. However, they are substantive new sources of basic information for further investigation and analysis, including Lord Indarjit Singh's occasional contributions via 'Thought for the Day' (BBC Radio 4), and recently Barrister Jasvir Singh and Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal have reflected on contemporary life from their perspectives of Sikh faith and history.

On the whole, this growing body of literature, tangible resources, information and digital potential are indicative of the existence of a strong academic foundation for developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE.

Contextual Background

The literature and resources outlined in the previous section provide context and background that can be traced back not only to the middle of the nineteenth century, but also to the history of the Sikhs (Singh, K 2006). Significant growth in the UK Sikh community dates from the 1950s, when from a few thousand Sikh migrants, the community expanded rapidly to more than quarter of a million over the next thirty years (Tatla, 1999). Coming from rural backgrounds, and largely a peasant society on the threshold of 'Green Revolution' in its homeland state of Punjab (India), the first generation of Sikhs were mainly occupied with their economic interests, social well-being and security (Barrier and Dusenbery, 1989). They worked mostly in the heavily manual labour oriented metal industry, passenger transport and the National Health Service. The post WW2 pioneering manual workers, some of whom were also ex-servicemen, made a vital contribution to the post war re-building of the British economy and services. They were joined by some teachers in the 1960s -70s and by skilled artisans and business professionals from Kenya, Uganda, Singapore and elsewhere in the 1970s. Sikhs in the UK were able to establish a basic community infrastructure including *gurdwaras* in various locations of concentrated settlement. Early *gurdwaras* were the first institutions to offer some elementary provision for the teaching and learning of the Panjabi language (Tatla, 1996) - Sikh parents were concerned about the loss of their language by second generation children born and/or brought up and educated here in the UK.

The Sikhs are very clear, both in theory and practice, that their religion and traditions for life and for in-depth academic studies, can only be fully pursued by learning the Punjabi language and *Gurmukhi* script (Bhardwaj, Kandola and Sangha, 2017). In Sikh history, therefore, the teaching and learning of Punjabi language and *Gurmukhi* script have remained integral to Sikh Studies. The significance of Punjabi Studies - more than Punjab Studies - has also arisen from the Punjab's imposed geo-political partition of 1947, at the time of India's independence (Singh, K 2006).

A broader, more functional Punjabi-Indian view is that for focused academic purposes, Punjab Studies could be rather wider in scope, because of the huge area that it encompasses with Pakistani Punjab and its culture - including Punjabi language and literature written in Shahmukhi/Arabic script (Singh, P and Thandi, 1996). Therefore, Punjab Studies would be beyond the immediate scope of community requirements. However, where advantageous, it could be used to inform Sikh and Punjabi Studies – historically and culturally.

UK *gurdwaras*' delivery of religious education programs remains integral to the teaching and learning of the Punjabi language in *Gurmukhi* script. This

development ensures a healthy debate regarding the community's religious, cultural and linguistic heritage. Presently, there are around 230 *gurdwaras* in the UK and some have a substantial asset and revenue base (Sangha, 2016). Despite many barriers of racial prejudice and discrimination, Sikh individuals and families have been developing and accumulating a wide range of skills, and professional and business competencies. They have been successful as workers and entrepreneurs in industry, business and services, and they have been generous in contributing to religious, educational, health and welfare projects in the UK and India. A class of Sikh professionals such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers, software experts, educationalists and public servants has also been emerging. They have an impressive portfolio of contemporary knowledge, experience and expertise which will become a rich resource for furthering the field of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE.

Some Sikhs/Punjabis have been involved since the 1950s in setting up various associations to promote civil rights, social welfare, equality and fairness for the community (Purewal and Singh, G 2017). Alongside developing political and social groups, the 1960s-70s witnessed a rise in the number of Punjabi literary associations. Some 100 UK settled Punjabi writers have created a substantial pool of Punjabi literature in *Gurmukhi* script (Sangha, 1997) - the review of which is beyond the immediate scope of this paper. The management committees of some *gurdwaras*, guided by Punjabi teachers, have tried to develop liaison with local state schools to develop provision of Punjabi language in their curriculum (Sangha, 2016). From the 1980s, the educational environment became more conducive to accommodating multicultural education, although its impact on mainstream provision remained limited (Singh G and Tatla, 2006). By the 1990s, the Sikh community was seen as better integrated with British life and *gurdwara* based organizations were confidently negotiating with local authorities on the community's social, cultural and religious needs (The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras in Birmingham, 1993).

In addition to language development initiatives, steps were also being taken to develop ideas for establishing Sikh and Punjabi Studies. The fifth centenary celebration of Guru Nanak Dev's birth in 1969 and Bhai Vir Singh's first centenary birth celebrations in 1973 were such occasions, on which participating scholars from Punjab, Delhi and England commenced discussions on the possibilities for Sikh Studies. However, during the late 1970s and early 1980s the Sikh community became involved in the Anandpur Sahib Resolution-led campaign which took a tragic turn in 1984 (Tully and Jacob, 1985). Educational projects slipped off the active agenda, as the UK Sikh community was drawn into a campaign against the policies and practices of the then Government of India affecting the Punjab and Sikhs. This continued for a decade until the mid-1990s when the new challenges and vulnerability of the community as a minority created a fresh momentum for establishing research, to analyse the issues and concerns that Sikhs were facing.

During the second half of the 1990s some structured initiatives were taken in the West Midlands for developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies. For example some Colleges of Further Education provided access courses for Asian, Black and Minority Ethnic (ABME) communities, with language, cultural and religious studies as optional modules (Sangha, 2001). At least five Colleges started providing opportunities for teachers, to formally train them in the teaching of Punjabi and/or other community languages. A Certificate and Diploma program was developed with accreditation of the Royal Society of Arts, and the relevant Examinations Board formalised learning assessment based on approved curricula in Punjabi, Urdu, Gujarati and Bengali for NVQ Level 2 to 4 equivalent qualifications. Three Colleges explored the possibility of linking their undergraduate courses to provision by Punjabi University Patiala and Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar. However, despite the passionate commitment of the academics involved, no memorandum of understanding was developed and signed to ensure a continuing institutional commitment for developing a critical strategic action plan to make the project a success. There was no provision for a follow-on supporting budget to sustain the program, so the outcome was limited by subsequent bureaucratic hurdles: an absence of approvals mechanisms and resources to mitigate changes in personnel and their priorities in the concerned institutions. The courses in the Midlands, at Bilston Community College (Wolverhampton College), Handsworth College, South Birmingham Colleges (City and South Birmingham College) and Coventry Polytechnic (Coventry University) were discontinued after 2-3 years due to low take up, the student exchange initiative also proved to be a one-off affair. The program was aimed at attracting first and second generation Punjabi migrants whose priority was to improve their employment, work or business prospects. An internal review at Handsworth College showed that the contents of courses on offer were insufficiently focused to meet learners' immediate social and economic aspirations. However, the review suggested that participants were satisfied with cultural and religious aspects of the program, and were keen for it to be adapted and continued, to educate the UK born and/or raised generation to develop their confidence and sense of identity. After this, the education of the younger generation remained an issue, and the rise of Voluntary Aided Faith Schools/Academies/Free Schools/ gave refreshed impetus for the teaching and learning of Punjabi and Sikh Studies, both for teachers and pupils. Hence some teacher education HEIs such as the School of Oriental and African Studies - University of London, have introduced dimensions of Sikh and Punjabi Studies for students and professionals.

The formation of the Punjab Research Group (PRG) was directly a result of 1984 turmoil: several researchers at British universities came together to address changing circumstances through discussion papers and meetings (Tatla and Thandi, 1996). A research journal called the International Journal of Punjab Studies was established – this is still published from the United States, as the Journal of Sikh and Punjab Studies. Three further anniversaries - the 1999

celebration of the foundation of the Khalsa Panth and the 2004 and 2006 celebrations relating to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* also generated awareness among the community as to the status of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the UK and internationally. Exchanges with the newly established Sikh Studies chairs in universities across North America inspired several academics to develop a model for Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the UK. A University of Birmingham conference prepared the background for Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha of Birmingham to resurrect a 1983 initiative, and talks with the University led to establishing of a lectureship in 2003.

Despite growing interest in this field, unlike developments in the USA and Canada, Sikhs in UK have yet to make a substantive similar move in the direction of establishing community sponsored chairs in Sikh and Punjabi Studies in Higher Education. The Sikh community's needs are also changing, especially with the emergence of UK born second, third and fourth generation Sikhs. The early priorities and methods of teaching and learning of Punjabi language and instruction in religious education within *gurdwaras* require new approaches, updated materials, technology and facilities. There is a shortage of suitably educated, trained and qualified teachers, managers and governors within the Sikh community schools' sector. There is also a limited pool of bi-lingual teachers, preachers, lecturers, hymn-singers, readers and interpreters of the Sikh Scripture. A clear lesson arising from this is that any new initiative should be based on realistic needs analysis, with capability of meeting those needs, reliability of financial provision and understanding of the staff appointment process.

These dimensions highlight the importance of developing effective language and faith education that is capable of transferring a working knowledge of the Sikh way of life to the next generation. Some *gurdwara* management committees have committed themselves to building Sikh ethos schools – so far ten such schools have been established across the country. Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha UK, led by Bhai Mohinder Singh, established three such schools in Hounslow, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The Wolverhampton free school was initially formed as Anand Primary School which struggled due to the low admission of pupils and had to be rescued under an improvement strategy. The message of this initiative for future educational projects is that government revenue and capital support can only work if there is a sound development plan to be managed and led by competent governance and management. There is already a well-established and reputable Sikh High School in Hayes, London, which is being run by a Charitable Trust led by Baba Amar Singh. Similar educational developments have taken place in Slough and Southall. The Sikh community in Derby, Coventry, Leeds, East London, Gravesend and a few other areas are actively pursuing the objective of expanding state sponsored faith based educational facilities. As evidenced in the following section, there is increasing awareness and desire within the

community to create facilities for delivering Sikh and Punjabi Studies from preschool to university levels (Sangha, 2016).

Brief History of Initiatives

The contextual background, overview of the literature and resources have shown that the UK Sikh community is established enough to have deeper and wider educational expectations for developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies. However, unlike in North America where several university chairs in Sikh studies have been established, the UK had none until 2019. However, the chairs in British Columbia and California were surrounded by a number of controversies which may provide lessons for future initiatives. The University of British Columbia Sikh chair was fully endowed by the Sikh community in Canada, and one of the notable points of dispute was ‘whose interests should the chair and its academic outputs serve?’ Some of the chair’s work came under the criticism that its contents were undermining Sikh traditions and the authority of the Sikh Scripture.⁷ Another controversy surrounding a publication relating to the *Janam Sakhis* (Life Story of Guru Nanak) reached the Canadian parliament and likewise, some of the earlier academic work arising from the California Sikh chairs was also challenged and was presented to the Akaal Takhat Sahib, Amritsar.⁸ The North American experience also brought issues of making appointments, academic freedom and faith-linked sensitivities to the forefront. They can be analysed to extrapolate lessons for application in any similar future projects. In the UK however, controversies at this scale have not occurred. The UK Sikhs had only one post in existence for Sikh Studies (a GNNJS sponsored lectureship in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham), which was a teaching post with some interest in research.

The following chronology of activities relating to various initiatives for developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE can be reviewed in conjunction with the rest of this paper to illustrate capabilities for devising models for a strategic development:

- 1969: The experience of celebrating the 500th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev and the public feedback convinced some UK Sikh educationalists to formalise their approach and take initiative to set-up a chair of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE;
- 1973 - 1983: A public resolution was passed in March 1973 at a Town Hall, Birmingham event, which celebrated the 100th birth anniversary of Bhai Vir Singh, to set up a chair in Sikh and Punjabi Studies. Owen

⁷ Arguably, these concerns diverted attention from problems with the quality of the scholarship itself, as highlighted by Grewal (1997).

⁸ The Akal Takhat, Amritsar is the sovereign seat of Sikh religious authority, it is central for Sikh political assembly and any *hukamnamas* (edicts) it may issue provide guidance or clarification on any point of Sikh doctrine or practice referred to it.

Cole, John Hick and the then-Head of Selly Oak Colleges provided academic advice to pursue it. The initiative was pursued by several community members, but was disrupted by the crisis in Punjab that resulted in the tragedies and turmoil of June and October/November 1984;

- 1984-5: The British Sikh-Punjabi Literary Society held a 3-day conference involving Punjabi writers from India, USA and UK in October, 1985. The event was convened by this author with a group of Punjabi writers: one of its key recommendation was to initiate 'schooling provision' for the UK Sikh community. The Punjab Research Group (PRG) was established in 1984-5 by academics such as Gurharpal Singh, Shinder Shandi, Darshan Singh Tatla, Ramindar Singh, Pritam Singh, and Eleanor Nesbitt;
- 1990s: Four HE and FE College partnership-based projects were initiated by several academics and community members, including this author;
- 2003 - 2008: A lecturer post held by Jagbir Kaur Jhutti-Johal at the University of Birmingham was established with sponsorship of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, Birmingham, until 2008;
- 2008 - present: The lectureship continued at the University of Birmingham;
- 1980s - present: Research activities initiated by academics such as Christopher Shackle (SOAS), Ian Talbot (Coventry University), Eleanor Nesbitt (University of Warwick), Vierinder Singh Kalra (University of Manchester), Navtej Kaur Purewal (SOAS), Jasjit Singh (University of Leeds) and Opinderjit Kaur Takhar (University of Wolverhampton) have continued;
- 1984 - 2019: The Punjab Research Group (PRG) has been hosting research conferences twice a year, it was established on the basis that it would be inclusive and all-embracing in covering academic interests of the three Punjabs (East, West and the Diaspora). During the past 35 years, it has provided space for academics to interact with each other regardless of territorial or disciplinary boundaries. The PRG held its 33rd International Research Conferences at the University of Oxford in October, 2016. The PRG conferences have been co-ordinated by a succession of academics and research students;
- 2014 – 2016: Three International Sikh Research Conferences have been held at the University of Warwick organised by researchers Harjinder Singh Lallie and Gurinder Singh Mann with an organising committee including Mandeep Singh Sehmi and Gurnam Singh. These annual conferences are set to continue. They are being well attended, providing an evidence of an emerging class of UK based researchers. They may be engaged in different academic fields but have a strong link with Sikh and Punjabi Studies;

- 2016: Researchers such as Jasjit Singh at the University of Leeds and Opinderjit Kaur Takhar at the University of Wolverhampton are delivering Sikh community research and development projects with potential to influence public policy;
- The SGPC sponsored students/scholarships at the University of Cambridge (which may or may not contribute directly to Sikh and Punjabi Studies as the sponsorships may not be limited to this area);
- 2018: The Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies led by Opinderjit Kaur Takhar, was launched by the University of Wolverhampton in UK, which offers PhDs, Master's level courses and continuing Professional Development in Sikh studies;
- 2018 -19: Marking the 550th Birth Anniversary of Shri Guru Nanak Dev ji, the Government of India announced funding of Guru Nanak Research Chair at the University of Birmingham, due to be operational from 2020.

Despite such examples of individual and group efforts, there is still an absence of a comprehensive, institutionalised and networked provision of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE. However, newly established state-funded Sikh faith schools and an emerging class of Sikh academics and researchers can reinvigorate and advance the objective of establishing Sikh and Punjabi Studies for progression to higher levels. On the whole, educational activities across the transnational Sikh community in terms of providing scholarships and funding are slowly growing. In addition to the SGPC's collaboration with the University of Cambridge, there are attempts to develop institutions outside of Western academia (e.g., Sri Guru Granth Sahib World University - Fatehgarh Sahib). Also, a new class of Sikh/Punjabi researchers are now working in some UK universities in diverse academic fields, and are introducing dimensions of Sikh and Punjabi Studies into the fields of religion, philosophy, education, history, law, health, and social sciences. Many academics are concerned that for Christians, Jews, Hindus or Muslims, issues that arise in the courts about articles of faith, external symbols, attire and practices have well-known sources for guidance that is readily intelligible. But in relation to the public manifestations of Sikhs, many cases have been coming before the courts, yet there is little specific research-based published knowledge which can guide public policy development and decision making. However, the UK Sikh Survey (2016) and the British Sikh Report (2017) have begun to provide some data for further research and analysis.

Overall, there is a now greater potential for developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the UK as the economic position of the Sikhs is stronger. The community is becoming better established, professionalised and has stronger communication networks. Moreover, there is significant growth in philanthropic giving.⁹ A

⁹ The UK Sikh/Punjabi community TV channels' relentless fund-raising campaigns for their own sustainability, and for health, education and other good causes provide ample evidence of this trend.

working assumption can be that UK Sikh community organizations, businesses, professionals, families and individuals would be interested in sponsoring this cause.

The 2015-16 Initiative to Establish a Sikh Chair

Early in 2015 this author consulted eight practising academics through ad-hoc conversations to revive the development of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE. The consultation followed a meeting with the University of Oxford (a global leader with strong academic profile in faith and community studies) to explore how best the field could be developed within the university if funds were raised and invested in the University's Consolidated Endowment Capital. The university was requested to advise on establishing an endowment-supported provision, including an indicative level of funding required for its sustainability. The university was asked whether an enabling Memorandum of Understanding could be agreed with the sponsoring foundation/trust and if there was any standard process and template to be followed for the purpose.

The university clarified that a project like this could only work in an Oxford context if there were 'local academic champions' within the institution who were prepared to provide internal leadership and build the program. An initiative without strong internal academic leadership to champion it had not proven to be successful at Oxford. Such initiatives needed to be housed in a faculty so as to be the responsibility of an established academic unit. The first priority thus would have to be to identify leadership with a departmental home for the proposed program. The university emphasised that all appointments at Oxford are made on academic excellence criteria. This would mean not only in the study of Sikhism, but also, established academic excellence in an underlying academic discipline within an existing department would follow similar criteria for appointments. For example, if an appointee's main field was anthropology, then he/she would need to be a very high-quality anthropologist as well as someone with demonstrable knowledge of aspects of Sikh religion, philosophy, history, heritage, Punjabi language and *Gurmukhi* script.

The university does not involve donors or their representatives in any way in its appointment processes or in the setting of its academic direction in teaching or research. It was very unlikely that Oxford would be able to help with the fundraising unless a department wishing to lead the initiative had its own fundraising function which wanted to take it on, because the university and its divisional development resources were heavily committed to existing priorities. The university clarified that the source of all funds which were raised would need to be reviewed by the university's committee to review donations prior to acceptance. The university was sensitive to its reputation, it works with credible donors and only accept verifiable funds for academic sponsorships.

The next step for the university was to identify interest amongst academics and their departments/faculties which would facilitate the development within their respective academic divisions. If an interest emerged a connection would be made with this initiative's leader to explore and identify the area of mutual interest. The key point was to identify and establish 'academic champions' within the university who would wish to develop this area of study. This was a prerequisite for taking the process further. The university undertook to prepare a note on the proposal to be made available to departments and faculties. The university suggested that an alternative could be to go for a modest provision, which might be more effective in building an enduring collaboration with the university with more substantive developments in the longer run. In any case the University's working position was that establishing a chair/centre/professorship/scholarship would still depend on identifying 'academic champions' within the university's departmental framework.

Exploratory meetings of the academics involved also considered the issue of location for establishing something in Sikh and Punjabi Studies. It was suggested that whilst Oxford could give the initiative international prestige it might not be as well-resourced as the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) - University of London. The academic community's diversity at SOAS, learning resources and physical closeness to the British Library, India Office Library and relevant museums where much of the materials on Indian languages, cultures, history and heritage exist, all favored this site. It was suggested that, compared with Oxford, London is more accessible and might be less costly in sponsoring a chair/professorship/scholarship. At SOAS, students could take Sikh and Punjabi Studies as an undergraduate subject and move on to an M.Phil or Ph.D. However, London was also seen by some as too expensive to live in, and a suitable regional university could be just as attractive with digital platforms and accessibility to research resources. The discussions also considered open teaching, learning and research modes that can be flexible and cost effective, since relevant reference materials can be accessed by ever improving accessibility to resources and inter-library services.

Academic Views on Establishing Sikh Studies

This section summarises views expressed by eight academics, presently working in different HEIs, including two independent researchers who are active in the area of developing Sikh and Punjabi studies, as well as those of 12 research students.

The academic discussion highlighted the importance of separating 'criticism' from 'critical analyses' in faith-based study. Generally, objections can exist within faith communities to critical study, however, there is a momentum towards developing debates on contemporary issues surrounding the Sikh community. Students welcome this approach and for many, it often is the first opportunity to critically engage in such debates. That study is moving beyond

textbook representations and received historiography of Sikhism. There is now an emphasis on diversity within the Sikh community. The exploratory conversations emphasised that teaching and research expertise needed to be developed in Sikh Studies. A Centre for Sikh Studies could take a lead in producing academic materials and teachers which are currently scarce in terms of the needs of the schools sector, which in turn could create further interest in Sikh Studies. The issue of academic freedom would have to be central in any endeavor to develop a centre, chair or professorship and that this must be balanced with the degree to which the Sikh community will be financially involved in this initiative.

It was also asserted that there is a lack of in-depth practical examination of representation and functions relating to the Sikh Faith as compared with other religions. Contemporary academic literature should reflect the lived realities of the Sikh community. The funding sources would influence the structure and nature of any institution and that aspiration for academic independence would be contingent on the type of funding gained.

The post-1984 observed changes noted in Sikh community identify the emerging role of Sikh community television channels and social media as an addition to the print media across the world, giving voice to a wider community beyond formal narratives. It was emphasised that there is an apparent latent desire for debate and critical evaluation among the Sikh community. The lay community's perspectives need to be considered when seeking support for any initiative, rather than thinking of one single Sikh community, it would be better to consider different constituents that need to be understood. For example there is a western educated constituency which may have tensions with traditional and seminary based religious education; the younger generation Sikhs and non-Sikhs engaged in undergraduate to PhD research in Humanities and Social Sciences may have different expectations; an under-developed but potentially significant collection of independent charitable and maintained faith schools have varying needs; research into ethnic minority faiths can potentially lead to funding opportunities; and voluntary advisory workers, activists and professionally employed individuals at *gurdwaras* would have on-going needs of professional development. It was noted that there is a high level of financial resource available in *gurdwaras*, and a strong interest among the congregations in utilising it for educational purposes. Sikhism is at a pivotal moment and discussion leading to establishing an academic centre for Sikh Studies is timely.

It was pointed out that Sikh Studies was a diverse academic area, and its scholars and their writings were widely scattered. This diverse field lacked co-ordination and organization for collecting and representing at an institution. It was reiterated that funding sources are likely to determine an institution's formation. The US model, where families provided funding had disadvantages as the community itself may be less involved, but the advantages were that there was less likelihood of interference, resulting in a greater academic autonomy. It was

underlined that regardless of the funding source, there must not be theological and doctrinal control of any centre/chair/professorship.

It was also suggested that discussions on a chair/centre/professorship must be forward looking, considering how the community would look 20 to 30 years from now. The issues being discussed were similar to those faced earlier when for example a South Asian Studies programme was created at Bradford College in 1979. It involved debate over whether it should be called Sikh Studies, Punjab Studies or Punjabi Studies. A Sikh and Punjabi studies program would have to have a wider focus, any restrictions might present difficulties as students had been less keen on narrowly based programmes. Often the majority of students could be from other backgrounds, with a variety of career interests. Many basic questions would persist on the direction to be taken, but this should not mean that no action should be taken until a resolution was found. The need for a chair/centre/professorship could be considered in conjunction with establishing a foundation/trust, with academic input considering community views and fund-raising. The experiences of other centres for faith studies could provide useful lessons.

There were assertions that sensitivities would be unavoidable when engaging in academic study of faith-based communities. Attention was drawn to some progress in linguistic research relating to *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and the shortcomings in the available literature. It was advised that expert and specialist cross-reference materials, for wider and in-depth studies covering research methodologies should also be accessible.

A collective overarching view was that any formalization of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE would be contingent on the work of a highly motivated, competent and committed team capable of maintaining the momentum. Its sustainability would also depend on the suitability of location and the type of model adopted to take the strategic development process forward. The discussions underlined that a centre/chair/professorship would have to be a focused project, reasonably flexible and inclusive in its scope, so that it was not viewed as a marginal area of learning and research. Emphasis would have to be maintained on the dimension of Punjabi language and *Gurmukhi* script for research relating to Sikh religion, history and heritage.

A number of questions were also raised and discussed regarding the scope of a chair/centre/professorship for Sikh and Punjabi Studies. For instance, should it include the training of bi-lingual readers, interpreters and researchers of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib* and Sikh philosophy, aimed at meeting the changing needs and expectations of present and future generations of the Sikhs in UK and worldwide? Should there be a suitable arrangement for training of bi-lingual/multi-lingual preachers, teachers, lecturers, singers and musicians besides the provision of teaching, learning and scholarly research and community development? A study of the UK and transnational Sikh community, the Sikh Faith, and Sikh practices would have to be undertaken

within a wider modern context of a diverse contemporary multi-faith, plural and secular social and political environment, enabling students and researchers to interrogate their own prejudices, biases and precepts and those of others impacting on the Sikhs and their social environment. A chair/professorship/centre would have to ensure that it retained academic freedom in order to advance Sikh and Punjabi Studies objectively and impartially to a highest possible standard. The current trend of emphases on 'lived religion' and study of Sikh experience and aspirations would fit well with this proposition. The questions concerning the core focus of the study whether it should be Sikh Studies, Sikh and Punjabi or Punjabi Studies would need to be further discussed. However, all the participating academics agreed that the resources available at, and surrounding SOAS, London, are unique and that there is a strong interest in the concept, which cannot be underestimated.

This author also reviewed inputs of 12 research students who participated in the 2015 International Sikh Research Conference at the University of Warwick who responded in writing, to his open invitation for submitting their views. One of their main points was that most UK universities do not meet the basic resource needs relating to the area of Sikh and Punjabi Studies. Most simply do not have suitable Sikh and Punjabi literature in their libraries. The available literature from general sources mainly cover a period between 1960s and 1990s which is not adequate for studying contemporary Sikh faith, life and practices. Most of the traditional books on the subject struggle to fit a broader requirement of religious studies. There is also an issue of the quality of translations of the Sikh scriptures and historical literature. There is not much evidence of a serious study of Sikh relics and artefacts available in private and public collections reflecting Sikh heritage. Present and future generations of Sikh researchers would have to have translations of materials originated in Punjabi, to understand what had been happening in the Sikh and Punjabi diaspora communities. The younger generation of researchers might wish to explore the epistemological and ontological aspects of Sikh scriptures so that their research outcomes could be written not only in contemporary context and language, but also in common, natural and simpler language. Much of the Sikh Studies literature is written for academics in complex and often borrowed jargon. Future researchers might need to rebase Sikh and Punjabi Studies into a changing framework of modern global Sikhism.

The research students preferred the field to be inclusive of questions covering many of the contemporary challenges which the Sikh community is facing. They argued that these should be identified and discussed objectively, impartially and independently for developing evidence-based solutions. They believed in an open learning culture without inhibition, for exchanging knowledge with Sikhs and non-Sikhs. The Sikhs community should be enabled by researchers to tackle tensions within and without the wider Sikh community. Its identity and the dimensions of internal divisions arising from Sikh ideology, politics and history should be tackled in the contemporary context. It was

suggested that there is little research into the issues of openness, transparency and accountability of the role of *gurdwaras*, TV channels and charities in their raising and using of congregations' donations and public funds. They need to engage responsively with their respective communities and general public on many issues of public interest and concern. There is also little research into the changing political, economic, environmental, medical, legal and philosophical climate as it impacts on the Sikh community.

Some research students commented that generally research on Sikh issues is less attractive because of little career opportunities, rewards and recognition. There is limited scope of employment opportunities for academics with post graduate research qualifications in Sikh and Punjabi Studies. The researchers and writers involved in this field often struggle to have their work published because of lack of demand for quality materials. Often academics with expertise in Sikh and Punjabi Studies have to use their transferable skills and knowledge to work for living in other fields. Even Sikh institutions, including *gurdwaras* worldwide, have not yet developed a proactive culture of encouraging and sponsoring philosophical and evidence-based research into Sikh philosophy and practices. This field is still relatively new for academic studies in cross-disciplinary terms, taking account of internal and external influences, and of the issues of gender, caste, race, ethnicity, disability, inequalities, and social justice.

In October, 2015, 30 leading academics, researchers and educationists involved in the area of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE met at the SOAS campus of the University of London. John Hollingworth, the SOAS's Exhibitions and Galleries Manager outlined the first Sikh-specific exhibition on the Golden Temple, Sikh culture and heritage featuring five one-day symposia, involving 23,000 visitors, was held in the Brunei Gallery. This project built on the success of the 2014 *Empire, Faith and War - Sikhs in WWI* exhibition which was also popular with public and schools. A major event featuring *The Cosmopolitan Court* was being planned for summer of 2018, which would also focus on aspects of the Punjabi culture.

At this time, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at SOAS, Gurharpal Singh advised that a key aim during his tenure at SOAS was to set up a chair in Sikh Studies, which still continues to be a priority. It was outlined that the creation of the South Asia institute had further advanced study of the region, and the school's strong background in training students in these areas was evidenced by a large number of alumni working in prominent academic positions elsewhere. It was also noted that SOAS routinely operates centres without endowed chairs, this model is feasible to operate independently.

Lauren Welch, Development Manager at SOAS reflecting on the experiences of centenary celebrations and associated fundraising campaigns, added that the development of Sikh Studies was being seen as an important dimension. It was being seen as an obvious strategic gap which needed filling in view of the existence of scholarships/endowed chairs relating to Jainism, Buddhism and

Zoroastrianism, and setting up an endowed chair in Hindu Studies was under discussion. In the context of research and assessment processes, it was underlined that SOAS's relevant department, housing religious studies, commands a credible rating among the similar departments in leading UK HEIs.

Challenges in Establishing Sikh and Punjabi Studies

The UK's Sikh and Punjabi population of Indian origin, inclusive of all beliefs, faiths and none, may well approach one million in the medium term. A majority of them will have some allegiance to the Sikh religion, be younger by age distribution, and be UK born or raised (Singh, R, 2015). To establish relevant and adequate programs in Sikh and Punjabi Studies in Higher Education for present and future generations, a survey and analysis of the changing educational interests, needs, expectations and demands would be helpful for making an objective assessment. A scoping and feasibility exercise can be informed by this data for any future initiative, and to estimate the level of funding required to ensure its viability and sustainability.

In terms of the fund-raising challenge, in addition to around 230 *gurdwaras*, numerous businesses, a competent community of resourceful professionals working in different fields, media outlets, and the community in general may well be capable of raising funds for establishing a chair/professorship/centre for Sikh and Punjabi Studies. It will, however, be another competing demand for funds. The Sikh community has managed to establish over ten state-funded faith schools (Sangha, 2016) and setting up a suitable provision for progression into higher education should be a logical next step. A challenge will be to motivate and inspire students to take up aspects Sikh and Punjabi Studies, along with their other academic/occupational graduate or post graduate studies. Students of humanities, social sciences, languages, religious studies and arts may naturally have some attraction to this area. The views and inputs of students who attend the Punjab Research Group meetings, Sikh Studies seminars and the International Sikh Research Conferences provide evidence of a steady rise of interest in Sikh and Punjabi studies, but future generations would have to be convinced of advantages of pursuing this direction of study.

Students who currently seek to pursue postgraduate and doctoral research in Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the UK feel that there is little structured provision and expertise within the country's universities. The academics who were consulted were of the opinion that this area of study lacks focus and strategy, and that only a comprehensive institutional facility can enable designing and development of provision and opportunities for exploring inter-disciplinary and wider dimensions. Universities lack doctoral supervisors and examiners relating to Sikh and Punjabi Studies. There are no known trained specialists available who may provide research supervision and guidance in the core areas of *gurbani*, *gurmat* and textual studies in Gurmukhi script, along with knowledge of Sanskrit, Persian, Urdu and other languages.

The growth in interactive social media is posing a different challenge, where an expansion of content relating to religion, politics, social, culture and other fields can be exciting, but also disheartening in terms of its poor quality. The content put out in the public domain may not withstand any reasonable academic scrutiny. The ideas, perceptions, data or concepts published in electronic social media may be impressive in quantity and proliferation, but they can be biased and questionable because of the absence of any objective testing, validation or authentication. Separately, within UK universities, students have been demanding diversity in the provision of reference literature, because, there is little provision of reference literature authored by Asian Black and Minority Ethnic (the ABME) writers - including Sikh and Punjabi writers.

It is a matter of further investigation to gauge the nature and level of demand for Sikh and Punjabi Studies at the doctoral level to determine the nature of resources required. There is, however, a need within the community for qualified people wishing to follow careers in religious and public education institutions. A basic ability to read the Sikh scripture, some knowledge of theology and experience of hymn-singing in *gurdwaras* have satisfied past, and to an extent, present needs. However, the hopes and expectations of younger Sikhs are different: there is increasing need for higher quality preachers and religious functionaries. The arrangement which existed since the arrival of Sikhs in UK after WW2 was based on the importation of Punjabi speaking *granthis* (professional readers of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*), *pathis* (professional or amateur readers of *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*) and preachers from India. Mainly they were self-made or trained in traditional seminaries to recite and interpret the scripture, and they possessed some working knowledge of Sikhi and historical texts. There is now a concern within the community that the old arrangement is no longer fully relevant and adequate. The *gurdwaras* will have a challenge of finding and engaging professional *granthis*, *pathis*, *gianis* (preachers and lecturers in Sikhi) with bilingual communication and suitable social skills-set. They should have a wider perspective and understanding not only of the religious texts and theological practices, but also of the morals, ethics, spiritual and cultural dimensions applicable in the contemporary social contexts (Sangha, 2016).

Some challenges are inherent in promoting and developing faith and community studies. For example, a critical academic discourse cannot avoid tackling issues such as race, caste, gender, sexuality, inter-faith marriages, identities, environment, radicalization, and conflicts, all of which can raise passions. That is why the quality of training, mentorship and coaching of facilitators, supervisors, assessors and research students has to be high for making progress. Expertise in exploring epistemological, ontological and pedagogical dimensions within the Sikh tradition, as revealed in *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, *Janam Sakhis* and classical writings, will have to be developed. The students and researchers would have to undertake research with integrity, openness and transparency to uncover issues and concerns to prepare society for the wider

and complex world of the future. Any serious Sikh and Punjabi Studies would face such challenges as any academic studies of a faith community would face – especially, in terms of the academic versus confessional approach. However, the learning culture is slowly changing, with the efforts of professionals and educational activists who are keen to develop Sikh and Punjabi Studies in the academic settings. There is a growing sense of maturity in the UK's professional Sikh community who are entering into debate on sensitive issues with confidence. These challenges are not unique to Sikh Studies; they are inevitable, but will continue to transform as the studies progress.

The Sikh community needs to prepare itself for living with a dynamic, open-ended and multiple heritage Sikh diaspora. Any critical intellectual inputs in debates should be seen as a part of on-going development. A critical self-reflection within the Sikh/Punjabi community should offer support for all voices within the community including various 'radical', 'conservative', 'liberal' and 'progressive' voices to open a healthy debate within and without. However, there are risks that should be borne in mind as the community is quite riven with factions and is highly politicised in terms of 'home politics.' This has implications for funding sources that would have to be carefully stewarded. There will also be varying expectations as to what can actually be delivered. Whilst the shadow of the 1984 tragedy still looms large over the community, there have been many lessons which the community has learned over the last thirty-six years. Research students and their supervisors should be able to interrogate the prejudices, biases and precepts that impact Sikhs and their social environment. The field as it evolves should have academic freedom, objectivity and impartiality, with an emphasis on Sikhism as a 'lived religion' (Sangha, 2016, Singh, R, 2015).

Conclusion: Models for a Strategic Development

The conclusion of this paper arises from a brief dynamic history of the development of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK higher education over the past 50 years. It highlights the existence of a substantial body of UK originated, published and unpublished literature, and a range of tangible resources available for further development. Many research academics - whether independent or university-employed - analysts or students; have produced, accumulated and publicised materials through voluntary efforts. There is evidence that in some instances, research and educational projects have attracted small public and voluntary sponsorships. However, there is no reliable or regular stream of funding to support and sustain innovation, research and development in Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE. While some individual research academics have been able to pursue projects within their role in HEIs, much of the progress in this field has been made through occasional voluntary meetings, seminars, conferences and exhibitions. Nor is there any structured mechanism or funding provision to develop a comprehensive reference library to house new and source

literature, or to network the physical and digital resources for Sikh and Punjabi Studies. The review of contextual background and history of initiatives in this paper has, however, highlighted evidence of interest and commitment for developing the field. This will require a sustainable institutional facility to accommodate and develop provision, and to formalise advice, support and guidance for further innovation, research and development.

It cannot be emphasised enough that one of the key challenges is the absence of reliable funding support and sponsorship accessible for developing Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK HE. However, a steady stream of marginally supported and self-driven research publications and the accumulation of tangible resources have continued to maintain momentum. This process has laid a strong foundation for further innovative research and development. Moreover, this paper has argued that there is an increasing interest among the new generation of academics and research students, who are keen to address the past, present and future themes relating to this area (often in conjunction with their academic work whether it involves community, religious, social, educational, cultural, health, environmental or political studies) to meet changing needs and demands within and outside the community.

A recurrent issue, as extrapolated from this analysis, continues to be a lack of collective and cohesive vision, direction and strategies for developing the field. Past and present efforts and initiatives are valuable, but they still remain fragmented and there is little overall networking or co-ordination for developing support for undergraduate and post graduate programs capable of providing a structured progression. The review of academic and student perspectives shows little progress in embedding Sikh and Punjabi Studies within the areas of Humanities, Law, Social Sciences and Health Sciences. These gaps reflect the absence of strategic planning and infrastructure development, partly due to lack of funds and sponsorships. However, there is strong potential and possibilities for raising funds from private, voluntary and public sectors if the UK's Sikh community prioritises debating and formulating a coherent set of aims and objectives to achieve a sustainable provision of Sikh and Punjabi Studies from preschool to PhD. Only a collective clarity of thought and wider consensus, inclusive of varying perspectives, can enable the community to avoid any distracting controversies (which have occurred in North America as well as the UK) in developing higher education in this area. Unlike the institutionalised provision of Sikh and Punjabi Studies in Canada and the USA (funded by families, businesses and philanthropists) there is little progress to date in the UK.

In strategic terms, an independent and legally formed charitable education trust/foundation for raising funds, advised by a council of academics and administratively supported by a small team of dynamic professionals may be the best way to take the process forward. A well thought out, suitably designed, and values-driven model can work. The fund raising would have to be open and

transparent, providing due accountability and recognition to the donors/funders/sponsors/contributors. Notwithstanding outcomes of any particular initiative, the 2015-16 discussions have suggested possible models for a strategic development. For example, an endowed chair/professorship/scholarship for Sikh and Punjabi studies at a suitable UK university is a traditional model; alternatively, a university accredited autonomous centre; or an independent centre working in collaboration with specialist HEIs can be a possibility. An approach could also be to seek mainstreaming of Sikh and Punjabi Studies provision by articulating, pursuing and lobbying suitable universities, because, much of the HE provision in most HEIs in England and Wales is student financed, and is demand and supply led. Finally, a model could be to establish an HEI for Sikh and Punjabi Studies on the grounds of expression of public interest, to meet public educational needs and demands, if a future legislative provision permits it.

Finally, an all-embracing message of this paper is that whilst alternative models can deliver Sikh and Punjabi Studies in UK higher education, the realization of any one of them will depend on raising an adequate level of funds. However, a modest approach can be adopted for making incremental progress, as long as clarity of vision, aims and objectives is retained. Its mechanisms and provision must be capable of promoting, developing and delivering competent teaching, learning and research outcomes. Its capacity for providing specific education and skills for the community's civic, social, educational and religious functionaries could raise its profile and earn it popular support. Its reference library with print, archival and digital materials has to be comprehensive and the provision must be supported by effective infrastructure, facilities and administration.

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Children of the Divine: Bhagat Puran Singh's Pingalwara and the Children's Rights Principle of Non-discrimination

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Abstract

This paper discusses the Sikh principle of non-discrimination and Bhagat Puran Singh's work with the marginalized in India. I start by outlining the principle of non-discrimination in Sikh and global human rights discourses. I then move on to looking at historic and contemporary examples of this principle in practice, including the life of Bhagat Puran Singh. I demonstrate that the right to non-discrimination, while recent in western children's rights discourse, has long standing force in Sikh tradition and the foundation of Pingalwara in Panjab. The work of Bhagat Puran Singh serves to address the need for a comprehensive strategy for India to work on the right to non-discrimination.

Keywords: Children's rights, Sikh, non-discrimination, Pingalwara, Puran Singh

Introduction

Sikhi was a way of life founded by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in 15th century South Asia, during a time rife with discrimination based on caste, gender, age and religion (J. Singh, 1981). At the center of Sikh ideology was the push to combat this discrimination and establish, in its place, the principle of undeniable equity. The issues that plagued society in the 15th century have far from disappeared in modern times. Presently, the United Nation Committee on the Rights of the Child remarks, in their concluding observations for India's reports on children's rights, that:

The Committee is concerned at the disparity among different groups of children in access to education, health care, safe water and sanitation and other social services and to the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Convention. It is also concerned at the persisting discrimination against children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, children with disabilities, children with HIV/AIDS, as well as asylum-seeking and refugee children. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014)

The vision that Guru Nanak Dev Ji set out with, of an equitable society, still remains largely unfulfilled in India and moreover Panjab. This paper will start by elaborating on this vision of equity, framed as the principle of non-discrimination. The paper will look at how the principle of non-discrimination compares with the right to non-discrimination in modern children's rights. Specifically using the life

and legacy of Bhagat Puran Singh, the founder of the institution of the Pingalwara, I will demonstrate how the Sikh discourse both predates and compliments modern human rights efforts. The Pingalwara is currently one of the most successful examples of a Sikh-based social welfare organization. They have seven branches, a printing press, a nursery, sustainable farms, schools, medical centers, vocational centers, and international support (All India Pingalwara Charitable Society Amritsar, 2017). Bhagat Puran Singh, in his treatment of the most marginalized in Indian society embodied the spirit of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's teachings and presents a possibility for achieving the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's (UNCRC) right to non-discrimination.

Sikhi and the Principle of Non-discrimination

While it is impossible to recount every instance of non-discrimination in Sikh scripture, *baani*, and Sikh history, *ithaas*, this section presents a few key instances that demonstrate how deeply rooted non-discrimination is. The principle of non-discrimination shows up primarily in the *baani* that was revealed to the Gurus. When the founder of Sikhi, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, penned his revelations on the origins of the Divine he reflected that there was no socially constructed basis for discrimination of any kind at the very start. In a *shabad* in raag Maru on *ang* 1035, Guru Nanak Dev Ji writes of a divine time before there was water, air, birth, death, sunrise or sunset.

There was no Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva.

No one was seen, except the One Divine.

There was no female or male, no social class or caste of birth; no one experienced pain or pleasure. ||4||¹

Guru Nanak Dev Ji was born into a Hindu family of a merchant caste. From early childhood, a young Nanak challenged many of the discriminatory practices he saw in his immediate surroundings. When he started his travels, his companion, the musician Bhai Mardana, was not only of a lower caste but also, as a Muslim, was a different faith altogether (K. Singh, 2004); this was quite radical at a time when people of different faiths did not have many such interactions (Kapur, 2017). In one of the more famous stories from Guru Nanak Dev Ji's life, he went to Saidpur and was invited to eat with the town chief Malik Bhago. The corrupt chief had made most of his money by overtaxing and wrongfully taking from hardworking farmers. Guru Nanak Dev Ji chose, instead, to eat at the house of a carpenter named Bhai Lalo, a man of few means which had been earned by honest work. When an enraged Malik Bhago confronted Guru Nanak Dev Ji, he was shown the difference in the

¹ Translations of original text.

food of the two men. As the Bhai Bala Janamsakhi² states Guru Nanak Dev Ji squeezed one *roti* from each man and while blood dripped from Malik Bhago's, milk came from Bhai Lalo's (C. Singh & J. Singh, n.d.). The metaphor and message of the story demonstrates the purity of food earned by honest means versus the poison of food earned through corruption. Moved by this interaction, Bhai Lalo went on to become an important Sikh and run a *dharmshala*. Each man was known for being either rich or poor in the world, but their connection with the Divine showed a reversal in their true fortunes (C. Singh & J. Singh, n.d.). From the onset of Sikh ideology, Guru Nanak Dev Ji never paid respect to worldly markers of discrimination and instead looked to markers of truth and encouraged his followers to do the same.

The Sikh faith continued with nine other Gurus, each an embodiment of that first Nanak with a pen name to match. They also entrenched in the institutions they created and the words they scripted, the undeniable right to live a life without discrimination. The second Nanak, Guru Angad Dev Ji, built on the legacy of non-discrimination through many social reforms. During this time, religious scriptures were the property of the high-caste elites. The inaccessible language of Sanskrit gate kept secrets of the Divine from the masses, leaving high caste priests to be interpreters and mediators. Guru Angad Dev Ji cemented the language of *Gurmukhi*, simultaneously planting the seeds for a connected to Gurbaani and freeing knowledge from the select few who had access to Sanskrit (T. Singh, G. Singh, 2006). This new language was easy to understand and made the revelations of the Gurus available to the common person.

Also during this time, Mata Khivi, to whom Guru Angad Dev Ji was married, formally established the practice of langar in which anyone could come to the Guru's court and receive food. Everyone would sit on the same ground and eat the same food; a practice that was groundbreaking at that time and continues to shatter ideas of hierarchy today. As Bhai Balvand and Bhai Sathaa describe in their Var in Ramkali in Guru Granth Sahib Ji,

Balvand says that Khivi, the Guru's wife, is a noble woman, who gives soothing,
leafy shade to all.

She distributes the bounty of the Guru's Langar; the kheer - the rice pudding and
ghee, is like sweet ambrosia.

The faces of the Guru's Sikhs are radiant and bright; the self-willed, self-oriented
others are pale, like straw.

The Master gave His approval, when Angad exerted Himself heroically.

Such is the Husband of mother Khivi; He sustains the world. ||3||

² The Bhai Bala Janamsakhis are a popular account of the stories of Gur Nanak Dev Ji's life.

In the life of the third Nanak, Guru Amar Das Ji, we saw yet again, the extension of every sphere of life to every human without regard for social position. During the time of Guru Amar Das Ji, Sikhi was growing and there was a need for a shift in governance. As the Guru could not be present everywhere, representatives were sent out on their behalf as a part of the *Manji* system. The representatives of each local area were tasked with things such as serving the congregation, spreading the Guru's message and collecting offerings (T. Singh, G. Singh, 2006). Amongst those appointed were women, often in challenging areas like Kashmir and Afghanistan (N.K. Singh, 2005). Guru Amar Das Ji also raised his own daughter, Bibi Bhani to be an active political and social member of the community. Bibi Bhani also played a foundational role in what would later come to be known as the city of Amritsar.

In conjunction with establishing equity amongst castes and genders, the Gurus also focused on equity in age. The Gurus themselves ranged in age from a child to a senior and there was never a condition of age put on the ability to achieve union with the Divine. Guru Harkrishan Ji, the 8th Nanak, led his Sikhs from the age of 5. Guru Amar Das Ji, the third Nanak, took on the Guruship at the age of 72 (T. Singh, G. Singh, 2006). *Gurbaani* revealed to Guru Arjun Dev Ji in raag Sorath reflects,

The One is our father; we are the children of the One. You are our Guru.
Listen, friends: my soul is a sacrifice, a sacrifice to You; reveal to me the Blessed
Vision of Your Darshan. ||1||

Thus the practice of not discriminating against all of humanity, as we are all children of the One divine energy that sustains us, was embedded into Sikh buildings, practices, institutions, scriptures and ways of life.

The fifth Nanak, Guru Arjun Dev Ji continued to build on Sikh principles as they designed Harmandir Sahib, the foremost of all Sikh centers, in such a way so that those arriving would have to step down in humility to reach the scriptures that were then elevated at the center of the building. Also, the main structure was built with four doors, in every direction, to be open to all castes and people. Thus, the Sikh principle of non-discrimination was built, literally, into the walls of the highest of institutions (Kaur, 1983).

The ninth Nanak, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji demonstrated, at the cost of his life, that he would extend humanity and compassion to everyone without regard for their social position. In what would come to be known as a historical moment not just for Sikhs, but for all Indians, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji set out to challenge the tyrannical reign of Aurangzeb in the late 1600s. The time was tumultuous for Sikhs, but notably for Hindus as well. There were decrees by Aurangzeb that Hindu schools and temples should be demolished. When the persecutors came to

Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji for help, at the guidance of the then young Gobind Rai (later Guru Gobind Singh), Guru Tegh Bahadur set in motion a series of travels towards the ruler that led to his eventual arrest and execution (T. Singh, G. Singh, 2006). In the two years of travels and rallying of fellow Sikhs, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji held his resolve to support those who were being oppressed, even when they were of a different religion. He went towards his death upholding the value of non-discrimination. The legacy of not discriminating on the basis of age, caste, gender and now religion grew stronger in the wake of these events.

After the light of Nanak passed through ten physical forms, the Guruship manifested in two parts: first and foremost, in the divine text of Guru Granth and second in the body of the people, the Guru Panth. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, as the last living Guru, upheld the value of placing Gurbaani, the written revelations of the Gurus, in the highest esteem. It was an easy transition to place the authority of the living Guruship into the scriptures. As a revolutionary act, during Vasakhi of 1699, Guru Gobind Singh Ji also transferred this authority into the body of the collective. This democratic body of the Guru Panth was envisioned as the fluid, dynamic, and political counterpart to the eternal perfection of the Guru Granth (N.K. Singh, 2005). The Panth, although imperfect in its execution, has strived to uphold the principle of non-discrimination.

This struggle between the ideals of the Guru Granth, and the performance of the Guru Panth is nowhere more notable than with the case of the caste system. The caste system in India was designed with intention and has deep historical roots and contemporary authority. Everything down to who was allowed to have government roles as well as military rank was determined by the system and favored high-caste Hindus. A contemporary review of caste relations in Sikhi demonstrates everything from neglect to overt discrimination still exist in realms with Sikh influence (G, Singh, 2010). Conversely, in writing on the transformative social power of the Panth, Jagjit Singh writes, 'Above all, the Sikh Panth abolished not only caste-status but an entire social system based on it.' (p.310, 1981). The Gurus consistently recruited lower-caste people to be in their service and in the post-Guru period, leaders like Banda Singh Bahadur had armies of lower castes (Singh, J. 1981). As they were allowed to climb the ranks, this time period saw those who were of few means, return from the army and be well established in society. During this pre-industrial time, land was also the main means of income. Thus, class struggles, as they were linked to caste, defined the social mobility of most of society. The feudal *Zamindar* system sustained the power of a few higher-class elites and had lower-caste peasants work the land with little to no benefit to themselves. In this climate, Banda Singh Bahadur lead a revolution and saw that the land was returned to those who worked it (J. Singh, 1981).

Another post-Guru period revolution that upheld the value of non-discrimination was the Singh Sabha movement and their fight for education rights for women and lower-castes. Sikh women were also amongst the first in India to be given the right to vote in 1925 by The Gurdwara Act (N.K. Singh, 2005). Rooted in the principles of the Guru, the Panth has continued to integrate non-discrimination into its institutions and practices.

Children's Rights and the Right to Non-discrimination

Almost 300 years after the final Guru lived in bodily form, in 1989, in the modern western world, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention in the Rights of the Child which is one of the most widely signed and ratified human rights treaties mandating non-discrimination ever (United Nations, 1989). The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international policy document that forms law in ratifying countries including India. It provides guidance to form policy in a manner that attempts to transform the lives of children at a local level. It is also a treaty that offers a common ethical framework, from a global-moral consensus, for all those who work with children and young people (Melton, 2005). Specifically, it is a document containing 54 articles that outline the rights of children as state responsibilities (United Nations, 1989). The four main principles of the CRC are the right to life and healthy development, the right to best-interest, the right to non-discrimination and the right to participation. The right to non-discrimination specifically reads,

1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members. (United Nations, 1989)

Other areas of rights covered include civil rights and freedoms, family environment and alternative care, basic health and welfare, education and cultural activities, and finally special protection measures.

In order to make these rights a reality, there are a number of responsibilities that states need to take on. The UNCRC asks states to turn the writings of the CRC into legislation and monitor their effectiveness. Early on, countries are to change legislation and see that existing legislation is in the spirit of the Convention.

Collecting information, training those who work with children, and reporting are also important elements. Whereas the first 41 articles pertain specifically to the rights of children, from 42 onwards, state responsibilities such as reporting procedures and dissemination are discussed. Article 44 requires ratifying states to report their progress to the Committee on the Rights of the Child two years after initially signing and every 5 years thereafter (United Nations, 1989). The Committee in Geneva then submits feedback to the countries in the form of Concluding Observations. These Concluding Observations report positive and negative developments in the reporting country and also provide suggestions for improvement (Robertson, 2001).

The concluding observations from India's report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child paint a grim picture when it comes to discrimination against children. The committee begins by noting that the previous committee report's recommendations have not been followed by the country. As previously mentioned, the committee highlights discrimination on the basis of caste, tribe, gender, ability, and refugee status. The recommendations of the committee include the following. First, that the country should adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat discrimination and have adequate programs in place to guarantee their results. Specifically, with regards to female children,

The Committee urges the State party to adopt a comprehensive approach to take effective and systematic action to prevent and combat social, cultural and economic discrimination against girls and women, including its root causes, social and institutional norms and practices that are inconsistent with the provisions of the Convention and that perpetuate discrimination against girls. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014)

This report essentially serves as an indicator that by measure of the global-moral consensus of the UNCRC, India largely discriminates against children and is thereby in violation of their basic human rights.

At the same time, India is in a historical moment, where charging the state with the welfare of its citizens has been a failed project. The rise of welfare reforms in the west in the late 19th century, which in turn grew into the creation of a social safety net in the inter-war and post-World War 2 years, saw the care for the most vulnerable in society become the responsibility of the State (Dehler, 2011). While the specific model varied depending on the country, there was a general consensus that society at large would provide the resources and care for those who were physically or mentally unable to do so for themselves.

With chronic issues of poverty, discrimination and regional conflicts, India was unable to create a social welfare system to care for those who fell through the cracks. By default, the care for the disabled, the orphaned and the destitute often fell to religious organizations amongst others (Dabir & Athale, 2011). Current neoliberal reform in India is arguable both top-down and bottom up (Anjaria & Rao, 2014). A shift to a rights-driven social reforms has contended with the many complexities of Indian politics, economics, and demographics (Deshpande, Kailash, & Tillin, 2017). The heterogeneous flow of power means that state players impact citizens on the ground, but there has also been impact that moves from those doing the work of welfare on the ground back towards the state. The work of the Pingalwara in Panjab, and the life of Bhagat Puran Singh then becomes a model for how the recommendations of the committee can be realized through a Sikh framework.

Bhagat Puran Singh and the Pingalwara

Bhagat Puran Singh was born in Panjab to a Hindu family. The title Bhagat, rarely rewarded to a Sikh, denotes one who is constant *bhagti* or loving worship of the Divine. Bhagat Puran Singh writes, in his autobiography, of his mother, who instilled in him his compassion and empathy for all of humanity (P. Singh, 2016). She planted trees, fed birds, removed thorns from walking paths, and taught her son to do the same. Like many women in Panjab, she was the center of her family. She worked, prayed, raised her son and gave money and grains to the various religious men that would come to her village. During Bhagat Puran Singh's school years, she worked as a domestic servant in the house of a doctor and sent her monthly earning to her son via money order. Despite being illiterate, she learned from them how to recite Japji Sahib, the foundational revelation of Guru Nanak Dev Ji. When her son, then named Ramji Das, fell ill with a fever at the age of 7, she vowed that if he got better, his life would be devoted to the service of humanity. His parents ran a home filled with Hindu rituals, including feeding and worshipping young girls as they represented goddesses. It is to this that Puran Singh credits how he 'developed respect for women and also how to huminity [him]self completely to the almighty' (P. Singh, 2016, p. 12). He also stated, "Looking at my own life, I think that if from childhood a child is taught about love and compassion, then he will start on the path of helping others and would spend his entire life doing this service." (P. Singh, 2016, p.12).

In one of his significant memories, Bhagat Puran Singh recalls that as a young man, having completed his exams for this tenth class, he went to a *mandir*, a Hindu place of worship, and washed sandalwood paste off of idols. This voluntary task took him a long time and as he was hungry by the end, he sat down to eat with the students learning Sanskrit at that *mandir*. He was kicked out by the priest and not given

anything to eat. By contrast, a few days later, he found himself at a Sikh *Gurduara*. Literally translated as the door of the Guru, this community institution was open to everyone and provided food with no regard for discriminatory practices. The same concept of langar, started by the aforementioned Mata Khivi, came full circle in providing an example of non-discrimination and other-oriented service for the young Puran Singh. After leaving Gurduara Reru Sahib, Bhagat Puran Singh returned home, kept his hair and started adhering to a Sikh way of life (P. Singh, 2016). He ended up spending the next 24 years of his life in service at Gurduara Dehra Sahib in Lahore where the seeds of the Pingalwara were planted. While at Gurduara Dehra Sahib, Bhagat Puran Singh also had access to the libraries of Lahore. He spent his time studying national and international social problems as well as his primary task which was caring for the sick, disabled, and homeless that came to the Gurduara. After the British were forced from India, Panjab was divided into Pakistan and current day Panjab, India. This historic Partition in 1947 forced Bhagat Puran Singh from the Gurduara in Lahore and he arrived in Amritsar where he continued his service of humanity.

It was before this huge life shift however, and during his time in Lahore at Gurduara Dehra Sahib, that Bhagat Puran Singh formed a relationship that would define his life. In 1934, someone abandoned a young boy at the steps of the Gurduara assuming that he would be cared for. The child, Piara, was not verbal, could not feed or bathe himself and could not turn sides. Bhagat Puran Singh took it upon himself to care for this child well into his adult life. For fourteen of these years, Bhagat Puran Singh literally carried Piara around his shoulders and on his back. Piara had signs and sounds that only Bhagat Puran Singh understood and the two were never apart from each other. When Piara turned 18, Bhagat Puran Singh stopped carrying him everywhere but he continued to care for him for decades to come. Although he was initially given a life expectancy of 30 years, Piara lived well into his senior years. Bhagat Puran Singh never married or had children of his own. Piara was the primary recipient of Bhagat Puran Singh's fatherly affection, he was an incredible source of joy for his caretaker. He was a symbol of the Bhagat's caregiving not just for all in need, but specifically children. Bhagat Puran Singh considered himself blessed to be able to care for Piara and said 'without him, my whole life would be tasteless.' (P. Singh, 2016, p.49). In his later life, Bhagat Puran Singh went on to win many awards and accolades but his greatest joy was Piara, the "garland around his neck" (Singh & Sekhon, 2001). No worldly acclaim ever measured up to being able to run towards doing the work that most of the world ran away from.

After partition, being forced from Lahore and Gurduara Dehra Sahib, Bhagat Puran Singh found himself in Amritsar where he worked tirelessly and with endless hope to care for those who society abandoned. He initially arrived at Khalsa College

Camp, a refugee camp for those displaced by the violent Partition, where despite his circumstances and the state of the country, Bhagat Puran Singh continued his care of Piara. He still wore him on his back and was proud of the fact that up until Piara was 18, Bhagat Puran Singh never so much as took a sick day to stop caring for the young man. The refugee camp held somewhere between 23 000 and 25 000 people many of who were sick, had disabilities, or were abandoned. Bhagat Puran Singh took personal responsibility for all of the most destitute in the refugee camp, often without the help of another person and in addition to the full-time responsibility of caring for Piara. He fought for their food, cleaned their soiled clothes, hauled their water, and often watched them die of easily treatable illnesses and then cremated their bodies. Instead of being defeated by the circumstances of the refugee camps and the smell of death and excrement, Bhagat Puran Singh marveled at the miracle that he was always able to get food for those he was caring for; he was astonished by what faith and nature provided him (P. Singh, 2016, p. 85).

After the refugee camp shut down, Bhagat Puran Singh moved his charges to sit underneath a pipal tree in front of the Railway Station Post Office in Amritsar. From here he would beg for food and after feeding those he was caring for, he would serve the rest to those sitting outside a nearby hospital. While the police did try and remove Bhagat Puran Singh from the railway station, the station master stood by him and said that no one would be relocated. Thus, they were able to develop a routine and provide food and care in a somewhat clean if not crowded environment.; Piara, in turn, liked the bustling environment and being around a lot of people. While here, the Bhagat continued to read newspapers, visit libraries, and expand his mind. His fascination with trees and the environment continued to grow into a consciousness that would later manifest in actions to save the very earth he inhabited. Bhagat Puran Singh recounts, in his biography, the many individuals he served at this time. He knew their names, their stories, the exact details of their hospital visits and how their final rites were conducted. Nothing about his service lacked humanity. He never turned his consciousness from the stark and painful realities of his world. He looked death, poverty, starvation, illness and genocide in the eye and never lost his respect for the divine grace by which he was able to serve.

The following years saw Bhagat Puran Singh continuing his work and constantly shifting from one place to another. He took those he cared for to abandoned houses, underneath other trees, an abandoned cinema and eventually founded a building for what would come to be known as the Pingalawara; the name that he gave his institution translates into a house or an asylum for the disabled. The Pingalwara started to take shape in 1948 and continued to grow in infrastructure and funding in its latter years. Bhagat Puran Singh recalls being inspired by the following revelation from the pen of the fifth Nanak, Guru Arjun Dev Ji, in Jaitsiri,

Pauree:

He dwells in a broken-down shack, in tattered clothes,
with no social status, no honor and no respect; he wanders in the wilderness,
with no friend or lover, without wealth, beauty, relatives or relations.
Even so, he is the king of the whole world, if his mind is imbued with the name of
the Divine.
With the dust of his feet, men are redeemed, because the Divine is very pleased
with him. ||7||

Disregarding markers of social status was always at the core of the work that Bhagat Puran Singh did. In his lifetime, he personally oversaw the work of the Pingalwara as it expanded into an institution that served hundreds of individuals who have been discarded by the society in which they lived. He simultaneously worked as a writer, establishing a printing press, writing and distributing literature on multiple subjects. Being an activist for the environment was central to his mission. As a pioneer environmentalist, the Bhagat did everything from pick up garbage on the streets to plant trees and develop knowledge on a sustainable environment.

Finally, in August of 1992, at the age of 88, and after a lifetime of service, Bhagat Puran Singh's mortality caught up with him and he left his body. His legacy remains; He wrote tirelessly and left specific instructions for future generations on how to care for the environment, our fellow humans, and Sikhi. He created institutions and inspired a movement that still has incredible force. In reflecting on writing about his life he says,

I want to narrate these stories so I can tell to the youth that a poor young man with no financial resources or political power can provide the service to the poor with astonishing results and can spend life of immeasurable spiritual happiness and thus can achieve evolutionary progress of his energies and receive respect of the world. (P. Singh, 2016, p. 90).

At present, the work that Bhagat Puran Singh started, continues in Panjab. The fight to serve those who the world blatantly discriminates against goes strong with international support and funding. The Pingalwara Charitable Society Amritsar has 7 branches and serves over 1700 patrons. They have a printing press, a nursery for trees, and a dairy farm. They also have '5 schools, 2 dental clinics, an ultrasound centre, an eye clinic, an artificial limbs centre, a physiotherapy centre, a sewing and stitching centre, etc. etc. All these services and facilities are provided free of cost' (All India Pingalwara Charitable Society Amritsar, 2017). At the head of many of the initiatives are women; from Dr. Inderjit Kaur, who is the current President of the entire establishment, to Abinash Kaur Kang, who works tirelessly in Canada as

the lead fundraiser overseas, women work with everything they have to keep the mission of the Pingalwara alive (All India Pingalwara Charitable Society Amrtisar, 2017). Inspired by Bhagat Puran Singh's love for Sikhi, their actions continue to change the world.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has done the work of establishing first and foremost, a lack of children's rights in India. As the committee on the rights of the child notes, 'India [is] home to 472 million children, which is 20 per cent of the world's child population.' (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014). The glaring violence produced against children on the basis of age, caste, tribe, ability, illness and other factors has massive impact (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014). Sikhs while representing a small part of India, they have a lot of ideological influence and have maintained a human rights discourse since the inception of the religion (Kapoor, 2018).

Modern human rights frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, highlight the right of children to exist free of discrimination (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). While the Indian state has signed and ratified the convention, and subsequently submitted multiple reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, they have remained suspiciously silent in including the contributions of religious organizations (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014). This, while religious organizations have filled in the gap left by the broken welfare state and steppe din to take care of the most vulnerable (Dabir & Athale, 2011).

Recounting Sikh scripture and history demonstrates the fundamental value of non-discrimination in Sikh socio-political and spiritual ideology. This rejection of discriminatory practices shows up in Sikh scripture, architecture, in the lives of the Gurus, and in the movements in the post-Guru period. As an extension, and a formidable example of this value, the life of Bhagat Puran Singh, and his legacy of the Pingwalara were examined. Essentially, Bhagat Puran Singh did, with the core Sikh value of non-discrimination, that which the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child demands in its key principals.

Bhagat Puran Singh cited many influences for the work that he did. The Bhagat referred most to his mother, his Guru and his love of Piara. He said Piara was 'a great support in my life. Had he not met me, I would not have been able to set up Pingalwara and won the love and respect of the world upto 80 years of my life, I have lived it with the innocence and purity of a child.' (P. Singh, 2016, p.87). Bhagat Puran Singh never waited for the right funding or circumstances to start his work. His life was a series of incredibly challenging circumstances throughout

which he served humanity with little or no regard for the enormity of the implausible. He labored, physically, mentally, spiritually and financially with the audacity of assuming the world could be a better place for those he served. He served everyone, without considering their station in life. He was the human embodiment of the Sikh value of non-discrimination.

As per the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Government of India needs a comprehensive strategy for addressing the violations to the right to non-discrimination. The work, in the past and present, of Bhagat Puran Singh's Pingalwara provides a model for one of the many pathways that could be taken to address this violation.

The Indian state should both explicitly mention the work of organizations like the Pingalwara in their state reports, and draw inspiration from these organizations to put the right of non-discrimination into practice for the world most vulnerable children. In practical terms, this does not necessarily mean a large-scale reproduction of the Pingalwara model at a state level. Part of the success, as shown through the biography of Bhagat Puran Singh is the intention that informs his experience and the grassroots level organizing. Therefore, when state reports or alternative reports are submitted to the UN committee on the rights of the child, the Pingalwara should be given specific mention. Simultaneously, as the state continues to develop social welfare in the face of the many unique economic, political and demographic challenges that India has, resources should be given to bottom up models like the Pingalwara. In the many heterogeneous ways that power moves in regards to the care of the most vulnerable, the expertise of those on the ground should be given precedence. The combination of closing this gap in reporting, and structural support for existing bottom up programs will ultimately serve the rights-based approach of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Making the Disappeared Appear: Ensaaf's Archive of Loss and Remains*

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Abstract

Ensaaf, a transnational non-profit organization, is in the process of creating an expansive digital archive of “disappeared” Sikhs in Punjab, India. This essay offers a reflection on Ensaaf's latest digital project: sharing the stories of the disappeared every day on their social media pages—Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Through such daily sharing, Ensaaf is performing a mediated ritual of remembrance. By employing the aliveness and dynamism of social media sites Ensaaf's team is actively and creatively engaging with loss and what remains.

Keywords: Ensaaf, disappeared, liminal death, social media, rituals of remembrance



Figure 1

Figure 2

On April 14, 1990, Punjab Police officials unlawfully killed Kuldeep Singh (17) and Pal Singh (18-19) in the fields near village Failoke in Amritsar district. Security officials did not return their bodies to their families.

* I would like to thank my wonderful writing group: Oyman Basaran, Shenila Khoja-Moolji and Jay Sosa for their helpful comments and suggestions.



Figure 3

On March 1, 1993, Punjab Police officials unlawfully killed Balwinder Singh in Faridkot district, he was 32 years old. Earlier, the Punjab Police officials from Jaitu police station had abducted Balwinder Singh from the bus stand in Barnala city in Sangrur district.

Introduction

Ensaaf (justice) is a transnational, non-profit organization “working to end impunity and achieve justice for crimes against humanity in India, with a special focus on Punjab, by documenting abuses, bringing perpetrators to justice, and organizing survivors.”¹ Sukhman Dhami and Jaskaran Kaur, both lawyers, founded the organization in 2004. Based on work Ensaaf activists and researchers are doing on the ground in Punjab² they claim to have created the largest-ever archive of disappearances and unlawful killings created in India.³ The team at Ensaaf is also digitizing this archive and their website contains an “interactive data visualization site, mapping and profiling 5,200+ extrajudicial executions.” In March 2019 Ensaaf started a project of expanding the reach and visibility of their digital archive through daily posts on their social media pages—Facebook, Twitter and Instagram—consisting of photographs and brief descriptions of disappeared (mostly) men and

¹ <https://ensaaf.org/>

² Some methods through which Ensaaf researchers and activists collect data include interviews with families of the “disappeared” and extrajudicial killings, interviews with human rights defenders and journalists and research on key legal cases (Protecting the Killers 2007, 9).

³ Ensaaf is not the only organization working on documenting and litigation. The Punjab Documentation and Advocacy Project formed in 2008 to do the work of documentation, advocacy and awareness, and strategic litigation. More information can be found at <https://punjabdisappeared.org>.

(some) women.⁴ Every day, they share “the profile of a person who was disappeared or unlawfully killed by Indian security forces on the anniversary of the incident”.⁵ Figures 1 and 2 and accompanying captions are the latest photographs and profiles on their social media pages (at the time of writing) while Figure 3 with its corresponding caption is the very first victim profile that Ensaaf’s team shared on March 1, 2019.

In the following I reflect on this daily project of making the disappeared appear in and through social media. What meanings are implicit in Ensaaf’s work of remembering disappearances on a daily basis? What kind of space and temporality do social media platforms provide to facilitate this project? I argue that Ensaaf’s team is transforming otherwise mundane and ordinary social media platforms to create sacred spaces where “haunting...an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known...” (Gordon 2008, p. xvi). Ensaaf is constructing and performing daily rituals of remembrance, facilitating community members to express feelings of loss and outrage. The dynamism of social media sites intersects with the daily ritual of sharing remains of the disappeared to keep disappearances alive in the collective consciousness of the Sikh community. This is because the disappeared never actually died, but inhabit a place between life and death, or what might be called liminal death.

Crime and Impunity

On their website, Ensaaf defines “enforced disappearance” as deliberate and willful arrest, detention, or abduction of an individual caused by officials working for the government, followed by the “refus[al] to acknowledge the deprivation of the individual’s liberty or disclose [their] fate or whereabouts...An enforced disappearance is a continuing crime until the disappearance is resolved.”⁶ Anthropologist Ather Zia’s observations about disappearances in Kashmir apply to the Punjab case as well. She writes that the term “disappearance” operates as a verb and means “‘made to disappear’ rather than simply disappear or go missing” (2019, p. 4). The phrase “enforced disappearances” first emerged in the 1960s in the Latin American context, including Haiti, Guatemala, Chile and Argentina, among others. It was around this time that disappearance became known as a “tool of

⁴ At the time of writing, Ensaaf’s website contained details of 5,145 enforced disappearances/extrajudicial killings of men and 117 cases of women.

⁵ Why We Started Sharing Victim Profiles One Year Ago. Available at: <https://mailchi.mp/42eac771da24/why-we-started-sharing-victim-profiles-one-year-ago?fbclid=IwAR1LOLwTuhZIGuW7vHjagH7DxTKGSdSu4sYzP9SHfNgp7biPfVXXxvqtSAQ> [Accessed April 14 2020].

⁶ <https://ensaaf.org/faq/#impunity>

repression...[and later] became code for arrest, deportation, and torture in secret prisons and dumping of dead bodies” (ibid. 4-5). In Punjab the disappeared are known as the *lapata*,⁷ though the term is not employed in Ensaaf’s digital archive.

The beginning of disappearances in Punjab has a complex trajectory that lies outside the purview of this paper. Most immediately, the disappearances can be traced back to the early 1980s. In October 1983, Punjab was declared a “disturbed area” and President’s Rule was imposed. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his followers took refuge in the Golden Temple the same year. While Sikh political leaders were part of the tussle between the national government and Punjab, the community as a whole faced the brunt of suffering. In June 1984, following political tension and under the pretext of “apprehending a handful of militants,” the Indian army, under government leadership, invaded the “theo-political center” of Sikhs, the Golden Temple in Punjab. Thousands of pilgrims were killed. Following closely on the heels of this attack, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards, on October 31, 1984. The assassination precipitated the organized, government-backed massacre of Sikhs in India’s capital city, New Delhi, and other parts of North India. The initial wave of killing lasted from the evening of October 31 through November 4, with more than 3,000 Sikhs murdered, yet the events of 1984 initiated at least a *decade* of state-sanctioned extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and torture in Punjab.

While acknowledging the human rights abuses that Sikh militants inflicted, Ensaaf is making visible and public the lawlessness and anarchy unleashed by the Indian state, the very institution that is supposed to formulate and implement laws, and uphold the rights of its citizens. In their report entitled “*Protecting the Killers: A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India*,” Ensaaf’s team writes of the “tens of thousands of people” who died in the period stretching from early 1980s through the mid-1990s. They acknowledge that “Sikh militants were responsible for serious human rights abuses including the massacre of civilians, attacks upon Hindu minorities in the state, indiscriminate bomb attacks in crowded places, and the assassination of a number of political leaders” (2007, pp. 1-2). Yet while the Indian state and mass media focused on and demonized this insurgency movement, the official story conveniently invisibilizes abuses by the government in its counterinsurgency operations. These counterinsurgency measures included:

arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial execution, and enforced disappearance of thousands of Sikhs. Police abducted [mostly] young Sikh men on suspicion that they were involved in the militancy...yet later denied having them in custody. Most of the victims of such enforced disappearances are believed to have been

⁷ <https://lapata-exhibition.com/>

killed. To hide the evidence of their crimes, security forces secretly disposed of the bodies, usually by cremating them...(ibid, p. 2)

Instead of being held accountable for their abuses, under special counterinsurgency laws, the Punjab police was offered several rewards and incentives to capture and kill militants. This in turn led to an increase in

“disappearances” and extrajudicial executions of civilians and militants alike. In 1994, Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights described the government’s operations as “the most extreme example of a policy in which the end appeared to justify any and all means, including torture and murder.” (ibid, p. 2)

Ensaaf has curated a well-designed and accessible archive of these enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions.⁸ The latest innovation in making the archive more visible is to maintain pages on major social media and networking sites: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. The project of sharing the profile of a disappeared or unlawfully killed person every day is performing the work of bringing injustices into (primarily) Sikh consciousness regularly, frequently and continuously. What follows is a description and analysis of this mediated daily remembrance.

Mediated Appearance of the Disappeared

Those who are disappeared die a strangely horrific and uncertain death. For family members and friends, disappeared individuals haunt them and assume an absent presence. They are not there, but because they died what might be called liminal or in between death, their traces are always present. Liminal death contains within it the idea of being simultaneously alive and dead, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, past and present (Gordon 2008, 24). In doing the work of archiving and documenting these disappearances, Ensaaf is “tracing these traces” (Gómez-Barris and Gray 2010, p. 5). They are consciously creating digital spaces for “specters or ghosts” to appear (Gordon 2008, p. xvi). These are not spaces for supernatural encounters, but encounters with pasts that refuse to take the shape of pasts because of violence that was inflicted on a minority community and never acknowledged as such by the perpetrators, in this case the Indian state.

Ensaaf is making the disappeared appear and acknowledging trauma and loss suffered by their family members and friends, but by sharing details of individuals everyday, the organization is also forming rituals of remembrance. “As a source of

⁸ <https://data.ensaaf.org>

cohesion and memory, rituals...provide a means by which group identity is formed and sustained among individuals with a common history and shared culture” (Jacobs 2016, p. 42). In expressing emotional connection with the past, rituals provide participants with outlets for “repressed feeling-states, creating conditions under which the cathartic release of emotions is made possible” (ibid). In performing the everyday ritual of remembrance via digital technology transcending boundaries of space and time, Ensaaf is forging a transnational imagined community of Sikhs, experiencing and expressing feelings of loss, but also outrage and anger at the Indian state. This is demonstrated in repeated invocations of *Waheguru ji* and comments on their Facebook page. The following are examples of emotional reactions that this mediated ritual of remembrance evokes:

- “Every day every day more and more We are the voice of the departed (sic)!!
- “India is a rogue state where there is no value of innocent life...”
- “The blood of innocent people’s (sic) who are killed by Indian state in different states will haunt them always...”

While Ensaaf’s story includes “the experiences, the perceptions, the feelings” (Butalia 1998, 98) of victims’ families, survivors and other engaged members of the community, the Indian state’s narrative forcibly excludes and leaves out these subjectivities. Moreover, even though the attack on the Golden Temple and the November pogroms are beginning to be commemorated (Chopra 2010, Grewal and Sabherwal 2019), “[m]emories about the various other violent actions of the state across the region *after* 1984 are much more dispersed and have gathered fewer collective memorializations” (Grewal and Sabherwal 2019, 345; emphasis added). The official Indian state story dismisses an entire period of tensions in Punjab, especially from the early 1980s to mid 1990s as a time of “militancy,” “terrorism” and “religious extremism” (Kaur 2019, 8). The dominant understanding about the Punjab conflict is that the Indian state successfully suppressed insurgency and K.P.S. Gill, former Director General of Police in Punjab, is credited for this so-called accomplishment (Grewal and Sabherwal 2019, 344). What these dominant narratives of successful counterinsurgency leave out is the “afterlives of violence” and the durable transformation in social, political and economic life (ibid). Ensaaf’s work of memory is bringing back these afterlives of violence into the Sikh community’s consciousness. Where the Indian state continues to deny and justify its crimes, Ensaaf is doing the work of memory to “develop a collective response to acknowledge those who were victims of gross human rights violations.”⁹

⁹ Why We Started Sharing Victim Profiles One Year Ago. Available at: <https://mailchi.mp/42eac771da24/why-we-started-sharing-victim-profiles-one-year->

Given the 5,000+ cases of disappearances that Ensaaf has documented so far, they will be able to continue the ritual of daily remembrance of the disappeared on social media for more than a decade. In a note explaining the meaning of the daily ritual of sharing stories of the disappeared, Ensaaf's Program Director Bachittar Singh writes: "It is an honor to share the memory of the victim with the wider community...In many cases, the image and the memory are the only remnants of the victim that the family still possesses, that weren't destroyed by the security forces."¹⁰ On the one hand, social media is a space replete with disingenuous, partial and incomplete information that circulates quickly and easily. But at the same time, social media also contains within it the potential for the "written about," namely marginalized communities, to become "authors" of their own stories, and compose an account that fills the gaps in the dominant story. By constructing an online archive on various social media sites and sharing visual remains of the disappeared, Ensaaf's team is claiming the veracity of disappearance and casting the disappeared as dignified and honorable protagonists in life stories cut short ruthlessly by an oppressive state.

By making remains of the disappeared appear, Ensaaf is also creatively engaging with loss. In their edited volume, *Loss*, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian remind us that implicit in the question "what is lost?" is the question of "what remains?" (2003, 2) So we can only fathom loss by making sense of what remains. The "attention to remains [also] generates a politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary" (Eng and Kazanjian 2003, 2; emphasis added). Performing the daily ritual of sharing individual profiles contains within it aliveness and generative potential. The medium in which Ensaaf enacts this ritual leaves its imprint on the meaning of the performance itself. Social media is driven by the posts that people *create, share, retweet*; refreshing the *news feed* every few seconds yields a new story. The project of posting remains of the disappeared daily borrows from and contributes to this aliveness, albeit (in what seems counterintuitive) through loss. The "continuous engagement with loss and its remains ...generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future (ibid, p. 4). The daily ritual of remembrance performed in the dynamic and constantly evolving space of social media sites is keeping loss and disappearance alive everyday. In doing so, Ensaaf is imparting value and meaning to what was otherwise dismissed as a meaningless life by the

[ago?fbclid=IwAR1LOLwTuhZIGuW7vHjagH7DxTKGSdSu4sYzP9SHfNgp7biPfVXXkvqtSAQ](https://mailchi.mp/42eac771da24/why-we-started-sharing-victim-profiles-one-year-ago?fbclid=IwAR1LOLwTuhZIGuW7vHjagH7DxTKGSdSu4sYzP9SHfNgp7biPfVXXkvqtSAQ)
[Accessed April 14 2020]

¹⁰ Why We Started Sharing Victim Profiles One Year Ago. Available at:

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[Accessed April 14 2020]

Indian state. Moreover, as Ensaaf clarifies on their website, these abuses are not yet part of the “past” but rather a “disappearance is an ongoing violation of the disappeared victim’s right to life until the disappearance is resolved.”¹¹ Sociologist Avery Gordon, writing about enforced disappearances in Argentina, states that “[d]eath exists in the past tense, disappearance in the present” (2008, 113). On the ground in Punjab, Ensaaf’s activists and lawyers are dealing with the presence of disappearance by reorganizing survivors, their families and the general public, and engaging in strategic litigation to help bring perpetrators to justice.

Conclusion

Through sharing the profile of a disappeared person every day on its social media pages, or what remains of the disappeared, Ensaaf is performing a mediated ritual of remembrance. By participating in this ritual of engaging with remains of the disappeared, members of the community, especially victims’ families and survivors are grappling with an unfinished past. The disappeared suffered a liminal death, suspended between life and death. Ensaaf is doing the work of memory to make visible the durable violence of the Indian state and grieve for lives deemed “ungrievable” (Butler 2006, p. 36). Ensaaf is able to employ the aliveness and dynamism of social media sites to engage actively and creatively with loss and what remains. Ultimately, Ensaaf’s project of keeping the disappearances alive is to start transforming the present tense of disappearance and liminal death into a death that happened in the past.

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Book Reviews

Drinking from Love's Cup: Surrender and Sacrifice in the Vars of Bhai Gurdas Bhalla

Rahuldeep Singh Gill,

AAR, Religion in Translation, Oxford University Press, 2017

Xiii+280pp., \$99.00 (hb), ISBN 978-0-19-062408-8

Rahuldeep Singh Gill's *Drinking from Love's Cup* is a welcome scholarly introduction to the poetic compositions of Bhai Gurdas, whose writings are central to understanding how Sikh intellectual and ethical traditions developed during the seventeenth century. Closely related to the family of the later Gurus, Bhai Gurdas is also famous for having served as the scribe for an important manuscript copy of the Sikh scripture. Scholars frequently use his verses as valuable primary sources. Amazingly, despite the central role occupied by Bhai Gurdas in Sikh history, very few English scholarly studies of his works exist, although translations of varying quality are available in print. There are some notable Panjabi studies as well as edited anthologies of the Bhai Gurdas' work, but these are not accessible for most general readers. Gill's work is important, both for the scholarly analysis of the manuscripts of Bhai Gurdas' work, as well as for the useful commentary and translation of selected *vars* of Bhai Gurdas offered in this book.

Gill approaches this subject with incisive clarity, breaking from the majority of earlier scholarship about Bhai Gurdas. Garnering the evidence that points to the dating of Gurdas's compositions in the seventeenth century, rather than the sixteenth, he breaks with the long-held views shaped by eighteenth-century hagiographic texts about the earlier dating of Bhai Gurdas's life and works, and one that aligns with historians such as J. S. Grewal (11-13, 36). Significantly, this is based on a close paleographic examination of the early manuscripts associated with Bhai Gurdas, all of which are undated. This period corresponds with the beginning of the Emperor Jahangir's ascension to the Mughal throne and the execution of the Fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan. By arguing for a later date, Gill also suggests that while there is insufficient evidence to gauge whether Bhai Gurdas personally witnessed the torture and death of the Fifth Guru, his compositions were certainly informed by the deep trauma experienced by the Sikh community by this event (26-36). Further, the pressures created by other claimants for the Sikh Guru's role, also forged Bhai Gurdas into a skilled and unrelenting supporter of Guru Hargobind's right to lead the Sikh community in those troubled times (31, 230-232, 247-248). While the dating controversy may likely continue, Gill's focus on locating and reading important manuscripts as evidence is certainly a step in the right direction.

The translations and scholarly commentary on the thirteen *vars* selected for publication also invite readers to think about Bhai Gurdas's work from useful literary, cultural, and historical perspectives. Gill persuasively draws on the wider connections between the images deployed by Bhai Gurdas, most notably the divine intoxication of those who have drunk from "love's cup," or *piram piala*, to note the resonance this imagery bears with that of love and martyrdom in Sufi traditions (48-55). Gill also connects the very genre in which Bhai Gurda wrote prolifically, the *var*, a folk genre devoted to martial and spiritual themes, as one ideally suited to "self-giving sacrifice," and to inspire and console the Sikh community, in the aftermath of recent tragedies (45). Here Gill's elegant linkages between the elite literary and evocative popular themes in Bhai Gurdas's poetry is very clear. Indeed, the translations and commentary, while remaining accessible to a general reader, point out the allusions to Persian words and themes, Vaishnava devotional ideas, popular bardic tropes, as well as devices derived from elite Sanskrit works. For all these reasons, this book can be used in classes about Sikh Studies, as well as classes devoted to South Asian or Panjabi literature, history, and religions.

Finally, while Gill modestly suggests his translations are "efficient (xii)," they offer at present the most mellifluous English rendering of the work of this important Sikh scholar and poet. Compare for instance, Dr. Jodh Singh's far more serviceable translation of Var16, *pauri 11*, which details the blessings of communal worship for the loyal Sikh or *gurmukh*: "the pleasure fruit of *gurmukhs* is the holy congregation whereby merging the consciousness in the Word that invisible Lord is visualized. In the holy congregation, the unbreakable cup of love is drunk by becoming tolerant (398)." Gill's translation more clearly conveys the literal meaning while lending credence to the larger analytical argument put forward in this book regarding the nature of self-sacrifice and divine intoxication: "Gurmukhs seek the fruit of joy in the holy assembly; merged with the word they speak the unspeakable/ With love's cup, they bear the unbearable (142)."

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Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines

Amandeep Sandhu,
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Destinations are about completion of journeys, finding answers and getting settled. The journeys, however, yearn for something more. They are about exploring further because they are about continuation. Bangalore-based journalist Amandeep Sandhu's journey to his native land is one through which he tries to understand the enigma that is Punjab, the subject of the book. Born and brought up away from Punjab, but always tethered to its ethos and spirit through his family, Sandhu visited Punjab to explore the familiar only to find the uncomfortable gap between the reality and the representation. He spent three years collecting material for the book. It should be noted that the author prefers to use 'Panjab' with 'a' after 'P' instead of the popularly used 'u' in order to highlight the Persian origin of the term. To avoid any ambiguity, this review, however, uses the official and standard usage which has been used by almost all the books published on Punjab in the few decades.

Popular imagination links Punjab with farming and that is the thread chosen by Sandhu to begin his story of Punjab. Starting with the problems of farmers in rural Punjab the author gradually unravels the institutional mesh that explains what he observes. His data is drawn primarily from rural Punjab and involves juxtaposition of contemporary case studies with historical facts. The descriptive account of village visits by the author animates one's understanding of contemporary rural Punjab. Thus, Sandhu's account of Punjab is an autoethnographic one, focusing on a rural perspective. By extension, it is an emotional journey through which he explores his roots. The author chose to develop sixteen chapters based on sentiments and concepts that presumably echo the condition of Punjab. Consequently, he chose local terms as chapter titles which would likely make any Punjabi person connect with the book. The titles begin with Satt (wound), 'berukhi' (apathy) 'rosh' (anger), 'rog' (illness) 'astha' (faith), 'mardangi' (masculinity) and 'dawa' (medicine) followed by 'paani' (water), 'zameen' (land), 'karza' (loan), 'jaat' (caste), 'patit' (apostate), 'bardr' (border), 'sikhya' (education), 'lashaan' (corpses), and 'janamdin' (birthday). Thematically arranged chapters can also be read individually. Gradually, it becomes evident that the more he explores Punjab, the more he comes across the 'faultlines' that mar the social fabric of the state and society.

Sandhu narrates a story of Punjab with angst which may not be very amusing for many. The book brings into relief the fractured relationship between state and Sikh community in Punjab. It ponders over repeated institutional setbacks that Punjab has suffered over the years in addressing some of its most fundamental problems. The author infers that the agrarian issues of Punjab are at the core of Punjabi society and the solutions of the same cannot be provided by neo-liberal policies of the state. The very state which has been the wheat

basket of the country stands today at the brink of impending environmental crisis, which threatens to leech its soil of its nutrients, land of its water and people of their agency. The identity politics of Sikhs became a pliable tool in the hands of leading political parties in independent Punjab, and they have been exploiting the sentiment to the maximum for their limited political gains, offering only 'band-aid fixed' solutions to its recalcitrant problems. Revisiting the tragedy of 1984 and its aftermath, which haunt Punjab's collective psyche till date, the author feels that the failure of the state to address the issues that emerged during the phase of militancy has further deepened the crisis of Punjab. Ironically, the facts related to the unfortunate events during that phase still remain twisted and contested, which also find resonance in author's accounts. The author poses some difficult questions to the state, to the Punjabi community and to himself in order to make sense of the tragedy.

Sandhu's story of Punjab is replete with instances of wasted opportunities, betrayals and apathy on the part of state, resulting in the burgeoning trust deficit between the people and the state. Amidst this crisis, the advent of Aam Aadmi Party in Punjab politics aroused hopes among the Punjabi people, including the diaspora, hoping for a better life in terms of health, education and other infrastructural facilities. However, as a party rooted in Delhi, its inability to understand the complexity and ethos of Punjab proved to be its nemesis.

Reflecting on the ethos of Punjabi society, the author recognizes the feudal character of Punjab, but doesn't explore its roots deeply. Though he devotes a separate chapter to caste, rightly bringing forth the struggles of dalits for agricultural land, his diagnosis of the problem demands more explanation. The section on education also highlights a few issues but is very limited in its scope. While recounting the rich cultural heritage of Punjabi language shared across the international border, it would have been interesting had he discussed communalization of language and culture in post-independence Punjab and removal of Urdu as a language from the school curriculum. The question of women in Punjab also remains marginal in the book, which the author also acknowledges. But, given the scale of issues discussed, it is challenging to fully assess all issues pertaining to Punjab in a single volume.

Yet, his attempt to understand Punjab in its entirety rather than in parts makes the book more meaningful, but also challenging. Most of the books published on Punjab in the last three decades focus primarily on Sikh identity politics. Sandhu's book tries to go beyond this narrative and opens up the canvas of Punjab for a wider understanding, without sidelining the identity issue. Sandhu's advantage is his focus on the contemporary situation of Punjab unlike many other books which focus more on its historical and cultural heritage. Sandhu's peek into the history is only to understand the present, which remains his focus. Compared to some of the recent books on Punjab written by scholars such as Rajmohan Gandhi, Harnik Deol, Pippa Virdee and others, Sandhu's work places more emphasis on his ethnographic experiences rather than his secondary

readings. He uses journalistic language and avoids jargon. The format further gives latitude to the author to avoid repeated references to secondary sources of information, which makes the book read like a novel. The author aims his book to be read by an audience wider than in academia.

Overall, while Sandhu made his own journey to Punjab in order to discover what Punjab means to him, his subjective accounts invite others to make their own visit to Punjab and search for their own interpretations. The author's observations and analysis may not be shared entirely by many but one cannot deny that the issues discussed do reflect the pain and aspirations of the Punjabi people. His honest attempt at a critical engagement with Punjab and some plain speaking make it an interesting read, and invites many others to enter the debate. Thus, the book rightly sensitizes the reader to the complexity of Punjabi society in contemporary times.

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