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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 quincentenary 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 GNNNSJ 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 functionalities 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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