



THE SIKH MESSENGER

A MAGAZINE OF THE
NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK



**Pupils Of King Edward's School, Birmingham
Enjoying Langer**

SPRING - SUMMER 2023

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

QUIZ FOR ALL YOUNG SIKHS

ETHICAL TEACHINGS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND BELIEFS

RELIGION	EQUALITY OF HUMANITY	GENDER EQUALITY	BELIEF THAT GOD DOES NOT HAVE HUMAN ATTRIBUTES LIKE FAVOURITISM & JEALOUSY	SERVICE TO OTHERS	STANDING UP FOR THE BELIEFS & RIGHTS OF OTHERS	TOLERANCE& RESPECT FOR DIFFERENT FAITHS & WAYS OF LIFE	CONCERN FOR FUTURE	ADVICE AGAINST MISLEADING RITUALS & SUPERSTITIONS
BUDDHISM								
CHRISTIANITY								
JUDAISM								
HINDUISM								
ISLAM								
SIKHISM								
HUMANIST								

Place ticks in the above boxes to show commitment to the above ethical principles. Research the teachings of different religions **and give examples** of supporting ethical teachings, **embedded in religious texts or founders lives**, for each tick placed in the above boxes. Exclude subsequent cultural/social changes.

With Compliments

to

The Network of Sikh Organisations

from

Guru Nanak Trust

Jasvinder Singh Kohli
Tel: (Mob.) 07957 362 66 44

With Compliments

From Amar Subhag Kaur and
Sundeep Singh Maker
Maker Properties

The Lord first created Light :

*From the Lord's play all living creatures came,
And from the Divine light the whole creation sprang.*

Why then should we divide human creatures

Into the high and the low?

G G S p 1349

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THE SIKH MESSENGER

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EDITORIAL

Khalistan-The Search for a Nice Safe Cage

Lord (Indarjit) Singh

Khalistan is an emotive word for Sikhs, yet there was little mention of the concept of an independent Sikh state before the Indian government's attack on the Golden Temple in 1984.

In the 1930s. Hitler rose to political power through appealing to majority bigotry by blaming Jews for all economic and social ills in the country. In 1983 Indira Gandhi 's Congress party was trailing in the opinion polls for elections the following year. Something had to be done for Congress to retain power. Indira Gandhi decided to use the same tactics chosen by Hitler to reverse the poll trends and keep her in power.

This time, India's 2% Sikh population were blamed. It was said that some Sikhs hiding in the Golden Temple were planning to invade India. This absurdity was used by Indira Gandhi to launch an army attack on the Darbar Sahib and other historic gurdwaras in Punjab with the killing and torture of thousands of innocent pilgrims. Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her outraged Sikh bodyguards. This was used as an excuse for further government orchestrated killings of thousands of Sikh men women and children throughout India. The appeal to majority bigotry succeeded; the Congress party, trailing in the opinion polls a in 1983, won a record landslide majority in the autumn of 1984.

The genocide against Sikhs and the desecration of the Darbar Sahib led to an explosion of Sikh disbelief, anger and loathing of the Indian government coupled with a realisation of the vulnerability of Sikhs in Punjab and the rest of India. We all shouted for 'Khalistan', a Sikh state independent from the rest of India. Anger subsided with the passage of time, and with it, the call for an independent Sikh state on the lines of Pakistan. There was also the practical difficulty in identifying a viable contiguous area of land where Sikhs were likely to have a lasting majority. Demand for an independent Sikh state gave way to campaigning for an official recognition of the genocide of the 80s and a guarantee for the rights of Sikhs throughout India.

Fast forward to 2023 and the rise of Amritpal Singh, from obscurity as a clean-shaven Sikh in Dubai, to a fully practicing Sikh in Punjab with some militant followers again demanding Khalistan. There are many questions about his sudden emergence, initial government inaction followed by near martial law, imposed on Punjab with the mass arrest of Sikh youth. The concern here, however, is to re-examine the demand for Khalistan. Is the concept of Khalistan, an independent religious state on the lines of Pakistan consistent with Sikh teachings? To ensure objectivity this question was put to an artificial Intelligence search engine which gave the *following reply*.

'The concept of Khalistan, an independent Sikh state, is a political idea that emerged in the late 20th century and is not consistent with the teachings of Sikhism. Sikhism does not promote the idea of a separate nation-state based on religion or ethnicity. Sikhism, which originated in the Punjab region of South Asia in the 15th century, emphasizes the oneness of humanity and rejects any form of discrimination or oppression based on religion, caste, or gender. The Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, teaches that all human beings are equal and that the ultimate goal of life is to realize the unity of the divine within oneself and in all creation.

Sikhism also teaches the principle of Miri-Piri, which emphasizes the integration of spiritual and temporal authority. According to this principle, the Sikh community should not seek political power for its own sake but should work for the well-being of all people and the promotion of justice and equality.

Therefore, the idea of a separate Sikh state based on religion goes against the fundamental teachings of Sikhism. instead, Sikhs are encouraged to work for the betterment of society as a whole, regardless of religious or ethnic differences.

It is difficult for any rational person to argue against this analysis of the challenge facing Sikhs today. The idea of a Khalistan as a nice safe cage where Sikhs can find sanctuary from the world about them, is not consistent with the thrust of Sikh teachings. Worse, recent events show evidence of extremist Hindus provoking Sikhs to respond to injustice and discrimination with calls for Khalistan to justify further repression.

Unthinking Sikhs in the West who indulge in ego-boosting ill-disciplined demonstrations outside Indian embassies abroad simply imperil the lives of their brothers and sisters in India. Their behavior must be resolutely condemned by the wider Sikh community. Sikhs, whether in India or abroad do however have a clear responsibility to draw attention to religious and social injustices suffered by Sikhs and other minorities But noisy, ill-tempered demonstrations and the shouting of slogans of Khalistan, play into the hands of those who seek to smear us as anti-Indian. We must be on our guard to resist such entrapment, while speaking out against Indian government pandering to majority bigotry.

The Khalistan that we must aspire to and collectively work for is the extension of Guru Nanak's teachings on religious tolerance, truth, justice and equality throughout India and further afield. Promoting Sikh values in a cruel and selfish world is no easy task and requires total dedication and commitment, as Guru Nanak reminds us in the following verse

*Those who wish to play this game of love for their fellow beings
Should be prepared to give their lives in fearless endeavor.
Once you embark on this path of duty, be prepared to give your life
In love of God and the wellbeing of the Lord's creation.*

Guru Nanak Guru Granth Sahib p1422

India's Draconian Crackdown on Dissent - Critics of The State Are Being Silenced At Home And Abroad.

Hardeep Singh

The government of Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, is currently engaged in a severe crackdown on free speech. It is mainly targeting prominent Indian journalists and others in the north-western state of Punjab.

This latest wave of state censorship was sparked by the protracted manhunt for Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh, which began last month. Thirty-year-old Singh, who has been pushing for the creation of an independent 'Khalistan' state within Punjab, is currently wanted on charges including attempted murder, kidnapping, assaulting police, obstructing public officials and stoking 'disharmony'.

As part of its pursuit of Singh, the Indian government has clamped down on civil liberties throughout Punjab. The police have made over 150 arrests, many of them linked to Singh, and in some areas they have prohibited gatherings of four or more people. The authorities have, at points, shut down mobile internet and SMS services for Punjab's 30 million residents. And they have instructed Twitter to block local access to the feeds of prominent journalists and an MP – even the Twitter account of BBC News Punjabi has been 'withheld'. According to the Chandigarh Press Club, this amounts to 'an attack on the freedom of press and against free speech'.

The Indian government's censorship drive isn't restricted to Indian citizens or journalists. During the ongoing Amritpal Singh manhunt, prominent Sikhs in Canada, like poet Rupi Kaur and New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh, have also had their Twitter accounts censored in India (although their tweets can be seen from elsewhere). Both have spoken out against current and historical human-rights abuses, particularly in Punjab.

Sadly, this wave of censorship by the Indian government comes as little surprise. NGO Reporters Without Borders (RWB) ranks India 150 out of 180 countries for press freedom in its 2022 global index. RWB states that 'the violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis' in India.

The government's response to the Delhi farmers' protest in 2020-21 certainly showed how authoritarian it can be. The International Federation of Journalists reported that during the protests, at least nine Indian journalists were subjected to police intimidation. Some journalists were even charged with sedition for sharing unverified content during the farmers' tractor rally in Delhi.

Indeed, public criticism of the government in general is frowned on by the authorities. Some journalists have even had their bank accounts frozen for being too outspoken. As RWB has it, journalists who are too critical of the government are 'subjected to all-out harassment and attack campaigns by Modi devotees'.

And it's not just journalists. Last month, opposition leader Rahul Gandhi was convicted of defamation after calling the prime minister a thief. He has since been expelled from parliament and is now facing a prison sentence.

It seems the Indian government will now do virtually anything to suppress public dissent. Earlier this year, it used emergency laws to ban a BBC documentary about prime minister Modi, which examines his role in the riots that took place in the western state of Gujarat in 2002. Following the documentary's release, the BBC's offices in Mumbai and Delhi were raided by Indian authorities. The same happened to Twitter's offices back in 2021, after it slapped a 'manipulated content' label on a tweet from a government spokesperson.

The Indian state is currently trampling on civil liberties. Freedom of speech and assembly are in grave danger, especially in Punjab. India may be the largest democracy in the world. But it is far from the healthiest right now.

Hardeep Singh is the assistant editor of the *Sikh Messenger*

Policy Watch: India leads the world in internet suspensions.

Courtesy Bridge India

Last month, internet and SMS services were shut across *the entire state* of Punjab for several days as the police searched for radical preacher Amritpal Singh. Punjab has 31m people.

In January 2020, the Supreme Court in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* said that access to information via the internet is a fundamental right under Article 19(1) of the Constitution. The order observed that internet shutdowns are a "drastic measure", which may be imposed only if it is lawful, necessary, and proportionate and only after publishing an internet suspension order.

The final vision of Justice
Lies not with Man or any creature of the universe
But with the Lord alone
Guru Nanak Guru Granth sahib P144

India Banned my Twitter Account for Affirming Civil Liberties in Punjab

Pieter Friedrich USA

For the past 17 years, I've been researching, writing, and speaking about human rights in South Asia, with a particular emphasis on India, but it was a benign thread about the need to uphold basic civil liberties in the north-western state of Punjab that finally got my Twitter account banned in India on, apparently, 20 March 2023.

Among the regions in India where human rights situations are a particular concern, Punjab has repeatedly topped the list over several decades. It all began, in earnest, in the mid-1980s.

In June 1984, allegedly in order to subdue a movement which the then government of India perceived as radical, a full-scale military invasion was launched against the Golden Temple — the holiest shrine of the Sikh religion. Thousands of Sikh civilians died in the invasion and related State-led violence. In November 1984, after Sikh bodyguards of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi assassinated her (an act of vigilante violence which I have personally denounced), thousands more Sikhs were slaughtered over several days.

That was the 1984 Sikh Genocide.

Subsequently, a militancy cropped up in Punjab. Some disaffected Sikhs took up arms. Along the way, the governments of Punjab and India cracked down brutally, indiscriminately arresting thousands — perhaps tens of thousands — of Sikhs (especially youth and often off the books) and executing many of them in custody before secretly cremating their bodies to hide the evidence of the mass atrocities.

Fast forward to today.

The party that held national power at the time has been replaced by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a radical Hindu supremacist party which demands that Sikhs accept that they are merely a sub-sect of Hinduism, which denies the identity of Sikhi as the world's fifth largest religion, and which seeks their forcible assimilation into the so-called "Hindu fold." The BJP, while pursuing the assimilation of Sikhs, also wants to eliminate Indian Christians and Muslims, whom it views as "foreign" to India, "internal threats" to the nation, and "traitors."

In late 2020, the BJP administration passed several laws intended to, supposedly, "reform" the agricultural system in India. A massive, year-long protest was launched with Sikhs, who disproportionately serve as the country's farmers, spearheading the movement. Although the BJP ultimately caved to protests in December 2021 by repealing the despised farm laws, along the way it constantly attempted to smear all Sikh critics of its policies as anti-national separatists.

In a land where Sikhs are increasingly feeling alienated and oppressed, separatist sentiment has, however, found real appeal among some of the

community's youth. After a long period of being denounced as "separatists" simply for opposing particular State policies, a segment of the community now seems to feel that, if this is how they are treated for being peaceful critics, then they will pursue separatism.

Acknowledging this is simply a statement of fact, not an endorsement of the sentiment, and yet even facts appear to be banned under the current Indian regime. Moreover, affirming the civil liberties even of that vast majority of citizens who are not separatists seems to have become similarly taboo in today's India.

On 18 March 2023, the Punjab Police launched an operation to arrest Amritpal Singh. A new and increasingly vocal voice demanding "Khalistan" (a separate Sikh state), Amritpal and many of his followers allegedly instigated a February 2023 invasion of a Punjabi police station to free one of his arrested aides. After inexplicably waiting a month to seek Amritpal's arrest, the government of Punjab decided to initiate a blanket blackout of mobile internet and a ban on assembly for all 27 million Punjabis as they pursued their suspect — a ban which has now lasted at least three days.

Enter the withholding of my Twitter account in India. On the same day that civil liberties were suspended across the whole of Punjab, I posted commentary about the situation on Twitter.

Perhaps most notably, I said that Amritpal should be arrested. While this is a controversial perspective among many Sikhs who support Amritpal's views, I stand by it. As I noted, supporting his arrest is not an affirmation of either his guilt or innocence, but simply upholding the judicial process of any democratic society.

"If Amritpal Singh is suspected of a crime, then (just as in any free and fair justice system) he should be arrested, given access to an attorney, tried, and, if proven guilty, convicted," I wrote. "Instead, however, Punjab's government has used him as an excuse to deny basic liberties to all." As I further argued:

"Whatever your opinion of Amritpal Singh, a man about whom I know very little, the mass crackdown on basic civil liberties in Punjab is a totalitarian nightmare. Internet and mobile service banned, assembly banned, media censorship. From Kashmir to Punjab, where is the Azadi [freedom]?"

"This is not an endorsement of Amritpal Singh, about whom I hadn't even heard until yesterday, but a denunciation of a governmental system which strips away the civil liberties of everyone in its efforts to arrest a single person. This is not justice. It's a witch hunt.

"Freedoms of speech, of assembly, of press, of communication, and more are inalienable rights which reign supreme in any democratic nation. No situation justifies suspending them. Ever, anywhere, at all.

"It's important to remember that arresting Amritpal Singh is not wrong even if he is innocent. 'False arrest' only occurs if there's no probable cause to suspect commission of a crime. That's what trials are for: examining evidence to determine guilt or innocence.

“What is wrong is to throw out a giant net and start willy-nilly mass arresting anyone and everyone. What is especially wrong is to subject an entire citizenry to denial of basic civil liberties (especially on an extended or indefinite basis) in the dubious name of ‘security.’”

Arrest the suspect but don’t strip away the civil liberties of every citizen in order to do it was, essentially, my argument. Within approximately 36 hours of posting this, however, I discovered that my Twitter account had been banned in India.

Twitter, which has responded to three or four past demands by the Indian government to withhold various individual Tweets of mine which it disliked, has always previously sent me a notification from Twitter Legal informing me of the complaint and the withholding of the Tweet. In this case, the only notification I got was from large numbers of my Indian followers on Twitter tagging me to inform me that my account is blocked.

I am far from the only one.

Twitter accounts banned in India over the past day include those of Indian and Western politicians as well as various prominent journalists.

These include, for instance, the account of Jagmeet Singh, a Canadian Member of Parliament (MP) who leads the country’s New Democratic Party. Indian MP Simranjit Singh Mann, president of Punjab’s Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) political party. Canadian Sikh poet Rupinder Kaur. Canadian Sikh journalist Gurpreet Singh Sahota. Indian Sikh human right lawyer Jaspal Singh Manjhpur. Indian Express journalist Kamalpreet Singh Brar. Punjabi journalist Gagandeep Singh. And many, many more.

The total number of accounts suspended in India is unknown at this time, but this follows a pattern of the Indian government attempting to silence even the most benign of its critics.

In February 2021, Twitter withheld hundreds of accounts from access by Indians, most of which were linked to reporting on the Farmers Protest. These included masses of mainstream journalistic accounts which were not Sikh-owned and definitely had nothing to do with the Khalistan movement. A number of the blocked accounts were owned by non-Sikh Indian politicians.

Ongoing censorship of critics of the BJP regime goes far beyond those raising Sikh-related issues.

In January, after the BBC released a documentary highlighting Narendra Modi’s role — before he became the BJP’s Prime Minister of India — in a 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom, Modi’s regime banned it before subsequently raiding BBC India’s offices over several days. In October 2020, the Modi regime froze the bank accounts of Amnesty International India, forcing the group to end its operations; in April 2022, the regime then arbitrarily banned Amnesty India’s chair, Aakar Patel, from leaving the country. These are but a couple of recent examples.

This is how the critics are treated. But what of the hate-mongers? Over the past year or two, a host of Hindu supremacist demagogues — often in company of BJP politicians — have repeatedly spoken at conferences of hundreds or even

thousands where they distributed weapons, urged people to socially boycott religious minorities, and led the audience in oath-taking ceremonies for the creation of an exclusively Hindu nation and the slaughter of minorities. No action, in essence, has been taken against them.

In many ways, the “culture of impunity” currently tolerating this kind of hate — hate which, ultimately, always translates to violence — can trace its origins back to the 1984 Sikh Genocide. In the modern age of the Republic of India, impunity for the 1984 Sikh Genocide set the stage for the mass oppression of all Indian minorities by a supremacist movement which, if justice had been pursued at the time, probably would have never managed to rise to power.

In its 2009 annual report on India, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted that, in practice, “India’s democratic institutions charged with upholding the rule of law, most notably state and central judiciaries and police, lack capacity and have emerged as unwilling or unable to consistently seek redress for victims of religiously-motivated violence or to challenge cultures of impunity in areas with a history of communal tensions.” USCIRF linked this culture of impunity directly to 1984.

“The failure to provide justice to religious minorities targeted in violent riots in India is not a new development, and has helped foster a climate of impunity,” reported USCIRF. “In 1984, anti-Sikh riots erupted in Delhi.... Over 4 days, nearly 3,000 Sikhs were killed, allegedly with the support of Congress Party officials. Few perpetrators were ever held accountable, and only years after the fact.”

USCIRF went on to explain: “In the late 1990s, there was a marked increase in violent attacks among members of religious communities, particularly Muslims and Christians, throughout India, including incidents of killings, torture, rape, and destruction of property. Perpetrators were rarely held responsible.” In 1992, the Hindu supremacist movement instigated the mob destruction of a 16th-century mosque and ensuing massacre of up to 2,000 Muslims. “Few have been successfully prosecuted,” noted USCIRF.

Later, the Nazi-inspired Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) — the parent organization of the BJP — and many of its subsidiaries launched a pogrom against Muslims in the state of Gujarat in 2002. “Court convictions since the Gujarat riots have been minimal,” concluded USCIRF. Again, in 2008, they launched another pogrom, this time against Christians. Reporting on the 2008 incident, USCIRF stated: “Mass arrests following the riots did not translate into the actual filing of cases, exacerbating the existing culture of impunity.”

While my journalism, over the past four or five years, has been almost exclusively focused on the issue of the rise of Hindu nationalism in India and its international support base, there are certainly other human rights concerns within the country. Rights violations have occurred on many occasions before the rise of the BJP, and not all of them are purely the fault of that party. Some of this violence was by BJP affiliates at times when the party did not hold national power, but plenty of other incidents were perpetrated by different political parties or ideological groups.

However, general impunity for the worst of those past atrocities — whichever

party was responsible for perpetrating the violence — laid the groundwork for giving the current BJP regime license to engage in unchecked oppression today.

What is happening right now in Punjab, though it is a state which is not currently ruled by the BJP, is absolutely occurring with the approval of the BJP-ruled national government. Meanwhile, Muslims are on the brink of outright genocide, Christians facing rapidly escalating persecution, and now too are Sikhs coming under direct threat by the ideological forces behind the BJP.

Today, the argument by the oppressor is that it's only targeting those engaged in separatism, vigilantism, or some such. Yet the methods — as we have seen, particularly in 2019 in the northernmost region of Jammu and Kashmir — have invariably been to institute a broad crackdown that treats every single citizen as a criminal and potential threat. This, in human rights terms, is collective punishment.

Ultimately, this collective punishment will almost certainly also include methods such as torture, indefinite detention, and even extrajudicial execution — the fancy “legalese” term for murdering detainees in custody.

Stripping away the civil liberties of all is the totalitarian method the Indian government, particularly under the BJP, has employed and is employing in order to squash any and all dissent against its draconian regime. Meanwhile, peaceful but critical voices — within India or abroad — are being systematically silenced by that regime in the hope that it can perpetrate its atrocities in secrecy. Censorship, as always, remains the tool of greatest necessity for the fascist.

The international community must stand up and cry out against this anti-democratic wave of fascism which is crashing over the once free Republic of India. Without such an outcry, India will — barring a miracle — soon devolve into total tyranny. While it has been on that path for all nine years of the Modi regime, the situation has only grown worse year over year, leading now up to the present-day situation in Punjab. Yet, rumour has it, the crackdown which began in Punjab a couple of days ago is now expanding beyond the borders of that state. Security can only be found through liberty. Cry out for Azadi in India.

Pieter Fredrich is a freelance journalist and ardent campaigner for human rights

ANALYSIS OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE SUDDEN EMERGENCE OF AMRITPAL SINGH

S Jagir Singh. President Malaysian Gurdwaras Council

Chronology

1. Before October 2022 little was known about Amritpal Singh, a clean-shaven Sikh living in Dubai. On arrival in Punjab, he takes Amrit and becomes a practicing Sikh.
2. One of the first people he meets is S Harnam Singh Dhumma, Head of the Taksal who promotes the Dasam Granth as the writings of Guru

Gobind Singh, despite the rejection of at least one third of it by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee as contrary to Sikh teachings. Other parts have been identified as ancient Hindu Tales at variance with Sikh teachings.

3. Dhumma presents Amritpal Singh with a sirapau, a symbol of esteem, and a portrait of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, former head of the Taksal.
4. He now begins to move around with 20 to 30 armed guards and is portrayed by some as the successor to Sant Bhindranwale.
5. Amritpal starts doing Amrit sanchar and raising his voice against drug abuse. At the same time, he repeatedly preaches that Sikhs are slaves in Punjab. They must undo shackles of slavery and become independent. His armed guards show disdain for the elderly by breaking and burning chairs placed in gurdwaras for their use, and forcing them to sit uncomfortably on the floor alongside younger members of the congregation. The violent behaviour of the armed guards ignoring Sikh teachings on respect for the elderly, creates fear in some congregations.
6. Amritpal Singh, with his armed guards and many other armed Sikhs attack Ajnala Police station where one of their group members is being held. Some police personnel are injured. Amritpal and his supporters then occupy the Police station. Astonishingly, initially no effort was made to arrest any of the attackers. It seemed that the police and State government of Punjab and Police were biding their time to justify a wider clampdown in Punjab.
7. A few days later, the Chief Minister of Punjab meets the Indian Minister of Home Affairs to ask for central military assistance. The police and military launch a joint operation to arrest those who were involved in the Ajnala incident. Strict instructions were given not to shoot when making arrests. Many of the demonstrators were arrested. Amritpal was seen being driven at speed in his Mercedes. He was followed by police cars, but no attempt was made to arrest him.
8. On 29 March 2023, Amritpal released a video saying he has escaped and is safe. He had linked his escape to assistance by Sri Guru Gobind Singh. His followers can be expected to say that Guru ji was protecting him to create a mystic aura around Amritpal. Meanwhile, near martial law is imposed on Punjab with hundreds, mainly young Sikhs arrested, movement curtailed, restrictions on the press and internet restrictions.

Disturbing Analysis

Now let us look at other earlier events to make sense of above.

1. The BJP Home Minister Amit Shah met the Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib in Amritsar behind closed doors about a year ago for about two hours. What transpired is not known, but a month later the central government

provided the Jathedar with central force bodyguards who had direct links with Minister of Home affairs.

2. The powerful Badal family, the BJP, Mr Dhumma, and the RSS have close and direct links. There are many reports exposes of their being together which are difficult to dispute. Amritpal's meeting with Mr Dhumma on arriving in India, meant that he also had the blessings of the Badals, the BJP and the RSS for his controversial mission. Amritpal had a one-to-one meeting with the Jathedar Akal Takhat Sahib in February this year. No one knows what was discussed, but the conjecture is that they talked about what Amritpal had to do to avoid arrest.

. Conclusions.

Evidence points to the possibility that:

1. *Amritpal was given free-reign to create unrest in Punjab and legitimise central government intervention.*
2. *The Ajnala disturbances appear to have been deliberately planned to legitimise central army intervention.*
3. *The arrests were planned to arouse Sikhs anger thereby calling of a Sarbat Khalsa meeting of protest.*
4. *That the planned meeting could lead to unrest and instability.*
5. *This itself could lead to Delhi imposing direct rule and possibly suspending Punjab State Assembly.*

MEETING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG SIKHS

Lord (Indarjit) Singh

Many will be familiar with the story of Guru Nanak's visit to two villages. The first village was hostile to his ideas while the second village was receptive and hospitable. To the astonishment of his companion, Guru Nanak prayed for the continued wellbeing of the inhabitants of the first village while hoping that circumstance would lead to those in the second more enlightened village moving to other places. Guru Nanak wanted kindness and concern for others, the essence of Sikh teachings, to be spread to more distant places.

Partition and the 1984 genocide resulted in many Sikhs leaving India to settle in the West carrying with them the wisdom of Sikh teachings. Those arriving in the 50's and 60's found enormous obstacles, as did those arriving later from East Africa. Open racism led to difficulties in employment and housing, and for Sikh children teasing and taunting in schools. Teachers were also guilty of a lack of sensitivity and understanding. I helped in a case where one child came to school wearing a turban

for the first time and was told by the teacher that it was 'grotesque, like something out of a pantomime'. Imagine what that did for the child's sense of self-esteem.

Despite all the challenges, this earlier generation of Sikhs still managed to open gurdwaras for prayer and socialising, while introducing their children to the tolerant teachings of our Gurus. The gurdwaras were always full. One gurdwara in South London had an active youth wing that encouraged discussion of Sikh teachings in English, debating and sporting activities.

I recently visited the same gurdwara. The service was coming to an end, yet there were more people in the langar hall than those listening to the kirtan in the half-full prayer hall. The absence of young people was all too obvious.

Why the apathy? Sikhs in the UK have taken their eyes off the ball. Undoubted economic success has led us to forget our spiritual responsibilities to the next generation and, in the spirit of the story of Guru Nanak's visit to the two villages, our need to make the world around us aware of the richness of Sikh teachings and how these can lead society to more responsible living.

I once spoke about Sikh teachings at an interfaith meeting. When I finished, a voice from the back asked 'why haven't we heard before about such wonderful teachings? I replied somewhat smugly, 'Sikhs don't proselytise'. The questioner at the back again stood up and said 'you should be ashamed of yourselves for not sharing guidance that can help us all.

We urgently need to re-introduce or increase lectures and discussions in English in our gurdwaras, the language young people best understand, to give Sikhs in schools, colleges and the workplace confidence and pride in their inheritance to carry the wisdom of Sikh teachings on balanced and responsible living to the next generation and into a wider world.

Separatist or stooge: mystery of Amritpal Singh, Sikh preacher on the run.

Sunday Times 25 March 2023

Kapil Komireddi

For days Indians have been gripped by one of the biggest manhunts in the country's recent history. The quarry is Amritpal Singh, a 30-year-old Sikh preacher who has emerged as a ferocious proponent of Khalistan—a Sikh theocracy to be carved out of the north-western state of Punjab. In incendiary sermons Singh had demanded displays of loyalty from Punjab's Muslims and Hindus.

To incite his growing band of followers he has portrayed Sikhs as a superior race subjugated by India, Hindus as a perfidious community, and Punjab as the fallen Eden whose greatness and glory could only be restored by seceding from India and erecting walls around itself to keep out non-Sikh contaminants.

With a massive operation under way to detain him last week, Singh appeared at the house of the elderly custodian of a remote Sikh temple in Punjab brandishing a rifle.

The old man was forced to feed the unwelcome guest, who helped himself to fresh clothes in the house and fled in disguise.

Videos shared on social media have captured him in a convoy of cars being chased by police, fleeing on the back of a motorbike and walking hidden by an umbrella in a neighbouring state. Singh's supporters, meanwhile, have attacked India's diplomatic missions in San Francisco and London.

India has retaliated by summoning British and American diplomats in New Delhi to lodge protests. It has even scaled down security outside the British High Commissioner's residence in the Indian capital.

Singh himself remains a mysterious figure. The scale of the operation to apprehend him, indicating the seriousness of the threat Singh is seen to pose, is a testament to his extraordinary rise.

The questions it raises are more worrying for India's future even than the disqualification last week from parliament for procedural reasons of Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the Gandhi dynasty and a leader of the opposition Congress Party.

A year ago, Singh was an unknown. Having dropped out of school with no qualifications, he was working as a truck driver in Dubai. His posts on social media, critical of prime minister Narendra Modi and supportive of the — mostly Sikh — farmers agitating against legislation to reform agriculture, hinted at Singh's views but did not distinguish him from other protesters.

Then, last summer, Singh abruptly returned to India and proclaimed himself the leader of Waris Punjab De — Heirs of Punjab — an activist outfit floated by a Punjabi actor called Deep Sidhu to aid farmers. Sidhu, once affiliated with Modi's Hindu-first Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), died in a car crash in February of last year. By August, Singh had cast himself as Sidhu's successor.

The dead actor's family and friends, having never heard of Singh until then, denounced him as an interloper. But Singh had by then inexplicably gained control of the organisation's social media channels, which declared him the rightful heir to Sidhu.

Clean shaven and not particularly observant during his expatriate years in the Emirates, Singh reinvented himself as a stern Sikh guru who upbraided young men for trimming their beards. He mimicked the appearance and usurped the vocabulary of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the militant Sikh advocate for Khalistan who had terrorised Punjab in the early 1980s.

In 1984, Indian forces led by Sikh officers killed Bhindranwale inside his hideout in the Golden Temple, Sikhism's holiest shrine. That action, known as Operation Blue Star, provoked a maelstrom that devoured the lives of prime minister Indira Gandhi — who was assassinated by her own Sikh bodyguards for authorising the mission — and thousands of Sikhs who were slaughtered in the subsequent sectarian riots.

Four decades later Singh has struck at the communal harmony forged since then between Sikhs and the other 98 per cent of India's population.

Most Sikhs are appalled by him, even those who are aghast at Modi's Hindu nationalism. Sikhism was founded as an egalitarian brotherhood by a great Hindu reformer, its theology borrowed heavily from Hinduism, and for centuries it was regarded, like Buddhism and Jainism, as a highly autonomous branch of Hinduism. Sikhs are not a distinct "race". They are descended almost entirely from Punjab's Hindu peasantry. And far from being seen as a threat to national security Sikhs have long been overrepresented in India's defence institutions. Within "the Punjabi Sikh community" in India, as Andrew Major, a distinguished scholar of the state, has written, "genuine commitment to the creation of a separate Sikh state" has been rare.

The appeal of Khalistan has always been much stronger among a radical minority within the sprawling Sikh diaspora communities who have financed violent ethnoreligious nationalism from their multicultural havens in the West.

The loudest calls against Singh have come, unsurprisingly, from within the Sikh community in India. But his transformation from a provincial rabble-rouser into an international celebrity has been facilitated by India's overwhelmingly pro-Modi press, which breathlessly covered his every move, conducted respectful interviews with him, and heralded him as the 21st-century avatar of Bhindranwale.

By the time action was initiated against him, Singh had grown sufficiently powerful to be able to inflict collateral damage. Last month Singh's heavily armed followers stormed a police station in Punjab. How is it that in a country where students have been hauled off to jail for tame speeches, Singh managed to remain untouched even as he raised a private militia and issued calls for India's balkanisation? And how has he managed to elude 80,000 police personnel for a week?

One casualty of Singh is the government of Punjab, which is headed by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), perhaps the most successful recent entrant to Indian politics. Founded in 2012, the AAP already controls two states, New Delhi and Punjab, and is emerging as a formidable contender for power against the BJP in other parts of India. Singh has succeeded in embarrassing the AAP and making it appear to be weak. India is agog with conspiratorial whispers that Singh is a pawn of the BJP.

Punjab's history lends plausibility to such rumours. It was a partisan calculation in the 1970s by the then dominant Congress Party that prompted Sanjay Gandhi to patronise Bhindranwale. Indira Gandhi's son plucked the preacher from obscurity and even paid the bill for the inaugural meeting of Bhindranwale's party. He had hoped to use the Sikh preacher as a puppet to neuter the Congress Party's opponents in Punjab. Instead, he created a monster that got out of hand and inaugurated a decade of carnage in the state and beyond. Indians can only hope that their politicians have learnt the right lessons from the past.

Kapil Komireddi is the author of *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*

Response from Network of Sikh Organisations UK

Sikhs were hunted down – letter in the Sunday Times 2nd April 2023

Your article: "Firebrand Sikh: Separatist or stooge? Mystery of preacher on the run in India" (World News, last week) raises an interesting question about the fate of pro-separatism Sikhs previously affiliated to Indian ruling parties over the years, be they Congress or the BJP. However, the author minimises the anti-Sikh genocide of 1984. When Indian forces attacked the Golden Temple, "militants" were neutralised, but many innocent pilgrims were also killed in cold blood. Between 5000-7,000 lives are estimated to have been lost. In the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination armed mobs by Congress party politicians had access to electoral registers which they used to mark Sikh households. Women were gang-raped, men murdered, and children set on fire with tyres around their necks. Calling these state-sponsored pogroms "sectarian riots" masks the murderous truth.

Lord Singh of Wimbledon
Director, Network of Sikh Organisations

HOUSE OF COMMONS OUTBURST BY BOB BLACKMAN MP- HANSARD 23-3-23

'The hooliganism of Khalistani hooligans outside the Indian high commission on Sunday is a disgrace to this country. This is the sixth time in as many years that the high commission has been attacked in a similar way. As my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), pointed out, security guards were injured, an attempt was made to remove the tricolour and windows were smashed. Khalistani militants are operating across the world; Canada, the United States and Australia saw similar attacks over the weekend. We are harbouring Khalistani terrorists in this country right now. Can we have a debate in Government time on what action we can take to ensure that these terrorists are held to account and banned in this country?'

Bob Blackman is a recipient of the Padma Shiri for his support to the Modi Government

RESPONSE

Bob Blackman MP, House of Commons, SW1A 0AA

Dear Bob

It was good meeting you at the celebration of Nawraz, the Iranian New Year earlier this month.

I am concerned by your blanket condemnation of some Sikhs who, for understandable reasons, see self-determination as a solution for a long-standing persecution of their community. While the violent behaviour of some outside the Indian embassy in London should be deplored, the UN itself supports the right of all people to self-determination. The background to the current unrest was the campaign of Amritpal Singh of Waris Punjab De who, with some strident followers in Punjab, was asking for a separate Sikh state. He and his followers are now in custody.

As you rightly said when addressing Iranian exiles, freedom of speech is a fundamental right, and if Amritpal Singh or any of his followers went beyond peaceful demonstration they can be duly charged. In your speech in the Commons, you made no balancing reference to the government's over the top clamp down against Sikhs in Punjab. Indian authorities have been arresting and raiding the homes of human rights activists with internet blackouts, social media crackdowns, and misinformation being spread across national news Twitter accounts of prominent Sikhs overseas (including that of a Canadian politician) highlighting India's record of human rights violations as well as the state's current clampdown, have been censored in India. Respected Sikh journalists in India have also been censored, with the Asia Desk of the Committee to Protect Journalists raising their plight, and journalists overseas have been sent threatening messages for daring to talk about what's happening. This is not a proportionate reaction and I hope you will mention it if there is a debate in Parliament.

While its right to deplore violence, we should also deplore over-the-top repression by the Indian authorities.

Kind regards Indarjit (Lord Singh of Wimbledon)

Talk On Sikhism To Pupils Of King Edwards School Birmingham

Lord (Indarjit) Singh

I am really to Matthew Bartlett for inviting me this evening to give this virtual talk about Sikh teachings and their relevance to the world today. I'd like to start by giving you a brief thumb nail sketch of Sikh teachings and then go on to explain how these and the teachings of sister faiths can help make ours a more cohesive and tolerant society.

Sikhism is a little over 500 years old. It started with the teachings of Guru Nanak who was born in 1469. Guru Nanak lived at a time of considerable conflict between the majority Hindu community, largely sunk in ritual and superstition, and Muslim invaders from the North, often bent on forced conversion. The majority Hindu community was dominated by a priestly class called Brahmins who taught that they, and they only could say prayers written in difficult to understand Sanskrit. Women and lower castes were not even allowed to look at religious scriptures. The religious duty of people was to give Brahmins food and money. It was a time when the uplifting teachings of religion had largely given way to bigotry and claims of superiority. Each community looked on others as lesser beings.

It was against this background that the Guru in his very first sermon said 'na koi Hindu, na koi Mussalman—that is that in God's eyes there is neither Hindu nor Muslim, and by today's extension neither Christian, Sikh or Jew. That is that the one God of us all is not interested in our different religious labels but in what we do. This

is one of the central messages of Sikhism, that the one God of us all is not aligned to any one faith and that our different religions are like different paths up a mountain leading to an understanding of God. He taught all paths should be respected and that our different faiths should not get in the way of understanding that we all equal members of the same one human race and this equality naturally extends to women.

Our holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib begins with a description of God with the words 'God was there before time, in the present and ever more. It goes on, God is without fear, without favorites, beyond birth and death, self-created, beyond time. Sikhism teaches that we should look to the three dimensions of balanced living at one and the same time. These are naam jaapna, kirt karna and wand chakhna. Naam japna is reflecting on the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib to get a direction on life; kirt karna is earning an honest living, and wand chakna the sharing of material wealth with the less fortunate.

Guru Nanak once met a group of supposedly holy men searching for an understanding of God in mountain wilderness. He told them that they would not find God in the wilderness, but in the care of their families and wider society. Today there is not much wilderness, but it is all too easy to escape into a virtual wilderness of personal obsessions, or computer and internet distractions to the neglect of social responsibilities.

Guru Nanak also warned against the chasing of money for its own sake. A rich man by the name of Dunni Chand came to the Guru and said I have accumulated a fortune in this world, what do I have to do to achieve similar success in the hereafter? The Guru gave him a needle and said it was his passport for similar success in the hereafter. He showed the needle to his wife and she laughed at him saying how can you keep a needle with you when you die?

The Guru wanted to ensure that we do not simply pay lip service to these ethical principles of responsible living but make them central to all we do. He therefore instituted a system of succession and in all there were 10 living Gurus, who showed that Guru Nanak's teachings were relevant in widely varying social and political environments. Living true to such teachings often led to confrontation with those in power and authority and two of the ten Gurus were cruelly martyred for their beliefs.

Guru Arjan, the 5th Guru, dedicated his life to interfaith understanding. He showed his respect for other faiths, by including verses of Hindu and Muslim saints in our holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, to show no one faith has a monopoly of truth. He invited a Muslim saint to lay the foundation stone of the famous Golden Temple in Amritsar to show his respect for different religions, and he placed doors on the four sides of the building to emphasise a welcome to all people from any spiritual or geographic direction. He was cruelly martyred by the narrow-minded religious ruler.

The 9th Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, gave his life for the right of people of another religion to freedom of worship. A delegation of Hindu pundits from Kashmir concerned about the forced conversion of their community by the Mughal rulers visited the Guru and said that we know that you do not agree with some of our religious practices, but you and other Sikh Gurus have always stood up for freedom of worship. Will you go to the Mughal Emperor in Delhi and implore him to end the

persecution of our community?

Guru Teg Bahadur knew to do so would probably cost him his life. But true to the teachings of Sikhism on tolerance and respect for other communities, made the journey to Delhi, and on a cold winters day was publicly beheaded by the Mughal Emperor for his support for freedom of belief.

The Mughals challenged Sikhs who then had no distinguishing identity to come out of the watching crowd and claim their master's body. But they hesitated to show themselves, and the Guru's body was eventually removed by stealth. The incident has its parallel with the earlier martyrdom of Jesus Christ when the disciple Peter thrice denied being a follower of Christ.

The tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh decreed that in future Sikhs must always be ready to stand up for their beliefs, however daunting the circumstances. On the spring festival of Vaisakhi in 1699, he decided to test Sikhs for their courage asking for those ready to die for their beliefs to step forward. To his delight Sikhs readily came forward. It was simply a test for courage and the first five were honoured by the Guru as the first members of the Khalsa or committed Sikhs ready to live by and if necessary, die for Sikh ideals.

The Guru was now sure that the infant Sikh community could stand on its own without the need for further living Gurus and declared that the teachings of earlier Gurus as recorded in the Sikh Holy Granth should be followed by Sikhs as they would a living Guru.

Sikhs have had to endure many hardships fighting religious bigotry and oppression of the poor. But even in battle there is a requirement to show compassion to the enemy. There is the story of a Sikh water carrier supplying water to the enemy wounded. He was taken before Guru Gobind Singh by angry Sikh soldiers. To their surprise, the Guru embraced the water carrier for living true to Sikh teachings on compassion even in battle. The Guru was now sure that the infant Sikh community could stand on its own without the need for further living Gurus and declared that the teachings of earlier Gurus as recorded in the Sikh Holy Granth should be followed by Sikhs as they would a living Guru.

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In concluding this brief talk on Sikh teachings, I would like to refer to a Normal Distribution a bell-shaped curve that many of you would have come across in statistics. At one end of the curve there are people called manmukhs, evil and greedy people who do nothing to make this world a better place; in the larger middle area of the curve are the majority of people who do little harm or good, and then at the other end of society there are those who Sikhs call gurmukhs, those who devote their time and energy helping to make society a better place. I am confident that

pupils at King Edwards will be at the gurmukh end of the curve. Thank you for listening to me.

BOOK REVIEW

Thoughts on Politics and Society by Lord Singh of Wimbledon Broadcasts on BBC Radio 4

Hardeep Singh

Lord Singh of Wimbledon, otherwise known as Indarjit Singh, became a household name for his regular broadcasts over 35 years on Radio 4's three-minute religious slot 'Thought for the Day' (TFTD). His first broadcast was in 1983, until his resignation in 2019 - on a matter of principle when an overzealous producer attempted to censor a talk on Guru Tegh Bahadur's stand on freedom of belief. In the end, the broadcast went ahead and was well received. A *Times* editorial referred to the corporation's behaviour towards Indarjit as 'shabby treatment' and called for an apology. The launch of a new book – *Thoughts on Politics and Society – Broadcasts on Radio 4* - captures Indarjit's broadcasting experience over three and a half decades. It includes his personal reflections, in addition to transcripts of his contributions over the years, which have been appreciated widely resulting in his nomination as the 'people's peer' in a 2005 poll of Radio 4 listeners, coming second to Bob Geldof.

Reflecting on his first few years as a presenter on TFTD, Indarjit writes, 'In the mid-eighties, the Indian government labelled all Sikhs as terrorists to justify the Indian army attack on the Golden Temple on one of the holiest days in the Sikh calendar. The talented and affable Producer Brian Redhead latched onto this as I came in to do a TFTD and asked me 'where's your bomb? I replied, I didn't want to bring it into the studio and left it outside an office marked Director General.' He casually takes what would be considered by most as an insult with his characteristic sense of humour.

In his first broadcast 'the lift is full' he illustrates the absurdity of common prejudices in society. As the lift at Indarjit's workplace went from the 8th floor down, members of different departments entered at each floor. Those already in the lift stuck out their stomachs suggesting the lift was full, with no room left for outsiders. However, the coterie of bulging stomachs didn't deter others from getting in, be they engineers (like Indarjit), or the civil servants on the lower floor. Indarjit tells us, 'I think my little story tells us a lot about human nature. It's rare for anyone getting into a lift or train or entering a new country, to be made welcome by those already there. But soon, the newcomer and the original inhabitants assume a near common identity, and perversely, strengthen this in joint hostility to further newcomers, or simply foreigners in general.' This phenomenon is a recurrent theme in the various transcripts, so much so that it's later formalised into 'Indarjit's law' - that being 'when two or more people find sufficient in common to call themselves us, they will immediately look for a them to hate' to strengthen their new found unity.

Of course, the various anecdotes Indarjit shared over the decades are examined through the lens of Sikh teachings, rooted in equality and tolerance for all, with many references to the teachings of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Hence why a British Ambassador, at an interfaith conference in Estonia introduced Indarjit as, 'the man who brought Guru Nanak to the breakfast tables of Britain'. Nanak's immortalised words of wisdom 'truth is high, but higher still is truthful living', encouraging individuals to become the embodiment of ethical living themselves, rather than merely follow dogma, have been shared with millions of listeners – many learning about Sikhism for the first time. A few years before Indarjit's first broadcast, a broadsheet newspaper had a crossword with the clue for a four-letter word meaning 'Punjabi Hindu' – the answer ignorantly being 'Sikh'. Indarjit's broadcasts not only improved wider recognition for Sikhs, but undoubtedly improved the nation's level of religious literacy. In one broadcast Indarjit tells the audience, 'Sikhs believe that our different faiths are like paths up a mountain towards an understanding of God through pursuing truth, equity, and justice in our daily lives'. That's one way of emphasising there is no monopoly on the truth.

Although TFTD is a religious slot (with calls to incorporate humanists) – Indarjit's imparting of ethical teachings rooted in Sikh ethos over the years, come in the wake of the political issues of the day – the rise of populism, rulings at the European Court of Human Rights and the fall of the Berlin wall, to name but a few. A variety of former political leaders like Tony Blair, Gorbachev and President Bush get a passing mention in the transcripts – but one thing remains constant throughout the 35 years, that is communication of the eternal and immutable wisdom of the Sikh Gurus.

When Indarjit left TFTD James Purnell, BBC Director of Radio wrote to him and said: 'I have no doubt that your contribution over many years is deeply appreciated by the Radio 4 audience as a voice of wisdom in these intolerant times'.

This book is a repository of that very wisdom and deserves a prominent place on all our bookshelves. It is available through Amazon, WH Smith and other retailers.

Hardeep Singh is the assistant editor of the *Sikh Messenger*

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

- **Sikh involvement in the coronation of King Charles 111**
- **NSO Annual Report 22-23**
- **House of Lords Debate on Asylum and Refugee Policy.**

A Summary of Sikh Teachings

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak who was born in Punjab in 1469. It was a time of hostility between the weak, majority Hindu community and Muslim invaders from the North, bent on forced conversion. Each claimed that theirs was the one true religion.

Against this background, Guru Nanak, in his very first sermon taught:

'The one God of us all isn't in the least bit interested in our different religious labels like Hindu or Muslim', or by today's extension, Christian, Sikh or Jew. God, the Guru taught, is only concerned with what we do in life, particularly to help the disadvantaged and oppressed.

Sikhism teaches that different religions are simply different paths to our understanding of God and our responsibilities in life. The Sikh teaching that we are all equal members of the one human family naturally follows from this, as does the emphasis on the full equality of women. Sikh women often lead congregational worship and are encouraged to fully participate in all walks of life.

Guru Nanak instituted a system of successor Gurus who showed by the example of their own lives that the principles of Sikhism remained relevant in different political and social circumstances. It wasn't easy, and two of the Gurus were cruelly martyred for teaching tolerance and the right to freedom of belief. The first of these martyrs was Guru Arjan, the 5th Guru and main author of the Sikh scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, in which, in addition to compositions of the Sikh Gurus, he also included verses of Hindu and Muslim saints to emphasize that no one religion has a monopoly of truth.

The 9th Guru, Teg Bahadur, though disagreeing with some aspects of Hindu worship, was publically beheaded for defending their right to freedom of worship against attempts of forced conversion by the Mughal rulers. At the time, Sikhs had no distinguishing symbols and were too cowed to be identified as Sikhs and claim their Guru's body, which was eventually removed by stealth.

The 10th Guru, Gobind Singh, son of the martyred Guru, thought long and hard about this lapse of courage, and how to ensure Sikhs always stood up for their beliefs. On the Spring festival of Baisakhi 1699, he challenged Sikhs to come forward if they were ready to stand up for their beliefs even at the cost of their lives. Sikhs readily came forward. The delighted Guru knew that Sikhism could now flourish without the guidance of further living Gurus. He gave Sikhs a distinct identity as a constant reminder of a commitment to live true to Sikh values at all times. The most noticeable of Sikh symbols is uncut hair covered with a turban. Others are a small comb as a reminder of the need for cleanliness, a steel bracelet, a kirpan or short sword, and shorts or trousers to replace the cumbersome Indian dhoti. The Guru then added verses of Guru Teg Bahadur to the Holy Granth and asked Sikhs to follow the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib as they would a living Guru.

A Sikh place of worship is called a gurdwara, and essentially consists of a prayer hall and an area for communal eating, the langar hall. All people, regardless of race, religion or social standing are always welcome to join Sikhs for langar, which in larger gurdwaras is served from dawn to dusk.

Sikhism is not a religion of renunciation, but one of a commitment to positive action for self-improvement and improvement of society as a whole. Sikhs are expected to follow the threefold path of *naam japna*, *kirt karna* and *wand chakhna*, that is: reflecting on spiritual guidance, earning by honest effort and using talents, wealth and experience to help others. Sikh teachings see people in three categories: 'manmukhs' who care only about themselves, then there are those who, while doing little harm to others, do little to make the world a better place, and at the positive end of the spectrum, there are the 'gurmukhs', those committed to working for the wellbeing of others who leave the world better for they having lived. The whole thrust of Sikh teachings is to move us to the gurmukh end of the spectrum.

Lord (Indarjit) Singh Director Network of Sikh Organisations UK

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) is a registered charity no.1064544 that links more than 130 UK gurdwaras and other UK Sikh organisations in active cooperation to enhance the image and understanding of Sikhism in the UK

Some of the things we do:

- Promote unity and cooperation between all Sikh organisations in the UK, whether or not affiliated to the NSO
- Enhance the image and understanding of Sikhism throughout the UK through broadcasts on radio and television and articles in UK dailies and the social media
- Promote and participate in inter-faith dialogue and the active promotion of tolerance and respect between faiths.
- Through the Sikh Chaplaincy Service (SCS) provide spiritual and pastoral care to all Sikhs in prison establishments in the UK
- NSO is the Endorsing authority for Mandeep Kaur, Sikh Chaplain to the Armed Services
- Support Sikh chaplains in hospitals,
- NSO is the recognised authority for the inspection of Sikh faith schools and is represented on the Religious Education Council and the All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Religious Education. Deputy Director NSO Education Dr Kanwaljit Singh OBE. provides training and guidance to Sikh schools.
- NSO is actively engaged in the protection of human rights and religious freedom with NSO Director serving a Vice Chair of the APPG for international religious freedom. The 'NSO is also supported by Deputy Director Jesbir Uppal of "Freedom Declared."
- Work with government and other statutory and non-statutory bodies to ensure that the views and concerns of UK Sikhs are fully represented.
- Counter the numerous sants, babas and politically motivated individuals who seek to distort the Gurus' teachings and establish their own 'maryada'

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