



THE SIKH MESSENGER

A MAGAZINE OF THE
NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK



CORONATION OF KING CHARLES III

**LORD SINGH OF WIMBLEDON PRESENTS
THE NEW KING WITH THE CORONATION GLOVE**

AUTUMN - WINTER 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

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS

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THE SIKH MESSENGER

Autumn / Winter 2023

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EDITORIAL

HUMAN RIGHTS OF SIKHS ABROAD

1. THE TIMES ON THE KILLING OF A CANADIAN SIKH 20-9-23 PRIME SUSPECT

India risks being cast as a rogue state following an assassination in Canada. A country like Canada would not accuse an ostensibly friendly nation — an important partner in the Commonwealth no less — of murdering a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil without good reason. So the statement by Justin Trudeau, Canada's prime minister, that India is squarely in the frame for the shooting dead of a Canadian Sikh political activist in a suburb of Vancouver in June is cause for concern. Relations between the two countries have been plunged into deep freeze as the Canadian authorities continue to investigate "credible allegations" that "agents of the government of India" were complicit in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh nationalist, prominent member of the Sikh diaspora in Canada and thorn in the side of India's prime minister, Narendra Modi. An Indian diplomat has been expelled by Ottawa and Delhi has followed suit with the tit-for-tat expulsion of a Canadian official.

If this allegation is true it could mark a turning point in how India, the world's biggest democracy, is perceived internationally. Mr Modi, a substantial figure in global politics, could find himself cast alongside Vladimir Putin as a rogue actor. Mr Modi's muscular instincts are well known.

Under his rule India has slipped down global rankings for religious and press freedom. In February the BBC's offices in Delhi were raided in retaliation for a documentary alleging that Mr Modi failed to protect Muslims suffering deadly sectarian attacks in 2002 when he was chief minister of Gujarat. His foreign policy is marked by a reluctance to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a pragmatic if cynical stance based on trade and Moscow's importance as an arms supplier. But the sanctioning of a political assassination of a foreign national would take matters to an altogether different level. Despite fears about his growing authoritarianism Mr Modi has maintained his position in the global mainstream. But killing Mr Nijjar, who was designated by Delhi as a terrorist for his championing of a Sikh homeland in the Punjab, takes India out of that mainstream and into the dubious company of "hit job" states like Russia.

This is a serious headache for the British, who are caught between two powerful Commonwealth members. Loyalty to Canada, a Nato partner and Five Eyes intelligence ally, is set against a desire for closer commercial ties with India, slated to be one of the big three economies by the middle of the century. Rishi Sunak has invested much political capital in a trade deal with India and basked in his relationship with Mr Modi during the G20 summit in Delhi. Mr Trudeau warns that Indian involvement would constitute an "unacceptable violation" of Canada's sovereignty. If he calls in the debt for Canada's solidarity with Britain after the

Salisbury nerve agent attack (four Russian spies based in Ottawa and Montreal were expelled) Mr Sunak could find himself having to sanction the Indian high commission in London. Safe to say that say the prime minister would be loath to do such a thing. But The diplomatic fallout from this affair is likely to be extensive. This is not Russians carrying out a “wet job” on Russians on foreign soil, which in the case of Sergei and Yulia Skripal resulted in severe reprisals against Russian embassies in the West. It is allegedly the murder by a foreign power of a Canadian citizen in Canada. This is a huge provocation that Mr Modi and his shadowy lieutenants in India’s intelligence apparatus may come to regret.

Courtesy The Times 20-9-23

2. HUMAN RIGHTS OF A BRITISH SIKH

Sikhs in the UK are increasingly concerned about the UK’s obsession with trade deal with the Modi government at the cost of human rights. In a comment in the Lords, I referred to the silence of the UK government over the illegal six-year detention and torture of Jagtar Singh Johal, a UK Sikh citizen while on a visit to Punjab. PM Rishi Sunak had an opportunity to raise the UK’s concerns in the strongest possible terms. Instead, mind focussed on trade, he simply lavished praise on Mr Modi, prompting me to make the following statement, and to the House’s credit in the discussion that followed, no member supported the government’s position.

Question by Lord Singh of Wimbledon

Does the Minister agree that it does nothing for Britain’s standing in the world when a British Prime Minister, looking for a favourable trade deal, expresses admiration for a man who was barred from entry into the United States and the UK for atrocities against Muslims in Gujarat, whose Home Minister refers to Muslims as “termites” and whose party is committed to turning India into a Hindu state, to the detriment of minorities?

Reply Minister Lord Ahmad (Con)

My Lords, I assure the noble Lord that we raised Mr Johal’s case. We have a wide-ranging relationship with India, and in that regard we have a very constructive dialogue, including, as I have raised directly on a number of occasions, on a wide range of human rights issues. I am sorry, but I do not subscribe to the noble Lord’s description of either India or the Prime Minister of India. I declare an interest as someone who has Indian heritage and is Muslim by faith.

Editor’s Note

The irony of a British minister refusing to criticise the Indian government in its treatment of Mr Johal, and what the minister termed ‘a wide range of human rights issues, is in marked contrast with the bold stance of the Canadian government.

The Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was unequivocal in condemning the behaviour of the Indian government to Indian origin Canadian citizens. Appalled by ‘credible evidence’ that the Indian government was behind the killing of a Sikh Canadian national, he criticised India’s behaviour in forthright terms, during the G20 summit in Delhi and in the Canadian parliament. Sikhs and others applaud his bold stance in support of the right to freedom of expression of Canadian citizens in a world of murky compromises for trade and so-called strategic interest.

OUR DIRECTOR'S CENTRAL ROLE AT KING'S CORONATION

Hardeep Singh, Assistant Editor

It is a matter of great pride that Lord Singh of Wimbledon, the Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations played a pivotal role in the King's coronation back in May 2023, and in doing so represented Britain's 524,000 strong Sikh community. He was part of a procession of peers who walked up to the altar and was also chosen to hand over a key piece of coronation regalia to King Charles III. During the ceremony at Westminster Abbey in London, Lord Singh handed over the Coronation Glove to King Charles. The multi-faith contingent of peers included a Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Sikh, and others – a signal of the King's emphasis on the importance of interfaith cooperation and a reflection of multi-faith Britain. Aside from the procession, and handing over Coronation regalia, the service also concluded with peers (including Lord Singh) doing a reading for the King on his exit from the Abbey. Thus, the beginning and end of the service could be seen as symbolic of the King's commitment to interfaith and role beyond being the designated head of the Church of England.

In the run up to the Coronation there was much speculation about the role's faith leaders would play, given the ceremony has traditionally been exclusively Christian. Lord Singh told the *Hindustan Times*, 'It's a great honour for me, but much more for the wider Sikh community, in this country, in India and further afield wherever Sikhs are across the globe. It's a recognition of the King's view of inclusivity'. He went on, 'I have known King Charles for many years, we met on many occasions, seminars, presentations, and I admire the work he is doing against global warming, care of the environment and so on. But I admire his attitude to religion even more.'

In fact, Lord Singh of Wimbledon was one of the first faith leaders to meet the King in September 2022, following the Queen's death. '[The King] has always been a good friend of Sikhs', Lord Singh wrote in a previous edition of *The Sikh Messenger*. At the time Lord Singh also recounted how during their meeting in September, Charles 'pledged to uphold not only the Christian faith, but also the right of all faiths to worship in the manner of their choice, something central to Sikh teachings'. The King prides himself to be recognized as not only the head of the Church of England, but a monarch with broader responsibilities to the mosaic of Britain's multicultural and multifaith society. In the 1990s, King Charles (then-Prince of Wales) spoke of the concept of a 'modern monarchy' being the 'defender of faith', as opposed to simply, 'defender of the faith', comments which came under some scrutiny at the time. However, the constitution of faith representatives involved in the Coronation is a testament to his longstanding and sincere commitment to these inclusive and tolerant values.

Back in 1999, several years prior to my joining of the Network of Sikh Organisations, the charity organised a seminal event at the Royal Albert Hall, where the then Prince of Wales attended as guest of honour. In fact, I'd heard about the event at the time, whilst being an undergraduate university student - an uncle attended. The event marked the tercentenary celebrations of the birth of the Khalsa, a fraternity founded in

1699 by the tenth Guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh, to push back against Mughal aggression. The future King gave a wonderfully entertaining and erudite speech. He referenced visits to India, and his utmost admiration for Sikh ethos. He was introduced with great appreciation at the event by Lord Singh – then known as Dr Indarjit Singh.

Indeed, Lord Singh has known King Charles for many decades. Our director's inordinate contribution to the interfaith movement in this country, and his regular Thought for the Day broadcasts on BBC Radio 4 received wide recognition and acclaim. In 1989, he became the first non-Christian to be awarded the UK Templeton Prize 'for the furtherance of spiritual and ethical understanding', and amongst those who listened to his broadcasts were members of the Royal Family. It is then little surprise that King Charles chose Lord Singh (a longstanding friend) to represent the Sikh faith at his Coronation. Although in polite conversation with others about Sikh leadership here, I often say, 'we have more leaders than Sikhs' – Lord Singh is considered by many as the de-facto leader of Britain's Sikh community.

The King's progressive view of multifaith Britain and Sikhism's contribution to it, gives us much to celebrate. Lord Singh's involvement in this historic ceremony - is a matter of great pride to us all here at the Network of Sikh Organisations – and something most Sikhs (and wider faiths) will remember as a sign of an inclusive and modern monarchy.

CONCLUSION OF THE CORONATION SERVICE

Declaration of support in service to the nation spoken by faith leaders to newly installed King Charles III as he was leaving Westminster Abbey.

'Your Majesty, as neighbours in faith, we acknowledge the value of public service. We unite with people of all faiths and beliefs in thanksgiving, and in service with you for the common good.'

NOTE

The words were warmly received by the King, but out of respect for the Chief Rabbi and the Jewish community and the prohibition on public broadcasting on the Sabbath, they were not relayed to the public.

SEMINAR ON THE RELEVANCE OF THE GURU GRANTH SAHIB AT SOUTHFIELDS GURDWARA 2-9-23

Dr Rema Kaur

Thank you for your kindness in inviting me to speak at this important Seminar. I would like to start by giving a background to why the Guru Granth Sahib was written, and why the teachings contained within it are so essential for our modern times.

Before the birth of Guru Nanak in, 1469, most people in India saw religion in terms of rituals and superstitions, and religious practice was very divisive. Hinduism, at that time, excluded people many people deemed inferior, and that often meant women and those of a lower Hindu caste— so basically the religion was only for a minority of the population. Muslims too gave a lower status to women and regarded non-Muslims as infidels. There was little religious tolerance. Religion at that time, as it often has been historically, was not about looking to the needs of others in society, but about supposed self-improvement, often at the expense of wider responsibilities.

Guru Nanak's teachings raised religion to a higher plane of uplifting spiritual and ethical guidance for all humanity. He spoke in a way that everyone could understand, making this new religion accessible to all.

Guru Nanak realised that this new ethical guidance would be difficult to live by. He wanted to show that living true to responsible teachings, is not only possible, but necessary for a just and fair society. So he instituted a system of succession; the task of successor Gurus was to show, by the example of their own lives, the practicality of Sikh teachings in varying, and often difficult social and political climates.

By the time of the 5th Guru, Guru Arjan, there was a real danger of Sikh teachings being distorted by so-called holy people. Guru Arjan therefore decided to compile an authorized version of Sikh scriptures. He set about collecting the work of his predecessors, adding many uplifting compositions of his own. He then did something **unique** in religious history; he added verses of Hindu and Muslim poets where these conveyed the same message as Sikh teachings, to show that no one faith has a monopoly of truth.

By the time of the 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh the infant Sikh community had proved itself in many ways and the Guru felt that it could now stand on its own without further living Gurus, providing that it always remained true to the guidance of the Sikh scriptures. Guru Gobind Singh added verses of his father Guru Teg Bahadur to complete the Guru Granth Sahib-declaring it the future guidance for all Sikhs.

So, the Guru Granth Sahib is the compilation of teachings spanning the lives of the ten gurus giving us guidance that has been tried and tested over nearly two centuries of varying and sometimes extreme religious, social and political upheaval.

From start to finish, the Guru Granth Sahib contains logical and inspiring guidance on the nature of God, life and social and political responsibilities. Importantly, it does not make rigid pronouncements on continually changing social issues. Instead, guidance

is couched in terms of principles of decent and responsible human behaviour applicable to all ages and all human circumstances.

Let me now outline some key areas of inspiring guidance in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Equality of all human beings.

Teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib emphasise the equality of all people regardless of gender or social status.

The Japji sahib says

'The one God of us all does not recognize man-made distinctions of high and low birth'

And Guru Nanak adds to this when he writes:

Know people by their inner light

There is no caste in the hereafter.

Guru Nanak bravely challenged the religious bigotry of the time, with his famous words 'Nai koi Hindu ha koi Mussalman'

There is no Hindu or Muslim only humankind

Our different religious labels are not the important thing – what matters is are actions and deeds

Through the ages there has been horrendous loss of life in the name of religion.

We all know of the brutality of partition and the later persecution of Sikhs in 1984, but in India, violence towards minority groups is escalating. In China there is persecution of the Uighur Muslims and in Palestine and Israel conflict continues. And these are just a few examples.

So the Sikh teaching of religious tolerance and respect is more relevant than ever.

Equality and respect for women is another important teaching

.In Guru Nanak's words 'without women no one would exist at all'

And this is much more than valuing women for childbearing as the Gurus illustrated.

Guru Amar Dass condemned the practice of sati – the practice by which women were expected to throw themselves on the funeral pyre of their husband when he died. The Guru spoke against the dowry system. There is even a shabad about it.

Guru Amar Dass encouraged women to gain the highest possible education, play an active role in religious services and even lead them.

Compare that with the milestones in the UK

It wasn't until 1994 that the first woman priest was ordained in the church of England – It wasn't until 2010 that the Equality Act forced employers to give equal pay to men and women doing the same job. Sadly, today, women still do not receive equal rights to men in many parts of the world and its our duty as Sikhs to challenge this.

The Guru Granth Sahib's teachings help us guard against today's obsession with materialism

Society tells us we need to have a highly paid job to gain respect, and the more money the better. Money is of course necessary. Guru Nanak did not condemn material

comfort but taught the importance of balance between the material and the spiritual dimensions of life.

The GGS says

What is the use of rich food and fine clothes

If the truth does not dwell within us

The Guru Granth Sahib reminds us of the importance of honest or Gurmukh living.

Guru Nanak taught ;

‘Truth is high but higher still is truthful living’

What is truthful living?

One of the three moral and ethical pillars of Sikhism is Kirt Karo.

This literally means earn by honest living. Not through exploiting or harming others, or cheating committing fraud, begging or constantly borrowing.

According to a report submitted to the government this year, Sikhs in the United Kingdom have the lowest unemployment, lowest dependency on state benefits, lowest number in social care and a lower representation in prisons than any other faith in the UK. This is a testimony to the value of Sikh teachings.

5) The second ethical pillar is-

Wand Chakna - sharing with those less fortunate

Seva means selfless service and is central to Sikhism. Sikhs are encouraged to serve others, especially those in need, without any expectation of reward or recognition.

The Guru Granth Sahib says “

One who performs selfless service, without thought of reward, shall feel content and liberated. " ([SGGS p 286](#))

6) Let me now turn to the third ethical pillar, Nam japna

Nam Jap means -Meditate, contemplate, think about God and our responsibilities in life.

We believe God is a force in and around all of us, The Guru Granth sahib explains it is “without beginning and without end”.

Importantly we are taught God is ‘beyond human comprehension.’ So if we struggle to fully understand what God is – that’s ok because we cant fully understand.

We can think about God in many different ways. To me, personally thinking about God means thinking about the universe the planet the people in it, focussing on doing good things and establishing meaningful priorities.

We sometimes talk about being too busy to pray but we can hold thoughts in our head about God whilst going about our daily lives.

A verse in the Guru Granth Sahib illustrates this

*A boy gets paper and makes a kite,
He flies it high in the air,
And though he is talking
In a lively way with his friends,
He keeps his mind on the string of the kite*

*While the child is asleep in its cradle,
Its mother is busy inside and outside the house
But she keeps her mind on her child.*

So we can hold thoughts in our head about God whilst going about our daily lives

The Guru Granth Sahib recognizes the limits of man-made ideas and values. It says

*The final vision of justice lies not with man
Nor any creature of the Universe;
But with God alone.*

The Guru Granth Sahib reminds us of our Obligations to society

Guru Nanak once met some hermits who had left their homes to live in the mountain wilderness in search of a greater understanding of God. They asked the Guru, 'how goes the world below? Guru Nanak was angry and said the world is suffering and how can it be otherwise when those with knowledge and understanding desert it in such a selfish way. To improve society we have to live within it and work for its betterment.

Today we have created our own wilderness. London is one of the busiest cities in the world but there are record numbers of people suffering from loneliness. It is all too easy to spend our life in a virtual wilderness, on the internet for hours on end or in other pursuits that leave us little time for those around us.

We need to be like the lotus flower, with its roots in muddy water flowers beautifully above

We need to live in society and work for its betterment. Not run away and escape to a desert island – either in the literal or metaphorical sense.

The Guru Granth Sahib teaches us to Reject Rituals and Superstitions:

The Sikh Gurus rejected rituals superstitions, and empty religious practices as meaningless and taking us away from true religious living
Guru Nanak described them as 'chains of the mind'.

The GGS teaches us about our planet

"There are planets, solar systems and galaxies. If one speaks of them, there is no limit, no end'. So Earth is one planet in the solar system which is a tiny part of our galaxy and our galaxy is a tiny spec in the infinite universe.

Long before it was common to talk about the environment, the Guru Granth Sahib taught us

'Pawan Guru, Pani Pita, Mata Dharat Maht'

'Air is our teacher, water our father and the great sacred earth is our mother'

This metaphor strongly emphasizes the love, respect and care we should give to our planet and that teaching is particularly poignant and relevant to the world of today.

Waheguru ji ka Khalsa; Waheguru ji ki Fateh.

NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

ANNUAL REPORT 22-23

Education Report

It is a pleasure to report that all school within the NSO endorsing and inspectorial jurisdiction were declared 'good' by Ofsted with the exception of one that is 'requiring to be good'.

NSO congratulates Anita Kaur Notta, the CEO/Executive Principal of The Khalsa Academies Trust on receiving The Royal Airforce Regular and Reserve Advocate award. Anita also received the 'Sikh Woman of the Year' award from The British Sikh Awards. The Khalsa Academies Trust was visited by the Regional Director Andrew Warren after the removal of their NTI, to congratulate them and to give them the green light to grow as a "strong" Trust. The Trust also leads the DFE Behaviour and SEND Learning sets for the West Midlands region. The Khalsa Academy Wolverhampton has also been invited to become an Attendance Hub by the Schools Minister RT Hon Nick Gibb due to their high attendance and attainment over the last two years.

NSO welcomes the appointment of Mrs Sukhi Sanghera as the Principal of Seva Primary and Secondary Schools.

All schools are expected to be part of an academy trust by 2030. Whilst this bill is currently on hold, the white paper is still in effect. The direction of travel is likely to continue towards consolidation of schools into Multi Academy Trusts with up to ten schools. This poses a risk to all our Sikh schools. There are only thirteen across the country, so unity is going to be of utmost importance. The NSO sees this as an opportunity for the community to unite for a worthy cause and will be working with the schools to ensure they are not impacted negatively by the latest DfE developments.

Cooperation between Sikh Trusts

We have had various meetings with our Sikh schools to plan how all the Sikh Trusts can work towards forming one Sikh Trust. It was decided that we explore partnership work within our schools to see how we can work together through our shared values. We had a meeting with the Regional Director to get advice. He agreed that the best route is partnership, but he cannot help us until the trusts are ready to join/ Merge with Multi Academy Trusts. All school Trusts will have to join a trust if the White Paper is passed by Parliament. It would be to our advantage if all Sikh schools form one Trust, rather than joining secular trusts. There has not been any decision on this, just a start through partnership work. Shaminder Kaur and I on behalf of NSO attended meetings with DfE's Faith Schools providers' group, that again emphasised the requirements of the White Paper. The Education Minister Baroness Barron attended a meeting to explain the White Paper requirements.

There have not been any s48 inspections this year. The next inspections of four Sikh schools will be conducted next year. A training session for inspecting Sikh schools is currently being planned for three Principals of Sikh Schools.

The Khalsa Academies Trust (TKAT) Safeguarding Statement

Khalsa Academies Trust is committed to safeguarding children. We believe that children and young people should never experience abuse of any kind. We have a responsibility to promote the welfare of all children and young people, to keep them safe and to practise in a way that protects them. We expect that all staff, volunteers, outside agencies and service providers adhere to our policies and share in our commitment to safeguard all children in our care.

Report by Lady Kanwaljit Kaur and Shaminder Kaur Ryatt

INTER FAITH INVOLVEMENT

- 1) As the national faith community representative member body of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN), NSO has continued to represent the Sikh community both on its Board of Trustees and the Faith Communities Forum. The former largely deals with matters of governance, formulating policy and management of the work it carries out with the aim of building good relations between different faiths; whilst the latter provides a platform for the national faith communities representative bodies to discuss issues of common concern.

Salient Points

- The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) notified IFN on 31 March 2023 that it would not provide funding for the IFN from April. However, following intense lobbying led by Lord Singh of Wimbledon, DLUHC has now offered conditional funding to IFN of up to £155,000 for use from July 2023 to March 2024.
The challenging financial issues relating to fund raising and long-term sustainability of the IFN are being looked into by the relevant working parties that have been established.
 - I am pleased to mention that Satnam Singh Poonian (NSO) has been appointed as the Sikh Moderator on the IFN's Faith Communities Forum. During the Forum's meeting in June 2023, Satnam drew attention to the Lausanne Movement and its proselytizing plans aimed at converting particularly the Sikhs to Christianity. Satnam made a powerful contribution.
 - Due to financial difficulties, most of the meetings have been, and are being held on on-line.
 - I also served and/or still serve on various IFN subcommittees and working groups, namely:
Finance and General Purposes Sub-committee (Chairman), Co-Chair Nomination Panel, Working Group on Diversity and Strategic Plan Working Group.
 - This year Inter Faith Week is scheduled for 12-19 November 2023.
- 2) A talk on Sikh Religion and Culture was given to: Northallerton, North Yorkshire
 - 3) Representation on North Yorkshire SACRE as well as on Bradford SACRE continues.
 - 4) Attended an event in Bradford organised by Religion Media Centre entitled "Creating Connections".

Report by Mohinder Singh Chana.

Religious Education and Interfaith Activity

I have represented NSO on the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC) since May 2018. In May 2018 I was elected to the board of directors for a term

of one year. During that year I attended all the board meetings and general meetings in London. I have also served on the Governance Committee of REC since then.

This year's AGM was held online in May 2023. The meeting was chaired by Sarah Lane Cawte who is the Education Officer for the Free Churches Group. She is also the chair of the Governance Committee. I have attended all the general meetings and the Governance Committee meetings. New Executive Officer, Andrew (Indy) Nottage was appointed during the last year.

There is a general feeling that there are critical issues facing the teaching of Religious Education today which leads to many children in our schools not receiving a decent Religious Education. The core contributor to the current crisis in RE is the lack of government support in comparison to the narrow group of subjects included and prioritised in the English Baccalaureate. This is in stark contrast to the views of parents, with a 2022 Savanta Survey finding that around seven in ten parents regarded what their child learnt in RE as important.

An open letter was written to the Secretary of State for Education Gillian Keegan pointing out the above concerns and that the crisis in RE is exacerbated by missed recruitment targets in 9 of the last 10 years. Religious education helps children take their place in society; supports them in being effective and engaged in the workplace and their community, and in discussing and debating issues related to religion and belief.

NATRE is also conducting a survey to obtain information about the current state of RE in all types of schools so that it can continue to support the teacher in the classroom by raising awareness of the impact of government policy on RE.

I did point out that most schools cover only 2 or 3 major religions in the classroom and discharge their obligation by an odd visit to the place of worship of other minority religions. In relation to the widespread ignorance about the Sikh faith I pointed out that violent incidents of bullying in schools against Sikh children are on increase. In some cases their turbans have been pulled off by the bullies. Special consideration must be given to faiths such as Sikhism to promote better understanding and harmony amongst our very diverse society.

This year, the REC has been exploring what a Religion and Worldviews approach might look like in a syllabus or curriculum, through its Worldviews Project. When the project is completed, the aim is to provide resources that will support syllabus writers and curriculum developers in their important task of translating the vision into classroom reality.

I have also been attending Ofsted's Schools with Religious Character meetings and workshops at schools and workplace settings through Faith and Belief Forum, speaking about Guru Nanak's vision of humanity, interfaith, equality, fairness and justice for all.

Interfaith Network UK

I joined the Interfaith Network UK representing NSO as Faith Communities Forum (FCF) Moderator in October 2022. Interfaith week ran from 13th to 20th November 2022. Most religious leaders offered messages from their own religious perspective for this week. In his message our director, Lord Indarjit Singh stressed the need to discard dated cultural norms that attach themselves to religious belief and focus on the important commonalities between faiths.

This year's Interfaith week is planned for 12th to 19th November 2023.

Inter Faith Buddies dialogue scheme: webinar Tuesday 17 January, Attended the meeting of the Faith Communities Forum in February held at The Central Synagogue, London. Main topics for discussion were: Faith and social care – Recently published report 'Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant for England' prepared by The Archbishop's Care Commission of the Church of England, proposing actions to achieve a positive vision of care and support and the values which underpin it, was presented and discussed.

National faith communities and inter faith / inter religious engagement – discussion and exploration of how different UK/national faith communities are taking forward inter faith dialogue and engagement.

The important role of Faith communities at the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III on 6 May was discussed. Presentation and discussion took place on the initiative 'The Big Help Out' and how volunteering can bring communities together and create a lasting volunteering legacy from the Coronation Weekend.

Government funding for the IFN was stopped for the current year. Lord Indarjit Singh played his part and approached Government departments responsible for this funding. I also wrote to my MP and the Government Department for Levelling up to reconsider their decision and reinstate the funding. This decision was reviewed by the Government and the funding was reinstated for this year. IFN did thank everyone for their support and particularly Lord Indarjit Singh for his efforts.

There was a convention organised by the The Lausanne Movement at Ilford Baptist Church titled 'Calling Sikhs to Christ' in June this year. Lord Indarjit Singh and Councillor Athwal played their part and pressured the organisers to cancel the event. The event was cancelled but the underlying intentions were worrying and presented challenges for the inter faith coexistence. I wrote to IFN to make them aware and find solutions so that this kind of events can be prevented. A virtual meeting of the Faith Communities Forum took place on 19th June 2023 and this item along with the Bloom report was discussed.

Most representatives were supportive and felt that this kind of act was very unhelpful for inter faith coexistence. It was mentioned that the material was shocking but not surprising as some particular faiths, like Christianity and Islam, which were evangelistic and wished to share and grow their faith. One representative expressed her view that it was unlikely that the speakers at the event would have been seeking to be deliberately offensive to Sikhs; they were caught up in their passion for sharing good news. I replied that there was a difference might not be accepted as such by others. People had no right to tell anyone else that they were less fortunate.

The Chair and most of the representatives spoke in support of Sikh community. The FCF member from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland extended his solidarity to Mr Satnam Singh Poonian and Mr Mohinder Singh Chana and all the Sikh community on behalf of CTBI.

Report by Satnam Singh Poonian

SIKH PRISON CHAPLAINCY

We have lost three Sikh Chaplains, S Swarn Singh Bharj from Leeds, S Gurbax Singh from Southampton, and S Amarjit Singh Hanspal from Milton Keynes. Prison Sikh

Chaplaincy Service would like to pay tribute to them. They have served Sikhs in Prisons for many years, and they were well-respected members of our team. We are seeking to recruit of the vacancies left behind by them. Some candidates are going through their security clearance in Leeds and Wales. A couple have already joined the Sikh Chaplaincy service.

We are working to arrange biennial National Sikh Chaplains conference in 2024. We will share the group picture in Sikh Messenger. The dates in May have been identified. The event has also been planned to celebrate the gurburb of Guru Nanak Sahib in November 2023 for Ministry of Justice. We wish Ajmer Singh in charge of Midlands and North Area, a very speedy recovery. He has been recuperating at home following a kidney transplant.

Report by Gagandeep Singh

ARMED SERVICES CHAPLAINCY

Internal and External Engagement has always been very active throughout the year. Meditation sessions for Health and Wellbeing Platforms within defence were delivered on request. International days, Cultural days, Leaders in faith & belief conference, talks on faith and belief to name a few internal engagements. Delivered talks for Indian women and memorial project, Festival celebrations at Scotland Yard, Shepherds Bush Gurdwara becoming ally of DSN, MOD Nitnem Gutka Launch in community, supporting upcoming Holla - Mohalla (warrior festival), supported service Personnel led unit visits and engagements with the local Gurdwaras by delivering talks. Delivered 2 day annual Chardi Kala Conference for all serving at Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre with huge success.

Faith specific spiritual, moral and pastoral support to service personnel and their families have been priority throughout the year. Timely support created the right frame for these individuals who were then able to make right decisions for themselves. Spouses have also been supported separately on many occasions. A virtual group has been created where regular opportunities of checking-in have been offered. Worked in collaboration with other World Faith Chaplains and alongside Commissioned Chaplains – supporting in the requested projects. Delivered to New Entrant Chaplains whenever possible. Developed good rapport with fellow chaplains from all faiths and build connections.

Report by Mandeep Kaur Sikh Chaplain to the Armed Services

MEDIA AND PARLIAMENT

Press Releases

India's clampdown on Punjab is not only a threat to the state but to democracy itself – 25th March 2023

The head of Waris Punjab De – Amritpal Singh became a practising Sikh only recently and has been campaigning stridently for Khalistan. Some of his followers attacked a police station where one of their associates was being held. Indeed, freedom of speech or discussion should be a fundamental right, but if he or any of his followers have broken the law, then the Indian authorities are within their rights to pursue and investigate them for alleged criminal behaviour.

Joint Faith statement: Religiously and racially sexually motivated grooming gangs – 12th March 2023 As UK faith representatives, we support the ongoing efforts of Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who, in the face of some considerable hostility, has courageously spoken out about the over representation of British Pakistani men in sex grooming gangs operating around the UK. The evidence contained within a number of independent inquiries – Rotherham, Telford, and Rochdale support her position on what is indeed a sensitive and difficult matter. [Coverage in News18 and another media outlet]

BBC's attempt to undermine Sikh teachings – 8th February 2023

It is well documented and admitted by the BBC that they tried to prevent our Director, Lord Singh, speaking on Thought for the Day (TFTD) about Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith. He was also pressurised to minimise the contribution of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in promoting harmony and respect between faiths. Unbelievably, after a script of a talk on the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur had been agreed with the producer of the day, he was asked late in the evening to scrap it and talk about something else. He stood his ground and said that freedom of belief was important to the world of today, and he made it clear that if he was not allowed to talk about Guru Tegh Bahadur, there would be an empty chair in the studio next morning.

From Where I Stand – Lord Indarjit Singh's autobiography – 4th September 2022 Indarjit Singh, or Lord Singh of Wimbledon is widely recognised as the de-facto leader of Britain's Sikh community. When being introduced by the British Ambassador to Estonia, he was referred to as 'the man who brought Guru Nanak to the Breakfast tables of Britain', for his inspiring broadcasts on BBC Radio 4. But what's the story behind Singh's journey towards faith leadership? From Where I Stand reveals how his newly qualified father, Dr Diwan Singh, rallied against British rule in India, by bandaging up Sikh protestors pledged to non-violence, being beaten by police. It was, a selfless and courageous act, which led to the family's eventual exile from Punjab to Britain.

Did Britain's intelligence agencies top off Indian authorities about Jagtar Singh Johal – 24th August 2022

There is increasing disquiet about new developments in the case of Jagtar Singh Johal. Human rights group Reprieve point to the unearthing of evidence that the British intelligence agencies, MI5 and MI6, may well have contributed to Johal's detention and torture by tipping off the Indian authorities, this they say is made worse when there was indeed a real risk that Johal could be tortured or face the death penalty in India.

Director's Vaisakhi message – 13th April 2022

Vaisakhi, the day of the creation of the Khalsa, is one of the most important festivals in the Sikh calendar with colourful processions, bhangra dancing and displays of gatka martial arts. It is a time when we remember the courage of the five Sikhs who, in response to Guru Gobind Singh's call, showed their readiness to give their lives for the inspiring and egalitarian teachings of the Gurus. It's a powerful message relevant to both Sikhs and non-Sikhs in the world of the 21st century.

Lord Singh Contributions – Hansard

Ukraine: Depleted Uranium – 30th March 2023

My Lords, I have read reports that depleted uranium shells cause birth defects in infants. That very thought, or even the uncertainty, is such that it will lower the moral standing of both the UK and Ukraine to use them. As has been said, it gives a very effective weapon to Vladimir Putin to escalate conflict. Surely that is not desired.

Scotland: Meeting with New First Minister – 29th March 2023

My Lords, on the point of “stronger together”, does the Minister see irony in the fact that, in the middle of the last century, the UK partitioned the subcontinent and, today, someone of subcontinent heritage is seeking to partition the United Kingdom, with equally problematic results?

Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme – 1st February 2023

My Lords, does the Minister agree that our intervention in Afghanistan directly led to the strengthening of the hands of extremists in the Taliban, causing huge difficulties for ordinary Afghan citizens, and that we have a linked moral responsibility to look to the well-being of those who we have caused to be refugees? Does he also agree that if we wish to reduce the flow of immigrants that has worried so many people, we should be much more careful in first thinking before embarking on such interventions?

Afghanistan: Women – 26th January 2023

My Lords, the Taliban rely on a very extreme interpretation of dated Middle Eastern culture. Does the Minister agree that, if religion is to be a force for peace rather than the main cause of conflict, all religions must embrace the equality and dignity of women, and remove all attempts at propagating the superiority of some and negative attitudes to others?

Response Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con)

My Lords, I totally agree with the noble Lord about those who follow a faith, whatever it is. To use just three examples, there is the status of mother Mary within the Christian faith, the status of Hazrat Khadija, the holy Prophet's of wife in Islam, and the status within the Hindu religion where you often hear the chant of “Jai mata ji ki” referring to mothers. The status of women is clear in every faith and it is important, as the noble Lord says, that it becomes pivotal to our discussions.

Asylum Seekers: Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran and Sudan – 24th January 2023

My Lords, the UK says that asylum seekers must go to the first safe country, but the United Nations commissioner for human rights says that that is incorrect. Would the Minister like to comment?

Response Lord Murray of Blidworth (Con)

The Government's position is clear: Article 31 requires that a person comes directly to the first safe country and is therefore obliged to claim in that country. Indeed, it is upon that principle that the European Union agreed the Dublin provisions about the return of asylum seekers to places where they made their first claim.

Afghanistan: Girls and Women – 23rd January 2023

My Lords, the Minister said in his earlier reply that the cruel and arbitrary treatment of women and girls had no religious justification. In view of that, and knowing what the Taliban are doing with their misunderstanding of Islam, could the Minister and the

Government prevail on Muslim leaders around the world to condemn this sort of behaviour in forthright terms? The silence is deafening.

Response Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con)

My Lords, I assure the noble Lord that we are doing exactly that. What better example could there be, perhaps, than seeing the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations—the second most senior person in international, multilateral organisations, herself a hijab-wearing Muslim—together with Sima Bahous, the leader of UN Women, also a Muslim, being part of the UN high-level delegation that attended? What that demonstrated to the Taliban directly was not just that they must engage women but that women must be pivotal to any society progressing. In every progressive society, irrespective of what the religion is, that is essential to ensure that society is progressive and that people prosper.

Prison Chaplaincy Services – 10th January 2023

Until three years ago the Chaplaincy Council was working well. Why replace something when it is not broken? A prison chaplaincy council representing the six major faiths has not met for some three years, with Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists being excluded from policy discussions and discriminated against in grant support, visiting and educational hours and career opportunities. Widening the prison chaplaincy council will worsen that situation. Why are our concerns and complaints consistently ignored by those charged with the promotion of inclusion and diversity, who feel that all they need to do to fulfil their remit is write pronouns after their names?

Response Lord Bellamy (Con)

First, I pay a personal tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Singh, for all that he has done over many years for prison chaplaincy and for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Sikh community. I mean that most sincerely. However, respectfully, I do not entirely agree with the thrust of his question. In the Government's view, the chaplaincy council needs to be brought up to date to make sure that all faiths are properly represented and, in particular, to make sure that the faith and belief advisers, who assist the Prison Service, particularly in the appointment of chaplains, and who are very often on the council, are remunerated and appointed transparently and consistently so that there is no question of any difference of treatment in that regard. It is perfectly true that there has been some disagreement with the noble Lord, Lord Singh, in the past—that I accept—but I hope that the reforms that we are in the process of consulting on will remove any scope there may be for disagreement on the way forward.

Iran: Women's Rights – 21th December 2022

My Lords, we all applaud the brave women and men fighting for the rights of women in Iran against an autocratic regime that sees women as lesser beings with, as a former Ayatollah put it, only half the brain size of a man. While the expulsion of Iran from a UN committee on women is welcome, does the Minister agree that a more powerful condemnation would come from Muslim leaders stating that the behaviour of the Iranian regime is rooted in perverse and dated culture and has nothing to do with the ethical teachings of Islam?

Response Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon (Con)

My Lords, I agree with the noble Lord. While I am not a Muslim leader, I am a Minister who happens to be Muslim and I totally and utterly condemn the suppression of women, not just in Iran but anywhere in the world. Women have a pivotal role to play in any society in any country. The evidence is there: where women play a central and pivotal role, societies prosper and countries continue to progress. Iran needs to change its direction now, not just because of what it is doing to its citizens but because its own religion that it claims to follow tells it to do just that.

Iran: Execution of Protestors – 12th December 2022

My Lords, the present revolution, or resistance, in Iran results from the cruel treatment of its brave women. The National Council of Resistance of Iran, led by a woman, has put forward a 10-point plan for democracy, which includes the absence of any sort of religious rule—a secular democracy—freedom of belief for all, and equal rights for women. Does the Minister agree that this is the right direction of travel for Iran?

UK Asylum and Refugee Policy – 9th December 2022

My Lords, I am grateful to the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury for this important debate. Much of what he told us has resonant echoes in Sikh teachings. I am also grateful to the noble Baroness, Lady Twycross, for her moving maiden speech. I look forward to the other maiden speeches, in particular that of my friend and fellow Sikh, the noble Lord, Lord Sahota.

In the past, it was normal to look on people in distant lands with suspicion and fear as likely to harm us and our obviously superior way of life. In Shakespeare's "Richard II", John of Gaunt underlined this way of thinking when he described Britain as a "precious stone set in the silver sea" to guard us "Against the envy of less happier lands"..

Nigeria – 7th December 2022

My Lords, does the Minister agree that when violence and atrocities take place in the name of religion, the leaders of that religion should be the first and foremost to condemn those atrocities? Does he further agree that an opportunity was lost at the recent freedom of religion and belief conference, hosted by the UK, to get a binding commitment from religious leaders to that effect?

X-Rays: Child Refugees – 6th December 2022

My Lords, it is an understatement to say that the use of X-rays to assess the age of children is like using a sledgehammer to crack a very small nut: it not only exposes children to harmful radiation but damages our image in the wider world. Would the Minister agree that traumatic events such as seeing near and dear ones killed and homes destroyed can visibly age people, including children, and that a country that is not even in the top 10 of those giving asylum per head of population should eschew this demeaning practice?

Asylum Seekers: Accommodation – 15th November 2022

My Lords, does the Minister agree that asylum seekers are not alien invaders to these shores but innocent people who are the victims of horrendous conflict in different parts

of the world, such as the Middle East, Afghanistan, Ukraine and so many other places? Does he agree that it is only right that we extend hospitality to them?

Genocide Determination Bill [HL] – 28th October 2022

My Lords, I too congratulate my friend and colleague, the noble Lord, Lord Alton, on his persistence in pursuing a politics-free determination of genocide. Genocide is the mass killing of members of an ethnic or religious community. Unfortunately, evil behaviour is often overlooked or condoned in the pursuit of trade or national self-interest. More than one UK government Minister has openly stated that we should leave human rights to one side when we talk trade.

In June 1984, the then Indian Government, trailing in the opinion polls, attacked the centre of Sikhism, the Golden Temple in Amritsar, and other gurdwaras to win the support of bigots in the majority community in the forthcoming general election. Thousands of Sikhs were killed. Baat Cheet, the official Indian army newspaper, openly declared that all practising Sikhs were potential terrorists. In November of the same year, tens of thousands of innocent Sikh men, women and children were brutally killed as a result of further incitement by the government-owned All India Radio, calling on people to kill Sikhs. Electoral lists were given to gangs of thugs to help them identify Sikh households.

Russia: Tactical Nuclear Weapon Deployment – 11th October 2022

My Lords, NATO was created to contain the threat of the former Soviet Union—an entity that no longer exists. It is individual countries, not NATO, that have been aiding and helping the brave people of Ukraine. Would the Minister agree that if we were to say that we will disband NATO it might just give Putin the escape route he so desperately requires? If that does not work, it will at least show the Russian people what sort of person Putin is.

Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II – 9th September 2022

My Lords, on behalf of myself and the wider Sikh community, I too want to pass on our sense of loss and sorrow on the death of Her Majesty the Queen. Her passing marks a moment of great sorrow and reflection for us all. As has been said, her life was one of selfless and unparalleled service to her subjects, conducted with both dignity and humility throughout her 70-year reign.

Jagtar Singh Johal – 8th September 2022

My Lords, Jagtar Singh Johal was a UK blogger who drew attention to India's continuing abuse of the human rights of minorities. The Indian Home Minister has publicly described Muslims as termites—that is the extent of the abuse of human rights. For his actions, Jagtar Singh Johal has been incarcerated and tortured for years in an Indian jail and is facing the death penalty. We have heard that we have constructive talks with the Indian Government. That has been going on for years—

what has actually been achieved? We talk about the importance of freedom of speech, but does the Minister agree that it smacks of hypocrisy when we choose to look the other way while negotiating a trade deal with India?

Repatriation of Cultural Objects – 6th September 2022

My Lords, as an interim measure until we have some consensus on this issue, does the Minister agree that we should have a little plaque at the bottom of each article emphasising or explaining from where and how the item was looted?

Tigray – 4th July 2022

My Lords, does the Minister agree that our selling arms to neighbouring Eritrea—a country with a dismal human rights record and an active participant in the maiming and killing in Tigray—is not exactly helping towards a peaceful resolution?

European Convention on Human Rights – 23rd June 2022

My Lords, would the Minister agree that, by definition, there can be no hierarchy of human rights and they should be exactly the same whether for those in Europe or Britain, or for those seeking refuge and asylum in small, leaky boats?

Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda – 15th June 2022

My Lords, last week we were given a clear assurance that refugees from Ukraine would not be sent to Rwanda. Does this two-tier system of human rights fit with any sort of concept of equal rights for every human being? While I deeply sympathise with the plight of the Ukrainians, other people are also suffering; and all people should have equal human rights.

Safeguarding of Young Children – 24th May 2022

My Lords, the safeguarding of young children is yet another important social concern alongside violence against women, racism in the police and youth crime. They are simply surface sores of an underlying social malady. Does the Minister agree that the long-term solution to such problems is a much greater emphasis in schools on the other three Rs; namely, right, wrong and responsibility?

India: Cereals Export Ban – 19th May 2022

My Lords, the situation regarding the export of wheat from India reminds me of the Bengal famine of the 1940s, when grain was being exported to Britain, thereby causing the famine. In these circumstances, with the heatwave and their diminishing supply, is it not totally wrong to expect, or put pressure on, the Indian Government to supply grain?

Kashmir: Human Rights – 17th May 2022

My Lords, India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, famously declared that the care of minorities was not simply a duty but a "sacred trust". It is a trust that successive Indian Governments have betrayed, first against Sikhs, and then with the present Minister of Home Affairs referring to Muslims as "termites". Does the Minister agree that our criticism of human rights abuse in Kashmir and elsewhere should not be muted because India is a member of the Commonwealth?

Palestine: Recognition – 6th April 2022

My Lords, numerous illegal Israeli settlements in Palestinian areas—some of them the size of small or medium towns—make the existence of a Palestinian state unviable. In any event, dividing people on the basis of religion creates suffering and lasting enmity. We see this between India and Pakistan, where more than half a million people died during the partition; we also see it closer to home, in Ireland. Does the Minister agree that it is much better to work towards equal civil and political rights for both Jews and Palestinians in the one land that is both Israel and Palestine, as was promised in the original Balfour Declaration?

The Media

The NSO's complaint about a former Rotherham councillor covered by **GB News** (both online and during a live television broadcast) – 24th February 2023

Director's letter in the **Times** on assisted dying – 5th January 2023

Director signatory to letter in the **Times** 'fulfil your pledge to govern with integrity, faith leaders urge prime minister' – 21st November 2022

Director's letter on 'grooming gangs' titled: 'Be specific on gangs' **Daily Mirror** – 25th July 2022

Director's letter in the **Times** supporting (the then) Prince of Wales on his criticism of the government asylum policy – June 13th 2022

Other

Deputy-Director Hardeep Singh writes about King Charles's visit to Luton gurdwara in the **Spectator** – 13th December 2022

Deputy-Director Hardeep Singh produces a resource on anti-Sikh hate crime for the Religion Media Centre – 21st October 2022

Director's letter to HM King Charles passing condolences on the death of HM the Queen – 9th September 2022

Director's portrait featured in the National Portrait Gallery for South Asian Heritage Month – August 2022

Deputy-Director Hardeep Singh spoke at the Ministerial - Freedom of Religion or Belief conference in Westminster – 6th July 2022

Deputy-Director Hardeep Singh writes about the ethnic cleansing of Afghan Sikhs for the **Religion Media Centre** – 23rd June 2022

Director hosted launch of BIM project - Indian Women and the War - in the House of Lords – 21st June 2022

Launch event for Lord Singh's autobiography - **From Where I Stand** - in the House of Lords – 7th June 2022

All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Lord Singh is Vice-Chair for the APPG for FoRB and during the last year the NSO has raised human rights violations with the APPG stakeholders including the persecution of Sikhs in Afghanistan.

Report by Deputy Director Hardeep Singh

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 Karwaljit 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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