



# THE SIKH MESSENGER

A MAGAZINE OF THE  
NETWORK OF SIKH ORGANISATIONS UK

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**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**COMMEMORATING 350TH MARTYRDOM**  
**ANNIVERSARY OF**  
**GURU TEGH BAHADUR**

**WITH ARTICLES ON SIKH TEACHINGS**  
**ON PEACE, JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**AUTUMN-WINTER 2025**

## 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

Baldev Singh Chaggar and Family,  
Bradford

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 2025

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# EDITORIAL

## 350 Anniversary of the Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur 9<sup>th</sup> Guru of the Sikhs

Indarjit Singh Editor

This year, Sikhs throughout the world have been commemorating the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur who centuries before the universal Declaration of Human Rights, courageously gave his life defending the right to freedom of belief of Hindus in Kashmir against the policy of forced conversion by Mughal ruler Aurangzeb, a tyrant who had imprisoned his father and murdered his brother. It was, as former Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams observed at the Singh Sabha gurdwara in Hounslow, a martyrdom unique in religious history; others had been killed defending their own teachings, but this was the first time in history that a person had sacrificed his own life defending the right to freedom of belief of those of a different faith.

### Prejudice and bias in the BBC

Unbelievably, the BBC, playing to majority prejudice, would not associate itself with the view of a former Archbishop of Canterbury and still has not apologised for its attempt to prevent me talking about the Guru's sacrifice of his own life in the cause of religious tolerance in the Thought for the Day slot on BBC Radio 4, to which I contributed for some 35 years. The objection was that the beheading of the Sikh Guru might offend Muslims today! The talk which went ahead after I made it clear that I would not change my topic and if I was not allowed to give it, there would be an empty chair in the studio next morning, it is reproduced below

#### Thought for the day 28-11-18

*Last weekend was, for Sikhs, a bit like Christmas and Easter rolled into one. Celebration of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak who taught the need for responsible living centred on the rights and concerns of others, was followed next day by the commemoration of the martyrdom of the 9<sup>th</sup> Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur who in 1675 gave his life in the defence of human rights.*

*The Mughal ruler Aurangzeb, in his determination to extend Islam to the whole of the sub-continent, was forcibly converting large numbers of Hindus in Kashmir. In desperation the Hindu leaders asked Guru Tegh Bahadur to intercede on their behalf. They said, we know that you and earlier Sikh Gurus have always stood up for the rights of all people, will you appeal to the Mughal Emperor to stop this forced conversion?*

*The Guru knew that such an appeal would almost certainly cost him his life. But true to Sikh teachings on freedom of belief he set off for Delhi. The emperor refused to change his policy and instead offered rich gifts to the Guru to convert to Islam. When Guru Tegh Bahadur refused, he was publicly beheaded in the centre of Delhi. His crime, defending the right to freedom of belief of those of a different religion to his own.*

*The universal right to freedom of belief is emphasised in the UN Declaration of Human Rights written in the aftermath of the Second World War. We all applaud its lofty sentiments, but all too often put these below trade and economic interest. For example, questions have*

been recently asked about the selling of arms to Saudi Arabia in the light of the killing of the prominent journalist Jamal Khashoggi and the on-going conflict in Yemen.

*Guru Tegh Bahadur set the bar high when on a cold winter's day, he gave his life in the defence of human rights and gave stark reality to Voltaire's, famous words: 'I may not believe in what you say but will defend to the death your right to say it. Yet, in the Sikh view, fundamental human rights will continue to be ignored unless those in power and authority are prepared to put these rights well above the false lure of short-term economic gain.'*

### **Footnote**

**To her credit, the producer who tried to stop my talk later had a change of heart and included it in a book of *important and moving contributions* during her time as a producer on Thought for the Day.**

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### **A verse by Guru Tegh Bahadur from the Guru Granth Sahib**

The man who in the midst of grief is free from grieving,  
Who is both free from fear, and free from the snare of delight,  
Nor is covetous of gold that he knows to be dust,  
Who is neither a backbiter nor a flatterer,  
Nor has greed in his heart, nor vanity, or worldly attachment,  
  
Who remains at his centre unmoved by good and ill fortune,  
Who is indifferent to the world's praise and blame  
Discarding every wishful fantasy  
Accepting his lot in a disinterested fashion  
Not moved by lust or by wrath,  
In such a man does God dwell.  
  
The man on whom the Grace of the Guru alights  
Understands the way of true conduct:  
His soul, O Nanak, is mingled with the Lord  
As water mingles with water

*Guru Granth Sahib* page 633

# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PEACE AND JUSTICE IN OUR TROUBLED WORLD

Lord Singh of Wimbledon

*The Age is a knife  
Kings are butchers  
In this dark night of falsehood  
No moon of truth is seen to rise*

**Guru Nanak**

Guru Nanak was commenting on the desolation caused by the Mughal invasion of India. He could well have been talking about the world today. It is a world in which signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights look the other way as Israel first turns Gaza into an open prison and then, aided and abetted by some members of the so-called Security Council, unleashes near genocide on its inhabitants, killing tens of thousands, and firing on little children as they queue for food.

Similar suffering is being experienced by the people of Ukraine, South Sudan and other parts of the world. The silence of religious leaders is deafening. We live in a world in which the pursuit of peace with justice is set aside in the pursuit of dodgy deals that reward the aggressor.

What do we need to do to make ours a fairer and more peaceful world.? But first A word about peace in its most widely accepted sense, namely, 'the absence of war'

The absence of overt conflict does not itself guarantee or necessarily imply political freedom and a respect for basic human rights. All wars, ipso facto, end in an absence of conflict, but this does not necessarily imply justice. All too frequently right does not triumph, and truth and justice are themselves often major casualties of conflict. Some will recall that tanks and guns of China's army brought 'peace' to Beijing's Tiananmen Square. It was the peace of the graveyard.

It is important that we briefly glimpse back at the past in our search for a better future. The Roman Empire had its Pax Romana covering much of Europe and the Middle East. It also had its slave markets, torture and death by crucifixion. In more recent years there was the British Empire with its Pax Britannica. This vast empire was more benevolent than some of its predecessors, but Pax Britannica was none-the-less a peace imposed on the unwilling to bring civilisation and Christian-values to natives and heathens. Nor was it without its direct repression, like the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre, where, in the Spring of 1919, several hundred people in Punjab were massacred in minutes by the soldiers of General Dyer in a brazen display of brute authority. It was an act condemned by the British Parliament and the spark that ignited the freedom torch in India.

The British Empire and the Western colonial movement reached its apogee by the commencement of the Second World War, which saw the racism of the Western world assume grotesque proportions in the horror of Nazism. The war saw the killing of millions in direct combat, and this was dwarfed by the horrors

of saturation bombing of civilians, including the incineration of thousands in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The war also saw the chilling consequences of talk of a master race and racially inferior people in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen where hundreds and thousands of, mostly, Jews perished in a combination of cold scientific thoroughness allied to human madness. The discovery of the full horror of the gas chambers and death camps silenced all talk about superior and inferior races. In the Europe of the 30s, persecution of Jews was not confined to Germany alone. It is often forgotten that the word Jew was a common term of abuse in this country, both before and during the Second World War.

It was this myth of racial superiority that had sustained rulers and cowed the ruled in Empire and colonies, and its collapse in the ruin of the Third Reich gave a major fillip to independent movements around the world. For the first time in human history there was general recognition of the proposition put forward by Guru Gobind Singh, tenth Guru of the Sikhs, some two and a half centuries earlier.

*'Manas ki jath sab ek he pacharbo'*

*'Recognise the oneness of the human family'*

The third major change stemmed from this view at least in theory, of a world human family in the formation of the United Nations Organisation. Although great power rivalry seriously hampered its effectiveness, its Charter and the later Declaration of Human Rights, gave powerful support to the proposition underlined again and again in Sikh teachings, that true and lasting peace is dependent on the recognition of the fundamental human rights of every man, woman and child.

In the words of the preamble to the Declaration of Human Rights on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1948:

*'it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be respected by the rule of law'.*

On the adoption of the U.N. Charter, the Great Powers could have moved in either of two directions. Active efforts to ensure basic human rights for all in the spirit of the Charter, or to pay lip service to the Charter with last ditch attempts to preserve the status quo against the tide of human history. Sadly, the Great Powers chose the latter course, with the then Soviet Union determined to hold onto its new empire in the East and the Western powers, equally determined to salvage and hold onto what they could of their colonial possessions and, as these crumbled, to engage in new power block politics for political and economic gain. The rivalry between the Communist and Capitalist worlds manifested itself in what was called the 'Cold War'. In recognition of the capacity of either side to utterly destroy the other. There was a peace of sorts between both sides, but it was a peace not based on justice but on the horror of total destruction.

This did not stop the manufacture and sale of improved means of killing. Most industrialised nations see the arms industry as an important earner of foreign exchange as well as a means to political leverage on the less 'developed' world. As our grandchildren and their children look back on today's times, I am sure that they will do so with loathing and repulsion at a generation prepared to

countenance and continue the death and maiming of millions for its own economic prosperity. I recall my sense of disbelief when I drew attention to the pogrom against Sikhs in 1984, the then Home Secretary bluntly told me 'Indarjit, we are well aware of the suffering of the Sikhs in the India of Rajiv Gandhi', but he continued 'It's very difficult, we are walking a tightrope and have already lost one major arms contract'.

The super-power game of chess continues, The Third World nation pawns buy arms to match those of their neighbours. The more they spend on arms the less of their GDP they have to spend on food and industrialisation and the less competitive they will be in world trade. Poverty inevitably breeds discontent and instability and further opportunities for exploitation.

When conditions are sufficiently bad to become news, we are asked to donate to famine relief collections. It is like putting sticking plasters over deep and festering wounds. The plaster covers or hides some of the suffering but does little to cure it.

In the India of Guru Nanak's day, the rich would similarly give small donations to the poor, to those they exploited, in the belief that this would earn them merit in the next world. The Guru was critical of such giving which induced a smugness in the giver whilst perpetuating injustice. These ritual acts of charity were, he said, not worth a grain of sesame seeds. Much the same can be said about Western aid packages to the Third World.

Let me briefly recap on all I've said. The world recoiling from the destruction of World War 2 has moved away from any set-piece sequel, but the peace enjoyed by the industrialised world today is one based on power block politics and alliances, which mask and perpetuate injustice and is far removed from the peace based on a universal acceptance of human rights as envisaged in the U.N Charter. It is a fragile peace which will not easily endure.

What do we need to do to make it more lasting and based on true justice? It is here that the Sikh religion can do much to guide us. Let us look together at the India of Guru Nanak's day some 500 years ago, as a microcosm of the wider world and see what lessons we can learn from his far-sighted teachings.

Looking at the religious rivalry around him, Guru Nanak emphasised the need for religious tolerance. In his very first sermon he declared:-

*'Ne koi Hindu Na koi Mussalman'*

That is: In God's eyes there is neither Hindu nor Muslim and, by today's extension, neither Christian nor Sikh nor Jew. That God is not interested in religious labels but in the way we conduct ourselves. God, he taught, has neither enemies nor favoured people, and no one religion has a monopoly of truth. He taught that the "I'm totally right and you're totally wrong" attitude is not only wrong in itself, but also a major cause of conflict.

Guru Nanak recognised an important truth. What passed for religion in his day, and still does so today, are underlying ethical teachings on responsible living, heavily overlain with near impenetrable layers of culture, superstition and a conflict causing arrogance that our particular amalgam of beliefs and practices is the only way favoured by the one God of us all

Today, most people call for the need for tolerance of other beliefs. But the English word 'tolerance' suggesting a reluctant willingness to put up with, is too weak and too negative a word to express the Sikh requirement of readiness to defend to the death, if necessary, another's right to belief. This is precisely what our 9th Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur, did when he was cruelly martyred upholding the right of Hindus to worship in the manner of their choice. It was Voltaire who said; -

*'I may not believe what you say*

*But will defend to the death your right to say it'*

More than a century earlier, Guru Tegh Bahadur had given practical utterance to this noble sentiment.

The Sikh Gurus understood the importance of showing commonalities in our different ethical teachings by incorporating the writings of Hindu and Muslim saints in our Holy Book, the Guru Granth Sahib, where these accorded with the main principles of Sikhism. They also invited a Muslim saint to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

Today, religious fundamentalism is still a major cause of conflict. The Gurus gave us an important lead, that we would do well to remember as we try to substitute dialogue for fanaticism. There is a further reward in such dialogue. While we learn to respect genuine differences, we also find that different faiths have much in common and our understanding of our own belief is heightened by similar teachings in other faiths.

The Gurus were aware that there can be no justice if some people consider themselves inherently superior to others.

Guru Nanak taught:-

*'Look to a person's inner light (God)  
and forget all ideas of caste or race  
for there is no caste or race in the hereafter'*

It was a sentiment echoed by each of the succeeding Gurus. As Guru Gobind Singh, our 10th Guru, put it:-

*Manas ki jaraph sab ek he pachambo*

*Recognise the oneness of the human race.*

Sikhism teaches that truth and justice will not prevail unless we constantly dedicate our life to these ideals. Sikhs wholly concur with the view of an English hymn that

*'They enslave their children's children  
Who would compromise with sin'*

If we truly believe in the ideal of one human family, we cannot support the notion of power blocks and friendly nations and factional alignments. Such factions and alignments are not new and the Guru in a beautiful hymn constantly stressed 'I am of God's faction'

Not only do factional politics divide us into warring camps but they also blur our sense of morality and injustice. In the world of today, we turn a blind eye to human rights abuses in a ‘friendly’ country while criticising similar abuse in other lands.

I was reminded of this in a recent discussion in the Lords on what can be done to protect Jews in the UK from growing antisemitism arising from the Israeli invasion of Gaza. When I suggested it might be helpful if the Jewish community in the UK issued a statement dissociating them from the Israeli action. But the UK categories Israel as a ‘friendly country’, and I was reprimanded by the government minister for making a ‘thoroughly inappropriate comment!’

## **SUMMARY**

Today, all countries pay lip service to the pursuit of peace and justice for all, while pursuing policies based on material gain. However, the reality is that we now live in a smaller world in which our destinies are closely entwined. We have to work together to meet the new environmental and social challenges facing us. There is an urgent need to change old-fashioned mindsets in moving to a fairer and more peaceful world.

This is particularly true of political attitudes and utterances relating to the need to work with ‘friends’ in enhancing defence against supposed ‘enemies’. This simply strengthens the hand of narrowly focussed leaders in other countries. Today, we cannot afford such old-fashioned and dangerous thinking in a world of closely entwined challenges and opportunities. We are all in the same boat.

We also have to recognise that what passes for religion has also become a major cause of conflict in the world of today. Religious leaders have to do some urgent spring cleaning to remove dated cultural practices and arrogant attitudes to other people and look to the underlying commonalities of right, wrong and responsibility that can help us move to true peace and justice.

Sikh teachings detailed above provide a powerful lead to moving both the political world and religious leaders to underlying imperatives in moving from the cruelty and injustice of the world today to a fairer and more peaceful world for looking to a fairer and more peaceful world for the future of our planet and future generations.

# **OXFORD CONFERENCE 31-8-25**

## **ROLE OF FAITH LEADERS IN ADDRESSING URGENT**

## **GLOBAL CONCERNs**

**Lord Singh of Wimbledon**

I would like to thank Udaveer Singh and others involved in organising this important event in the beautiful setting of Keble College, for your kindness in inviting me as Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker to address a faith response to common concerns for peace and justice in the interdependent and strife-torn world of today.

I speak from a Sikh perspective on where we are and what we must do to make the world a safer and fairer place for future generations.,

A wise poet reminds us that *rivers and mountains interpose to make one people implacable foes*. But it is not only geography that divides our one human family; it is also human greed, prejudice and bigotry, including religious bigotry.

Seeing others as lesser beings has been a source of conflict throughout history, leading to the horror of the slave trade, empire building and gross economic exploitation. It also led to the absurdity of superior and inferior races. Such talk was common in the 1930s not only in Germany but in this country. In 1937, in a speech to the Palestine Royal Commission justifying the proposed uprooting of Palestinians to create a Jewish State, Winston Churchill said:

*"I do not admit that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly-wise race.....has come in and taken their place".*

Rivalry between "higher-grade" races resulted in the horror of the First World War. Millions died. The war ended with the defeat and humiliation of Germany. Prejudice led to Jews being blamed for both the defeat and the resulting suffering.

Prejudice and bigotry swept Hitler to power. The Second World War followed, with further atrocities against the Jews, the widespread killing of innocents in Europe and, in the Far East, the incineration of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The suffering and devastation of war shocked world leaders into a new realism, and a common desire to work for a more peaceful world. Victor nations agreed that the only way forward to lasting peace would be recognition of the equal rights of all members of our one human family—imperatives for peace and justice first put forward by Sikh Gurus more than three centuries earlier in the words, 'manas ki jaath ek he pacharbo - to recognise the oneness of the human family'

Sadly, the desire of powerful countries to assert superiority over others has continued unabated. The West invaded Iraq and destabilised the region on the pretext that Iraq was developing weapons of mass destruction, strengthening the hand of Islamic extremism, Russia invades mineral rich Ukraine Israel occupies the West Bank and attacks the Gaza strip causing Belson-like suffering.

In the name of defence, more powerful nations exploit smaller regional conflicts by selling arms to impoverished people in places such as the Middle East, or by direct involvement in conflict in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan. India, the land of Mahatma Gandhi, buys oil from Russia to help fund Russian aggression against Ukraine, India also sells arms to Russia who, surprise surprise, unbelievably, sell arms to Pakistan for use against India.

I have always been puzzled by politicians in the UK and other places arguing that we need to spend more and more on defence. I see no threat to these shores. But in a speech in the Lords last month Lord Robertson, a former defence minister, made clear what politicians mean by defence. He spoke about countries like China and Russia threatening the 'existing world order'. He was right. They too are also trying to acquire crude political and economic power.

The briefest glimpse at world history shows that the existing world order is built on racism, slavery, and gross economic exploitation. Conflict is inevitable in a world order built on such insecure foundations.

What do we need to do to move to a fairer world? Religious teachings were meant to provide the answer. But today, rivalry between different religions or subsets of beliefs, is itself a major source of conflict and suffering. But I still believe that following ethical teachings put forward by the founders of our different faiths are the best way forward. for both individuals and society as a whole. Let me explain myself.

The founders of our different faiths understood that we human beings are all too often motivated by greed, selfishness and prejudice, rather than a desire to look to the wellbeing of others, and taught imperatives for responsible living. Sadly, these common uplifting ethical teachings soon became overlain with rituals, superstitions and culture, and worse, a common desire to impose their religion's supposedly God-given authority, on others.

Guru Nanak was a witness to such religious bigotry in the India of some 500 years ago. The Guru openly challenged this irreligious view of religion. He taught the one God of us all is not in the least bit interested in our different religious labels, but in what we do to create a fairer and more peaceful society, He and succeeding Gurus, bravely criticised the notions of caste or race, superstition and meaningless rituals attached to religion, and stressed the complete equality of women.

At the same time, they recognised and highlighted the ethical commonalities between our different faiths. Our holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, not only contains writings of the Sikh Gurus, but also, parallel ethical perspectives from Hindu and Muslim saints. Sikhs invited a Muslim saint to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple, in Amritsar, which has doors on each of its four sides to signify a welcome to all from any geographic or spiritual direction. A Sikh leader, Maharaja Ranjit Singh named by the BBC as one of the greatest leaders of all time, welcomed Muslims and Hindus into his Government and gave generously to mosques and Hindu temples while bringing peace and prosperity to Punjab.

The problems faced by us today, are perhaps more complex than those faced by Guru Nanak, but I believe that this approach of looking to the good in others and building on common values and common interest is the only way to lasting peace and justice for all.

Today, much more needs to be done to make religion a force for good, but to do so we have to remove the overlay of rituals, superstitions, culture and bigotry to put underlying ethical teachings in their true perspective.

Today, we are in a smaller, interdependent world, with common challenges. Our destinies are inextricably entwined. And we face common environmental and other challenges. We have to realise that now, there is no us and them, only us. We all have a common responsibility to change old-fashioned mindsets about exclusive and superior religions, and the belief that force is the only way to conflict resolution. As mentioned earlier, the existing world order is built on dodgy, unstable foundations of greed and conquest. I believe Its structure can be strengthened with a universal commitment to common ethical imperatives found in our different religions.

To move in this direction, there is first a need to do a little spring cleaning of religion to bring underlying ethical teachings to the fore by removing divisive arrogant claims of God given superiority of belief, and harmful culture which has become embedded in religious

texts. If I had time. I could give examples. They have that have nothing to do with the ethical values of the faiths concerned. Most people learn to ignore them, **but they are food and sustenance to the extremists, justifying violence and negative attitudes to others,**

A word about culture. Aneurin Bevan founder of the off the National Health Service, regarded culture with suspicion. He said whenever he heard the word culture he thought of bacteria. Bevan was more. right than he realised. We now know that bacteria can be good and bad. Bacteria in some foods like yoghurts can enhance our health and well-being. Other bacteria can do incalculable harm to our physical health. In the same way, culture can enhance or harm our social norms. Negative cultural attitudes to women and those not like us, are harmful, while cultural attitudes to the care of the vulnerable and elderly enhance social wellbeing.

At the turn of the century, I was invited to Lambeth Palace to join what we called the Lambeth Group to celebrate the coming millennium by formulating common ethical values for a fairer and more peaceful 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although we were from different religions, we had no trouble in agreeing priorities: ethical values that would carry us to a peaceful 21st century.

The exercise reminded us that the ethical values taught by our different faiths aren't all that different. Our different religions are overlapping circles of belief with the part in common being much greater than the smaller area of difference. It is now more important than ever before, that we keep our common values to the fore at all times not, only in our personal lives, but in meeting common environmental challenges that could imperil the future.

Blessed and beautiful is the hut  
Where the Lord's Praise is sung  
Worthless the palace  
Where the Lord is forgotten

Poverty is bliss  
In remembering God  
In the holy congregation  
May worldly goodness be consumed by fire

If it makes man mammoth slave  
To live by grinding corn  
Wearing only a blanket  
But having a contented heart  
Is better than ruling a Kingdom  
Without inner peace

Guru Granth Sahib Page 745

# CONTRIBUTION OF SEVA SCHOOL TO SIKH EDUCATION

## From Humble Beginnings to Outstanding: A Sikh Faith School's Remarkable Journey

Coventry, West Midlands, UK - In 2014, a new chapter in British education began with the opening of a free British Sikh faith school SEVA, dedicated to blending academic excellence with spiritual values. Founded to serve the local community and its surrounding areas to uphold Sikh principles of service, equality and learning, the school started with a vision: to provide a nurturing environment where children could thrive both academically and morally.

The journey, however, was not without challenges. In its early years, the school faced growing pains typical of new institutions. This spurred leaders, staff, and the community into action. Determined to raise standards, the school embarked on a rigorous improvement plan, focusing on teaching quality, curriculum development and pastoral care.

By 2022, their efforts bore fruit. Ofsted inspectors returned and awarded the school a Good rating in all areas, praising its strong leadership, inclusive ethos, and commitment to pupil progress. The school had become a beacon of hope for families seeking a faith-based education rooted in British values. Inspectors reported

“Pupils benefit from attending a welcoming and inclusive school. The Seva virtues of kindness, courage, honesty, tolerance, respect and responsibility are woven into the curriculum and understood by everyone. Leaders have high expectations of all pupils and expect them to work hard to achieve their best.”  
Ofsted, November 2022

Reflecting on this milestone, Principal Mrs. S.Sanghera said:

“When we received the Good rating, it was a proud moment for everyone. It showed that our hard work and our belief in our vision was paying off. We wanted to create a school where academic success and spiritual growth go hand in hand - and this was a big step towards that goal”

The success story didn't stop there. In 2024, during a Section 48 Faith Inspection, the school achieved the highest accolade: Outstanding in all areas. Inspectors commended the school's unwavering dedication to Sikh teachings, its vibrant spiritual life, and the way faith permeated every aspect of school life - from assemblies to community service projects

Speaking about this achievement, Mr. A. Basra added:

“Outstanding in our faith inspection means more than a rating - it means we are instilling the values. Our pupils don't just learn about Sikh virtues; they embody them. This is what makes our school truly exceptional.”

Inspectors praised the trust:

‘The trustees are highly ambitious for the school; they ensure pupils have access to opportunities inside and outside the school to develop them as good human beings’

NSO Section 48 Faith Inspection Report 2024

‘Staff are positive about leadership...They say that leavers consider their well-being and work-life balance. Trustees know the school well and provide effective challenge and support’

NSO Section 48 Faith Inspection Report 2024

### Empowering Pupil Leadership

The school places a strong emphasis on developing leadership skills among pupils. Opportunities include:

- Head Boy and Head Girl roles leading school councils and representing pupil voice
- Faith and Curriculum Leaders promoting Sikh values and organising charitable initiatives

- Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions supporting younger pupils academically and emotionally.

**Pupil Voices:**

- “As Head Girl, I organised a charity event and raised over £500 for a great cause. I also had the opportunity to represent my school by attending the Coventry and Warwickshire RE SACRE event at the University of Coventry sharing a presentation on Equality,” said Sireena B, Year 11.
- “As Head Boy, I launched a podcast to share the latest news and inspirational stories happening at Seva School and in the community. Together we raise awareness of issues pertinent to our learning and development and pupils and citizens,” said, Sam S, Year 11.
- “As a Form Captain and Sports Leader, I have relished the opportunity to have learned about the importance of communication and relationship building with different communities,” shared, Nimrat K, Year 9.
- “As Faith Leader, I value and appreciate the teachings of the founder of the Sikh faith, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, and how they underpin the House system at our school. They are Kirat Karo (Work Hard), Naam Japo (Remember God) and Vand Shako (Share your good fortune),” shared, Arashdeep K, Year 8.
- “As Mental Health and Wellbeing Champion, I aim to improve the confidence of others and through this have grown in my confidence to know that I can make a difference,” added Gursheen K, Year 11

In March 2023, the school embarked on a multi-million-pound Department for Education (DfE) funded capital build project, marking a transformative chapter in its journey. This investment elevated the curriculum, resources, and facilities to new heights, ensuring pupils have access to world-class learning environments.

**Key Developments Included:**

- Two new libraries for academic enrichment.
- Two multi-use games areas and a 3G pitch for sports excellence.
- A Drama Studio and Music Rooms to nurture creativity.
- Refurbished, state-of-the-art classrooms equipped for a wide range of academic and vocational subjects.

These enhancements solidified the school’s position as a place where children belong, achieve, and thrive for generations to come.

The vision of the Trust and leadership culminated in a landmark achievement: the opening of a purpose-built Darbar Sahib on 6th September 2025. This beautifully adorned space serves as:

- A place of peace, worship, and reflection, dedicated to Sikh teachings and their global significance.
- A centre of excellence for learning Panjabi, Tabla, Harmonium, Shabads and Santiyah Gurbani.

Families and pupils are captivated by its beauty, harmony, and spiritual depth—a true embodiment of faith and education intertwined.

The journey has been remarkable and one etched in the history books as one of unwavering belief in faith, unsurmountable resilience and an unequivocal commitment to the academic and spiritual growth of its pupils.

Seva School and Sevak Education Trust.

### **Comment**

The Sikh Messenger and the wider Sikh community warmly appreciate the outstanding achievements detailed above. The Principal Mrs. S. Sanghera, staff and governors pupils are to be warmly congratulated for their vision and hard work in academic achievement and promotion of Sikh values in a way that brings credit to the whole Sikh community.

## **NSO ANNUAL REPORT 24-25**

### **MEDIA**

#### **Press Releases**

##### **June 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 - 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Bluestar**

This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Operation Bluestar, the codename for an Indian army operation between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1984 to remove 'militants' from the *Sri Harmandir Sahib* or Golden Temple in Amritsar. The attack on Sikhism's holiest shrine coincided with the martyrdom anniversary of Guru Arjan, and many innocent pilgrims were killed by the Indian army – with some estimates suggesting thousands were murdered during the operation.

##### **September 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 – Serious Concerns about APPG 'Islamophobia' definition**

Our letter to Angela Rayner, the then Deputy-Prime Minister – Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

'We want to raise our grave concerns about the APPG 'Islamophobia' definition which has already been adopted by the Labour party and incorporated into its governing body's code of conduct. Adoption of this contested definition into law would have serious implications on free speech, not least the ability to discuss historical truths. The former home secretary Sajid Javid argued adopting the APPG definition would 'risk creating a blasphemy law via the backdoor'. Meanwhile, former Labour MP Khalid Mahmood co-authored a report outlining how the definition has already been weaponised to shut down those accused of offending some members of the Muslim community.'

##### **September 26<sup>th</sup> 2024 – Lord Khan's response to our concerns about the APPG Islamophobia definition**

Publication of Lord Khan's letter to the Network of Sikh Organisations confirming the APPG definition's conflation of race and religion is 'not in line' with the Equality Act 2010.

[Excerpt from Lord Khan's letter]. 'As you have mentioned, the definition proposed by the APPG is not in line with the Equality Act 2010, which defines race in terms of colour, nationality and national or ethnic origins. More appropriately, the Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination, harassment or victimisation to anyone with a religious belief as well as to those who lack a religion or belief, subject to certain exceptions. A person who experiences Islamophobia from their employer or when accessing goods and services may be able to bring a case of religious discrimination or harassment to an employment tribunal or other civil court.'

This was a breakthrough for defending free speech and widely reported in the mainstream media.

### **25<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – The Sikh Messenger Autumn/Winter 2025**

- In this edition we covered the NSO AGM, Annual Report 23-24
- Religious Discrimination in Prison Chaplaincy
- Global Sikh Council meets in London
- Islamophobia and Free Speech

### **9<sup>th</sup> December 2024 – Why the Terminally Ill end of life Bill is an affront to Sikh teachings**

The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) is unequivocally opposed to Kim Leadbeater's Terminally Ill (End of Life) Bill, as we have been with other previous attempts to give power to the state to control life and death, and rubber stamp what in no uncertain terms is 'assisted suicide'. The use of euphemisms continues to be deployed by those supporting this controversial Bill, often to soften the reality of what is being proposed here – state sanctioned suicide. This was aptly illustrated in the debate during the second reading of the Bill. A point of order was raised by a Labour MP accusing Danny Kruger MP of using 'incorrect language' with his use of the word 'suicide'. As Kruger rightly clarified, 'what the Bill would do is amend the Suicide Act 1961. It would allow people to assist with a suicide for the first time.'

### **20<sup>th</sup> January 2025 - Our Letter to the Home Secretary on 'grooming gangs'**

'We are encouraged to hear the steps the government is taking to address the issue of group-based child sexual exploitation or 'grooming gangs' as outlined in your speech in the Commons last week. This shows the government's commitment in looking to address a national shame and what is now regrettably an inter-generational scandal. That said, the proposals do fall short of a statutory national inquiry (like Grenfell), which would have far more powers, and provide the necessary coverage for victims from the dozens of towns and cities impacted. In your speech you referred to a rapid audit to be overseen by Baroness Louise Casey. This audit will amongst other objectives, 'properly examine ethnicity data and the demographics of the gangs and victims', as well as 'cultural and societal drivers for this type of offending'.

The letter was copied into Sikh heritage MPs, none of whom responded. It included reference to the targeting of Sikh and Hindu heritage girls and received coverage in the *Times*.

### **13<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – NSO complaint to BBC: Radio 4 'grooming gang' broadcast**

#### **Complaint to Radio 4 – Sunday programme with Edward Stourton**

The Sunday programme on Radio 4 with Edward Stourton on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2025 refers to the Hindu Council UK and the Sikh Association UK objecting to the 'misleading' word 'Asian'. In terms of accuracy, for the record, there is no Sikh Association UK that we are aware of, the presenter is likely referring to us – the Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) who have worked with the Hindu community since 2012, in raising objection to the word 'Asian', and our director had a letter in the *Times* last week.

## **6<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – Marking the Birth Anniversary of Guru Gobind Singh – the tenth Guru of Sikhism**

We at the Network of Sikh Organisations UK offer the Sikh community warmest greetings on the auspicious occasion of the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh ji, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh's life was one of an unwavering commitment to uplifting ideals; a life dedicated to the pursuit of social and political justice, freedom of belief, and the equality of all human beings, including importantly, the dignity and complete equality of women. The message of his life and teachings carries invaluable guidance for all humanity and is of particular relevance to a world in which near genocide is seen in Gaza, along with continuing suffering in Ukraine and many other parts of the world. Sadly, those fleeing conflict and the destruction of their livelihood are met with

## **Lord Singh's oral contributions – Hansard | April 2024 – March 2025**

### **25<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – Jewish Community in London: Safety**

My Lords, does the Minister agree that it would enhance the image and security of the wonderful Jewish people if the Jewish people in this country were to issue a strong statement dissociating themselves from the policies of the Netanyahu Government and the atrocities that have been committed on the people of Gaza, who are also human? Instead of that, the Board of Deputies has unfortunately sent a delegation to Tel Aviv showing solidarity with the Netanyahu Government, whose atrocities include the destroying of hospitals and the firing on aid convoys, killing even British people.

### **25<sup>th</sup> July 2024 - King's Speech**

My Lords, I speak from a Sikh perspective, which emphasises that we are all equal members of one human family. Seeing others as lesser beings has been a source of conflict throughout history, leading to the horror of the slave trade, empire building and gross economic exploitation. It also led to the absurdity of superior and inferior races. Such talk was common in the 1930s not only in Germany, but in this country. I was called a Jew in school by those who wished to hurt me.

### **9<sup>th</sup> September 2024 – Anti-Muslim Prejudice and Hate Crime**

My Lords, there are no comparative statistics to show that Muslims suffer more from irrational prejudice than, say, any member of the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist faiths. To borrow from Shakespeare, if a member of those other faiths is cut, do they not bleed? Will the Minister confirm that the Government will be even-handed in looking at the needs and concerns of all religions and those of no faith?

### **13<sup>th</sup> September 2024 – Sudan**

My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Collins, for bringing this important debate. The horrendous suffering in Sudan is rooted in the inflated egos of two power-hungry warlords. Their rivalry, however, does not explain their ready access to sophisticated and expensive weapons or the scale of destruction and suffering in a brutal civil war that has cost more than 1 million lives, with millions more fleeing their homes.

We are all moved by TV pictures of devastation, of bewildered children searching for food and drinking contaminated water, and of skeletal children suffering serious malnutrition. We see heart-rending appeals to relieve suffering. But our donations are, at best, like the placing of sticking plasters over deeper and festering wounds—wounds caused by a spiralling global arms trade.

### **14<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – Gaza Crisis**

My Lords, recorded history states that Palestinians were forcibly removed from the homes that they had lived in for centuries, by the Stern Gang, Irgun Zvai Leumi and others whom we then called terrorists, to create the State of Israel in 1948. Does the Minister agree that it is shameful and beyond belief that, in the 70 years that have passed, instead of helping displaced Palestinians to build a new life, the West has been selling arms to Israel to bomb schools, hospitals and even UN refugee centres in Gaza and the West Bank, killing tens of thousands of innocent men, women and children in atrocities condemned by the UN and all human rights organisations?

### **15<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – Religious Hate Crime**

My Lords, the hate crime that captures the headlines often has a political dimension where religions are involved, such as in the Middle East. Although serious, it is transitory. More serious is the hate crime of religion on religion, with claims of God-given superiority. Does the Minister agree that open dialogue between religions on the actual teachings—I do not mean just having tea and samosas, which is the usual thing—would help identify important commonalities that can strengthen cohesion in society?

### **26<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – International Aid Workers: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

My Lords, the United Nations aid agencies, the International Criminal Court and human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch all say that what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank is genocide. The Pope says it is genocide. In the circumstances, does the Minister agree that to talk of humanitarian aid while supplying weapons to assist in the genocide is nothing short of hypocrisy?

### **6<sup>th</sup> December 2024 – Social Cohesion and Community during Periods of Change**

My Lords, I too congratulate the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of York on calling this important debate. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Sharma, on his impressive and thoughtful maiden speech. The poet reminds us that rivers and mountains interpose to make one people implacable foes. It is not only geography that divides what Sikhs call our one human family; it is also human prejudice and bigotry. Most of us like to believe that we have no prejudices, and that prejudice is confined to the ignorant few. Nothing could be further from the truth. Prejudice, or a fear of difference, is inherent in us all. We are all genetically programmed to be wary of difference. In less enlightened times, even left-handers like me were regarded with suspicion—the Latin word for left is “sinister”. The challenge before us is to recognise and discard irrational prejudice against fellow members of what Sikhs call our one human family.

### **5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 – International Women’s Day**

My Lords, religion still plays an important part in many lives. Religious texts written centuries ago often denigrate women. Most people learn to skip over those bits, but the extremists latch on to them. Is it not time to ask religious leaders to interpret those texts in the context of today’s times for guidance to their followers? That is the only forward, to get away from the kind of situation we find in Afghanistan.

### **18<sup>th</sup> March 2025 Gaza: Ceasefire**

My Lords, with all the reservations we have heard about the excesses of Israel in Gaza in this House, from the Foreign Secretary and in many other parts of the world, why are we still supplying arms to Israel?

### **25<sup>th</sup> March 2025 – Israel Arms Exports**

My Lords, the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others have all condemned Israeli brutality and genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The International Criminal Court has declared Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, guilty of war crimes and issued a warrant for his arrest. Will the Minister agree that, in continuing to supply arms to Israel, however diplomatically we put it, we are complicit in the genocide of Palestinian men, women and innocent children?

### ***The Sikh Messenger***

We are about to publish the latest edition of *The Sikh Messenger*. We are now making some editions of our quarterly magazine available on our website [www.nsouk.co.uk](http://www.nsouk.co.uk). Individuals who want to pitch an idea for *The Sikh Messenger* can reach the editors: [info@nsouk.co.uk](mailto:info@nsouk.co.uk) – follow us on X (formerly known as Twitter) @SikhMessenger – where we now have over 9,400 followers.

### **Letters to the Editor**

9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – Lord Singh's letter in the *Times* about the camouflage term 'Asian' to describe 'grooming gangs'.

Faith leaders including Lord Singh opposed Kim Leadbeater's assisted dying bill. An open letter with 29 signatories was covered in a news story on the front page of the *Telegraph* in November 2024.

August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2024 – Lord Singh's letter in the *Times* on freedom of speech and Islamophobia.

### **Speaker events**

In January 2025, Lord Singh spoke for the motion at Oxford Union debate – 'This House Believes Multiculturalism Has No Future in the UK'.

Our Deputy-Director Hardeep Singh presented at the Battle of Ideas in October 2024.

### **Memorial events**

Lord Singh laid a wreath at the Chattri Memorial in Sussex on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

### **News and NSO's national impact**

We made news in the *Times* back in January 2025 with a report on our letter to the then Home Secretary on 'grooming gangs'. The headline/subheading - *Sikh group urges home secretary to widen grooming gangs inquiry - Non-Muslim girls have been considered 'fair game' by some abusers, the Network of Sikh Organisations UK claims in a letter to Yvette Cooper.*

We subsequently wrote to Baroness Casey and were supported by Sarah Champion MP in raising the issue of the religiously motivated targeting of Hindu and Sikh girls. Baroness Casey referred to our concerns in her national audit – titled National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, published in June 2025. Here is the excerpt from the report:

‘This audit also received representations about the need to examine further cultural and religious drivers behind child sexual exploitation including concerns that Sikh and Hindu children had been targeted for abuse because they were ‘easy targets’ and who would never tell anyone about being exploited because of the shame.’

### **‘Islamophobia and free speech’**

Our work standing up for freedom of speech and the encroachment an ‘Islamophobia’ definition on our freedom to discuss historical truth, like the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, or express objection to halal slaughter has been the subject of significant news coverage in the *Times*, *Telegraph* and elsewhere. We have been the only Sikh group to make a stand. Regrettably there has been silence from Sikh heritage MPs, despite our writing to them. Worst still, one Sikh heritage MP publicly supported the previous All-Party-Parliamentary-Group definition of ‘Islamophobia’. Moving forwards, the NSO will continue to stand up for freedom of speech and freedom of religion for all.

**Our Deputy-Director, Hardeep Singh has written about a variety of community related issues in the mainstream media.**

Various articles in the *Spectator*, *Telegraph* and Religion Media Centre amongst others.

### **Inter Faith Involvement**

- 1) Following the closure of Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN), a meeting to discuss the future of the interfaith movement in England took place at the National Bahá’í Centre, London on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

The meeting was convened by Warwick Hawkins of Faith in Society Ltd to which the representatives of the main faith organisations, including the Network of Sikh Organisations UK, were invited.

The ex-co chair of IFN Canon Hilary Barber, Vicar of Halifax Minster was in the chair.

Sadly due to family bereavement I could not attend but Lord Singh kindly stepped in at the last minute and attended the meeting on behalf of NSO. He spoke well, made a valuable contribution and his attendance was much appreciated. Here is an extract of the minutes of this meeting relating to Lord Singh’s contribution.

“The Chair invited Lord Singh of Wimbledon to offer a reflection, drawing on his long experience in interfaith work. Lord Singh said that all faiths shared core ethical teachings on how to live responsibly, but over time these had been overlaid with rituals, superstitions and cultural practices both beneficial and harmful. On top of this, many traditions had developed an arrogance which had historically led to conflict, between religions and within them. He called for open, questioning dialogue within and between traditions; and a deliberate shift from defending identity to focusing on shared ethical values. Religion should not be treated as a private matter to be avoided in public life, but as a bedrock for a civilised society.”

The following was agreed as the next step:

A Working Party should be convened, with Warwick Hawkins as its secretary, to draft a small number of model options for a future structure or body.

Mr Hawkins would draw up a proposal for the Terms of Reference, composition and way of working of the Working Party.

This proposal would then be ratified or amended at a second meeting of the full group, in the new year.

2) A talk on Sikh Religion and Culture was given to:

- Monday Fellowship Group, Barwick in Elmet, West Yorkshire
- Harlow Men's Forum, Harrogate
- The Probus Club of Huddersfield, Huddersfield

3) Representation on North Yorkshire SACRE as well as on Bradford SACRE continues.

In both cases updated Agreed Syllabus is being rolled out.

4) Later this month will be representing NSO:

- Multi Faith Festive Tree Launch, Bradford
- Bradford Synagogue Civic and Interfaith Chanukah Service
- **Mohinder Singh Chana**

### **Armed Services Chaplaincy**

It has been a busy year both on Civilian Chaplaincy and Commissioned Chaplaincy ends.

Lot of demand to provide Chaplaincy cover on Royal Air Force stations has offered a wealth of experience, but also pressure on time too.

The faith specific spiritual, moral and pastoral support to SP and their families have been priority throughout the year. This has led to fair out of hours work dealing with some highly sensitive and challenging cases. 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.

Hosted various acquaintance visits of potential WF including Sikh Chaplains into services. Have contributed in various discussions of recruitment of future Military Sikh Chaplains. Worked in collaboration with other World Faith Chaplains and alongside Commissioned Chaplains – supporting in the requested projects. Delivered faith sessions to New Entrant Chaplains whenever possible. Developed good rapport with fellow chaplains from all faiths and build connections. Respecting others' views and treating everyone with fairness while co-operating has been the foundation of year again.

Internal and External Engagement has 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 and belief conference, talks on faith and belief to name a few internal engagements.

Supported Holla Mohalla, DSN annual Akhand Path Sahib, 1914 Sikh troops formation, Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib Jis commemorative events, a day seminar on Guru Nanak Dev Jis Gurpurab to name few external events.

Delivered for Fields of Remembrance at National Memorial Arboretum and in New Delhi Commonwealth Graves.

Nominated to be part of British Delegation visiting Indian historical and religious sites during India Heritage visit 2025. During this visit, represented Sikhs, military, women in forces and religion while speaking at various prominent places and people

**Mandeep Kaur, Sikh Chaplain RAF**

# Press Release Global Sikh Council

(NSO is affiliated to the GSC)

## PROTECTING SIKH HERITAGE

### Global Sikh Council urges Pakistan to restore historic 'samadh' of Mahan Singh in Gujranwala

*'The Samad is important for Sikh diaspora. It is the cultural pride of Gujranwala and Punjab' :*  
*Dr Kanwaljit Kaur*

Chandigarh, September 12, 2025 – The Global Sikh Council (GSC) has expressed serious concern over the reported damage to the Samad of Mahan Singh, father of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, located in Sheranwala Bagh, Gujranwala. Built in 1837 by the Maharaja in memory of his father, the heritage monument has suffered partial collapse following recent heavy rains in Pakistan.

GSC President Dr. Kanwaljit Kaur said the octagonal base of the Samad has caved in, leaving the central structure and dome at risk of further collapse, posing a danger to a nearby school and local residents. She urged Pakistan's Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETBP) to immediately undertake stabilisation and conservation measures to safeguard the monument.

"The Samad of Mahan Singh is a vital part of Sikh and Punjabi heritage. Its preservation is not only important for the Sikh diaspora but also for the cultural pride of Gujranwala and Punjab as a whole. We appeal to the Government of Pakistan and ETBP to restore the site to its original glory so that future generations can continue to connect with this chapter of history," she stated.

While acknowledging ETBP's efforts in maintaining certain major Sikh shrines, the GSC highlighted the neglect of many other sites, including the Samad, which has steadily deteriorated over the decades. The Council emphasised that neglect, coupled with natural calamities, has now brought the monument to a critical stage. The GSC has welcomed the assurance from Chairman of ETBP in this regard and expressed hope that the promised restoration would be carried out in a timely manner.

"The Global Sikh Council is ready to collaborate with ETBP in this important conservation effort," Dr. Kaur added, calling for the Government of Punjab in Pakistan and elected representatives of the region to extend full support to the restoration initiative.

## 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> Guru, Tegh 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 Tegh 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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