Institution and Community Building among Sikhs in Britain: Some Critical Reflections on Current Challenges and Future Direction

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The Bradford and British Sikhs have travelled a long journey since their arrival as pioneer immigrants from the early 1950s onwards. The author has been a "participant observer", working and living within the Bradford community since 1965 and often involved actively in its various organisations in different roles. He has been documenting and publishing his observations from time to time.[1] The present paper builds on the critical examination of the development of Sikh institutions and organisations in Bradford, their leadership, and the general progress of the community. It is argued that Bradford Sikhs represent a microcosm of British Sikhs as a whole. The growth and trajectory of transformation of the British Sikh community and its institutions and community mobilisation have been broadly similar. Most of the issues identified at the local Bradford level remain relevant for Sikhs at the national level. In constructing a likely socio-economic portrait and speculative vision of British Sikhs in the middle of 21st century, the paper draws on author's continued "insider" research on the community, both locally and nationally.

Introduction: Early Sikh Settlement in Bradford

Bradford, situated 200 miles from London in the north of Britain, is a large city with a cosmopolitan population of over half a million. At the beginning of the 20th century it had some 350 wool textile mills. Bradford had a long established link between textiles and imported labour as successive ethnic groups have been recruited to work in its mills and factories. By 1851 over 10% of the city's population was of Irish heritage. After the 1939-45 War, under the East European Volunteer Workers arrangement Bradford became the place of settlement for immigrants from Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and the Ukraine. There was also an established German community of industrialists in the city. Later, Italian girls and women were brought into the city to fill vacancies in the mills and factories and help the export drive (Howath 1989, 6-8). The inflow of imported labour continued with people from the West Indies and the Indian Subcontinent. What actually brought the Indians and Pakistanis to Bradford in the closing years of the 1950s is difficult to confirm (Ram 1986, 13-16). However, the known fact is that within the textile industry restructuring was in progress. New investment required cheap, reliable and low skilled labour, with shift work, long hours and week-end coverage. The numbers of local people prepared to work in the "dark satanic mills" was inadequate and declining. As

additional and replacement labour, the South Asian economic migrants perfectly met these criteria (Allen 1977, 2-4, Fevre 1984, Chapter 1).

Sikh presence in Bradford goes back as far as the early 1930s (Rajput 2013, 13). Little is still known about the life and experiences of early pioneers. It is around the middle of 1950s that their number started building up. Following the tradition of emigration, initially majority of the Sikhs were from the Punjab districts of Jullundur and Hoshiarpur. Others joined them from Eastern African countries largely towards the end of 1960s and early 1970s (R. Singh 1978, 2).

Prior to the introduction of 1962 Immigration Control Act migrants were exclusively male aged between 20 and 40 years. By 1965 unskilled workers could enter Britain only through employer sponsorship but people with higher or professional qualifications could still enter without employer specific voucher. As the immigration rules became more restrictive getting their spouses and children became a priority for the male migrants. Settled migrants tried to sponsor their immediate relatives and even aspiring friends who could enter Britain within the admissible categories. This legitimate process of sponsored migration continued well into the middle of 1970s. The growth of travel agents specialising in cheap transport to *vilayat* (Britain) also encouraged some illegal migration. As the most potential migrants had contacts within the earlier settled migrants in Britain they embarked on their journey with confidence expecting minimum or little difficulties on arrival. They were, almost invariably met at the point of disembarkation and accommodated in the homes of their sponsors, kin or friends. Basically, for most, a sort of *new* extended family came into being in Bradford. This pattern of migration, also known as "chain migration", had significant consequences in the form of initial ghettoization and overcrowding.

The arrival of new Sikhs continued to the end of 1970s when their number reached an estimated 5,000. Over the years, new migration and natural increase in the local Sikh population has been balanced with their gradual outward movement to the adjoining districts of Leeds, Calderdale, and Kirklees and even further afield. Thus according to the 2011 Census there were 5125 Sikhs in Bradford - an increase of only 341 persons from the 2001 figure of 4784.[2]

Majority of Sikhs were migrants from rural agricultural classes in the Punjab with little or moderate level of education. Those from East African countries were skilled and educationally better qualified. In 1977, 74 per cent of Sikhs worked in the textile, engineering and construction sectors. Some of the educated ones worked on the local buses and a few in the public sector professional jobs (R. Singh 1980, 12,Table 7). With the decline in the textile and manufacturing sectors of the local economy, the occupational profile of the community changed. Some went into self-employment while others became early retirees. Most of the younger women who were previously working in mills and garment making factories moved into caring and cleaning jobs, largely through employment agencies. Most of the men who took voluntary redundancy from the local buses set up family run retail and newspaper shops.[3]

Institution Building 1: Growth and Development of Gurdwaras

Until 1964 Sikhs in Bradford had not established any recognised social, cultural and religious organisation. Their only socio-political organisation was a local Branch of the Indian Workers Association (GB). Oral histories confirm that for religious worship they would meet in small groups in private homes. Occasionally, they celebrated *gurpurbs* - birth and death anniversaries of Sikh Gurus and other religious festivals, in rented public halls. For male Sikhs the prime centres for socialising and entertainment were public houses. The above was the pattern of communal life in most cities of Sikh settlement in the UK. In 1958, the first gurdwara was established in Chapeltown Road, Leeds. Bradford Sikhs made generous contributions towards the purchase of this building. Thus, for weekend religious worship they started visiting this gurdwara.

In 1963 they set up the *United Sikh Association Bradford*, an organisation to establish a gurdwara in Bradford. In March 1964, the first gurdwara was opened at 16-20 Garnett Street, converted from an old carpet warehouse bought for £3500 raised through door-to-door collections (R. Singh 2000, 39). Soon the gurdwara became a focal point of the community. It met their specific needs and became a contact point for links with official agencies and local institutions. Over the years they have established seven more gurdwaras, three community centres, three educational and cultural societies. These organisations have provided Sikhs an independent ethnic, religious and socio-cultural identity in the city.

Like most gurdwaras in Britain, Bradford gurdwaras operate as an overarching social, religious and political institution of Sikhs. These days many retired men and women regularly visit gurdwaras to seek comfort and solace from the vicissitudes of ageing such as the feelings of have lost influence and control over family affairs, deteriorating health and loss of individual independence and self-sufficiency. It reduces their loneliness and isolation to some extent. Gurdwaras solemnise marriages, run Punjabi language classes, elderly centres, reading rooms, matrimonial service, health related sessions, bereavement service and form filling sessions. Sikhism being a *spiritual* and a *temporal* religion, at times gurdwara activities evidently shades into political pursuits of one sort or another. Most gurdwaras provide a stage to visiting local politicians and religious leaders and politicians from Punjab on their tours abroad. Generally the gurdwara officials tend to promote their own brand of politics as well.

In the years ahead the role of gurdwaras within the community is likely to change. Present “broad community centre” type activities are likely to have vanished. The coming generation will be limiting their social function to the essential, e.g. conducting marriages, and births and death related formalities. Conducting routine religious services and promotion of Sikhism will still be the primarily duties of gurdwaras. The routine services are more likely to be restricted to the weekends and the celebration of limited principal religious events. Even those would be time bound, tightly planned and well managed.

English and Panjabi may be intermittently used at least for another two to three decades during the services before English take priority over Punjabi.

Currently all gurdwaras in Britain employ imported paid *granthis* (priests) and *kirtanis* (musicians). So far, no (known to me) British born Sikh has adopted priesthood as a career while odd ones are emerging in preaching roles. A large part of the routine tasks in gurdwaras are performed with profound religious devotion and commitment by women. Particularly, running of *langar* – the free kitchen - is the preserve of mainly first generation Punjab born women with some assistance from the young females. *Langar* is generally served by male volunteers. It is expected to undergo a considerable change in its timing and menu in future. Whether the British born generation of Sikh females would have the devotion to feed the *sangat* (congregation) with traditional dishes is uncertain. They are more likely to go for alternatives, for example, employing paid cooks, changing the pattern of dishes, restricting the service times or ultimately importing *langar* from external food caterers. Some of these alternatives are already being tried in some gurdwaras in other cities of Britain. All gurdwaras already charge for religious and other individually requested services including *langar*. As the standard morning service in most gurdwaras is becoming shorter - generally finishing by lunch time - the provision of decent substantial refreshments on arrival might replace the full *langar,* especially on gurdwara financed events. Steadily, initial resistance would wane and a varying style of *langar* may become an acceptable standard.

The seven gurdwaras in Bradford are split over the following lines: existence of caste (three gurdwaras), following of a *sant* (one gurdwara), strict *amritdhari* - baptised tradition (two gurdwaras) and liberal mainstream following (one gurdwara). They have come about from the single gurdwara in 1967 to up to seven and this is largely attributable to internal conflicts within management committees and the self-esteem of certain individuals or a group. In this respect Bradford is not unique - an identical pattern exists across the Sikh diaspora. The growth of gurdwaras has happened haphazardly, unplanned, and unrelated to the potential size of local congregation. There is one gurdwara per 600 Sikhs in Bradford, and they are all within walking distance from each other. Despite a continued decline caused by 'outward flight' of Sikhs in Bradford they are still extending their premises (R. Singh 2015, 12-16).

Over the years, the number of gurdwaras in the UK has increased to an estimated figure of 250-300. At a cost of multi-million pounds grand multipurpose gurdwaras have been erected in Britain, e.g. Gurdwara Sri Singh Sabha Gurdwara in Southall, Sri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Gravesend, Gurdwara Sahib Leamington and Warwick, Glasgow Gurdwara (Scotland), Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha in Handsworth, Birmingham and Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Smethick, Sandwell. Following a general trend across Britain even in Bradford each gurdwara has become bigger, magnificent and multipurpose. Along with this the cost of their routine maintenance and extended services they all provide has increased. In this progression of internal competition between gurdwaras for grandeur, their management committees

seems to have ignored the long-term consequences of their decisions which are likely to emerge from the fundamental changes the community is experiencing.

Alongside the path of ongoing change some sombre questions seem obvious. Will the future incomes be adequate to preserve the multiplicity of gurdwaras or are they likely to experience the fate of many local churches - closures, mergers and eventual sale? What type of future gurdwara management structure and style will be appropriate? What needs to be done to remove duplication and waste of limited community resources? What services will the community need from gurdwaras outside local public sector provisions in the future? In fact, these questions remain pertinent for Sikh communities across Britain and beyond. Answers to these questions are only good speculations.

Gurdwara Management: Income and Use of Resources

Income of gurdwaras comes from voluntary donations, celebration of special religious and social festivals, wedding ceremonies and open appeals for specific purposes. The revenue and resources of a particular gurdwara are directly related to the size of its congregation. As the Sikhs economically prosper there is a visible tendency for them to move outwards from their initial inner-city settlements to more desirable residential areas (R. B. Ballard 1977, 42-43). However, most gurdwaras are currently located in inner-city districts as they are in Bradford. If the present trend in the dispersal of Bradford community (as discussed earlier) continues even further away from the gurdwara and the loyalty of 'out-movers' dwindles to the institutions built by their forefathers on which the income of all gurdwaras of Bradford currently depends, they will face a gradual decline. Their incomes are likely to be further affected: (a) from a likely reduction in celebration of social events and visits to the gurdwaras for non-religious motives especially with the passing off Punjab-born adults and (b) as the tradition of making frequent public appeals for raising funds in weekly services (which more often are highly embarrassing and humiliating for those not supporting a particular cause) lose popularity with British born Sikhs.

Gurdwaras heavily dependent on "loyal sangat" may lose a large part of their income as out-movers enhance links with institutions in the areas of their new settlement, resulting in diminished loyalty to gurdwaras attended by their ancestors. The possible negative impact of ethnically mixed marriages, inter-caste marriages, and the ever increasing influence of western life-styles should not be ignored on gurdwara attendances and thus revenues. Apparently, potential recipients of gurdwara services have become informed consumers - exercising free choice in gurdwara services. As a cumulative effect of the above factors, mergers and closures of some gurdwaras seem inevitable. Shift in devotee attendances relating to particular services in Bradford gurdwaras is already happening and a decline in regular attendances in four gurdwaras is noticeable, and increasing. This development is a clear indication of unlikely survival of these gurdwaras in the times ahead. Furthermore, as gurdwaras receive no external funding their future incomes remain unreliable and unpredictable. There is generally a high risk of *waste* of resources in gurdwaras,

especially where income-spending is unbudgeted, uncontrolled and financial accountability is less stringent. Many gurdwaras remain unregistered with the Charity Commission, thus there is less external scrutiny of their accounts and of overall accountability.

In a small community like Bradford, present replication of (similar) services by gurdwaras is undoubtedly resulting in inefficient and extravagant use of scarce financial and human resources of the community. Despite an awareness of the problem within the community, the gurdwara management committees and their collective organisation - *Board of Representatives of Bradford Gurdwaras* - have done little to deal with the problem. Their lack of response is understandable. Introducing changes in the established structures is likely to be controversial and painful as they hit and hurt some vested interest.[4] Each gurdwara is concerned about preserving its self-image or egos of influential individuals and continues to operate in state of denial of the issue. Unless some collective action is taken, future financial circumstances and consumer choices are likely to address it. In this context, the transformation within the community would be highly significant.

In theory, gurdwaras have only three possible routes open for action on duplication of services. The first and simple choice is to *do nothing* and let time take its course. Clear signs of diminishing regular *sangats* in four gurdwaras are likely to result in insufficient income and volunteers to do anything outside their primary function of holding religious services. They could be faced with a choice between a merger and closure.

The second choice is to explore the possibility of sharing services with others through negotiation and cooperation, using the basic economic principle of *comparative advantage*. This will preserve the independence, self-image or ego of each gurdwara and in unison offer their congregations a wide range of high quality and efficient services or facilities they would want. To some extent devotees have already started making such choices in the absence of any steps taken by managers of gurdwaras in this direction.

The third choice is to offer only a package of standard religious services at individual gurdwara level and leave the extra-religious services provision to be managed collectively by an overarching organisation, for example, a "local board of gurdwara representatives" under mutually agreed terms and guidance. This body could charge fees for certain services directly from their users while others could be provided through a contribution from each participant gurdwara in accordance with an agreed method. And the delivery of the provision could be managed through paid appointed employees or voluntary workers - professionally trained, supported and supervised.

Gurdwara Management Models

The traditional model of running and managing a gurdwara rests on (a) *sewa* - mental, physical and financial voluntary contribution and (b) over-riding power of *sangat* - an unorganised congregation, in all matters. The principle of *sewa* implies devotees voluntarily performing routine physical tasks, such as cleaning

and cooking and serving meals in *langar*, and all managerial positions being honorary with the exception of paid positions of professionals, e.g. the *granthis* - scripture readers, *kirtanis* - musician and other *Gurbani* - hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib - readers. The *sangat*, at least in theory, is capable of over-turning the decisions of elected management. There is an inherent contradiction between such *theoretical power* of the *sangat* and the legitimate decision making powers of elected management boards/trustees. Often manipulative and vociferous individuals or groups, within or outside the management board, abuse this ambiguity resulting in internal disputes often ending up in the courts. As discussed earlier, the present system of gurdwara management has some other serious weaknesses too. So far *sangats* have been docile, reverent and unchallenging. This is all likely to undergo change in the future when *sangats* will be better educated, questioning and seeking accountability.

The management structures and leadership styles of Bradford gurdwaras is a miniature model of the national picture. Each gurdwara has an independent legal identity established through a written constitution. Over the years they have moved over to the model of electing against the tradition of *sangat* unanimously appointing management committees for day-to-day running of gurdwaras. Therefore, some gurdwaras have replaced the role of the *sangat* by a formal paid membership body which votes during the election of a management committee. Taking another example, the Amrit Parchar Dharmik Diwan gurdwara is run by a group of individuals appointed by its spiritual leader living in the Punjab. The experience shows that irrespective of the model employed in establishing management, factional interests of one sort or another have caused lasting tensions and conflicts. Most of the time elections aren't contested on issues significant to the community, but as a struggle by a particular ambitious individual or a group to gain status positions for establishing a power base within a key community institution. All management positions are unpaid and voluntary. However, there is a perception within the community that not all officials are genuine "*sewa* seekers" *(sewadars* - volunteers*)* some are only "status seekers".[5] In Bradford's close-knit Sikh community tribal attitudes and clannish politics operate during gurdwara management elections. This is a direct consequence of chain migration of the early days.

To eradicate the general weakness of the traditional model a prototype model of gurdwara management suggested below may become a preferred, more effective option. In a small gurdwara, a board of trustees could work as a management committee too. Initially it may be appointed by the *sangat* with due consideration to their educational, managerial and organisational qualities and expertise for a definitive period. At the expiry of its first definitive term, rather than holding an election for the new board, a proportion of trustees may retire who could be replaced at the recommendation of the trust board by similar number of suitable individuals in line with the Charity Commission guidelines. In appointing new members due consideration should be given to fill the skill gaps identified by the board. The board's nominations will be formally approved at the annual general meeting of the *sangat* or a membership body established

(where a *sangat* is too large) to preserve the application of a democratic system in the management.

The main functions of the trustees/management board will be to determine the strategic direction, business plan and financial controls, and recruitment, appointment and overseeing the work of paid employees. The day-to-day running of the gurdwara could be the full responsibility of paid full and part-time employees with open opportunities for the volunteers to contribute in various activities. This model will eradicate many of the contemporary difficulties and problems relating to internal factionalism and open conflict in choosing management teams. The newer generation of young Sikhs are not interested in the contemporary local politics of individual gurdwaras. In the coming years one would expect the new generation of trust board members to have arisen above the caste, clan or *biradari* - caste networks which currently are the source of tensions in management boards.

To cultivate cooperation between local gurdwaras a two layer model could be developed: micro management structure at an individual gurdwara level concurrent to a collective body of all local gurdwaras on the top. As for the "top body", it would have delegated members representing each gurdwara. It will not interfere in the everyday running of a member gurdwara. Its role would be broadly to: address the general issues impacting on the community as a whole; provide strategic guidance to local gurdwaras; represent the Sikh community as a single entity to outside bodies; and make a collective response to major challenges facing the community. This body will endeavour to facilitate coordination between local gurdwaras in their activities through eradicating duplication and efficient use of resources for maximum benefit to the community. At some stage, it might decide to take the responsibility for certain activities such as *amrit-sanchar* (baptism ceremony), Panjabi language teaching, library and resource centre for Sikh studies, and centre(s) for elderly etc.

Can such an overarching *top body* for optimising services to the local community work? The possibility of this happening is not surreal. This has been tried in Bradford (as in some other cities) only with limited success. In the wake of heart-rending and volatile situation created by the Indian Army's attack on the Golden Temple in 1984 and the Delhi massacre of Sikhs, Sikh organisations in the city set up a supreme body - *Federation of Bradford Sikh Organisations (FBSO)*, (a) to present a collective perspective on the tormenting state of affairs to the British media, (b) to maintain internal solidarity within the community and (c) to sustain cordial relations with the local Hindu community which was considered an adversary. FBSO functioned successfully in its primary mission and in furthering cooperation between gurdwaras in some of their other routine activities until 1993 when it suddenly vanished (R. Singh 2000, 61-64). In 2005 it was revived in the shape of *Board of Representatives of Bradford Gurdwaras* (which excludes other Sikh organisations) which in 2017 was still operational. The obvious example of its success has been the jointly held annual *Nagar Kirtan* processions. Beyond this it has limited influence in bringing about consistency in religious practices or coordination in the principal areas of

religious functions and services offered by its members. There is hope, but no certainty.

Gurdwara Leadership Styles

Across Britain, gurdwara leadership remained largely in the hands of conservative, moderately educated Punjab-born older males until 1984. There was virtually little input from the young British-born male or female members of the congregation. It is only from the mid-1980s that some young educated people under the influence of British radical Sikh organisations have made a significant entry into the management of gurdwaras. For example, in Bradford, despite there being no dearth of young talented Sikhs in the community this has happened in only two gurdwaras.[6] Up to the 1980s, in gurdwara leadership choices little distinction was made between the "clean shaven" and "practicing turbaned Sikhs". A large majority of the male *sangat* used to be "clean shaven" too. Since the 1980s, pressure built up from the continuous increase in the number of *amritdhari*, baptised and radicalised Sikhs, to replace the liberal gurdwara management boards by *amritdharis*. As the majority of congregations were and still are, *non-amritdharis*, a negotiated solution seems to have emerged that at least the top important position holders in the management should be *amritdharis.* It is doubtful, if the compromised solution would be workable or even observed in the future.

With gurdwaras now being recognised as a principal Sikh institution by official agencies, this increases the aspirations of their officials within and outside the Sikh community. This leads to competition, rivalries, jealousies, and tensions between the status seeking ambitious individuals to gain positions on gurdwara management boards. In the absence of any formal system of training, induction or mentoring, sharing of management responsibilities within the elected management boards becomes difficult. Consequently the responsibility of day to day routine arrangements and for establishing and maintaining external links falls on the shoulder of a few key officials. In doing multiple jobs their performance suffers and controls remain loose. However, they become the power holders within the organisation.

It is only very recently that women have taken interest in gurdwara leadership positions and only a few have reached positions of power and authority. However, most of the time, they are still taken as "token" representatives with little influence and proper voice. In spite of this, many women and some men of professional background have actively taken over the responsibility of Punjabi language classes, religious education groups, sporting activities and the libraries in all gurdwaras.[7] They would naturally inspire others for taking leading roles within the community in the future.

Religiosity and Identity

Sikhs are per se religious and visit a gurdwara with religious sentiments and a commitment to participate in the congregation. The visible signs of gradually

increased religiosity are: an increased number of *amritdhari* Sikhs, seven day opening of the gurdwaras, celebration of a significantly enlarged number of Sikh *gurpurbs*, annual *Vaisakhi* parades*;* and a renewed interest in celebration of social and religious family events in gurdwaras e.g. organising *Sukhmani Sahib Paths* (reading of Sukhmani hymns) and *akhand paths* (uninterrupted reading *of Guru Granth Sahib*) for festivity of weddings, birthdays, special anniversaries, deaths and occasions of personal achievements. For many elderly Sikh gurdwaras serve a dual function - they are religious cum community centres that provide the opportunity to meet many recognizable people who had been connected with their earlier life in one way or another. The annual *Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan* (public religious procession to celebrate the *Vaisakhi* event) on the streets of Bradford, attended by a couple of thousand men, women and children of all ages, provides a living evidence of this development. This phenomenon is entirely generated and promoted by the Punjab-born generation and carries a kind of superficiality and temporariness about it. Thus it is realistic to believe that the present situation is expected to gradually wane.

In the contemporary narrative of heightened religiosity of British Sikhs, the image of the Bradford Sikh community is minute but identical. Although the increase in religiosity was significantly triggered by the 1980s events in the Punjab, yet it has maintained its momentum across the globe by continued reminder of anti-Sikh atrocities by imported *granthis, kirtanis*, visiting Sikh preachers and political leaders from Punjab and by the British digital and printed Sikh media. More recently, British Sikh TV channels continue to reinforce the view that the genocide of Sikhs was a premeditated plan of extreme right Hindu organisations such as RSS and Indian governments of both the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) and the Indian Congress to annihilate their distinctive independent identity as previously propagated by Sikh militant groups. Articles in the British Punjabi weeklies like the one by Jathedar Mohinder Singh Khehra entitled *Right Hindu Party RSS Plot to Completely Exterminate Sikh Nation* in *Des Pardes*, on 24 February 2017, appear regularly. An unceasing belief in such a plot and blame culture, and a perpetual denial about internal deficiencies block all chances of a rational debate (R. Singh 2015, 21).

By the middle of 21st century the population of practicing Sikhs in Britain is likely to change significantly. Traditionally the Sikhs are easily recognised from the word Singh or Kaur in their names. The use of family name/surname was not a standard practice in many Sikh families in Punjab. However, the use of family/surname became an imposed necessity for consistency with naming practice on arrival in Britain. As the use of surname, particularly with the British born children, became a tradition 'Mr. Singh', 'Mrs. Kaur' and 'Miss Kaur' started vanishing fast. In the process of Anglicisation of Sikh names, the disappearance of 'Singh' or 'Kaur' even as a middle name is not uncommon either. Even as early as the 1960s, many Sikh immigrants shortened or anglicised their original first names to make acceptance within local circle of whites easier. Now, it has become an obvious trend in adopting non-traditional Sikh names as first name for their children among many parents. As a result of increased number of mixed marriages, the number of white-Sikh and black-Sikh

categories are likely to increase. The latent impact of this practice on their children's religious identity and interest in Sikh beliefs and customs is unlikely to be positive although it may be too early to say. The impact of longer term living in a secular environment, and the adoption of western value systems are going to be off-putting on their religious thinking too. The Casey Review notes that there is an increase in secularity in Britain. The percentage of people reporting that they had no religion grew from 16.8 % to 26.1 % in the period 2001 to 2011 (Casey, Dame Louise December 2016, 27). In the general British population, amongst 18-24 year olds 63 % have no religious affiliation compared with the figure of 24% of 75 years old. Within the 18-24 age group, 37% were not raised within a religious faith and 68% did not attend religious services (Clements 2017). It remains to be seen whether the British Sikhs will follow this trend or positively redefine their religion. Furthermore, by tradition, Sikhism is not a proselytising religion.[8] It doesn't advocate conversion of others into Sikhism. Guru Nanak advocated subscribing to one's own, whether it was Hinduism or Islam. The struggle for saving Sikhism so far has been directed towards reviving religion within the Sikh community itself. The overall ethos of repressive fundamentalism prevailing in many gurdwaras at present with their emphasis on *Khalsa* identity is not conducive to promoting Sikhism among a 'secularized' new generation either. According to the British Sikh Report 2016, only one per cent Sikhs keeps five articles of faith (*Kara - steel bangle, Kesh - uncut hair, Kangha - comb, Kashera - shorts and Kirpan - sword*), 23% keep two articles (*Kara and Kesh*), and 46% keep one article (Kara). Furthermore, only 53% of men and 46% of women maintain uncut hair (BSR Team 2016, 9 Table 10).

According to Professor Lucinda Platt one in 10 Sikh men and one in 12 Sikh women had a partner of another religion (R. Singh 2012, 41). These were the figures some eight years ago and the current figures are likely to be higher. The total relationships including established partnerships and others across ethnic boundaries are estimated to be even more significant. According to a recent British Sikh Report, 80% of adult Sikhs feel comfortable with a member of their family or a friend marrying someone outside their caste and 55% will feel comfortable with him/her marrying a *non-Sikh* (BSR Team 2014). Mixed marriages are not simply a social *privartan* (change) rather a slow uncontrollable *kranti* (revolution). The reason being the participants in this change are independent rational minds unlikely to yield to social and religious pressures. The reality of such marriages is widely recognised by the parents, although unenthusiastically, to keep their children within the family circle. Since 2013 a serious controversy has arisen regarding the solemnisation of mixed caste, mixed race and inter-faith marriages through *Anand Karaj* - Sikh religious marriage ceremony. According to *Rehat Maryada*, the *S*ikh Code of Conduct, for an *Anand Kara*j ceremony to take place, it is essential for the bride and the groom to be Sikhs. Furthermore, an *Akal Takhat Hukamnama*, essentially an edict, has imposed another condition, that marriage of a couple without 'Singh' or 'Kaur' in their names cannot be performed in a gurdwara.[9] An "inter-caste" marriage couple may meet this condition, but "inter-faith and inter-race"

marriage couples are unlikely to meet this condition unless the non-Sikh partner change religion and add 'Singh' or 'Kaur' to his/her name. This stipulation will deprive a vast number of children born in Sikh families an *Anand Karaj*.

Anand Karaj marriages are a complex and controversial unresolved issue facing the community. With strict interpretation of these rules, denying children of Sikh parents a gurdwara marriage has serious identity questions for their children and implications for gurdwaras - a loss of revenue and more gravely potential attendees. Despite the existence of strict requirements for an *Anand Karaj* since 1945, these were never stringently applied either in India or in the Sikh diaspora. Unexpectedly, the stringent fulfilment of religious conditions for conducting marriages in gurdwaras has become a big issue with risky politics and negative consequences for the preservation and promotion of Sikhism. Furthermore, such internal issues not only create divisions within local congregations but at times they have created ugly physical incidents among opposing factions.[10]

Modernisation versus Orthodoxy

The Sikh way of life in western countries with their religiously, culturally and ethnically diverse environment is expected to be influenced further by a number of changes internal to the Sikh community. When the import of India trained Panjabi speaking preachers dwindles completely, the Sikhism preached will be of the locally trained, English speaking, British born, *granthis* who may be liberal and tolerant. They, having familiarity and links with other communities including their socio-religious beliefs and norms of life, are likely to interpret Sikh scriptures and Sikh history with an open mind and more rationally. With Punjabi completely replaced by English as the language of verbal and written communication for the coming generation, their own knowledge of *Gurbani* - the contents of *Guru Granth Sahib*, scriptures and Sikh history, would be acquired only through English language sources. They will be learning about Sikhism largely through internet and many families may not be the first source of learning about one's religious traditions. They themselves would be questioning the rationality and relevance of most religious, social and cultural traditions, presently taken as given. They may follow some in a modified way, but not with profound devotion. They will have respect, but not blind faith in religion. The frequency of their visits to gurdwaras is likely to be irregular. As now, Sikh women may be the key torch bearers, ahead of men, in keeping the links with gurdwaras and selected traditions alive. Thus, the religious life-style of coming generations is unlikely to be a replication of traditional or even neo-orthodox socio-cultural and religious practices.

Currently, there seems to be a struggle going on between "modernisation" and "orthodoxy", that is, a tension between the forces that tend to liberalise religious rituals, practices and cultural norms, and the revival of more obvious and vigorous fundamentalist traditions in Britain. The promotion of multiculturalism of the 1980s doesn't appear to have moderated the spread of extremism. The rising trend of radicalism and intolerance from a small section

of younger generation of Sikhs relating to inter-faith marriages is a clear manifestation of this struggle (Chandhoke 2016). Some straight forward elements of modernisation will get easy acceptance whilst others would remain contentious, making the task of a liberal-oriented future gurdwara management committee to build consensus more difficult. Steadily the use of latest technology is increasing in gurdwara services. Three Bradford gurdwaras project both English and Punjabi versions of *Gurbani Shabad* (religious verses) being sung in *kirtan* instantly in English and Punjabi during routine services. Many gurdwaras now use social media for advertising and promoting their religious programmes. They display their services and programmes on websites. In the absence of British-born bilingual professionally trained Sikh preachers these new initiatives are attempting to lessen the existing alienation of non-Punjabi speaking younger generation from gurdwara activities. The non-English speaking *granthis*, preachers and the *kirtanis* seem to be finding active acceptance of these practices too. In due course shortage of local English speaking professionals can only be rectified through training, and by raising the prestige and status of "*granthihood*" (priesthood) as a career.

For decades it was a normal liberal practice in the diaspora to take *langar* in gurdwaras on dinner tables, but the ones with strong time-honoured views insisted on taking *langar* by sitting in *pangats* - rows on the carpeted floors. After a few years of internal warfare, a dual system based on individual choice, has been agreed. Age related issues have also brought other changes. With many elderly in the congregation finding it difficult to follow the tradition of sitting on the floor during normal religious services many gurdwaras, with extreme reluctance, have started providing a limited number of chairs at the back or along the side walls of the main prayer/worship halls. Whether this practice would become a standard without serious internal controversy and some skirmishes remains to be seen.

Social values among British born Sikhs have already changed since the earlier decades of their parents' arrival in Britain and are likely to transform further. For example, the practice of mutual help - so common among pioneers - has virtually vanished; individualism and mutual competition is enhanced; consumption pattern has become radically different; attitude towards saving and overseas remittances have altered with the demise of "myth of return". The intricate cobweb type traditional social networks that include extended family, relatives, friends, and co-villagers, would gradually narrow down to immediate family, close relatives and friends. New generations will be conducting their life within redefined traditional notions of *family*, *biradari* (caste group), *izzat* (honour), respect, shame, modesty, honour, marriage, parental care and so on. To the surprise of the parents their children's understanding these concepts is ever coming closer to the western attitudes and way of thinking.

The traditional gender role boundaries in career choices and domestic duties have become blurred and unimportant. Inter-mixing of men and women wasn't common in many orthodox families in the past has become more widely acceptable, and at social and entertainment functions it has become spontaneous. Perhaps, the only surviving exceptions are separate doors for men and women

for entering the gurdwara congregation halls and invisible curtains in the middle for their separate sitting. But, not for too long, I suppose. Women feel emancipated and self-reliant and enjoy this new equality in status. In marriage decisions and arrangements for wedding celebrations (other than paying substantial amounts) most parents have accepted the erosion of their traditional responsibilities with reluctant willingness. Marriage has become more contractual and a partnership between individuals. Dissolution of unworkable and unhappy unions carries social stigma no more. Cohabiting, pre-marital physical relationships are no longer social anathemas or matters of shame to the family. Despite the impressive observable transformation in gender roles 71% women felt discriminated in an extended family and 55% had the same feeling at a gurdwara (BSR Team 2013, 25).

Notwithstanding a significant decline in pub drinking among old and new male generations, drinking per se has not diminished at all - 28% Sikhs drink at least once a month and only 37% never drink (BSR Team 2014, 28). On the other side, whilst drinking among women was almost a social taboo one time, it has already become discreetly acceptable within certain social circles. Unsurprisingly, consumption of alcohol will simply become a matter of personal choice for both sexes (Rait 2003, 102). Along with Valentine day, stag-nights and hen-parties, unheard of social customs in South Asian cultures only a few decades ago, clubbing is becoming a norm for young people.

Despite the fundamental belief that caste has no place in Sikhism, in reality Sikh community has been and remains fractured on caste lines. As the Sikhs settled in significant numbers in the UK, *Ramgharhia* and *Ravidassia* sections set up their own gurdwaras in many cities. Even *Bhatra* Sikhs have their own gurdwaras (R. Ballard 1994, 88-116). Caste still manifests significantly in marriages arranged by parents. However it is losing significance as inter-caste marriages (largely through children's independent choice of partners) are increasing and becoming more and more acceptable (R. Singh 2012, 40-43). In future mixed marriages are likely to increase despite the refusal by many gurdwaras to solemnise inter-race marriages. The diversity in occupational choices is proving influential in eroding the significance of caste in Britain. As Sikh surnames are largely caste derived, even after losing its social significance, it is likely to continue as part of an individual's identity. Thus caste is unlikely to become fully redundant among Sikhs for the unforeseeable future. According to the British Sikh Report 2016 whilst 80% of the Sikhs in the UK believe caste to be unimportant, nevertheless 14% still consider it important (BSR Team 2016, 18, figure 9).

Institution Building 2: Community Organisations

An account of Bradford's Sikh community organisations and their activities provides a flavour of non-religious aspects of Sikhs life in Britain as similar organisations also exist in other British cities. It also highlights their significant weaknesses. Beside gurdwaras there are a few other Sikh community organisations. *Sabrang Radio* established in 1999 by a small group of close

friends goes on air for four weeks, twice a year, on *Vaisakhi* and Guru Nanak's Birth Anniversary. It presents a mixture of religious and entertainment programmes mainly with Punjabi speaking adult listeners in mind. Yorkshire Sikh Forum (YSF) is another Bradford based association. It is an organisation of some twenty likeminded businessmen with no grass root membership. With its static membership and official team, over the last 22 years its future seems to be closely linked to the life of key individuals.

Bradford (now British) Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs (BECAS), Bradford Panjabi Cultural Society (BPCS) and Bradford Sikh Youth and Community Services (BSYCS) currently organise literary, cultural and entertainment programmes for Punjabi speaking audiences. Activities of these organisations are mere replication, e.g. annual *kavi darbars* (Punjabi poetry symposiums), *lohri* (annual social event in January of celebrating the birth of a child in the family) and *tiain* (young females' annual dancing party in July/August) celebration, and small social functions limited to their respective members. Attendances at their cultural events are principally of Punjab-born adults. The contents and language of their activities are of little relevance to the British born young Sikhs. Thus they show little interest in these functions and their management. The main sources of income of these organisations are the donations made by the audience plus small donations from Punjabi businesses. Given the small size of Bradford Sikh community, three organisations with comparable aims and activities are perhaps too many. Working together, putting aside individual egos and ambitions of their officials, they have a much greater potential to do diverse things extremely effectively. Given the nature of their largely Punjab-born adult gatherings and the lack of guaranteed income from external sources, their future looks untenable.

Throughout the 1960s and the 1970s Bradford Sikhs were actively involved in anti-racial discrimination, anti-racist immigration legislation and race relations activities of the national Indian Workers Association (IWA) through its Bradford branch. The IWA was committed to the politics of left and Marxian ideology, thus beyond the comprehension of ordinary folks who had no strong interest in the British or Indian politics of the IWA. Gradually its political identity within the community faded. At present the label IWA exists on the sign boards of two community centres in Bradford.

Here two significant features of Sikh community organisations are worth noting. Firstly, generally a new organisation emerges from a split with the original organisation and the dispute continues for a while over the ownership of premises and accounts. For example, in Bradford, a new Ravidas Gurdwara in Thornbury has come about from a split within the management of the earlier one; Ramgharhia Gurdwara on Bolton came about from a rift within the management of Guru Nanak Dev Gurdwara which itself had emerged from the dispute within the management of the first United Sikh Association Gurdwara in Garnett Street. Since 2015 a serious conflict is going on between the two rival groups of IWA about the rightful ownership of the building on Leeds Road. The second IWA centre on Wakefield Road remains dormant. Benefit to the community of both centres is negligible and indeed a colossal waste of

community resource. BPCS is a splinter group of BECAS. (R. Singh 2015, 13-15, 28). Such disputes are typical within the Sikh community. British Punjabi print media carries news about such disputes as they occur. For example, *Des Pardes*, on 24 February, 2017 printed a full page adverts about a court case relating to ownership of Miri-Piri Gurdwara in Southall. Similarly, a four page report appeared in *Des Pardes*, on 14 January, 2005 regarding the internal ownership dispute of Gurdwara Amrit Parchar Dharmik Diwan, Oldbury. Such disputes are expected to become less frequent as Punjab-born founders of gurdwaras and other community organisations are gone.

Secondly, many cultural, literary and other voluntary groups are personality led organisations. For instance, IWA, BECAS, BPCS, YSF, are basically personality driven organisations besides their democratic constitutions and grand aims. They are reluctant to embrace changes in their operation and activities to accommodate modernised attitudes, tastes, expectations and needs of the fast transforming local Sikh community. It will be no surprise if they soon fade into peoples' memory and become a part of British Sikh heritage.

Sikh Politics

Sikh politics operate more vividly and actively at a considerable scale only in the major conurbations of Sikhs in Greater London, West Midlands and East Midlands. The Sikh political leaders of Punjab have been visiting Britain ever since the establishment of Sikh migrants. They have been setting up branches of their parties largely in Southall and Birmingham. In spite of occasional visits of some prominent Sikh religious and political leaders from Punjab, the Bradford Sikh community has largely remained unaffected by their activities and the politics of Punjab. However, the events of the 1980s in India had a serious impact on Sikh community politics, the level of religiosity, intra-community relations and the management of the gurdwaras across diaspora.[11] Some Bradford Sikh youth established links with British branches of Punjab based International Sikh Youth Movement and actively promoted the politics of *Khalistan* (demand for an independent sovereign Sikh state in India) in the community. They also made inroads into the management boards of Guru Nanak Gurdwara and Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara. When the group lost control over Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara management, it drifted away and established a separate Singh Sabha Gurdwara in 1993/94. In general, over the years the Sikh mind has been occupied with political and other developments in Punjab.

Unlike the visible success of Sikhs in gaining positions in local elections, nationally Bradford Sikhs have so far remained largely engrossed in the petty politics of their gurdwaras and community organisations. Despite the Sikhs being loyal supporter of the Labour Party, locally and nationally for decades, so far only two Sikhs nominated by the party had been elected to the council during 1986-1994 and no one since then. According to the British Sikh Report 2015, during the General Election of 2015, the voting intentions of British Sikhs were: 31% Labour, 16% Conservative and 1% Liberal Democrats, whilst 35% were undecided (BSR Team 2015, 9). More recently, both the Liberal and

Conservative parties have managed to create a narrow base among Sikhs too. Given that the Sikh community is small and thinly dispersed across the city, unlike the Muslim community, there is little chance of any Sikh councillor being elected on the strength of its own community's votes.

Up till 2017 there had only been five Sikh MPs (and no turbaned Sikh) in the UK. In 2015, however, there was no Sikh MP and only four Sikhs are in the House of Lords. During the 2015 General Election there was a good chance of two Sikh contestants from the areas of high concentration of Sikh voters being elected MPs. According to Thandi they lost mainly due to the lack of support from the radical wing of Sikh activists due to their opposing political views (Thandi 2015). There is a lesson here that it is unlikely for Sikhs to enter the Parliament without the support of mainstream political parties and non-Sikh voters. Success of Marsha Singh from Bradford – an overwhelming Muslim constituency and Paramjit Singh Dhanda from Gloucester - an overwhelming white constituency - are examples of this assertion. The Sikh Manifesto issued by The Sikh Network prior to the 2015 General Election demanded encouragement from the mainstream political parties to increase political representation at national and local level (The Sikh Network 2015, Section 1). As a postscript to above, it is worth noting there are currently two Sikh MPs in Parliament, both first elected in 2017 and from the Labour Party – Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (the first turbaned Sikh) from Slough and Preet Kaur Gill, (first female Sikh) representing Birmingham Edgbaston.

Currently, the radical viewpoint about the annihilation of Sikh identity and nationhood by extreme-right Hindus in India sells extremely well to the religiously emotional older generation of Sikhs and to a minute section of the British born educated young people under the influence of some radical groups, such as Babar Khalsa, Dal Khalsa, Akhand Kirtani Jatha, the Sikh Federation UK and Sikh Awareness Society. *Amritdhari* identity and *Khalistani* politics, persistently promoted as a way of life for decades, to ward off assimilation and as a protector of faith, seem to be steadily losing their impact. The 1980s horrendous events should be viewed in a historical context. The "religious correctness" that has prevailed for decades in Sikh politics would have lost its observance and strength. The authoritarianism and aggressively imposed tactics of neo-orthodox Sikh movements are likely to be seriously challenged and resisted by the future rational generation. There would be a renewed emphasis on building and promoting discrete Sikh identity based on the knowledge and understanding of the uniqueness of Sikh principles against the concept of historical victimhood and theories of Hindu conspiracy of annihilating Sikhism.[12]

National Representative Organizations

Many a times a fundamental question is raised. Who represents the Sikhs in the UK? The simple answer is "Nobody - and everybody", suggests Jasjit Singh. He derives his conclusion from the central notion of egalitarianism in Sikhism that entitles "any individual Sikh to represent himself and his whole community."

Therefore, "any sort of hierarchy established within Sikh circles is by definition bound to be challenged at the earliest opportunity, most probably by Sikhs themselves" (J. Singh 2013). This appears to be true across the diaspora but in India the supremacy of *Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhik Committee* and the *Akal Takht* is accepted by majority of the Sikhs. In Britain, whenever an organisation claims to be nationally representative of the British Sikhs a key problem lies in the lack of clarity about its true membership and genuine democratic processes used in the election of its leadership.

Let us explore the question of collective representation of the UK Sikhs further. There are two distinct, still, mutually inclusive, parts to this vital question - religious representation and political representation. This inclusiveness emerges from the fact that Sikhism transformed to be a *miri* (temporal/political) – *piri* (spiritual/religious*)* movement from the times of the sixth guru Guru Hargobind under the guidance of living gurus recognised as *Sache Patshahs* (true kings - supreme in religious and political status). It was a revolution. On the one hand the Sikh gurus propagated the freedom of building individual religious identity on knowledge, understanding and commitment rather than within the framework of traditions, rites and rituals of the established religions (e.g. Hinduism and Islam) of their time. Any coercion and imposition in the way of this independent development was to be resisted and opposed, even if necessary by force. On the other hand, the Sikh movement propagated *equality of mankind*, thus a movement against all kind of inequalities - religious, caste, social, cultural, political or economic. During the lifetime of living gurus (*Sache Patshahs)*, the strategy and command to achieve the two objectives of this revolution in unison was embodied in one body or *jot* that later turned into an established religion, Sikhism, and its followers became the *Sikh Panth* – Sikh community, but without a living human person. The *Sacha Patshah* was now the scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib* or *Gurbani.* This notion of inclusiveness of religion and politics continues to persist in the Sikh community. For example, in the 1980s, in Punjab, supremacy of religion over politics occurred with the emergence of a vigorous a demand for *Khalistan*, an independent sovereign Sikh state in India. The impact of this was felt across the Sikh diaspora and continues to influence the politics of British Sikhs and the tensions within the management committees of many gurdwaras.

Mixing religion and politics is neither relevant nor a beneficial concept to the democratic functioning of a society. It also becomes a hurdle for unrestricted expression of alternative perspectives. Nevertheless, Sikhs continue to believe that in Sikhism, religion and politics are intertwined and by implication any Sikh organisation (and its leaders) representing Sikh masses has the right to speak on *all* issues – religious, political or others, concerning the community. This presents a highly problematic situation for the British Sikh community in dealing with external institutions and in resolving issues internal to the community. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 21st century multiple self-styled organisations and groups have emerged claiming to represent British Sikhs, at national and international level to governmental and non-governmental organisations on *all* issues concerning them. Among quite a few, three well

known national organisations include: The British Sikh Consultative Forum, The Sikh Council (UK) and The Sikh Federation (UK). The British Sikh Consultative Forum emerged from its earlier existence as International Human Rights Group in 2002. It aimed to provide Sikh organisations a forum for mutual consultation and "a central point for interface with Government, national bodies, organisations and other communities". It is a body of autonomous members providing advice to and negotiates on Sikh issues with official and other agencies.[13]

The Sikh Council (UK) was formed in 2010, formally launched in June 2011 in the Houses of Parliament. It received recognition from MPs of All Party Parliamentary Group in 2013. Its constitutional structure consists of a General Assembly of all shades of fee paying affiliated gurdwaras and other Sikh organisations, a democratically Executive Committee and a Board of *Amritdhari Jathedars*. It has recently been actively involved in finding an amicable temporary solution to the unpleasant situation regarding mixed marriages in gurdwaras.[14]

The Sikh Federation (UK) was formed in 2003 largely based on the membership of International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF, born in UK in 1984). ISYF had its key aim of promoting the concept of *Khalistan*. It was banned in Britain as a terrorist organisation in 2001 but is no longer a proscribed organisation since March 2016. The Sikh Federation (UK) claims to have membership of affiliated gurdwaras and Sikh organisations and to be the first Sikh political party established in Britain.[15] It is also a member of The Sikh Network which claims to be an inclusive organisation of over 1000 members drawn from Sikh organisation, gurdwaras, youth groups, professionals from various fields and individual activists (The Sikh Network 2015, 2).

To some extent, a variety of perspectives on political, social and economic issues is expected and needs acceptance as long as they do not damage the community. The acceptance of even limited legitimacy is crucial for a minority community (which the Sikhs are in Britain) in the short run. However, none of the above mentioned organisations can claim common legitimacy within the community largely due to suspected claims about their membership. The operation of democratic principles in electing their leadership is generally obscure. From the information on their respective websites and their activities reported in the digital, social and printed media these organisations seem to suffer from common weaknesses and face similar challenges to earn across-community legitimacy. There is little evidence to prove their contention of representing the *Sikh interests at grassroots level*. Given their wide-ranging objectives they struggle to find a clear focus for their activities. They tend to meddle in diverse religious, cultural and political issues. The direction of their activities is generally directed towards *action by others* and ignoring what the community needs to do in addressing its internal weaknesses for self-sufficiency.

Despite the poor progress, limited success and qualified recognition of the above organisations, their emergence establishes the community's need, willingness and commitment to set up some sort of democratic, transparent,

accountable, inclusive national body or bodies to represent British Sikhs. The experience so far suggests that a single organisation even with two separate committees, one for religious affairs and the second for socio-political affairs, is doomed to failure due to internal tensions and a tendency by individual leaders to achieve complete power over the organisation. In view of this we would propose that rather than a single representative organisation two separate parallel but mutually collaborative organisations would be more appropriate and effective in representing the community. Following the central concept of *miri-piri* (temporal-spiritual or political-religious) in the *Sikh Panth*, a national organisation focussing on religious matters internal to the community, e. g. the role and management of gurdwaras, religious education, religious practices etc. and liaising with external faith-organisation and official agencies; and a separate national organisation dealing solely with matters broadly falling under "socio-political sphere". The essential regular collaboration between the two such organisations will be based on sharing their respective perspectives on various issues on non-intervention basis. And for their effective and smooth functioning, standalone membership will be a necessary condition. Furthermore, it has to be understood that competition for status seeking through breach of their agreed boundaries will make them suspect, ineffective and damaging to the Sikh community.

Although currently there is no distinct religious legitimate operative authority in existence in the UK to provide an effective advice and resolution to local gurdwaras on controversial issues, yet for religious services, rites and rituals, they are expected to follow the prescribed *Sikh Rehat Maryada*, and seek guidance in religious affairs from the *Akal Takhat* in Amritsar. From time to time, certain religious issues emerge which have specific relevance to the Sikhs in the diaspora. They need unique solutions. There is no common national platform where peaceful discussions or a dialogue can happen on contentious issues to achieve acceptable compromises. The community also lacks any mechanism to seek consultation with normal *sangat*s. Gurdwaras are charitable organisations by their functions, thus they can benefit from the guidance provided by the UK Charity Commission in certain matters. Sadly not all are registered with the Commission, as registration is not obligatory. Attempts to set up a widely acceptable national representative body of UK have produced limited success. But going by the historical experience the future looks cautiously optimistic.

It is widely recognised that there is an urgent need for establishing an open, democratic and constitutional structure enabling UK gurdwaras to function freely and responsibly in a plural free society. Singh and Sangha (R. S. Sangha 2015) propose a federal system linking all gurdwaras to a national organisation created constitutionally and democratically upwards. At the *base level* will be autonomous gurdwaras. *Level one* will be "local boards" of representatives set up in cities with good number of gurdwaras comprising representatives of member gurdwaras to coordinate the wider activities of local gurdwaras for the benefit of the entire local community and to provide them with a platform to exchange views on matters of mutual local concern. Cities with small number

of gurdwaras in a region will set such a board collectively to provide equivalent services with a regional perspective. They estimate there could be 15-20 such regional type local boards across the UK. *Level two***,** will be the UK level, a grand board, drawing members from the "local boards". Therefore, this board will be a legitimate representative body of an estimated 250 UK gurdwaras. With mandated authority it should be capable of providing support and guidance to local gurdwaras on a variety of issues with regards to discharging their responsibilities effectively within the framework of the local constitutions. The proposed system for managing gurdwaras will establish a practicable national legitimate and accountable body; competent and responsive in overseeing the Sikh community's broadly religious affairs and its primary religious institutions. However, to achieve this, the constitutionally elected membership of the boards at all levels would have to be established through a democratic process that had respect, credibility and authority with external organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The case for setting up a national representative socio-political organisation of UK Sikhs is a much greater and complex task. The contemporary religious-politics of the Sikh community is largely linked to political, religious and human rights affairs of Punjab. Most of the UK based Sikh organisations with religious-political objectives are the direct off-shoots of the same name political groups in Punjab. Unsurprisingly, a splinter groups springs up in Britain following a split in its parent group in Punjab. In the pursuit of their objectives they tend to have access to gurdwara finances and stage. Their persistent struggle in achieving a hold on gurdwara managements has resulted in localised clashes and alienation of certain sections of Sikhs. Control over the management of two gurdwaras in Bradford (as discussed earlier) is a typical examples of this phenomenon. The continuation of this situation for too long is neither desirable nor thinkable. With the maturity of British-born generation aspiring to influence the gurdwara managements and community affairs in general, the focus of its religious-political activities will have to shift from the Punjab to the diaspora. Therefore, there is a vital need for an entirely different type of organisation capable of presenting impartial Sikh perspectives on various issues likely to impact on the UK Sikh community.

For promotion and protection of Sikhism, the case for establishing a separate Sikh political party would be difficult to justify. In 1991 some Muslim activists pushed the idea of establishing a Muslim Parliament in Britain. Quickly the whole community distanced itself from this concept. It was criticised as unnecessary and divisive diversion and a challenge to the loyalty of Muslims to British institutions. The initiative was dropped as a futile exercise by the Muslim community. It will not be a surprise if a fully settled and integrated Sikh community reacts to the concept of a Sikh political party in a similar manner. For the general welfare of the Sikh community, its economic prosperity, protection of civic rights etc. the only effective way ahead for Sikhs is to vigorously work through the mainstream political parties and institutions. The enthusiasm of Sikhs for participation in local and national elections is already very strong. Even one time solid loyalty to the Labour Party is weakened and

their participation in other national parties has increased. A lesson can be learnt from the Sikhs in Canada. Working through mainstream political parties, they have managed to achieve full recognition at governmental levels, they hold high offices in political institutions and have become self-sufficient in dealing with issues concerning them.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that from time to time certain national and local policies and situations would emerge where representation of discrete Sikh perspective would be essential. Therefore, setting up a legitimate Sikh organisation which would fulfil such a responsibility would be appropriate. Setting up of an independent Sikh Think Tank (name may differ) with primary aim of empowering the UK Sikh community to engage with the UK political system and create partnership with democratic institutions would be an innovative idea.[16] It would identify and research into areas where progress of Sikhs is inadequate. It would identify and provide critical analysis of government policies likely to impact Sikhs in some distinct way. It would conduct surveys to gage the views of UK Sikhs on particular social and political issues. It would act to shape a consensus viewpoint on certain issues within the Sikh community as far as possible. It would identify the challenges internal to the community in developing unity for action. It should continually engage in research and widely disseminating its findings in form of *The British Sikh Reports*.

Integration and Intercommunity Links

At least until the 1980s, Sikhs were living "parallel lives" in self-segregated immigrant culture. They did not seriously question their initial purpose of migration: to work, and earn money for their families at home, to whom they meant to return. For a pretty long period hard earned incomes were not used to create a better lifestyle in Britain. They were geared to sending money home for uplifting the life styles of family left behind and investment for a better future on presumed return. Despite the demise of "myth of return" there is still a perceptible pattern for Sikhs to actively retain their ties with the homeland.

British Sikhs are an economically prosperous, firmly rooted vibrant ethnic community. They are successfully integrated in local economies, labour market and professions. Various factors have contributed to this upward socio-economic mobility despite the presence of racial prejudice and discrimination. Their economic prosperity is evident with very few on the margins of poverty and deprivation (Rajput 2013, BSR Team 2014 44).[17] They are comfortably integrated into the local civic, political and economic structures. However, being a minority community they have so far failed to acquire prized leading positions on the top end of these institutions. At the local level, just like Sikhs in other British cities, Bradford Sikhs operate at the margin. They have to work more strategically to establish a base in the corridors of power.

The path of Sikh acculturation and integration has been relatively smooth. They are unlikely ever to be fully assimilated into the white community's social, religious and cultural institutions. They are now a world recognised *religious*

and *ethnic* group. They claim to be a *nation* with grand history, had a onetime kingdom and distinctive heritage. Now they have a wide diaspora too. Like all other minority ethnic communities they have preserved the essential features of their religious and cultural identity. Despite the lingering fears, their coming generation is unlikely to fully erode those for a time to come. But this is not to deny the reality that over the previous five decades Sikhs have adopted some elements of local culture, social customs, modes of behaviour and manners, although in somewhat modified form (as discussed earlier). They seem to have created a hybrid culture, an interesting fusion of western and South Asian cultures. Their selectivity in these areas suggests a form of integration in the shape of peaceful-coexistence.

With continually declining numbers amidst the continually growing size of the Muslim population and a regular flow of eastern Europeans, in many cities such as Bradford, Sikhs are becoming a marginal community. To protect their standing as equal citizens they have to improve their understanding of new and other established ethnic communities. The levels of communication and social interaction between the Sikh community and other South Asian groups have been influenced by the history of anti-Sikh atrocities as understood by them. Because of a close cultural, regional and linguistic affinity with the Punjabi Hindus, despite some touchiness, their relations haves generally been harmonious. The Sikhs have little in common with the Gujarati Hindus other than a shared national origin. The social interaction with the Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims was always covertly sceptical, hostile, tense and reticent. Over the years their assessment of British people and their values of fairness, equality, tolerance has enhanced and they have developed a very positive attitude for their social and cultural life-styles. This constructive and respectful standpoint has helped Sikhs in becoming economically prosperous and gain acceptance as equal citizens.

Bradford Sikhs, particularly gurdwaras, have shown a limited proactive stance in inter-race and inter-faith organisations. Nonetheless, they have always responded enthusiastically to the initiatives taken by them. For example, only a few Sikhs, mainly in their independent capacity, remained active in the Bradford Racial Equality Council and the Faith Forum (during their existence) and held prominent positions in their executive committees (R. Singh 2015, 71, footnotes 27,28, 29). However, the Sikh community organisations make deliberate efforts to involve the civil dignitaries, MPs and elected councillors as chief guests in religious and cultural celebrations. In Bradford, they are participants in mainstream political parties, vote in local and national elections with enthusiasm, aspire for and hold positions in civic institutions such as magistracy, regional lieutenancy, police and so on (R. Singh 2015, 71 footnote 28).

It would be reasonable to conclude from the path of change among Bradford Sikhs (and across the UK Sikh community) that they have completely discarded the immigrant characterisation of their forefathers and become genuine British citizens. British Sikh Report 2014 states that 95 % of respondents feel proud of being born in Britain and in their "Britishness" (BSR Team 2014). Any notion of *return home* seems a long gone myth for them. They view Britain their

homeland. Punjab the homeland of their grandparents and great-grandparents has become a place for pilgrimage where their distant cousins and nieces live, and where their holy places are. For some it is a place of *real agony* as their ancestors left the land and other properties to which they are legally entitled but find it difficult to claim and look after. Their social interaction now is more significant and frequent with close relatives and friends in countries such as Canada, the USA, Australia and other western countries. The overall links of the British born with Punjab have become extremely weak. They are only interested in Punjab related general news, often with superficial curiosity in the commotions expressed Punjab politics (R. Singh 2015, 59-63).

Some Speculative Conclusions on Future Direction

Towards the middle of 21st century British community will be the fifth generation of pioneer immigrants. As time passes and the Punjab-born generation declines, inter-generation struggle within British-born Sikhs is likely to be no more than a normal phenomenon. The number of mixed-race and mixed-faith households will have increased. British spirit of religious and cultural tolerance will have enhanced through further acculturation. Inter-caste marriages and cross-over attendances at caste-based gurdwaras and general undefined gurdwaras will have increased internal cohesion within the community. Britishness and British Sikh identity will have sharpened. According to the British Sikh Report 2016, 13% Sikhs self-identified as "British" and 48% as "British Sikh" (BSR Team 2016, 18). There is clear evidence from the British Sikh Reports that they discarded "British Asian" as their self-identity. According to the British Sikh Report 2014, 73% of British Sikhs are bilingual but only 26% can write Punjabi in Gurmukhi script (BSR Team 2014, 21). Gradually, very few are likely to have limited exposure to the spoken Punjabi, but little familiarity with its written form.[18] English will be the first and home language. In respect of temperament, relative to the first generation immigrants this generation will be more courteous, cool and mild. They would be more questioning, rational and diplomatic in their conduct of community affairs. Dialogue, discussion, persuasion, negotiation and compromise are likely to be their preferable tools in managing change. They are less likely to hold extreme religious and political views as they will be living in ethnically diverse residential areas. They are likely to have a liberal outlook in life. The general character of individuals, their approach to community life, and their system of managing community institutions will be radically different in many aspects from pioneer immigrant ancestors.

They would be able to provide a leadership above the *caste/biradari* or *clannish* boundaries for the management of gurdwaras and other community organisations, which are the entrenched weaknesses of current leaderships. Many of them will have experienced the corporate models of management in their own working life and thus more knowledgeable about alternative ways of running charitable organisations. Despite having the spirit of volunteering and serving the community they are likely to believe in running and managing

gurdwaras more like mainstream charity organisations. Likewise, on the areas such as services for elderly, Panjabi language teaching, celebration of cultural functions, promotion of Sikh beliefs and history, and the story of Sikh immigration and local heritage, their perspectives on community action will be different. To provide these services effectively they are likely to be looking for different ways suitable to the reality of their time - accentuated with moral, economic and social responsibility criteria.

As far as the gurdwaras in the UK are concerned, they are likely to maintain their own autonomous legal identities. There are already too many gurdwaras in every city even with large Sikh concentration, providing similar services resulting in a waste of community resources. For financial and other considerations their number is likely to change through some type of consolidation. The contemporary situation of no legitimate over-arching organisation/authority directing or supervising their operation will have changed. The present partially successful attempts to establish a legitimate national representative body of British gurdwaras may turn into a reality. They are likely to be managed with foresight for changing needs, and with non-religious considerations - social, political and a particular brand of Sikhism. Their managements is currently deeply located in *the present-day* context, without appropriate skills, and working with innate fear of liberal British-born Sikhs is likely to be replaced with people of professional and managerial skills. The current practice of electing managements in a tribal fashion - marred with personal accusations, and often resulting in being challenged for fraud are likely to become genuinely democratic. The young will be least interested in the internal politics of gurdwaras. For the control of gurdwaras the present struggle between the British-born and non-British-born will have become part of history. Furthermore, in this context, particularly the contemporary tussles in the control and management of gurdwaras between fundamentalist *amritdhari* minority sections of Sikhs and a large majority *sehajdhari* - non-baptised Sikh population is likely to have eased. Similarly, the present resistance to inter-faith and inter-race marriages is likely to be further eased. However, maintenance of internal peace and community cohesiveness are likely remain a significant challenge.

There are likely to be major challenges for the British Sikhs (and in fact for the Sikhs across the diaspora) which they have to successfully resolve. For example, they still have to find satisfactory answers to some contemporary social issues, such as gay, lesbian, transsexual and transgender orientations and attitude towards organ donations etc. Living in a state of denial of diverse sexual orientation within British Sikhs is not a realistic option. For example, according to the British Sikh Report 2015, 24, out of 1009 respondents declared being gay/lesbian and 10 stated being bisexual (BSR Team 2015, 31). Traditional Sikhism offers little guidance on these subjects. These are thorny questions with no plausible answers in sight. Nevertheless, the British-born future generation of Sikhs having grown up in a manifestly diverse cosmopolitan environment and worked in a wide range of careers, and functioned in ever changing political scenarios, are likely to cope with these challenges more wisely, comfortably and effectively than their forefathers.

[Editorial Note: The bulk of this paper was first completed in 2018]

Notes

[1] The historical development of Bradford Sikh Community and some likely changes in the future are investigated in the author's latest publication, *The Future of UK Sikhs: A Bradford City Story*.

[2] City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council: Intelligence Bulletin, 3 January 2017.

[3] Bradford Sikh community being small and closely-knit helped in making highly reliable observations by the author.

[4] The author wrote on two occasions - in 2006 and 2014 to gurdwaras, other Sikh organisation and about thirty well known influential individual Sikhs in Bradford on this subject. In response to the first letter a well-attended meeting of representatives of all organisations met at the Ramgharhia Gurdwara in Bolton Road and fully debated the problem of replication of facilities in the local gurdwaras. Despite a unanimous agreement to take the agenda forward for action nothing positive has happened. The second letter with its main focus on the Golden Anniversary year celebration of the first Sikh gurdwara in the city got little response from any organisation. However, awareness of the issues are increasing within the younger generation.

[5] This view emerges when people notice extensive election campaigns being fought by rival parties through local and national Punjabi print media over several weeks. The large expense incurred by individuals or groups to gain honorary positions to serve the community create suspicion about their covert objectives.

[6] In Guru Nanak and Singh Sabha Gurdwaras in Bradford young people have successfully taken dominant positions in management. Their overall philosophy and conduct is skewed towards religious orthodoxy and critical evaluation of western social norms. They are disposed towards radical *Khalistani* politics. They have made a considerable positive impact on the thinking and conduct of their congregations. These gurdwaras present a visible contrast to the more relaxed, moderate and secular ethos of other gurdwaras. Whilst the size of Singh Sabha congregation is slowly increasing, the opposite has happened in the Guru Nanak Gurdwara.

[7] Currently (2017), in Bradford, Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara's assistant stage secretary and Ramgharhia Gurdwara's president are women.

[8] A noticeable number of White-Americans ("gora Sikhs") have adopted Sikhism under the influence of Jogi Bhajan Singh.

[9] A *sandesh* issued by Sri Akal Takhat on 16th August 2007 as quoted in para 2.3 of Guidelines of Approach to Inter-Faith Marriages in Gurdwaras by Sikh Council UK posted on 25 October 2014 on Sikh24.com.

[10] For example, see Sukhwant Dhaliwal (2016). On September 11, 2016, a large group of Sikhs forcibly stopped the marriage between a Sikh girl and a Hindu

boy from taking place at Leamington and Warwick Gurdwara Sahib. Fifty five intruder Sikhs were involved and arrested by the police. Such incidents had previously happened in Southall, Birmingham, Coventry, Bradford, Leeds and Swindon.

[11] These events include: the dishonourable Blue Star Operation - the Indian Army's attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar in June 1984; the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards in October 1984; the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi and other cities in India in November 1984; and heightened insurgency among Sikh youth in the 1980s.

[12] There is a detailed discussion on this subject in Ramindar Singh (2011), June, p 29, and July, pp 27-28.

[13] http://68.71.138.134/≈-bscforg1/

[14] http://sikhcounciluk.org

[15] http://www.sikhfeduk.com

[16] *The Sikh Network*, set up prior to the 2015 General Election is a good potential model for a Sikh Think Tank.

[17] These features are evidently displayed in the life stories contained in Singh and Rajput (2013).

[18] The number of students taking GCSE and A Level examinations in Panjabi had been small and declining. The Examination Boards in Britain decided to stop offering these qualifications after 2016/17. An extensive campaign against their decision forced them to temporarily suspend their decision. Nevertheless, the future of these qualifications doesn't appear to be very optimistic. Neither Sikh parents nor their children seem to be enthusiastic in studying Panjabi beyond the gurdwara provision. For example, in Guru Gobind Singh Gurdwara in Bradford over 200, 5-17 year old children are currently (2017) attending Punjabi classes but only 8 intends to sit for the GCSE examination. In other parts of the country the establishment of several Sikh faith or free schools may help in promotion of Punjabi and Sikh Studies.

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