

## **House of the Guru? Young British Sikhs' Engagement with Gurdwaras**

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As a young Sikh growing up in the UK I often heard statements from *gurdwara* [Sikh place of worship, literally 'the Guru's house'] stages lamenting the fact that young Sikhs were not interested in Sikhism. Speakers would complain that young people were not attending *gurdwaras*, were not interested in learning Punjabi and were failing to keep the Sikh identity. To date, few scholars have examined how young Sikhs engage with their tradition and with religious institutions even though parts of the Sikh Diaspora are becoming increasingly skewed towards youth. According to the 2011 census, of the 423,158 Sikhs currently living in England and Wales 146,891 (35%) are between the ages of 15-34. What is more, unlike the other South Asian communities in the UK, the majority of the Sikh community is UK born. Although much has been written about Sikh migrants and Sikh migration, there has been very little research examining how British born young Sikhs engage with their religious tradition. Indeed, for Singh and Tatla (2006: 207), "the culture of young British Sikhs today remains an area of darkness for the community and a testing ground for its uncertain futures."

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This paper looks to enlighten this 'area of darkness' by focusing on the ways in which young British Sikhs engage with *gurdwaras* through data gathered as part of a wider research project exploring religious transmission among 18-30 year old young British Sikhs. Having examined diversity among *gurdwaras* in Britain, I then explore how this diversity impacts on young Sikhs – on their engagement with *gurdwaras* and on their ability to take on leadership and *gurdwara* management roles. I discuss how young Sikhs adult reflect on *gurdwaras* as places of nurture and on their experiences engaging with *gurdwaras*. Finally I explore if there is any evidence of a growth in young British born Sikh *granthis* or is the situation of "imported *granthis*" continuing in the present day.

### **Methodology**

In undertaking this research, a qualitative methodological approach was taken, using a variety of sources as part of the investigation (Denscombe 2007, 37). The main methods included: semi-structured interviews with 30 18–30-year-old British Sikhs who had either spoken at or participated in events organised for young Sikhs; a self-selecting online survey of young British Sikhs; focus groups with Sikh students; and participant observation at events organised for young Sikhs, including Sikh camps and university Sikh society events. The fieldwork was undertaken throughout 2009–2010, with the online survey

running from November 2009 to July 2011. The survey elicited 645 responses in total; it had been advertised on discussion forums relating to Sikhism and Bhangra and on Facebook pages belonging to gurdwaras, Sikh camps, university Sikh societies and Bhangra groups in order to reach to as wide a range of respondents as possible. As there is currently no means of obtaining a random sample from all young British Sikhs and as young people are a difficult population to study—they tend to be very busy and mobile (Denton and Smith 2001, 2)—survey respondents were self-selecting and consequently respondents are likely to be young Sikhs with a strong commitment to Sikhism. This is justified by the fact that this research examined how and why young Sikhs engage with their religious tradition and therefore sought the views of young Sikhs who would respond to an online survey relating to the Sikh tradition.

### **Gurdwara Types**

As Nesbitt (2005: 39) explains, a building can only be called a gurdwara if it “houses the Guru, in the form of the Guru Granth Sahib” although scholars have found much diversity within this category. In her research on Sikhs in Varanasi Myrvold (2007: 154-6) found two types of gurdwara, those built to mark key events in Sikh history, and those built to serve the religious and social needs of the community, although it is clear that in the Western Sikh diaspora, all gurdwaras fall into the second category. Recent studies have also highlighted distinctions in the types of gurdwara which exist in Britain. Although most are similar in that they are run by committee (Helweg 1979: 82) Singh and Tatla distinguish between two different types of gurdwara; ‘mainstream’ gurdwaras which “do not restrict membership or participation in the management committee to particular caste groups ... [whose] *sangat* can be, and often is, caste plural identify along caste lines” (2006: 77) and caste focused gurdwaras belonging to the Ramgarhia and Bhatra communities. Although they note the “contribution of *sants* (traditional Sikh preachers) in establishing gurdwaras” (2006: 75) and include the *sant* managed gurdwaras in the ‘mainstream’ category, it will be demonstrated that there is much diversity within the mainstream category itself.

Of these categories, it is the ‘mainstream’ gurdwaras which I found are most open to change in terms of gurdwara leadership. Whereas those taking part in leadership and congregational roles in caste based gurdwaras usually come from a relatively small group of individuals and families, attendance and leadership in mainstream gurdwaras is much more diverse. Indeed, a number of ‘mainstream’ gurdwaras in Britain have recently established young committees, or committees which have included positions for British born Sikhs. Analysing those young Sikhs who are part of these committees, it is clear that many of these young people are inspired by particular Khalsa groups in particular the AKJ or Damdami Taksal (known as *jathabandis* – lit. ‘tied to a group’), which as I illustrate (Singh J 2014), are gaining a growing presence in the UK. As these *jathabandis* follow *maryadas* (codes of conduct) which

differ in subtle ways from the Sikh Rahit Maryada (Singh J 2014), the congregations in these gurdwaras often begin to follow the code of conduct of the group to which the majority of the committee members belong.

I am arguing that the increasing need for gurdwaras to cater for young Sikhs has caused the congregations of a number of mainstream gurdwaras in the UK to respond by electing young Khalsa Sikhs on to their committees. As Khalsa Sikhs affiliating to *sant* groups (e.g. Nanaksar) would usually be involved in their own institutions, the Khalsa Sikhs becoming involved in mainstream gurdwaras are usually those belonging to groups which have less of an institutional presence, i.e. the AKJ or Damdami Taksal. Consequently, some mainstream gurdwaras are, following an election, often quite suddenly transformed into gurdwaras which promote a particular *maryada*. This leads to the situation where a “mainstream” gurdwara may have a particular ideological bias for a period of time, until the committee changes at which point this ideological bias is reorientated. Indeed, it is often possible to ascertain which ideology is being followed at a particular gurdwara by the events which are held there. For instance, it is likely that gurdwaras regularly holding AKJ *rainsbhais* are linked to the AKJ, whereas those holding *barsis* [anniversary celebrations] for particular *sants* are linked to the particular *sant* group in question. It is important to note however that as mainstream gurdwaras with very large congregations will often cater for members of different ideological groups, just because a gurdwara hosts a *rainsbhai* or *barsi* does not automatically mean that it is strongly affiliated. It is the repeated organising of events for particular groups, or the inviting of kathakaars who affiliate to *jathabandis* which indicates that a gurdwara is affiliated.

A recent example of this ideological switching was demonstrated at Havelock Road gurdwara in Southall, the largest gurdwara in the UK. The *barsi* (anniversary) of Baba Takhur Singh of the Damdami Taksal has been held annually in December since his death in 2004 in various gurdwaras all over the UK including Havelock Road in Southall in 2010. My field notes from visiting Havelock Rd gurdwara in 2010 soon after the *barsi* highlighted a number of posters on display relating to the history of Damdami Taksal although interestingly my field notes from visiting this gurdwara in 2012, since the committee changed at Havelock Road, highlight that these posters are no longer displayed and that no *barsis* have subsequently been held. Although in this case, the ideology being practiced at Havelock Rd has changed with the change in committee, it is important to note that in some cases the ideological change within mainstream gurdwaras has become permanent, especially as members of the congregation begin to follow the *maryada* being practiced. In this case, although the gurdwara itself is attended by members of all caste groups, the congregation are now linked by group affiliation. To summarise, I suggest that Singh and Tatla’s (2006) list of gurdwara types should be amended as follows, presenting four broad but diverse categories of gurdwara in the UK reflecting the main reason for congregational attendance:

1. **Mainstream gurdwaras** – EITHER not linked to any particular person or ideology catering from Sikhs from diverse caste and ideological backgrounds OR linked to a *jathabandi* (usually the AKJ or Damdami Taksal) for a short period of time usually due to the election of members of these groups onto the gurdwara committee. In both cases committee members and the congregation usually belong to a variety of caste backgrounds.
2. **Caste based gurdwaras** – e.g. Ramgarhia, Bhatra in which the management committee belongs to a particular caste group, usually attracting members of the same caste group.
3. **Sant led gurdwaras** – where the gurdwara is not run by committee but rather led by a *sant* or by people entrusted by the *sant* (this differs from a committee as this is usually via a process of selection rather than election). Congregations in these gurdwaras are usually a mix of caste affiliation although some *sant* gurdwaras are primarily caste specific, e.g. the GNNSJ. Others such as Nanaksar attract a wide variety of caste groups.
4. **Jathabandi gurdwaras** – these institutions are strongly linked to Khalsa *jathabandis* (usually the AKJ or Damdami Taksal) as committee members and the congregation affiliate to a particular maryada even though they may be from a variety of caste backgrounds. Jathabandi gurdwaras are distinguished from mainstream gurdwaras in that there is little chance of an ideological switch away from the Khalsa group as the congregation are strongly affiliated.

In terms of numbers, I estimate that of the roughly two hundred gurdwaras in the UK, approximately fifteen percent are specifically caste based, seven percent are *sant* led gurdwaras, three percent are *jathabandi* gurdwaras with the remainder being mainstream gurdwaras. Of these categories, the Sant and *Jathabandi* gurdwaras are often nationally and trans-nationally networked allowing for the emergence of large group of adherents. The emergence of different types of gurdwara appears to be being repeated across the Sikh Diaspora as Nayar observes in her study of the establishment of gurdwaras in British Columbia, Canada. She describes the “emergence of the “fundamentalist” and “moderate” gurdwaras beginning from 1998 ... [and then] the establishment of “sectarian” orthodox gurdwaras [which I am terming *jathabandi* gurdwaras] especially after 1998” (2010: 45) following an edict from the Akal Takht prohibiting the use of table and chairs in langar halls

A small number of *jathabandi* gurdwaras can be found in the US and Canada, for example the Gurdwara Gur Nanak Parkash, Tracy, California which affiliates to Damdami Taksal, and Tapoban gurdwara in Ontario, Canada which affiliates to the AKJ. The general pattern in the US / Canada appears to be of large mainstream gurdwaras which cater for Sikhs of all ideological persuasions. For instance, although the gurdwaras in Fremont, San Jose and Stockton host small AKJ programs every month (details at

<http://ekhalsa.com/programs.php>), these are clearly not institutions that are affiliated solely to the AKJ, although this does indicate a presence of the AKJ in these areas. In this regard, the size of the function being organised and the regularity with which functionaries which affiliate to *jathabandis* are invited can provide clues as to how affiliated to a particular Khalsa group a mainstream gurdwara actually is.

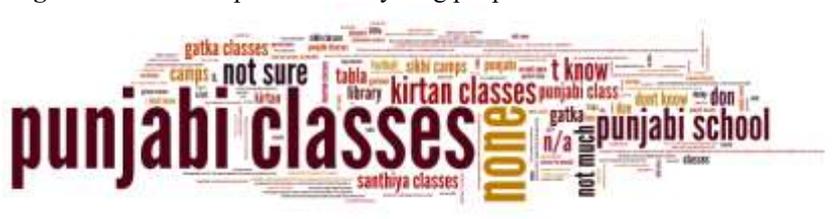
### Young Sikhs and Gurdwaras

Regardless of gurdwara type, to date little systematic research has been carried out on the composition of gurdwara congregations (Singh and Tatla 2006: 89) and consequently there is little way of knowing how many youth regularly attend a particular gurdwara. In terms of formal nurture or transmission, it is clear that many gurdwaras in Britain make efforts to cater for Sikh children (Nesbitt 2000; Hadwen 1995) depending on resources available and on the priorities of those in charge (Hadwen 1995: 376). According to Nesbitt (2000: 143-147) gurdwaras generally use the following methods to transmit the Sikh tradition to young Sikhs:

1. Punjabi supplementary schools
2. Specially organised children's services
3. Teaching in the main gurdwara program focused on children
4. Sikh youth camps
5. Music classes
6. The provision of library facilities

It must be noted however that not all gurdwaras offer these facilities for their young people, with some survey respondents stating that their local gurdwara did 'very little' or made 'no provision at all'. Others stated that their gurdwara did a lot for young people as demonstrated in this wordle of responses to the question "What sort of provision does this gurdwara make for young people?"

**Figure 1:** Gurdwara provision for young people



As the figure above shows, the most common activity organised by gurdwaras for young people are Punjabi classes. As Hadwen (1996) and Nesbitt (2000) describe these supplementary classes are usually run by concerned Sikh parents. These classes do not teach Sikhism but focus primarily on the transmission of the Punjabi language helping to explain Drury's (1991)

observation that, despite attending supplementary classes, many of her young Sikh respondents demonstrated ignorance about Sikh teachings. The classes do however play an important social role in transmitting Sikh ethnic consciousness to young Sikhs. Gurpal, a 19-year-old interviewee from the Midlands, explained that although “we didn’t used to want to go first – then we used to go every evening ‘cos we wanted to see our mates instead of just weekends ... we didn’t really learn much, but the main reason we used to go was the social side.” – Interview 21/10/2009

Nevertheless, some gurdwaras do organise Sikhism classes in addition to Punjabi classes. Puran, a 22-year-old male from the North of England, described how he spent his childhood attending “*tabla* class, *vaja* [harmonium] class, and Sikhism GCSE class at [X] gurdwara, then on a Sunday [Y] gurdwara Punjabi school, then [Z] gurdwara for *gatka*”. For Puran, the Sikhism classes “were really influential ... for a young person like myself at the time, it was really welcoming and it was so basic that everyone could understand ... I started to get inspired ‘cos I started learning about Sikh history and I could see how much people had done for us to be able to stand here today as Sikhs ... so that’s when I started to grow my hair.” – Interview 22/10/2009. This demonstrates that in the UK, Sikh parents are increasingly willing to send their children to any gurdwara which offers the best teaching provision, even if this means attending more than one gurdwara on the same day. Also although parents may wish to teach their children Punjabi, they appear to require teaching about Sikhism.

As well as offering Punjabi classes, Sikhism classes and martial arts, many gurdwaras also offer *kirtan* classes. Hardev, a teacher of *kirtan* from the Midlands explained that he had recently decided to move his classes out of the gurdwara “because of the politics - there was a heck of a lot of the politics at the gurdwara.” Similarly, Puran described how the lack of stability in the management of his local mainstream gurdwara, particularly as a result of the committee system, had affected his learning about Sikhism, describing how:

when the new committee took charge they said that they wanted to have control of everything – I sat in one of the meetings and they wanted to know everything we were doing ... All politics started coming in from then and from there, they told [Teacher X] that he can’t teach any more. And it was like – why have you done this – you had so much *sangat* coming – and from then it’s dropped ... now – it’s just 5/6 people.

Puran’s observations highlight a key issue with religious transmission in gurdwaras in that much is dependent on the goodwill of volunteers who are able to both give up their time whilst also currying favour with those in charge. As the gurdwara functionaries almost exclusively speak Punjabi, Singh and Tatla note that many young British Sikh professionals feel alienated from gurdwaras and their politics and/or feel that they cannot relate to these imported functionaries who generally preach to the congregation using examples that have little relevance in twenty-first-century Britain (2006: 90)

adding to the “existing dissonance between transmitters and receivers of the tradition” (ibid: 90).

A key reason why young Sikhs appear not to be getting involved in the management of gurdwaras relates to the fact that the workings of committee politics make little sense to them, based as they are on Punjabi factional politics. As Singh and Tatla (2006: 30) explain, Sikhs in Punjabi villages tend to be organised in factions or *paartis* around a leader. Consequently factions pervade all forms of Sikh organisation, indeed Singh and Tatla go as far to state that “the history of Sikh institutions is probably best understood as the history of internecine factional conflict” (2006: 30). Factionalism is endemic in Sikh organisations, “a permanent ‘state of nature’ that has neither diminished nor lost its significance after several generations of British Sikh society” (2006: 31). Although factions are constantly restructured in line with the success or failure of leaders, it is important to be aware of the role of factions when trying to understand the conflicts which take place over the control of gurdwaras in Britain.

As has been demonstrated, the lack of stability created by factional politics, and the fact that those teaching young Sikhs in gurdwaras will at some stage need to affiliate to one faction or another results in little stability in teaching provision. As committees change, those affiliated to the outgoing committee are replaced with people who curry favour with the incoming committee. The ‘chop-and-change’ nature of teaching makes little sense to young British Sikhs and may be one reason why many events for young Sikhs are now being organised outside gurdwaras. Hardev further explains that for many gurdwaras providing teaching provision for young Sikhs is simply not an economic priority:

All the experiences we’ve had with gurdwaras in terms of this kind of activity are very negative. And I’ll tell you why that is - it’s because this kind of activity doesn’t generate any revenue for the gurdwara; the only revenue it generates is the people who come to *matha tek* [bow to the Guru and give offerings] to attend the class. One of the committee members at one gurdwara was extremely supportive; he said to us, ‘you don’t even have to ask’, but he said, ‘just be aware that if there’s a wedding or *akhand paths* [unbroken readings of the Guru Granth Sahib], they’re generating £2000 whereas this is generating £30—and I understand that. – Interview 28/01/2010

Here, the distinction between the different types of gurdwara is important. Unlike in mainstream committee run gurdwaras, gurdwara in which management is based on selection rather than election such as *sant*-led gurdwaras, may offer more stability for young Sikhs as teachers are generally not dismissed if they find themselves belonging to the ‘wrong’ party following an election. In this regard, *sant* gurdwaras “not only shield the *sant* and their particular life styles from wry eyes of some management committees, but they have also become, in some measure, models of religious worship ... [allowing

them to] practice the traditions associated with each *sant* tradition” (Tatla 1992: 362). Although Dhesi (2009) observes that there have been a number of recent issues with the sants in charge of Nanaksar in Coventry and the Amrit Parchar Dharmik Diwan, leading him to conclude that “it would be wrong to assume that gurdwārā institutions controlled by one authoritative-figure are more successful than gurdwārās managed by a committee selected or elected by the sangat” in both of these cases the issues have been with the sants themselves, not the stability of those teaching. The fact that there is a greater likelihood of stability in teaching provision in sant institutions is a key consideration for young Sikhs.

In terms of leadership roles, although young Sikh adults appear to be involved in organising events for their peers in all of the four gurdwara types described, this is most prevalent in the *jathabandi* gurdwaras. This appears to be the case, because *jathabandi* gurdwaras have easy access to networks of young British Sikhs speakers, who are unaffiliated to individual institutions. This means that unlike the education secretaries in specific gurdwaras who may be forced to move on following elections, these young British Sikh speakers are able to continue contributing to events regardless of which committee is in charge.

### The Embodied Guru

In addition to being places of learning, the importance of the Guru Granth Sahib as the ‘embodied Guru’ for young Sikhs became apparent when analysing the online responses to the question of why young Sikhs go to gurdwara:

**Table 1:** Reasons for Gurdwara Attendance

#### 40. I MAINLY go to gurdwara

	Total	Number
to learn about Sikhism	21.6%	138
to meet friends / relatives	2.3%	15
to eat langar	0.6%	4
because of habit	8.8%	52
because my parents are going	7.0%	45
to attend family functions	8.1%	52
to do sewa	13.1%	84
Other (please specify)	38.4%	246

Surprisingly, the largest response to this question was in the ‘Other’ category. The wordle below highlights some of the explanations given for choosing ‘Other’.

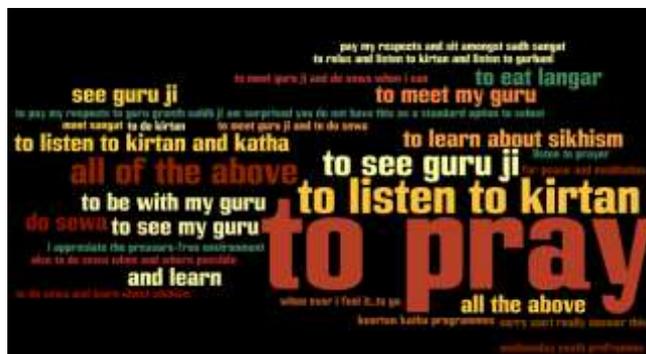
**Figure 2:** Why Young Sikhs go to Gurdwara

Figure 2 highlights the relationship which many young Sikh adults have with gurdwaras. As a 26 year old female from Southall explained, the gurdwara is important as a space “to gain a peaceful state of mind. Listen to kirtan”, an idea also emphasised by a 28 year old female from Southall who explained that she went to gurdwara to “get some peace from a hectic daily life, to connect with God, to sit with sangat and listen to *kirtan*, to partake in seva and simran, to discover something new relating to Sikhi, to feel part of a community.” However the most popular ‘other’ reason to attend gurdwara was to pay respect to the Guru Granth Sahib. Comments included “to be in the presence of the Guru”, “To be with Guru Ji” and “To have darshan of Dhan Dhan Sahib Sri Guru Granth Sahib Jee Maharaaj”. Indeed a 31 year old female respondent from Bedford, unhappy that this option had not been included in the original list of options wrote “TO PAY MY RESPECTS TO GURU GRANTH SAHIB JI AM SURPRISED YOU DO NOT HAVE THIS AS A STANDARD OPTION TO SELECT? WHY?”

In this regard it is argued that the gurdwara occupies a distinct position in relation to other religious institutions in that for many Sikhs the gurdwara is the only place where Sikhs can interact with the complete Guru Granth Sahib. Although some Sikhs will have copies of Sikh prayer books (*gutkas*) in their homes and fewer still will have the means to host the Guru Granth Sahib, for most Sikhs in order to pay respects to the Guru Granth Sahib in its complete embodied form, they will have to visit the gurdwara. Consequently it may not matter how much teaching provision gurdwaras make for young people. As the literal ‘house of the Guru’ gurdwaras will remain important for all Sikhs, young and old. This may explain why, although most of the survey respondents had attended a gurdwara all their lives many stated that they were ‘not sure’ or ‘did not know’ what sort of provision their local gurdwara offered for them. For many young Sikhs the gurdwara appears to be primarily a place of worship where one can sit in the *sangat* [congregation] and obtain the *darshan* [blessed gaze] of the Guru.

### Translation Software

I am suggesting that the relationship between many young Sikhs and the Guru Granth Sahib has been impacted by the emergence of translation software. One of the most striking changes to occur in British gurdwaras in the past 10 years is the installation of projector screens in most of the larger institutions. These screens are used to display translation software to the sangat, usually presenting translations of the *kirtan* being sung at the time and/or when the *hukamnama* is being read. Although a number of different types of translation software are currently available including [srigranth.org](http://srigranth.org) and [myguruji.com](http://myguruji.com), in the UK the most frequently used software is *Sikhithemax*. This software was designed by Tarsem Singh from Coventry and released in 2000, following the release of the first English translation of the Guru Granth Sahib in word document format by Dr Kulbir Singh Thind from the USA which was first made available on [www.gurbanifiles.org](http://www.gurbanifiles.org). Responses from the survey demonstrated the importance of *Sikhithemax* for many young Sikhs, with one 18 year old male respondent from Birmingham describing *Sikhithemax* as “an amazing invention. I was actually a *mona* [had a haircut]; after attending a *Rainsubhaae* Keertan and seeing the meanings of *gurbani*, my life turned upside down - or right side up”. A 28 year old female from Southall explained that “it is the best thing that has happened in the last 5 years or so, it makes understanding *shabads* [compositions] and what is being said much easier ... it should be born [sic] in mind that it is a literal translation and doesn't give the most deepest meaning but it's definitely a start to getting to grips with *gurbani*.”

### Young Sikh Granthis?

Having explored how young Sikhs engage with gurdwaras I now examine if there is any evidence of the development of young British born granthis in British gurdwaras. Although there are currently no fully appointed granthis in the UK it appears that young Sikhs are becoming increasingly involved in gurdwaras by organising events for their peers. These events which include camps and talks in English take place in a number of gurdwaras across the UK. Analysing those who are invited to speak at these talks, it appears that there are a select few religious transmitters who are regularly invited. Many of these individuals have the following characteristics:

- Usually Male
- Usually Single
- Usually young (< 40 years old)
- Usually turbaned (both male and female)
- Usually affiliated to a particular group (AKJ, DDT) or to a Sant
- Usually Amritdhari (initiated)
- Usually proficient in English and Punjabi

It appears that these individuals, rather than being employed as granthis in gurdwaras, deliver lectures and talks in English as part of their voluntary service (sewa) whilst having normal day jobs in which they are employed as teachers, IT workers or in business. So why have these young Sikhs not chosen to take on permanent positions as granthis and kathavacaks even though the Sikh population in Britain is now skewed towards youth? Having analysed interview and survey responses I am arguing that gurdwaras still cater primarily for the older generation and consequently the factors which are inhibiting the emergence of British born granthis include:

1. **LANGUAGE** - Gurdwara congregations still cater primarily for first generation migrants. In a pilot survey of the congregational makeup of the gurdwaras in Leeds on a Sunday in June 2010 it became clear that most members of gurdwara congregations were first generation Punjabi speakers with few 18-30 year old young Sikhs in attendance. Therefore gurdwara functionaries need to be able to communicate fluently in Punjabi. Few young Sikhs are confident in spoken Punjabi, and would therefore not be able to present katha on a gurdwara stage during the main Sunday programme.
2. **KNOWLEDGE** – Few young Sikhs have sufficient knowledge about Sikhism to undertake the role of granthi. Unlike in the Punjab where “the procedures for pursuing the required standards of competence in order to build up a career as a kathavacak today are numerous and frequently involve formal studies at educational institutes and/or more informal studies under the supervision of senior colleagues” (Myrvold 2012: 197), there are no such qualifications in the UK. Myrvold further describes how aspiring Sikh performers are to pursue both theoretical studies and practical training during two or three year long programs (Myrvold 2012: 200) and notes that committee members often wish to employ people with recognised qualifications from India. Although some of the young Sikh preachers have spent some time in India, at Taksals or colleges, many simply appear to translate Punjabi katha into English, usually using the katha of Giani Takhur Singh or Bhai Pinderpal Singh into English or quoting from English translations of books including Bhai Rama Singh's autobiography, - *Se Kheniya* by Sant Harnam Singh (Rampur Khera) and Bhai Sahib Randhir Singh's autobiography - see <http://ask.fm/basicsofsikhi>.
3. **SUPPLY** - there is a good supply of cheap, available kathavacaks from the Punjab. Myrvold (2012: 193) found that “all the kathavacaks I interviewed in Punjab had either been abroad delivering katha or had plans to travel and migrate”
4. **RESPECT** - Myrvold (2012: 202) found that “while young kathavacaks in the beginning of their career tend to be more optimistic and appreciate the public attention they have gained, performers with longer work experience have emphasized their

dependence on local patrons, mostly the committees of gurdwaras, and expressed feelings of not being given due respect.” Consequently she found many kathavacaks encourage their children to choose other occupations.

5. **SALARY** - An analysis of job advertisements for ‘Religious Workers’ placed by Sikh institutions in the UK highlights that few young Sikhs would have the necessary skills to undertake this role. Examining the advertisements for ‘Religious Workers’ on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014 on the <https://jobsearch.direct.gov.uk>, of the sixteen jobs, nine were placed by Sikh institutions. The standard salary offered for these positions is the national minimum wage of £6.50 / hour (\$10/hour), with the highest annual salary being £13-£15K per annum (\$22K USD) with many of the positions being short term or temporary contracts. Compared to the average graduate starting salary of £21K this would not be attractive to many young Sikhs. All roles specified the requirement to be Amritdhari and to have experience and knowledge of:

1. Gurbani reading, Kirtan, Religious Discourse (Katha)
2. Complete knowledge of the daily "Gurdwara routine"
3. Fluent Punjabi reading and writing
4. The ability to play and teach Harmonium and Tabla
5. Preaching and Pastoral Work
6. Knowledge of how to carry out prayers for funerals, weddings and other rites

Instead of being permanently employed by particular institutions, many of these young Sikh religious transmitters tour the country performing English talks to interested congregations, often as part of larger networks including ‘Sikh 2 Inspire’ and ‘Inspirations’. This engagement with gurdwara congregations allows these speakers to increase the reach of these talks in English beyond camps and Sikh societies, which often tend to cater for the same select families and individuals. Others allow these young Sikhs to regularly present katha in English, with Jagraj Singh ‘Basics of Sikhi’ presenting at Park Ave Gurdwara in Southall every Sunday evening, although from posts on his Facebook page, this event appears to be regularly re-scheduled by the committee.

### **Conclusion**

As has been demonstrated, gurdwaras in the UK are not homogenous, with the type of institution determining the importance placed on religious transmission events and their content and style. The ideas relating to tradition and authority which are transmitted in gurdwaras also vary depending on the type of institution, with those being run by *sants* or by *jathabandis* being a part of wider national and transnational networks. Of the four types of gurdwara presented, I predict that there will be a growth in the number of *jathabandi*

gurdwaras, especially given that increasing numbers of young Sikhs are affiliating to *jathabandis* such as the AKJ and Damdami Taksal, and given the increase in the number of events being organised by these groups (e.g. Khalsa Camp California).

I have also shown that for many gurdwaras organising events for young Sikhs is not a priority given the low economic return from these types of events. Although scholars have previously placed the responsibility for religious transmission in the hands of religious institutions, as this paper has demonstrated, for young Sikhs, religious institutions primarily provide young Sikhs with a social context in which to 'grow up Sikh'. Formal transmission organised by the older generation is generally regarded as being of poor quality and appears to be far too unstable, being subject to personal grudges and factional politics, which young British Sikhs do not understand or wish to engage with. This helps to explain the emergence of 'newer' arenas of transmission including camps and university Sikh societies, and of young Sikhs who themselves travel the country to educate their peers. In terms of leadership roles it appears that those in charge of gurdwaras have 'outsourced' the education of young Sikh adults to young Sikh adults themselves. This appears to suit many of these young Sikhs who have little interest in being involved in the day to day running of gurdwaras, and would rather spend their time educating young Sikhs. Despite this growing interest in education I have demonstrated that although the British Sikh population is now skewed towards youth, a number of factors are inhibiting young British born Sikhs from taking on roles as granthis, with salary and reputation being a key factor. Unless the conditions and status of gurdwara granthis changes significantly, I predict that the situation will continue as it is with the majority of gurdwaras employing granthis from the subcontinent.

Nevertheless, I have also demonstrated that many young Sikhs may not actually expect any formal religious transmission from their gurdwaras, and simply attend to pray and take a break from daily life. In addition, the status of the Guru as an embodied, living person is clearly becoming more important for young Sikhs, possibly through innovations such as *Sikhithemax* allowing young Sikhs to interact with their Guru wherever they are. It is clear that young Sikhs will not stop attending gurdwaras, as these institutions offer their only opportunity to pay respects to their embodied Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib. This demonstrates that despite a whole host of external changes, gurdwaras retain their primary role as 'houses of the Guru'.

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