

The Religious Lives of Young British Sikhs: A reflection on community engagement through a Collaborative Doctoral Award



Beyond the Campus, University of Brighton, 10th April 2013

Dr Jasjit Singh, University of Leeds

Web: www.leeds.ac.uk/sikhs, Email: j.s.singh@leeds.ac.uk

Twitter: [@DrJasjitSingh](https://twitter.com/DrJasjitSingh)

Background

Postdoctoral Impact and Research Fellow, University of Leeds



Theology & Religious Studies

- Religion and Identity
- Sociology of Religion
- Religion and Youth
- Religious Transmission
- www.leeds.ac.uk/sikhs



@DrJasjitSingh

Arts Engaged

- Government and public policy
- Media and corporate
- Cultural organisations and industries)
- **Communities and voluntary groups**
- Museums and galleries
- www.leeds.ac.uk/artsengaged



@ArtsEngaged

Background

- Young Sikhs often accused of not being interested in Sikhism and in Sikh Identity

THE TIMES THE SUNDAY TIMES

From [The Times](#)

November 24, 2006

Sikhs head for the barber and turn their backs on tradition

Western intolerance of religious symbols and a series of street attacks are prompting young men to shed their hair and turbans

Independent.ie

Irish Sikhs abandon traditional turbans

The Telegraph

Young Sikhs abandon turban in favour of 'Bollywood haircuts'

By Rahul Bedi in New Delhi 12:01AM BST 26 Mar 2007

For centuries one of Sikhism's most distinguishing symbols, the turban is

The New York Times

For young Sikhs, the turban is old hat

By Amelia Gentleman

Published: Thursday, March 29, 2007

- Not found to be the case when researching “Young British Sikhs, Hair and the Turban” (Singh 2010)
- Many events organised by and for 18-30 year olds – in English
- Generally run outside *gurdwaras* by young Sikhs themselves

Background

Sikh Student Camp
Supported by: Gurdwara Darshan Barber East London, (18+)

UHSU HERTS SIKH SOC PRESENTS
CHA AND SAMOSA
FREE FOOD! FREE RAFFLE!
WEDS 6TH OCT 2PM
KEY CENTRE

Sikh Family Camp
Join us for a weekend of fun & learning for the whole family!
Guru Nanak Gurdwara Wakefield Rd Bradford BD4 7DP
A camp not just for kids but a setting for parents to participate too
Featuring Birds of Prey
Sikh Presented
Inflatable
including a HUGE bounce

The Sikh Course
A new perspective on life...
Discover the fundamentals of the Sikh faith in a FREE one-day course
Next Course:
Central Gurdwara, 32 Derby St, MANCHESTER
Sun 16 Aug 2009
10am to 6pm
Complimentary Lunch
find out more, simply visit:
Course.com
Sources Available
"A genuinely profound and eye-opening course which provides real answers to the big questions in life. Highly recommended to absolutely everyone."
- Mrs. J. Gill

FREE FOOD
not 2 b missed
One World Week: Wednesday 24th Feb 2010
11:30am - 3:30pm (Bishops Green)
Further info:
www.brunelkikh.org.uk

MEDITATION On Campus!
WOLVES SIKH SOCIETY
Location: MC401, C...
Uni of Wolve...
Time: 5:00PM
Nov...
NOURISHMENT FOR THE MIND, BODY & SOUL WILL BE PROVIDED

PRAYER FOR PEACE AKHAND JAAP
CONTINUOUS NAAM SIMRAN
Prayer begins at 5am Saturday 25th and will continue for 24 hours
at the GURUDWARA on 18-20 Soho Road, Handsworth, Birmingham served by Guru Nanak Nishkam Sev
Since September 2001 British Sikh youth have been holding the 'Akhand Jaap' or the 'continuous recitation'.
The message is simple - let's pray for...
Free coach transport available from various locations. For further information please ring: 07958 email: aj10@SikhKids.com web: www.SikhKids.com

The S.I.K.H.
SPIRITUALITY IDENTITY KNOWLEDGE HUMILITY
After last years success, the Sikh Awareness Society and S.I.K.H. present to you...
Mon 16th - Sat 21st August 2010
Apply now @ www.thesikhcamp.com
07967 668 312 / 07792 533 878
Hotline / Office: 0845 388 S.I.K.H. / 0845 388 7454
Limited places £85
16+

SIKHS IN THE CITY
WEDNESDAY 3RD MARCH
MEETING AT 5:30PM OUTSIDE CIVIC QUARTER LIBRARY
INFORMATIVE DISCUSSION/DEBATE WITH LIGHT REFRESHMENTS



Establishing the Collaboration



AHRC / ESRC Religion and Society Programme Youth Call Collaborative Research Studentship Scheme (CRS)

- Encourage and develop collaboration between HEIs and non-academic organisations and businesses.
- Provide access to resources and materials, knowledge and expertise and provide social, cultural and economic benefits to wider society.
- Three years full time leading to the submission of a doctoral thesis
- Supervision joint responsibility of the HEI department and the non-academic organisation. Lead supervisor is the academic supervisor

Establishing the Collaboration

- Little historical engagement with academia by British Sikh organisations and institutions
- Little awareness of academic studies of Sikhs among Sikhs themselves
- Little awareness of the possibilities of collaboration with HEIs and of the role of research in policy making
- Who might be interested?

Institutions (Gurdwaras)	Community organisations
<p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funded through regular devotee donations • Represent local congregation • Large venues available for dissemination of research • If linked to particular group, then large, national, transnational <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primarily focused on institutional / group issues • Often affiliated to particular caste groups / political groups and/or ideologies • Membership often mutually exclusive 	<p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on wider “community” issues such as representation • Representative of member institutions • Initially established to tackle local / policy related issues • Unaffiliated to institution/ideology • Members often also affiliated to religious institutions <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often run by few concerned individuals • Arms length support from institutions • Funded by irregular donations • Small venue

Collaborating Partner



The Bradford Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs

- Formed in the 1980s to tackle issues of racism and representation for young Sikhs in Bradford schools
- Interested in educational issues and in the experiences of young British Sikhs
- Regular interaction with Bradford *gurdwaras*
- Links with national Sikh media
- Organise pan-institutional events for Sikh elders
- “Independent” from institutions or ideological groups
- Previous experience of collaboration on academic research (Chana 2005)



Proposed Outcomes

University:

- Continued development of local and national outreach in association with the long established Community Religions Project;
- Connection with long-established local Sikh organisation;
- Opportunity to support and co-supervise research;
- Possibility of growing the profile of Religious Studies as a subject of potential interest to future students in the Sikh community.

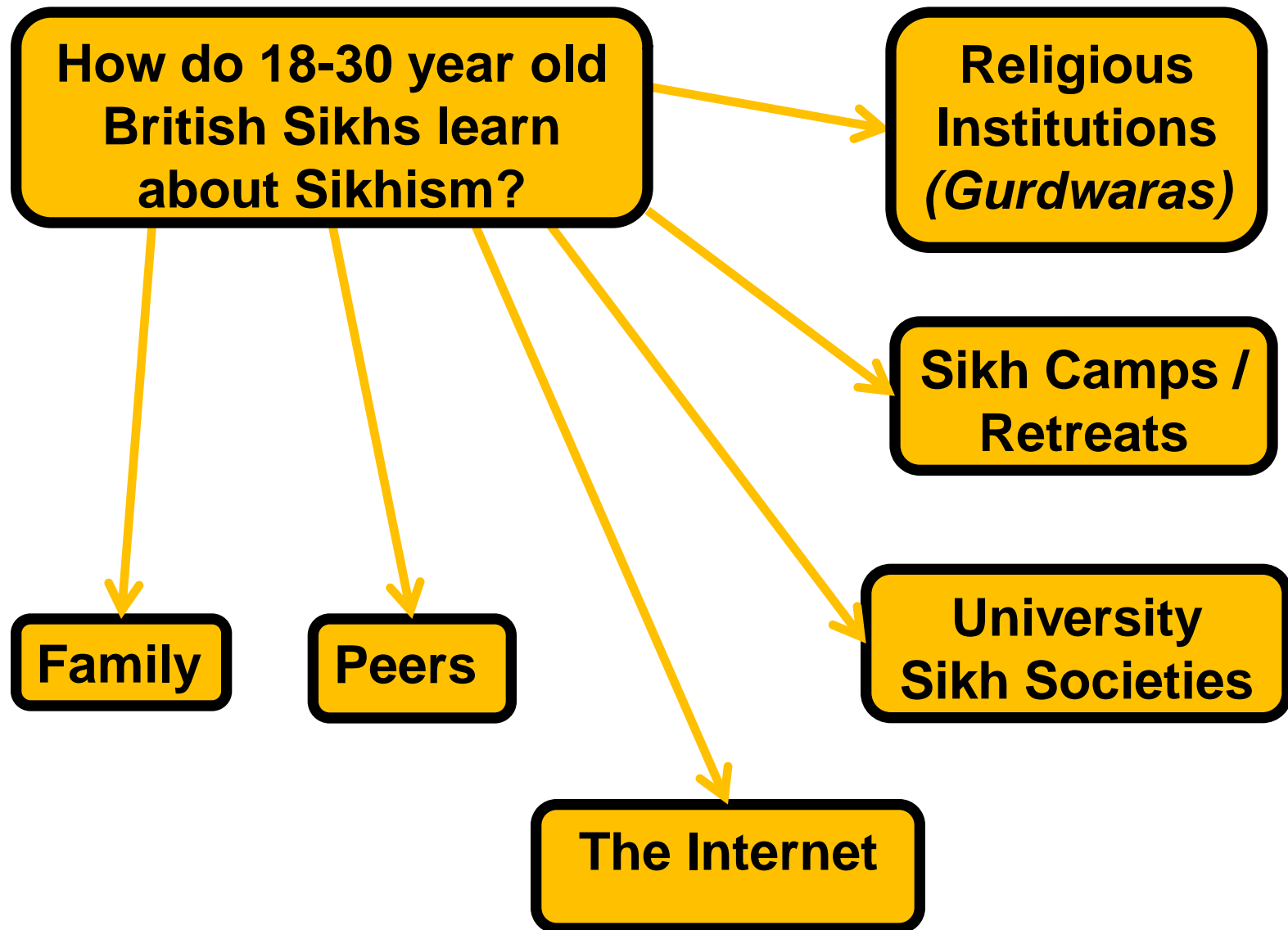
BECAS:

- Connection with a university for mutual discussion of future of Sikh Studies in Britain;
- Interest in finding out more about the views of British Sikh young people on Sikhism, and in particular on the role of *gurdwaras* in their development;
- Assistance of a doctoral student;
- Public lecture series, workshops for young people.

Research Questions

1. How do young British Sikhs learn about Sikhism and what role is played by traditional sources of authority including gurdwara functionaries, parents and schools?
2. **Why are young British Sikhs organising events to teach Sikhism, what sorts of events are being organised, and why are these generally held outside gurdwaras?**
3. How are new technologies including translation software and the Internet impacting on the transmission of Sikhism, and on young Sikhs' ideas of tradition and religious authority?
4. **What is the relationship between the various arenas of transmission? Do they support or challenge one another, and if so what are the consequences of this?**

Research Arenas



Research Methods

1. Interviews with 35 key 'transmitters' of Sikhism
2. Focus Groups with Sikh students
3. Participant Observation at events organised by / for young Sikhs (Camps and University Sikh Societies)
- 4. Online survey of young British Sikhs (600+ responses)**
5. Phone-in shows on a Panjabi radio station
6. Speaking at events organised by / for young Sikhs
7. Analysis of lectures and websites

Actual Outcomes

University:

- Established connection with BECAS allowing for possibilities for future collaboration
- University of Leeds now regarded as an institution where studies in this topic can be undertaken; Links being established with potential doctoral students / policy makers / teachers
- Possibility of undertaking doctoral research into the Arts and Humanities highlighted for many young Sikhs
- Possible development of MOOCs targeting teachers / mature students,

BECAS:

- Profile of BECAS raised among Sikhs in general and young Sikhs in particular
- Research undertaken into a topic of interest
- Awareness of new possibilities of funding
- Links with similar groups nationally leading to the organisation and presentation of events for Sikh children
- Profile of BECAS raised nationally and internationally – rebranded as ‘British Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs’
- Possible relationship ... future collaborations?

BECAS' Profile

IDENTITY

Belief and Belonging: Identity and Religion in Northern Kenya

Professor John Mack
University of East Anglia

The project drew together an interdisciplinary team from the UK and Kenya to explore the effects of conversion to Christianity or Islam on questions of identity in the northern Kenya region. This has resulted in a restructuring of patterns of pilgrimage and a refocusing of ideas of belonging in spatial terms. In the town of Marsabit there are at least five established

ethnic groups. Despite conversion to 'universalist' religions, however, ethnic sentiment remains a powerful point of reference. Likewise, traditional spirit possession practices continue in the contexts of healing rituals even where participants are otherwise members of a church or mosque.

Further information
<http://goo.gl/otKHK>



Borana spirit possession, Marsabit, northern Kenya

Keeping the Faith: The Transmission of Sikhism among young British Sikhs (18-30)

Professor Kim K. Nott and Mr Jasjit Singh
University of Leeds

This project examined the religious lives of young Sikhs, with a particular focus on understanding how Sikhism is being transmitted among British Sikhs between the ages of 18-30. Traditional methods of religious transmission, through families and religious institutions, were examined and compared with newer methods of transmission often organised by young Sikhs themselves including Sikh camps, University Sikh societies and the internet.

A collaboration between the Religion and Society programme and BECAS (the British Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs), the project has encouraged more than 600 young Sikhs to engage with the research through an online survey.

Further information
www.leeds.ac.uk/skhs

Finally, someone has created a survey for modern Sikhs. I thank the University of Leeds.

ONLINE SURVEY RESPONDENT



The golden dome on the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, Southall, London



Supporting Organisations

ASHT aim to work with key strategic partners to deliver our work to Sikhs and non Sikhs. Below is a list of a few of these partners

Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life
Birmingham City Council
Bradford City Council
Bradford Educational and Cultural Association of

ਪ੍ਰਵਾਸੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਲਈ 'ਬੀਕਾਸ' ਵਲੋਂ ਇੱਕ ਨਵੀਂ ਸੋਧ



ਖੱਬਿਉ: ਸ੍ਰ. ਜਸਦੇਵ ਸਿੰਘ, ਕਮਾਨੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਘੁੱਮਣ, ਤਰਲੋਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਚੱਢਲ, ਪ੍ਰੋ. ਕਿਮ ਨੋਟ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਲੀਡਜ਼, ਜਸਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ (ਵਿਦਿਆਰਥੀ), ਜੋਤਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਨਿਰਵਾਨ, ਮੋਹਣ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੰਘਾ।

ਬਰੇਡਫੋਰਡ-ਕਮਾਨੀਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਘੁੱਮਣ) ਬਰੇਡਫੋਰਡ ਐਜੂਕੇਸ਼ਨਲ ਐਂਡ ਕਲਚਰਲ ਐਸੋਸੀਏਸ਼ਨ ਆਫ ਸਿੱਖਸ (ਬੀਕਾਸ) ਅਤੇ ਲੀਡਜ਼ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਦਰਮਿਆਨ 26 ਨਵੰਬਰ 2008 ਨੂੰ ਇੱਕ ਅਹਿਮ ਇਕੱਠਾ ਲਾਗੂ ਕੀਤਾ ਗਿਆ ਹੈ। ਇਸ ਇਕੱਠੇ 'ਚ ਮੌਜੂਦਾ ਬਰਖੁਰਦਾਰ ਜਸਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਨੂੰ ਪੀ.ਐਚ.ਡੀ. ਕਰਵਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਹੈ। ਪੀ. ਐਚ. ਡੀ. ਦਾ ਮਸਲੂਮ 18 ਤੋਂ 30 ਸਾਲ ਦੇ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਦੀ ਮੌਜੂਦਾ ਭਰੀ ਦਾ ਤੌਰ-ਨਿਰੀਖਣ ਕਰਨਾ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਨੌਜਵਾਨ ਇੰਗਲੈਂਡ ਵਿੱਚ ਰਹਿੰਦੇ ਹੋਏ ਆਪਣੀ ਸਹੀ ਪਛਾਣ ਕੀ ਰੱਖਦੇ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਵਿਚਿਅ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਅਤੇ ਕਿਵੇਂ ਪ੍ਰਾਪਤ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਨ। ਇਸ ਸਰਪ੍ਰਸਤੀ ਦਾ ਕੇਂਦਰਨ ਆਰਟਸ, ਹਿਊਮੈਨਿਟੀਜ਼ ਰਿਸਰਚ ਕੌਂਸਲ (AHRC), ਇਕਨੌਮਿਕ ਅਤੇ ਸੋਸ਼ਲ ਰਿਸਰਚ ਕੌਂਸਲ (ESRC) ਵਲੋਂ ਲੀਡਜ਼ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਰਪਿਤ ਹੈ। ਬੀਕਾਸ ਪ੍ਰੋਜੈਕਟ ਵਲੋਂ ਕੀ 1000 ਸਲਾਨਾ ਤਿੰਨ ਭੁੱਖਾਂ ਲਈ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਨੂੰ ਮਾਲੀ ਅਮਦਾਦ ਦੇਣ ਦਾ ਵਾਅਦਾ ਹੈ। ਲੀਡਜ਼ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਵਲੋਂ ਪ੍ਰੋ. ਕਿਮ ਨੋਟ ਅਤੇ ਬੀਕਾਸ ਵਲੋਂ ਸ੍ਰ. ਤਰਲੋਚਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਚੱਢਲ ਹੋਰੀ ਜਸਜੀਤ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਮਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਦੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵਿਕਸਤ ਕਰਨ ਸਮੁੱਚੀ ਸਿੱਖ ਕੌਮ ਲਈ ਇਹ ਬੜੇ ਮਾਣ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ

ਹੈ ਕਿ ਇਹੋ ਜੇਹਾ ਪਹਿਲਾ ਉਪਾਲਾ ਸਿੱਖ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਸਬੰਧ ਵਿੱਚ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੀਆਂ ਭੁੱਖਾਂ ਅਤੇ ਭਾਵਨਾਵਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਦਾ ਇੱਕ ਕਤਨ ਹੈ। ਅਸੀਂ ਆਸ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਇਹ ਖੋਜ ਪ੍ਰਵਾਸੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨਾਂ ਲਈ ਅਤੇ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਦੇ ਮਾਤਾ ਪਿਤਾ ਲਈ ਲਾਭਦਾਇਕ ਸਿੱਧ ਹੋਵੇਗੀ। ਇਸ ਦੇ ਨਾਲ ਹੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਘਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧਕਾਂ ਲਈ ਇਸ ਖੋਜ ਦੀ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ, ਆਪਣੀ ਨੌਜਵਾਨ ਪਨੀਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਗੁਰੂ ਘਰਾਂ ਵੱਲ ਪ੍ਰੇਰਤ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਸਹਾਇਕ ਹੋਵੇਗੀ। ਇਕ ਹੋਰ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਵੀ ਪਾਠਕਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਸਾਂਝੀ ਕਰਦੇ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਬੀਕਾਸ ਕੁਝ ਸਮੇਂ ਤੋਂ ਲੀਡਜ਼ ਯੂਨੀਵਰਸਿਟੀ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਸਾਹਿਤ ਅਤੇ ਗੁਰਮਤ ਬੋਧ ਹਿੰਤ ਚੇਅਰ ਸਥਾਪਤ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਕਤਨਬੀਲ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਪੀ. ਐਚ. ਡੀ. ਕਰਵਾਉਣ ਦਾ ਉਪਾਲਾ ਇਸ ਚੇਅਰ ਪ੍ਰਬਾਏ ਪਹਿਲਾ ਕਦਮ ਮੰਨਿਆ ਜਾ ਸਕਦਾ ਹੈ।

ਇਸੇ ਸਿਲਸਿਲੇ ਵਿੱਚ ਬੀਕਾਸ ਦੀਆਂ ਕੁਝ ਮੀਟਿੰਗਾਂ ਆਰਟਸ ਕੌਂਸਲ ਇੰਗਲੈਂਡ ਦੇ ਨੁਮਾਇੰਦਿਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਗਈਆਂ ਹਨ ਅਤੇ ਇਹ ਖੁਸ਼ੀ ਦੀ ਗੱਲ ਹੈ ਕਿ ਉਹਨਾਂ ਵਲੋਂ ਬੀਕਾਸ ਪ੍ਰਕਾਸ਼ ਸਹਿਯੋਗ ਮਿਲਣ ਦੀ ਆਸ ਹੈ। ਇਹ ਆਪਣੀਆਂ ਧਾਰਮਿਕ ਪ੍ਰੰਪਰਾ, ਵਿਰਾਸਤ ਅਤੇ ਪੰਜਾਬੀ ਮਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਨੂੰ ਪ੍ਰਦੇਸ਼ਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ ਵਿਕਸਤ ਕਰਨ ਦਾ ਇੱਕ ਯੋਗ ਉਪਾਲਾ ਹੈ।

RELIGION AND IDENTITY

Sikh Identity and the formation and transmission of 'Sikhism' in Britain

Jasjit Singh University of Leeds

How is Sikhism transmitted among young adults between the ages of 18 and 30?

This project examines the growth of religious transmission events for young Sikhs – such as camps and university Sikh societies – and links them in the context of both traditional methods, particularly religious institutions and the internet.

A collaboration between the Religion and Society programme and BECAS (the British Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs), the project has engaged more than 600 young Sikhs to engage with the research through an online survey.

Information:
eds.ac.uk/sikhs

Finally, someone has created a survey for modern Sikhs. I thank the University of Leeds.

Online survey respondent



BECAS are pleased to have worked in conjunction with Leeds University to sponsor Jasjit Singh. The research and its findings will be invaluable in increasing awareness of the religious lives of young British Sikhs and in understanding how they engage with their religion and culture.

Mr Trilochan Singh Duggal
President of BECAS (British Educational and Cultural Association of Sikhs)

Law and the Jaina Community in Britain

Menski SOAS

The aim of the project was to reconstruct the history of Jaina law and the emergence of a 'world religion' in the 19th and 20th centuries.

art cases, biographies, community and interviews with contemporary leaders both in India and the UK, the project also contributes to better understanding of the socio-legal position of the Jains in Britain, and of how they cultivated sense of identity. The project helped to advance a minority subject which has recently advanced and continues to attract interest globally.

Information:
www.leeds.ac.uk/jainastudies



The SOAS project on Jaina Law helped 'insiders' to Jainism, its advocates and those advancing its cause, to attest their views/arguments with independent research. The project also facilitates meaningful understanding of present legal contexts and dialogues for 'outsiders' by offering historical and well juxtaposed socio-legal perspectives.

Rishabh Sancheti
Advocate,
Supreme Court of India

Actual Outcomes

Personal:

- **Increased awareness** on how community groups work
- **Appreciation** that community work is often a labour of love – inspirational, dedicated individuals working on a shoestring
- **Experience in speaking** to community groups and non-academic audiences
- **Academic Teaching** is contemporary, relevant and based on my research
- **Experience in articulating** the “vision” of research (and the research process) to those in the community
- **Increased confidence** in working with the Sikh community and with Sikh elders in particular – understanding of concerns, issues and interests (e.g. Poetry)
- **I GOT A JOB !!**

Reflections

- **Community Impact** - The involvement of BECAS in setting the research agenda certainly helped to ensure that the research participants felt that they had a stake in the research project.
- **Explaining the process** - recognise that many community organisations may not be aware of the research process and that it may be necessary to explain the process and outcomes of research.
- **Selection of Partners** – if possible it is worth considering which collaborating organisation would be most suitable. Collaborative suitability could depend upon a number of factors including political affiliation, research freedom, and organisational structure.
- **Managing expectations** – given their investment community organisations may expect an immediate return. Therefore it is necessary to outline the process of research and to define a reporting structure to ensure that the collaborating organisation is aware of how the research is progressing.
- **Gets you 'out there'** – Even if some days you don't feel like collaborating, the very fact that you are means that your research is 'out there'

The Religious Lives of Young British Sikhs: A reflection on community engagement through a Collaborative Doctoral Award



Beyond the Campus, University of Brighton, 10th April 2013

Dr Jasjit Singh, University of Leeds

Web: www.leeds.ac.uk/sikhs, Email: j.s.singh@leeds.ac.uk

Twitter: [@DrJasjitSingh](https://twitter.com/DrJasjitSingh)