



Sikhs - Tracking the Journey

Flourishment & Contribution
in Birmingham & the Black Country

#SikhHeritage

My Story, Our Journey:

The Sikh Migration Project

Sikhs by nature are visionary, courageous explorers. Their hard work, adaptability and discipline led many to become assets in the world wars, supporting the Allies to victory.

They later went on to settle in the UK and contributed to industrial development. Over the last 100 years, they have flourished. Today, Sikhs can be found all over the world and in all spheres of society, From medicine, business and politics, to music, art and culture.

“My Story, Our Journey” is a project focused on tracing the heritage of Sikh communities in Birmingham and the Black Country.

In this project we explored the journey from being humble migrants to becoming successful, active participants and contributors in the UK. The project engaged first and second generation Sikh migrants to record their life stories and lessons learnt. We asked about their childhoods, their journeys and the struggles they experienced on arrival into the UK. We explored their motivations, strengths, values and how they established themselves in a new country.

Using additional research, we charted: how the community established roots within Britain; integrated as active members of society; overcame discrimination; and formally protected the Sikh identity.

Migration is an important theme for Sikhs. We believe that we are all spiritual migrants on this planet. Having travelled through a cycle of many births and deaths, we are navigating ourselves back home to our Creator. This project was helpful in allowing us to ponder on these reflections, and appreciate how to respect the challenges, struggles and sacrifices that form part of this journey.

This project has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. We are indebted to them for allowing us this opportunity to explore, and permanently record our heritage.

We also acknowledge the extensive contributions of our volunteers, without whom we could not have achieved so much in such little time. Our volunteers and contributors have added value and expertise to this project, that would not have been possible with the funding alone.

This booklet accompanies an exhibition, website and an educational toolkit. The archives of this project will also be deposited in the Library of Birmingham, Sandwell Community History & Archives, and Dudley Archives.

We take pride in the Sikh journey. Thank you to all of our contributors and volunteers for helping us to preserve this unique element of our Sikh heritage.

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Sikhs - An Introduction

The Sikh Dharam (faith or disciplined way of life) was founded in 1469 by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first in a line of 10 consecutive Sikh Gurus who established the faith. The faith teaches that there is one God from whom we have all originated.

Practically the Sikh (or “learner”) is a disciple of the Guru (spiritual teacher). In 1708, after the line of 10 Gurus ended, the Guruship was passed down to the sacred Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib Ji. This scripture is revered as the eternal Guru of the Sikhs and can be found in every Gurudwara (Sikh place of worship).

A key teaching is the importance of living an honest, honourable and worthy

human life, in the presence of God. As Sikhs, we are expected to continuously pray, and serve God’s creation. We must be forgiving, loving, content, compassionate, humble, accountable and generous to others.

A Sikh’s true identity is considered to be formed by the values and virtues by which he or she lives. The values named above reflect the kind of practices that Sikhs endeavoured to bring over to the UK as part of their heritage. The lessons of unity and interdependence are some of the foundations for modern Sikhs in the UK today.

Sikhs initiated into their faith have a distinct outward identity. They are

required to wear the 5 Kakars (commonly known as 5 Ks), (Kara, Kes, Kanga, Kachhera, and the Kirpan). Males (and some females) wear a ‘Dastar’ (turban). These words are explained in our glossary.

This identity was formalised to help Sikhs remember their faith values, and also to ensure that Sikhs are visible within crowds, in order to support anyone in need.

Sikhs are not just a religious or faith group. They are described as an ethno-religious group because as a community they share a common: history; cultural traditions; geographic origin; language and literature; are a minority within most parts of the world.

Therefore, when Sikhs arrived in the UK, the preservation of their language, cultural traditions, faith and literature was essential, along with their religious practices and identity.

In the UK, this was challenging, due to the discrimination the Sikhs faced in early 1950s Britain. As we will explore later, Sikhs had to fight for the protection of their distinctive identity.

The Sikh community originated around the state of Punjab in India. Whilst many Sikhs came directly from these areas to the UK, others were twice migrants through Kenya, Uganda, Afghanistan and other countries.

These Sikhs had a mixture of educational backgrounds. On arrival in the UK, however, many joined factories and foundries, engaging in manual labour and becoming part of the UK’s industrial labour workforce.

Those who came with qualifications had to prove themselves, often starting from the ground up.

“No matter where you go in the world, people can steal your money - but they can’t steal your education!”

Dr Jaswant Singh Sohal



Global Migration Map of the Sikhs

Since the 15th Century



Guru Nanak Dev Ji travelled extensively during the late 15th & early 16th centuries to spread teachings to uplift humanity. The figure of Guru Nanak Dev Ji making his journeys inspires Sikhs to reach out to, and engage with people from different walks of life. His four known journeys are marked on this map by the red thread, and four distinct styles of stitching.

The East India Company brought the first recorded

Indian over to the UK in 1614, which suggests there was trading between India and the UK.

A verse written by Guru Gobind Singh Ji (the tenth Sikh Guru), in praise of God, references the British and French & suggests awareness of European countries.

"The people of France and England revere Thee, the inhabitants of Kandhaar and Quraishis know Thee;

the people of western side recognize their duty towards Thee."

This suggests that there may have been opportunities for Sikhs from India to travel to England around this time.

The 19th and 20th centuries saw the main waves of Sikh migration. The migration that took place in these centuries has resulted in the formation

of large, long-standing, developed Sikh diasporas around the world.

The purple threads are representative of the first known wave of mass migration. The blue threads are representative of the second wave of migration, mainly consisting of double migrants.

Maharaja Duleep Singh

The First Recorded Sikh Migrant

Maharaja Duleep Singh, also known as Dalip Singh and later in life nicknamed the Black Prince of Perthshire, was the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. He was Maharaja Ranjit Singh's youngest son, the only child of Maharani Jind Kaur.

Duleep Singh was exiled by the East India Company to Britain in 1849, at the age of 14, following the end of the 2nd Anglo-Sikh war.

Duleep Singh was befriended by Queen Victoria who wrote to him, persuading him to come to live in Britain. Having arrived in the UK, on his own, Duleep Singh had no contact with his family or heritage.

He was invited by the Queen to stay with the royal family in Osbourne, where she had a sketch made of him playing with her children and Prince Albert.

When he expressed a desire to return to India, however, a suggestion was made by the East India Company Board that he take a tour of the European Continent. He did so with Sir John Spencer Login, and Lady Login.

At the age of 18, he sent a letter to his mother which was intercepted by the British in India. He then sent a message via courier, with Pundit Nehemiah Goreh, who was forbidden to contact the Maharani.

Duleep Singh then wrote a letter under the name of Sir Login, to the British Residents in Katamandu, who described the Maharani to be in poor health.



Maharaja Duleep Singh, also known as "The Black Prince of Perthshire". Portrait, c.1860

The British decided she was no longer a threat and she was allowed to join her son in 1861, and return with him to England.

In 1884, for the first time, he was able to re-establish contact with his cousins in India, and renew his connection with the Sikh faith.

Prior to this, all his attempts to learn about his heritage had been thwarted, and he was not allowed to have a formal initiation into the Sikh faith. He never returned to India and passed away in Paris.

Princess Sophia

A First 1st Generation Sikh

Princess Sophia Alexandra Duleep Singh, was the daughter of Maharaja Duleep Singh. She was one of the first, 1st generation Sikhs recorded in the UK. Her godmother was Queen Victoria.

She was born on the 8th August 1876 at Belgravia in Suffolk. She could have had an easy life and spent her time enjoying luxury.

However, on a trip to India she discovered the legacy of her grandfather, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, 'the lion of Punjab', who was beloved by all members of his kingdom. He had protected his subjects (Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs), by treating them all equally and ensuring that they all had enough land to cultivate and survive. She saw the injustices that were now taking place in Punjab, since her family had lost rulership.

On return to the UK, Sophia wanted to live up to her grandfather's legacy and make a difference in society. After seeing prejudice against her sister (who was prevented from becoming a doctor), Sophia became involved in Women's rights. She joined the movement for Women's Suffrage (being allowed to vote). She attended meetings and joined in demonstrations, including the famous Black Monday demonstration when the Suffragettes clashed with the police and many were injured.

She joined the Women's Tax Resistance League. This led her into court, twice, having the bailiffs visit her house and take her belongings. She also went out on the streets, giving out leaflets, alongside her fellow suffragettes.

After the war she joined the Suffragette Fellowship led by Mrs Pankhurst. Sophia was a very active campaigner. After Mrs Pankhurst's death in 1928, she was appointed President of the Committee. Princess Sophia remained a member of the Suffragette Fellowship to the end of her life.

After returning to the UK with her father, she wanted to support Sikhs who had fought in the wars. She helped them settle in the UK, find places to live and helped them heal from the war. She helped with war efforts, along with many other women.

For more information:
visit www.duleepsingh.com
> BBC documentary 'Sophia: Suffragette Princess-Princess Sophia Duleep Singh'



Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, selling subscriptions for the Suffragette newspaper, London, April 1913

Physical Migration - Causes of Migration

The UK Sikh community is made up of direct migrants from India, twice and triple migrants.

There has been a Sikh presence in the UK since the 1600s, with the majority of Sikhs arriving after the First World War. Whilst there were several reasons that Sikhs chose to come to Britain, very few planned on relocating permanently. In most cases, Sikhs were economic migrants looking to return money to family in India, and build a better lifestyle for when they returned.

By the 1960s Sikhs began to bring their families over to settle in England. Many Sikhs feared losing their cultural and religious heritage, and therefore created

small communities where they could preserve, what Ballard describes as, the "Punjabi moral order" they themselves had grown up within.

East Africans were late arrivals in the UK, and unlike direct migrants, arrived as complete families, with the intention to settle here. Bhachu explains that their distant relationship with India, and their expertise in maintaining a cultural identity within Africa, helped them to establish themselves much more rapidly on arrival into the UK.

Twice migrants from Afghanistan, Fiji, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, West Indies and other places, also chose to settle here in later years.



Physical Migration

Journey to the UK

Sikhs travelled by ship and plane to arrive in the UK. From the research we conducted, it appears that from the late 1950s, air travel was the most common for Sikhs.

Although Britain had an open door immigration policy, at the end of the Second World War, some Sikhs had difficulty procuring an Indian passport from their government. They had to travel to local countries in order to get a passport, so that they could travel to Britain. In using this route, many passports were discarded along the way.

For a number of our participants, this journey was their first time on a plane, and they had little idea about what they would encounter when they arrived. What they were aware of was the weather, and the lack of heating at the time. For this reason, suitcases often included blankets or shawls to help them adjust to the new climate.

Some participants have noted that when they arrived at Heathrow, there was no-one there to check their passports or their identification. For this reason, it is hard to estimate how many Sikhs arrived in the UK at that time.

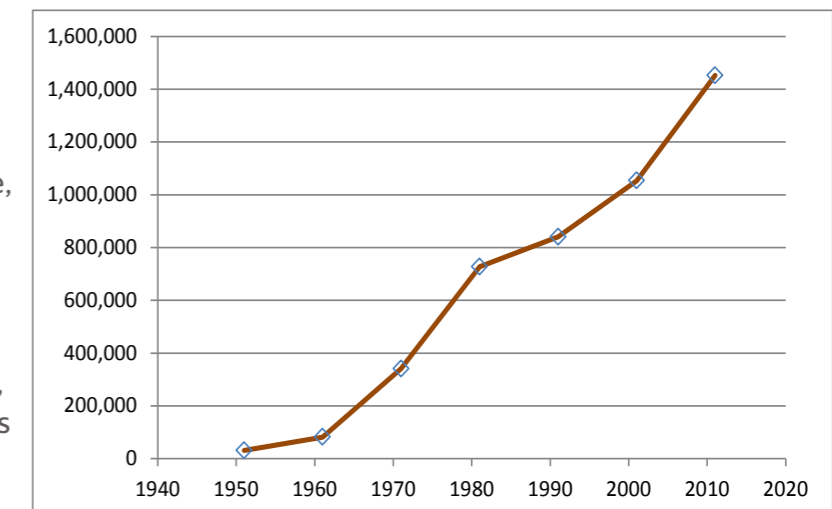
There were also cases where, in order to get permanent citizenship, those with Indian passports had to return them to the Indian embassy. For these reasons, original passports of settlers have been hard to acquire within our research.

At the time Sikhs were not recognised as a subgroup, so all data is recorded within the larger Indian population. This consisted of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and other Asian minorities. What we do know is that between 1961 and 1971, the population of Indians in the UK increased by roughly 260,000.

Due to the massive increase in population, the first immigration law: 'The Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962' was passed to make temporary provisions for controlling the immigration into the United Kingdom of Commonwealth Citizens from all over the world.

Tarlok Singh, a lawyer, helped support migrants in the second large wave flee Uganda. He helped and supported them to obtain British passports so that they could escape persecution. At the time, Uganda was becoming Africanised and all other communities were required to leave.

Below: Graph showing change in UK Indian population between 1951 & 2011



Migration Timeline

“Our children have not been brought up in the same circumstances that I was brought up in. Our grandchildren are being brought up in different facilities, different situations, different privileges ... We should try to adapt ourselves ... Where you live, believe in the place, and be loyal and sincere.”

Bikram Singh Bhamra

1614
First Indian brought over by the East India Company; followed by 'Lascars' (Indian sailors) who travelled to and from the UK throughout the 18th Century.

1833
Semi-skilled Sikh artisans were transported to Uganda and Kenya as employees, to build the East African Railways.

1897
Migrated to Canada to create the Canadian Pacific Railway. Others migrated to the USA to work on agricultural or railroad construction jobs.

1945
First mass migration of Sikhs into the UK, to help with the post-war reconstruction. This was known as the 'General Influx of Commonwealth Migrants'.

1984
Indian troops stormed Sri Harimandir Sahib, Amritsar, causing Sikhs to flee to Europe and North America. 5,000 refugees settled in the West Midlands.

1854
Maharaja Duleep Singh was exiled from Punjab and taken to England, where he lived with Queen Victoria.

1906
Sant Attar Singh Mastuana sent five Sikh men to spread the Sikh Dharam in the UK.

1947
The partition of India resulted in the largest mass human migration known in history. One of the major areas affected was Punjab (Sikh homeland).

1990
Afghan Sikhs fleeing the Taliban, settled in the UK.

1857
Major recruitment into the British Indian Army from Punjab. Students and servants travelling to Britain also increased.

1912-13
Maharaja Bhupinder Singh (King of Patiala), donated to set up Shepherd's Bush Gurudwara in London. This was a base for Sikh migrants to the UK.

1950s
Many male Sikhs left their families to seek manual labour in the inner cities of the UK.

2007-10
The 'Irregular Migration in Europe - December 2011 Report' suggests that Sikh migration into the UK has reduced between 2007 and 2010.

1878
Indians/Sikhs migrated to Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Suriname, Fiji and East Africa, as 'indentured labour'.

1914
After WWI, pictures suggest there were a number of Sikh males known as 'Pedlars', who travelled across the UK selling items out of suitcases.

1960s
Second mass migration into the UK from East Africa. after the movement to 'Africanise' countries such as: Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya.

1880
Sikhs migrated to Fiji for military jobs. They called themselves the 'Fizi Indian Population'. Most now live in Australia, and call it home.

1916
Princess Sophia became a prominent Suffragette, selling 'Votes for Women' papers and nursing WWI soldiers.

1962-71
British UK legislated the Commonwealth Immigration Act 1962-71. reducing the rights of Commonwealth citizens migrating to the UK.

1895
Sikhs arrived in Australia and took part in the 'Gold Rush' on the Victorian fields.

1939-45
During WWII many Sikhs joined the British Army. They already had large communities in many major cities, and helped in the war efforts.

1966
Families began joining their husbands/fathers who had already settled in Britain.

1800

1850

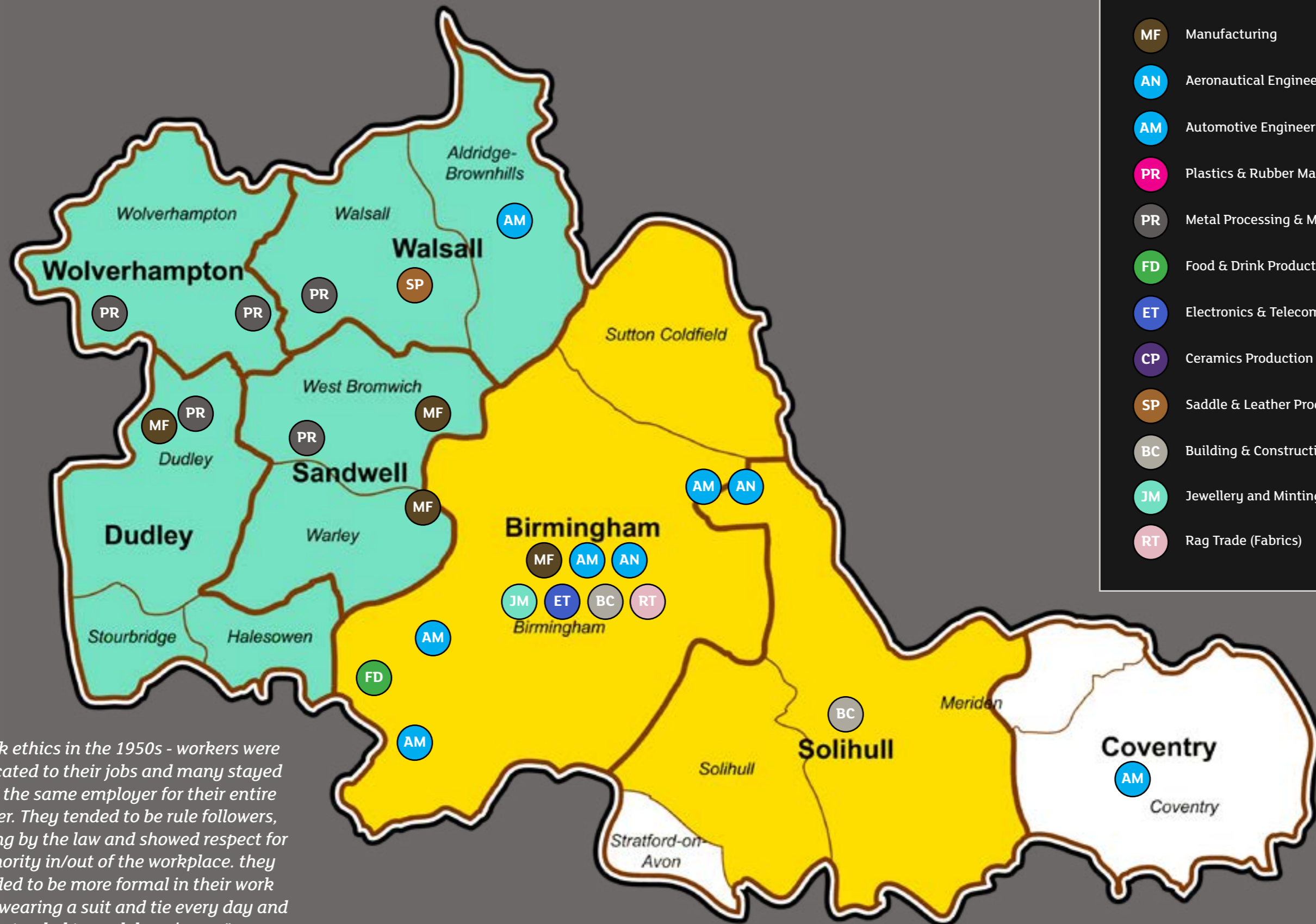
1900

1950

2000



Sikhs: Work and Professions in Birmingham and the Black Country



Key	
MF	Manufacturing
AN	Aeronautical Engineering
AM	Automotive Engineering
PR	Plastics & Rubber Manufacturing
PR	Metal Processing & Manufacturing
FD	Food & Drink Production
ET	Electronics & Telecoms
CP	Ceramics Production
SP	Saddle & Leather Production
BC	Building & Construction
JM	Jewellery and Minting
RT	Rag Trade (Fabrics)

“Work ethics in the 1950s - workers were dedicated to their jobs and many stayed with the same employer for their entire career. They tended to be rule followers, abiding by the law and showed respect for authority in/out of the workplace. they tended to be more formal in their work wear, wearing a suit and tie every day and tended to work long hours.”

Anonymous

Malcolm X

Support and Solidarity

The segregation and discrimination in British society led to Sikhs uniting as a community and fighting for their rights. Organisations like the Indian-Workers' Association and other Trade Unions were formed to support Sikhs and other communities to create a sense of equality and security within the UK. They particularly supported those who worked in the Foundaries.

For Sikhs, one of the largest factors for discrimination was the Dastar (turban). Many employers wanted Sikhs to remove the Dastar and cut their hair before they were given work.

The social context therefore led to many Sikhs forfeiting their physical identities. It took many years, until these rights were gained and Sikhs could comfortably live as they pleased within Britain.

In 1965, Malcolm X visited Smethwick (North-West Birmingham). He had been invited by the Indian-Workers' Association (GB).

In solidarity for the local community, Malcolm X stated: "I have come, because I am disturbed by reports that coloured people in Smethwick are being treated badly. I have heard that they are being treated as the Jews were under Hitler." His speech took place only 9 days before he was assassinated.

"I was raised in the Black Country when some people wanted to make it white."

Below: 1965, Malcolm X during his visit to Smethwick, where he protested against racial discrimination

"You can't judge someone by their appearance. What you may find is that they're completely different to what you thought. That is how we harbour prejudice."

Gurinder Singh Mandla

Rivers of Blood - An Era of Acceptable Discrimination

In 1968, Enoch Powell MP, did a speech referred to as 'Rivers of Blood' at a Conservative Association meeting in Birmingham.



He stated, "Those whom the gods wish to destroy, they first make mad. We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the

material of the future growth of the immigrant-descended population. It is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre. So insane are we that we actually permit unmarried persons to immigrate for the purpose of founding a family with spouses and fiancés whom they have never seen."

He believed in racial cleansing, and felt that only those of white skin should be allowed to reside in the UK. He went on to share his thoughts on the Sikh community, and their struggle to maintain their identity.

"The Sikh communities' campaign to maintain customs inappropriate in Britain is much to be regretted. Working in Britain, particularly in the public

services, they should be prepared to accept the terms and conditions of their employment. To claim special communal rights (or should one say rites?) leads to a dangerous fragmentation within society. This communalism is a canker; whether practised by one colour or another it is to be strongly condemned."

In his eyes, integration meant conforming to the social norms and practices already established. He did not encourage or accept any form of diversity. His fear was that if other communities were allowed to live their lives as they wished, they would overpower the existing customs and culture.

"In this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man."

His words are representative of the insecurities that were felt in British society. There were many signs with sayings, such as: **"no blacks, no irish, no dogs", or "One room available. No colours"**. The ignorance displayed towards other cultures and faiths was apparent, and outwardly expressed on a daily basis. Many Sikhs faced this at school, work and in social settings.



Discrimination

Workplace

Many Sikhs when they arrived in the UK faced discrimination when trying to find work. Karamjit Singh Tanday described the climate at the time.

“When I arrived from Kenya and started school in the 1960’s, I was an 11 year old wearing a turban. I was only 1 of 2 Sikh boys who wore turbans, I faced a lot of abuse by other kids and indirectly by teachers. Even on my way home, I would have my turban knocked off. It was my faith that got me through.

The Job Centre would just give you a piece of paper with details on where to go. Where I worked if a person turned up at the security gate, the security guard would ring up personnel and they would simply ask “what number?”. The number given would represent the types of different ethnic groups. For example, if

you’re Irish you’re No.1; Asian No.2; West Indian/Black No.3, and White No.4.

My office was next door to the personnel department. I saw menial jobs such as labouring being offered to Blacks and Asians; but if they requested to be interviewed for a senior position or an office based job they were often turned away at the gate without an interview. Those types of job opportunities were only given to the ‘white man’.

When I left school in the late 1960s I got an apprenticeship wearing a turban. I had to work twice as hard as the ‘white man’ to get any recognition. If I wanted training I had to fight for it, but the funny thing was, I had higher qualifications than most of the ‘white guys’ working with me. I wasn’t allowed any time off work, and had to go to night classes to learn - whereas they could attend college during working hours and were paid.

Below: 1970, Karamjit Singh Tanday with his training school colleagues



Obstacles + Support = Success

Purchasing a Gurudwara for the Community

As Sikhs decided to become permanent residents in the UK, they faced challenges acquiring property and laying down roots. Piara Singh Purewal describes the struggle of purchasing a church in Smethwick.

“We noticed a church for sale for £5,000. Buta Singh then spoke to the agent about acquiring the property. However, British Nationals were not happy about an ethnic minority buying this building, as they felt it was a heritage building. They counter offered £5500.

As a community we gathered and discussed the situation. We kept bidding, and price kept increasing. There came a point where we believed that we will not be able to buy the property.

I used to study English at night classes, and met John Kendal, who became a close friend. I discussed the situation with him, and he sympathised.

He made an offer on our behalf, for £11,600, and the offer was accepted. Everybody in the community was overjoyed. To help us secure the building, John put surety for our mortgage. We could not have bought it without him.

In 1961, we opened Guru Nanak Gurudwara, Smethwick at this site. All communities, including some Caucasians celebrated with us.

As we gathered the money to buy the property, the West Indians who lived in the flat below us, handed over an unopened pay packet. So this Gurudwara was bought by all communities, and we are grateful to all of them.

Below: c.1960, Mehar Singh Sohal and members of the Sikh community at a sports tournament



The Integration Process

Becoming British

Many Sikhs arrived in the UK with a desire to be accepted by society. This was difficult because of inherent racism in British culture, which prevented them from being themselves. They were forced to conform to the norms of society.

Not only were difficulties found in interactions with the native British population, but the environment and infrastructure was not always suitable for their daily customs.

Many Sikhs struggled with cleanliness. The lack of running water and baths at home, prevented them from being able to care for their long hair the way

they used to; this contributed to the decisions of eventually cut their hair. Socially, drinking was a norm as Public Houses were gathering points for all communities. Even in a segregated society, this was the only communal place for socialising and unwinding after long shifts at work.

For many Sikhs who worked in foundaries, which were often dirty and dusty, to meet at the pub after a long day was common practice.

Mota Singh described his routine of going to the Gurudwara every day for a few hours, before spending the rest of the day in the pub.



“In 1959, I was asked what I learnt?”

I answered: Exploitation! In this generation, what I have learnt is exploitation through going to clubs, gambling, racing, bingo clubs. This is not our culture.

We must teach our children to be better. If our children follow this path, what was the point of us coming here to make a better life?”

Piara Singh Purewal

Faith Reconnection

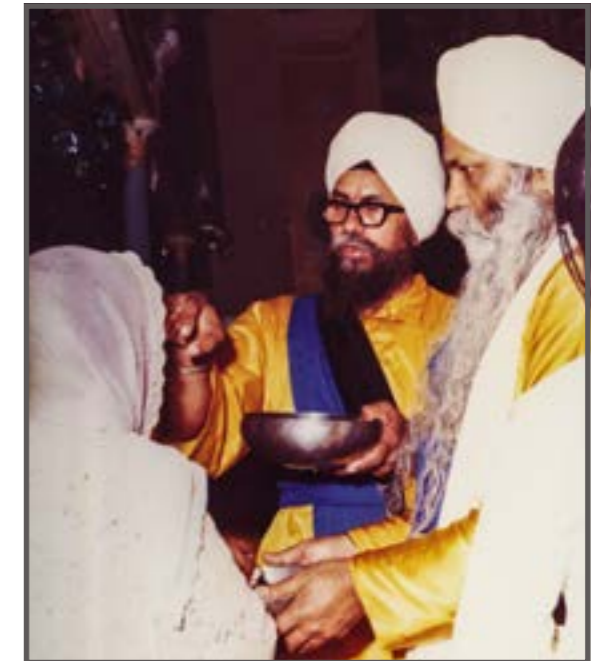
Practicing the Sikh Faith

Although some early Sikh settlers compromised their identity: by cutting their hair and drinking alcohol; they had respect for the Sikh faith, and would visit the Gurudwara on a weekly basis.

Similar to Maharaja Duleep Singh, these Sikhs began to feel an urge to reconnect with their spiritual heritage and faith. This was largely inspired by the emergence of several Sikh congregations, and Gurudwaras forming in Birmingham and the Black Country.

To support this, Gurudwaras began to hold Amrit Sanchaar ceremonies. Within the 1980s, as education of the faith spread within the communities, masses

of Sikhs would attend the ceremonies to be initiated into the Sikh dharam.



Empowerment

Protecting the Dastar (Turban)

There were a number of cases from 1959 to the early '80s where Sikhs were fighting for their right to wear the Dastar (turban) within everyday life. Two of these cases occurred in the Birmingham and Black Country area.

In Wolverhampton, in August 1967, Tarsem Singh Sandhu, a bus driver, was sacked for violating the company dress code when he wore a Dastar to work.

The case resulted in protest marches by local Sikhs and petitions from Punjab. It was only after one Sikh made threats to his own life, that the Transport Authority decided to allow turbans for Sikh drivers.

Later, in 1983, the Mandla vs. Lee case secured the rights of the Sikhs under the 'Race Relations Act (1976)'.

In 1978, Gurinder Singh Mandla was refused entry into a school, as his desire to wear a Dastar was seen to be against the school dress code.

Initially the case was lost both in court and in appeals. After which, the community took the matter to the House of Lords. They created educational literature, and marched through Hyde Park to deliver a letter to, then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

Eventually, the House of Lords agreed to class Sikhs as an ethnic minority and protect their rights.

This was a landmark case for Sikhs and minorities in the UK.

Below: Sikhs gathered in Hyde Park for the 1982 Turban protest demonstration - Mandla Vs. Lee case



Flourishment

Education and Recognition in the UK

Sikhs were not afraid of the comments made by fascists and racists. Many continued to face prejudice on a daily basis, whilst keeping their Sikh identity. Their sacrifices and courage has allowed Sikhs to form an identity as a unique community, outside of the category of 'Indian', in British society.

Decades later, a Sikh man (Rt. Hon. Paul Uppal MP) was appointed to the same constituency that Enoch Powell served, when he made the 'Rivers of Blood' speech. This reflects how much the Sikh community has flourished, despite the hurdles they confronted.

I am very proud of parents ... Despite all the disadvantages - if there is one thing Sikhs should be proud of, it is their girls."

Surinder Singh Bakshi



Above: 1974-75 Dental School Final Year Students
University of Newcastle upon Tyne



Above: 1972 Kirpal Singh Tahim, University of Birmingham, Electrical Engineering Graduation



Above: 2014, Cham Kaur Gill graduating from
University of Birmingham

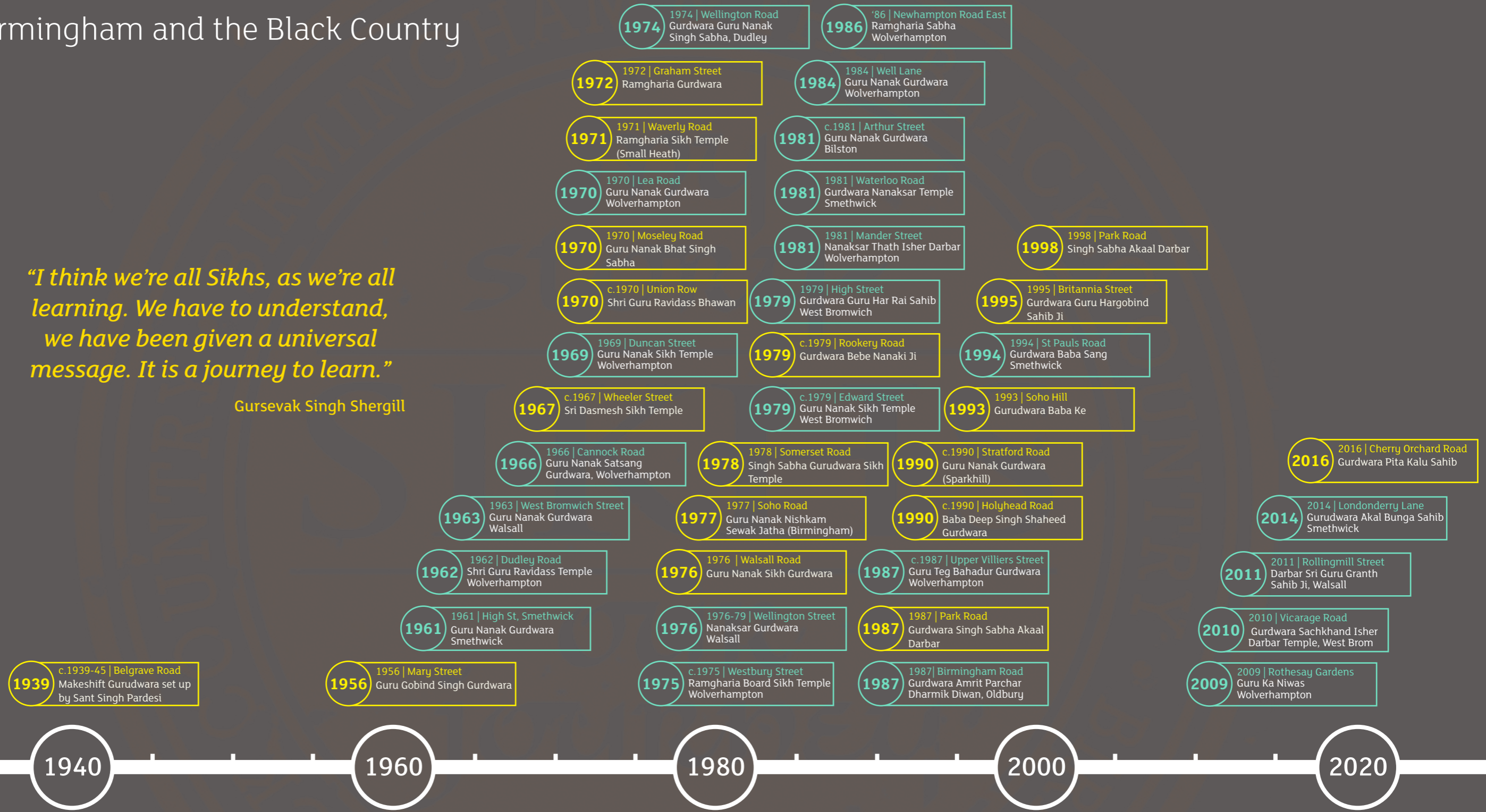


Above: 2017 Sewa Singh Mandla with his OBE, after the investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace

Timeline of Gurudwaras in Birmingham and the Black Country

“I think we’re all Sikhs, as we’re all learning. We have to understand, we have been given a universal message. It is a journey to learn.”

Gursevak Singh Shergill



Spirituality & Worship

Sikhs believe in One Universal God. Their life mission is to pray to God and serve his creation, whilst being active and honest contributors within society.

Within the Sikh community, worship occurs both in private and in congregational format. Sikhs have daily morning and evening prayers. All Sikh prayers, end with a plea for “Sarbat Da Bhalla”, the welfare of all creation.

The Gurudwara acts as the hub for the Sikh community where children and adults are educated in the Punjabi language, reading spiritual scriptures, and Sikh history. This education helps students excel spiritually and engage with their faith, as well as supporting with Punjabi & Sikh Studies qualifications. This guidance is given to encourage children to engage with their faith and heritage, and build strong support networks in the community.

When Gurudwaras were formed, they served the community by providing a space to preserve and protect, spiritual and cultural practices. They were inwardly looking at how to maintain unity within the community and help raise the next generation of Sikhs.

Since forming, they have gone on to inspire outreach and community endeavours. These include Midland

Langar Sewa, and Zero Hunger with Langar, who both take the Sikh practice of serving a free meal, and offer it to those in need, in the UK and abroad.

Other endeavours into sectors such as: aid work, the media, education and the public sphere have all developed as part of the Sikh ethos and values. Their inspiration arose from the congregation engaging in and learning from Gurudwara life and practices.



The Sikh Home - Early Migrants Re-defining Roles

Sukhwinder Singh Panesar arrived in the UK in 1969, at the age of 14. On arrival he was assessed in 'reception school' before joining a mainstream school in Birmingham. For many years it was just him and his dad living in Handsworth, Birmingham.



For Sukhwinder, the adjustment to the new climate was the hardest, he explains: "When I came to England, I didn't like it... because it was snowing and I had never seen snow before and it was so much snow and very, very cold. I said to my dad, "I just want to go back to India. I want to go home.""

As males living alone, there was more responsibility for them to take care of the home and cook for themselves. He

explained: "[in] those days, it was hard. It was hard in the sense that, you know when I was in college – although you were in college, your mind was at home or thinking about... what we going to cook tonight? That was always at the back of your mind. What we going to have tonight?"

Secondly we had to do our own laundry. You know we had to wash our own turbans, our own everything. We couldn't take our [turban] to the laundry, so we had to wash them at home; and obviously wherever we were renting there were, you know – restrictions - that you cannot wash your clothes such and such days - and then there was a problem with the hot water. You know, you can only have 30 mins water, but then you have to put a coin in the meter for hot water.

Yes, every house we lived in was rented accommodation - they set their own standards. This is what you have to do.... sometimes we would last about a month in that place and take what they call "bori bistera" to somewhere else – we managed to find accommodation regular I mean. As I say, don't think we left any house in Handsworth where we hadn't been. But we were in the Handsworth area. Always in the Handsworth area, so we didn't actually move out. But it was nice."

The Sikh Home

Family Life

Gursharan Kaur Virdee came to England with her family, following her husband who had arrived here for work. She lost her husband a few years later and attempted to return to India. However this relocation had a detrimental effect on her children's education, so she returned to the UK, and lived with her uncle and brother-in-law in Birmingham.

For Gursharan, her children were her priority. She stated, "In the evening, I would stay up late, sitting with them, while they were studying. And in the morning, no matter if I was ill, I would get up and take them to school. This was my responsibility... to educate them." Her four children have grown to be educated professionals, with a minimum of a master's degree each.

As a homemaker, she describes the struggles of living in England in the 60s and 70s.

The first challenge was bathing. Public baths were extremely common in England, with most British washing themselves with a wet cloth. For Sikhs, having arrived from a country where they would bathe in flowing water every day, this was a challenge.

"My husband, where he worked, would have a bath before leaving each day. He said, "Those who want to bathe a lot, go out and bathe in the public baths." I said, "No, I don't want to bathe outside!"

They fill a tub with water and soap and everything - and everyone bathes - no! - I didn't like that. So whenever he went somewhere, I would very quickly fill up the kettle again, and again, and bathe the children. I'd also bathe myself."

She goes on to describe the challenge with food, as some of us Sikhs had a vegetarian diet to maintain.

"One week they would write your order and then next week they would drop it off. "Your order has arrived"... You wouldn't get many greens either... then it was only... When it was the season – in the summer you'd get a little bit, otherwise no. This is how it

was.... now you can get anything from around the world – whatever you want. In those days, these were the difficulties. If nothing else, we would do thurka to (spice up) the beans, if there was no other vegetable (sabji) we could get. Well, it has happened... But there has been a change in [The British] and there has been a change in us."



Sikh Women

Overcoming Male Pride

Avtar Singh Johal arrived from India with his older brother and later, his wife and sister-in-law joined them.

In those days, I'm talking about the '70s - and this is about culture not faith - your wife and your sister would not be put to work. I'm not talking about housework. I'm talking about outside work... They considered women working outside as slavery... The men would go out to work, and the women would stay at home raising the families...

Women would get together within the homes, and that was their socialising. Their entertainment was going to the park, like Smethwick Victoria Park... When women did begin to work, men did not approve of it. I can share my own family story:

My children were growing up, and my wife Manjeet said, "What am I doing all day? Sister-in-law (Meeto), does

everything. She picks the children up from school. I'll just start work."

My practice was, if you want to work, I don't have any issues with it. There was a laundrette nearby, and she started work there. My brother didn't approve. He verbalised his thoughts with other men in the community saying that Avtar is doing things incorrectly.

He said, "if you are not able to make ends meet"... I interrupted and said "we live together, we are all doing well together, both of our wives are helping. Meeto says she doesn't want to work, because you don't let her."

One Sunday evening, six respected members of the community showed up at my house. I welcomed them. They blatantly insulted me: "if you need money we will give you money, but stop Manjeet from working." I called my wife into the room. They spoke and told my wife to stop working as it was "behti" (disgrace).

She said, "I am working hard. It's of no disgrace... [Meeto] is home to take care of the children. I sit at home twiddling my thumbs while my husband and you go to work, it's not seen as bad. I'm a human... This is nothing shameful. I'm going to work! Wait ten years and more women will be also be working."

Years later, she met one of these men (Jarnail Singh), and shared, "I saw your wife leaving work today. Do you remember what I said that day. Look now, your wife is working too." That was the day that he realised he was in the wrong.



Sikh Women

What a difference a few decades make!

Maninder Kaur Matharu was raised in Chandigarh, India. She joined a migrant living in England with his family in 1971, after getting married at the age of 18.



I came to England with hopes and dreams, aspiring to become something successful.

I was disheartened

because I could not use my education, and was told to sew coats in a factory. I felt like I had no-one I could share my feelings with. Factory life was not for me.

After two years, my father-in-law told me to stop working, and care for the family. There was lots to do at home. Things had to be done by hand. We didn't have fridges or washing machines.

I wanted my children to be well educated. Every parent has that thought - Whatever we didn't do in our lives, our children can do.

Years later, my children and husband asked: "Mum what are you going to do sitting at home?... You should use your education." I was really scared when I went back to college for the first time. They tested me rigorously, I couldn't believe that I got a distinction. My husband joked, "they just gave it to you". They said, "The housework won't end anyway. So just go." So I enrolled in Handsworth College. Got my GCSE's - that

old education came in useful. I did my RSA in bilingual and interpreting. Then, I was a bilingual teacher for 20 years.

Rajinder Kaur Bakshi was born in Tanzania. She came to England by herself to attend University in the early 1960s, as an overseas student. Later in life, she got married and



the couple travelled the world, before settling in the UK. On arrival, her husband was appointed the first Sikh (and Indian), Chief Medical Officer in Birmingham.

When I arrived to study, it was a big challenge. I saw no other Sikh girls. There were only men around. I lived in student accommodation - it was like a bed and breakfast, they called it "Digs". It's different for students now. Their parents are here as well. I just came here to study and went back. That was it.

People asked why I wasn't married, but I expected to work. My parents were very broad minded. My dad didn't mind. That's why I became a girls guide, and a Queen's Guard when I was young.

I married late because I wanted to study, and I worked as a teacher. I stopped when the children came - to raise them. Whatever I did, I always reached the highest point. Once I married we even climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. We were both adventurous.

Holding onto Values

Story of a 1st Generation Sikh

Preet Kaur Gill grew up with her father who acted as the longest standing head of the Guru Nanak Gurudwara, Smethwick. She describes growing up in the 70s and 80s, with an extended family, as an exciting and busy experience. She faced challenges when practicing her faith at school resulting in bullying from students. Within her life she was given the chance to study away from home, and progress in the public sector. She has become the first Sikh woman MP in the UK, while being rooted in her cultural and spiritual values.



The one lesson I always remember my dad teaching me was, "If you are here in this world, and God gave you this life, make sure you make it a better place to be." That is the same lesson that I teach my children now. For me, being a Sikh and being a woman are both important elements, but I think being a mother completed me.

I took Amrit when I was 11. I was raised around the Gurudwara and by my grandparents. They would share many stories and encourage us to speak Punjabi. My dad felt strongly about his language and identity, that was prevalent in the way we were raised. He would sit us together to read our evening prayers. He also created opportunities for us to serve the community.

I was Amritdhari for two years. In the 1980s, it was difficult. I went to a school

where you had to wear a skirt with knee high socks, and unlike now there were no exceptions for faith based reasons. There was everyday discrimination and name calling. It was a lonely experience for me at the time.

No matter what, I've always stayed connected with the values of my faith. I think Gurbani (scripture) is important. It is important in the way I raise my children. We have Sukhmani Sahib (a prayer for peace) constantly playing in our home. I also pray with my daughters before bed. It is important to me that I pass on the same values that I was given.

I am grateful that they get to go to a Sikh school. I can see that they are being taught all the things that I learnt from my grandparents. The way that they talk about values, with clarity, makes me proud.

Everything I do has some element of Sikhi in it. Whether I identify it as Sikhi or not, the values are universal to me. You can follow any path, but I was born a Sikh and I try to be a good Sikh.



Above: Daljit Singh Shergill (Preet's father) engaging with the local community

Holding onto Values

Where are we going?

Bhai Sahib, Bhai (Dr.) Mohinder Singh OBE KSG, arrived in the UK in 1962; after being born in Uganda, a British colony, and living in independent African states. As part of a varied career, he has worked extensively on developing relationships with other interfaith leaders, and promoting multi-faith, values-led education.



"I'm 78 now and I was reflecting: where do I come from? Where do I end up? Where do I go from here?"

My Guru explicitly informed me, that my soul has been travelling. We are all spiritual travellers, and we are migrants on this planet. So we must think hard. What have we been able to achieve?

We are informed that we have to travel on this ocean, and there are tempests and storms. You have to have a compass, draft a route plan, and have some toolkits to navigate.

Similarly, when navigating this life, we have to have values. How do we have a moral compass? How do we orient ourselves in this life? There are pitfalls - many. It is very important to know where you are going. If you don't know, you are out of context.

About 30 million people are on the move in the 21st century now. Some migrants, some refugees, this, that and the other. How can we deal with them? Everyone is trying to figure out what to do.

There is a concept, where God Almighty says, "My child, go! You are a sovereign. You have infinite potential to do good and evil. But, my child, all this creation is at your service." Imagine, everything is at the service of human beings.

There are 7.3 billion people on this Earth. No two people are carbon copies. This is natural diversity. We must be humbly

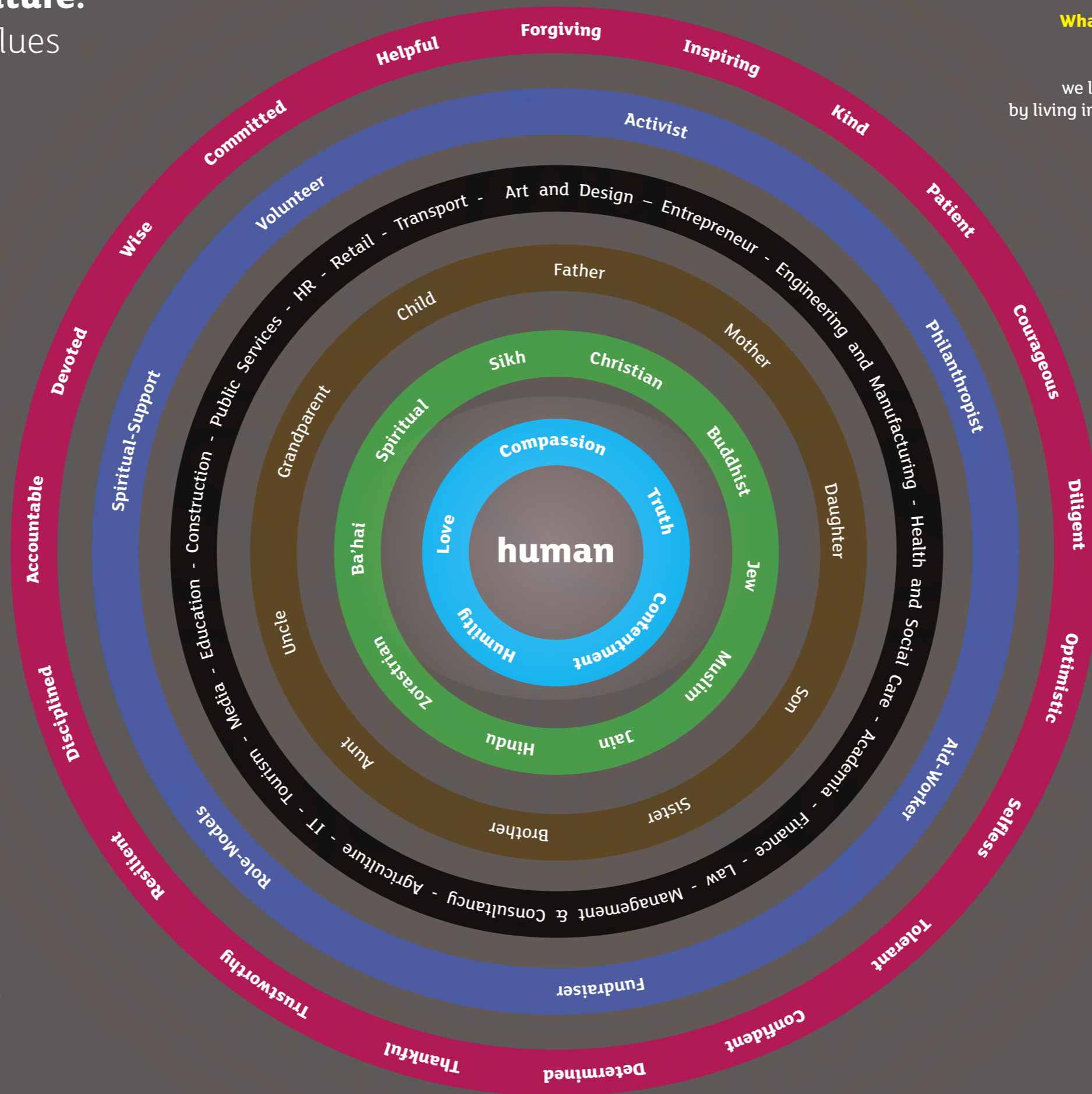
proud, that we are unique. Each person has to navigate through life, and get hold of toolkits, to navigate in a good way; so that we can get back to where we've come from.

Where did we come from? God. Where are we going? To God. Why are we here? God loves drama. He wants us to come home, otherwise there is a transmigration of the soul.

This story is very important. Be informed, don't be followers. You have the choice and you have the teachings - all faiths, at the core will tell you of values and virtues.

Building the Future: Life-enriching Values

Throughout our lives as 'spiritual migrants', we have many identities. We are identified not only by our cultural and national identity, but by our gender; family roles; faith; ethnicity; professions; community roles; hobbies and interests.



What makes successful migration?

From a Sikh Dharam perspective, we long to reconnect with our Creator; by living in God's will and striving to become good human beings.

Therefore successful migration involves retaining our values and virtues. At our core, no matter what our faith is, we maintain a sense of compassion, love and goodness.

Then through our various roles, we embody these values in our daily lives and actions.

Lessons to be Learned

Experiences, Knowledge and Inspiration



"Do good for your community and be helpful to everyone. It is so rewarding when you are doing something for others, not just yourself... That is what I would like them to do."

Tarsem Kaur Sahdra

"If you are a Sikh, be a proud Sikh. Be confident in yourself. If you are confident in yourself - be confident in your education, you can achieve everything in your life."

Dr Jaswant Singh Sohal



"Share your experiences and knowledge with others. Help everyone and bring everyone to the same platform. Do something for the community. Lead by example."

Jarnail Singh Bhinder

"I want our young Sikh generation to move into politics, and understand politics... Once we are there, then we can help everyone."

Gurmail Kaur



"Success won't be given on a plate, you have to work hard and enjoy what you do... Human beings are naturally prejudiced. If you are not aware of it, you will be caught short."

Dr Sukhdev Singh Gill



"Protect the hard work that we did. Behave wisely and protect our reputation."

Piara Singh Purewal

"If you understand the message of the Guru (Guru Granth Sahib Ji) then you will benefit and our community will benefit from it."

Santokh Singh Saran



"We need to keep our culture. Our religion, it is very important to who we are... We are British, but we are still Sikh, and our values are very, very important."

Tarlok Singh Bansal



"Hard work is the key to success. Good education and belief in yourself makes you strong. Let your religious values help you make the right decisions and do good with your life. Live happily together, create a good environment for future generations. Don't criticise but learn from each others' mistakes."

Inderjit Singh Rana



"We are moving forward and back. If collectively, on average, we are all moving forward - that is the purpose of our life."

Manjeet Singh Boparai

"Teach your children with love, not anger; they will learn more. Teach them to respect everyone. Wherever you go, teach your children Punjabi."

Mota Singh



"Where you live, believe in the place and be loyal and sincere... Look after the older generation. You are here because of the older generation. Try to learn your mother tongue."

Bikram Singh Bhamra





"Never shy from your responsibilities. Follow what the Sikh faith teaches you. Almighty God decided you would be a Sikh, so be a good Sikh. Lead a disciplined life, follow the guidelines - this will increase the quality of your life."

Sewa Singh Mandla



"Teach children how to live in a family. Teach them about life; how to live a good life. Our duty is to teach them while they are young."

Daljit Kaur Bansal

"In this country, everything is different. We couldn't maintain that culture. God has created everyone differently, but we are all one, and our children have shown that, by embracing both cultures."

Shivdev Singh Kainth



"Live within your means. Be satisfied with what you have and don't forget your roots. Don't compare yourself to others. Don't make false promises. Believe in education for the future."

Daljit Kaur Rana



"I request parents to bring their children to the Gurudwara and engage them in their faith, as much as possible. A home that promotes Sikhi, and children respect their parents - for me, that is heaven."

Maninder Kaur Matharu



"We should learn from our Guru. Don't depend on anyone. Stand on your own two feet. Respect your elders. Love everyone. You can get anything, if you believe in God."

Surinder Singh Nijjar

"It's important to keep your identity. Yes we are professionals, but we have been given a purpose in life ... It could be as simple as helping someone cross the road ... Find your purpose, and give something back to society."

Gursevak Singh Shergill



"Be proud of yourself! It should show on your face that you are a proud Sikh. The biggest mistake Sikhs make is to think that the Turban is a hinderance. Your turban doesn't determine your future! It didn't stop me from achieving anything!"

Surinder Singh Bakshi



"Be a true Sikh. I don't mean outwardly - but follow the philosophy of the Gurus. Move away from arguments and friction within the community. Guru Gobind Singh Ji gave us 52 points for good living - we should follow these for a positive life."

Surjit Singh Sandhu



"Have belief in yourself. Push yourself that little bit more, but be realistic. Progress, but progress in a sustainable way. It is like a marathon, not a one shot thing... Getting promoted is easy, but fulfilling the role is the hard part."

Kirpal Singh Tahim

"Nothing is impossible if you keep your faith. By doing this, even when we encounter difficulty - no matter how hard - in the end we will be content."

Charanjeet Kaur



"Talk to all people, from all walks of life. They will all have something to contribute, which will enrich your life and make your life better... I would like people to influence everyone in a better way."

Gurinder Singh Mandla



Glossary

5 Kakars: Spiritual Limbs; Items worn by initiated / practicing Sikhs
Aan: Honour
Amrit: Holy water given to an individual who wants to practice the Sikh faith
Amrit Sanchaar: Sacred service to initiate into the Sikh faith
Bezti: Disgrace; shame
Bori Bistera: Belongings; reference to your bed linen and clothes
Darbar: Court room; Throne room; worship hall in a Sikh Gurudwara
Dastar: Turban
Dharam: A disciplined way of life, a faith or religion
Diaspora: The dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland
Ethno-religious: An ethnic group whose members are also unified by a common religious background.
Gatra: cloth sash that holds the Kirpan, across the heart, representing compassion
Granthi: Person who is trained to read Guru Granth Sahib Ji
Guru: Teacher; prophet; highest authority in the Sikh faith
Guru Granth Sahib Ji: 1708 Guruship was handed to the Sikh Scripture, who is now the eternal 'living' Sikh Guru
Guru Gobind Singh Ji: The 10th Guru of the Sikhs
Guru Nanak Dev Ji: Founder of the Sikh faith
Gurudwara: Sikh place of worship
Guruship: The status and appointment of a Guru
Kanga: Wooden comb for the hair, representing cleanliness of body and mind
Kara: Steel wristlet representing the oneness of God and virtuous ethical action
Kachhera: Undergarment (like shorts) representing the importance of fidelity & chastity
Kaur: Name (reflecting royalty) adopted by females to reflect dignity & wise leadership
Kes: Uncut hair, representing the importance of living in God's will
Khalsa: The body of individuals who have been initiated into the Sikh faith
Kirpa: Blessing
Kirpan: Associated with words 'Kirpa' and 'Aan'; A small curved blade, kept in a sheath, secured in a gatra (sash); represents responsibility and compassion
Langar: Free kitchen; 100% vegetarian food freely available to all
Maharaja Ranjit Singh: Ruler of the Sikh Empire
Maharani: Queen; Queen Mother
Punjab: A region of northern India; Land of the 5 Rivers
Punjabi: The native language of the Punjab region
Sabji: Indian curry
Sarbat Da Bhalla: Prayer for the welfare of all creation
Sikh: Learner; individual born into Sikh family; practitioner of a the Sikh faith
Sikhi: The practice of the Sikh faith
Singh: Name (meaning lion) adopted by male Sikhs to reflect dignity & wise leadership
Supplication: The action of asking/begging for something earnestly or humbly
Thurka: Form of cooked seasoning that is added to Indian dishes

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We will be forever grateful to our elders for the sacrifices, decisions and courage they had, to migrate to the UK. Everything we are reaping now is a result of their hard work and aspirations for us.

We apologise if we have missed anyone from these lists. We also recognise that we are still at the first phase of the project, and many more individuals will be joining us throughout the remainder of the project. If you would like to get involved please contact us via our website or email: heritage@ncauk.org

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Gurudwaras

Babe-ke Gurudwara
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Suwinder Bains

Lead Organisation

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For more information and to contribute
to this project, please visit:

www.NishkamHeritageCentre.org

#SikhHeritage

GNN SJ

